



Religion and religious practice

Best practice guidelines

Disclaimer

Religion is a sensitive topic, involving deeply personal beliefs and a wide range of different approaches to and interpretations to matters of faith in every religious community.

For the purposes of this guide, 'religion' and 'religious practice' are spoken of in general terms meant to convey an idea of large themes. It is impossible to speak to the particulars of every individual's beliefs and choices, and readers should keep in mind that this is a broad introduction meant as a starting point.

This guide is not meant to replace in-depth study of the subjects touched upon.

Definitions

A **religion** is a system of beliefs and worship practices that a group of people follow and choose to adhere to throughout their lives.

Religious practices are actions that an individual takes as part of their religious beliefs. These are often defined by sacred text or teachings that have been passed down through a spiritual being, deity, prophet or leader(s) of the religion.

Types of belief

Types of religious belief and belief in God can be categorised under the following groups:

- **Polytheism** is the belief of more than one God. Some examples of Polytheistic religions are Taoism or Shenism.
- **Monotheism** is the belief of only one God. A common example of this are the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.



- **Deism** is the belief in the existence of a God or Spiritual being without supernatural revelation or prophets. A few branches of Deisms are Classical Deism, Modern Deism, Pandeism, and Panendeism.
- **Theism** is the belief of the existence of a God or Spiritual being, without denying revelation or prophets.
- **Agnosticism** is the belief of neither believing in or denying the existence of a God or Spiritual being, and that it is unknown.
- **Atheism** is the belief that a God or Spiritual beings do not exist.

Religions

There are many religions around the world that have existed for centuries and have long histories in many different parts of the world.

As of 2021 (World Population Review), the most common world religions are:

- Christianity (31.2%)
- Islam (24.9%)
- Hinduism (15.6%)
- Buddhism (6.6%)
- Sikhism (0.30%)
- Judaism (0.18%)

Within each of these religions, there are different denominations or sects that believe in different tenets or practice in different ways.

Adherents of each religion have titles. For example, people who follow Christianity are referred to as Christian. Within Christianity, they may also adhere to a denomination like Catholicism, so they may also be called Catholic.

The correct way to refer to people of different world religions are:

- People who follow Christianity are Christians
- People who follow Islam are Muslims
- People who follow Hinduism are Hindus



- People who follow Buddhism are Buddhists
- People who follow Sikhism are Sikhs
- People who follow Judaism are Jewish people

Less common religions like Wicca, Paganism, and Rastafari, are frequently fetishised and demonised in popular culture. These stereotypes are harmful to members of those religions, but also to those outside these practices—by assuming that people following certain religions are all evil, drug or sex addicts, or brainwashed, people deprive the world of voices and opinions that can contribute important ideas to life and society.

In addition to these religious populations, 15.6% of the global population is secular, non-religious, agnostic, or atheist.

There is no single universally recognised 'right way' to worship. Also taking into account the many smaller religions that are not recognised or well-known, there are many chances for even the most well-intentioned person to make a mistake. Taking care to not discuss religious matters in absolutes avoids a number of problems. Also, take care to leave room for people with different experiences to share their knowledge and be sure to acknowledge their personal truth.

Religious practice

Religious practice is the act of following the teachings and/ or performing acts of worship, which are usually defined by the guidelines, beliefs, actions and rules of a religion's belief system.

Examples

- **Prayer:** this can be as frequent as daily, or multiple times a day. It is common for religions to observe a weekly prayer service that is usually held in congregation at a Holy site.
- **Meditation:** can be practiced in various forms. A common ground with meditation is self-directed awareness and reaching a calm state in the mind. Meditation is widely practiced in religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.
- **Fasting:** the act of refraining from food or certain foods, water, or certain actions for a limited time period.



- **Pilgrimage:** the act of taking a journey to a known Holy destination or Holy landmark to reach a higher stage of spirituality and reinvigorate a person's beliefs in their religion. This is widely practiced in religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.
- **Sacrifice:** this is the ritual of sacrificing an animal, libation, and/or vegetation for worship.
- **Acts of Charity:** giving charity is seen as an act of worship. Giving money or goods, volunteering time, and lifting spirits are all considered acts of charity.
- **Religious lifestyle:** prohibition from certain acts, foods, items, etc. Many religions follow a belief system which include certain actions and items that followers must refrain from engaging in. This set of rulings define the way in which followers of a religion live their life. For example, Muslims follow what is Halal and Haram in order to live their daily lives. Jewish people follow Kosher teachings.
- **Morals, ethics, and values:** many religions have guides and concepts for how a person should behave, creating a compass system for what is good or bad.
- **Observing religious holidays and celebrations:** many religions observe holidays and celebrations annually or periodically in order to remember or mark a moment in the religion's historical calendar. For example, Christmas, Eid, Rosh Hashanah, Diwali, etc.

Sacred texts in religion

Many major religions use **sacred text** to help define the teachings and actions of the lifestyle that people who follow a religion should undertake. It is usually believed that scripture originated through a divine source. For example, Muslims believe that the prophet Muhammad received the Quran from God through an Angel called Gabriel (Jibrīl).

If representing sacred texts in media, it's important to learn about the guidelines and practices in which different religions use to properly handle sacred texts and Holy books in day to day life. For example, the Quran is usually only placed in a clean environment, and can only be handled if a person has performed a ritual of cleanliness.



Most Sacred Texts Of Major World Religions

Religions	Most Sacred Text(s)
Baha'i	The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys
Buddhism	Tipitaka
Christianity	Christian Bible
Hinduism	The Vedas and The Upanishads
Islam	The Quran and The Hadiths
Jainism	The Agamas
Judaism	The Tanakh and The Talmud
Shintoism	Kojiki
Sikhism	Guru Granth Sahib
Taoism	Dao De Jing
Wicca	The Book of Shadows
Zoroastrianism	The Avesta

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Places of worship

Places of worship or religious practice for communities of certain faiths are usually Holy houses of worship, places, or buildings. Referring to these holy buildings by their correct names is an important part of being respectful, as they do not share one common name such as a temple or church. Some examples of common buildings for worship are:

- Temples (Buddhism, Taoism)
- Gurdwaras (Sikhism)
- Shrines (Buddhism, Hinduism)
- Churches (Christianity)
- Mosques or Masjids (Islam)
- Synagogues (Judaism)

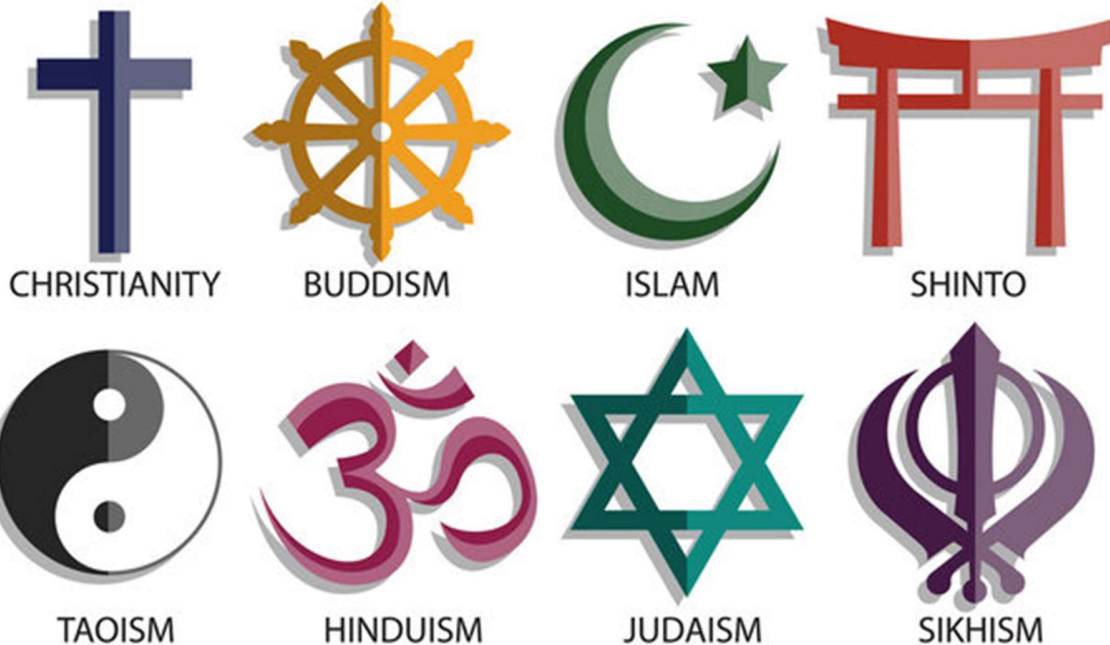
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Some houses of worship have segregated areas for men and women, require rituals of cleanliness before entering, or certain dress codes.

Religious symbols

It is common for religious people to carry/represent a symbol that is uniquely recognised by them and to identify things that belong to their religion. Below are more examples of symbols used in common religions:



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Power and abuse

Religions, especially those with highly formalised infrastructures, give considerable power to people who meet certain criteria. But not everyone given that power wields it well or with good intentions. It's difficult to know where the line is between a leader who is charismatic and one who is forceful. And most abuses occur behind closed doors.

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Religious abuse is any abuse administered under the guise of religion. It can include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; harassment and humiliation; and intimidation and isolation. It often leads to lasting psychological trauma. It can also include misusing positions of authority in a religion for secular or ideological ends or to pursue selfish gains.

Topics around religion and religious practices can be triggering for those who have survived religious abuse. It's important to be sensitive and to give people room to escape situations and topics they're not emotionally prepared to handle.

Respect

Stepping into a new situation is always fraught, and religion can be among the most opaque rituals of behavior that are the easiest to make mistakes in. But there are a few habits that can help avoid causing offense or harm:

- Be polite
- Listen
- Wait to be invited
- Be willing to try new practices and ideas
- Don't fear the unknown

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