



The Agreed Syllabus for RE

Guidance and Support Materials

Glossary of Religious Terms

This glossary of terms is closely based upon the SCAA Glossary of Terms for Religious Education (1994) which was drawn up in consultation with members of the faith communities concerned.



Christianity Glossary

Unlike the other five world faiths included in this glossary, most of the terms given below are in English and will be familiar to many people. The historic languages of the Christian scriptures are Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The Old Testament was written largely in Hebrew, with some texts in Aramaic and Greek (Apocrypha). The whole of the Old Testament was translated into Greek, although many words and passages have their origin in Aramaic. Latin became increasingly the language of the Western Church from the 5th century AD when the Bible was translated into Latin.

Absolution

The pronouncement by a priest of the forgiveness of sins.

AD (Anno Domini)

In the Year of our Lord. The Christian calendar dates from the estimated date of the birth of **Jesus Christ**.

Advent

Coming. The period beginning on the fourth Sunday before **Christmas** (40 days before Christmas in the Eastern Orthodox tradition). A time of spiritual preparation for Christmas.

Agape

The love of God. New Testament word used for the common meal of Christians; a Love Feast.

Altar (Communion Table, Holy Table) Table used for **Eucharist**, **Mass**, **Lord's Supper**. Some denominations refer to it as Holy Table or Communion Table.

Anglican

Churches in full communion with the See of Canterbury. Their origins and traditions are linked to the Church of England, and are part of the Anglican Communion.

Apocalyptic

(i) *Revelatory*, of God's present purposes and of the end of the world.
(ii) Used of a literary genre, for example, the Book of Revelation.

Apocrypha

Books of the **Old Testament** that are in the Greek but not the Hebrew **Canon**. Some **Churches** recognise the Apocrypha as part of the Old Testament **Canon**.

Apocryphal New Testament

A modern title for various early Christian books which are non-canonical.

Apostle

One who was sent out by **Jesus Christ** to preach the **Gospel**.

Ascension

The event, 40 days after the **Resurrection**, when Jesus 'ascended into heaven' (see Luke 24 and Acts 1).

Ash Wednesday

The first day of **Lent**. In some **Churches**, penitents receive the sign of the cross in ashes on their foreheads.

Atonement

Reconciliation between God and humanity; restoring a relationship broken by sin.

Baptism

Rite of initiation involving immersion in, or sprinkling or pouring of, water.

Baptist

(i) A member of the Baptist **Church**, which grew out of the Anabaptist movement during the 16th century **Reformation**. (ii) A Christian who practises **Believer's Baptism**.

Baptistry

(i) Building or pool used for **baptism**, particularly by immersion. (ii) Part of a **church**, where **baptism** takes place.

BC (Before Christ)

Period of history before the estimated birth of **Jesus Christ**.

Believer's Baptism

The **baptism** of people who are old enough to understand the meaning of the rite.

Benediction

Blessing at the end of worship. Also, late afternoon or evening service including the blessing of the congregation with the consecrated host (usually in a **Roman Catholic** context).

Blessed Sacrament

Bread and wine which have been consecrated and set aside for future use (usually in the **Roman Catholic Church**).

Brethren

Christian, Exclusive or Open Brethren are Christian groups which emphasise piety, high moral values, faithfulness to the Bible and plural leadership.

Canon (Scripture)

The accepted books of the Bible. The list varies between denominations.

Catholic

(i) *Universal*. (ii) Often used as an abbreviation for **Roman Catholic**.

Charismatic

A modern movement within the **Church**, emphasising spiritual gifts, such as healing or speaking with tongues.

Chrismation

(i) The **Orthodox** second **sacrament** of initiation by anointing with chrism (a special oil). Performed at the same time as **baptism**. (ii) Anointing with oil, for example, healing or coronation.

Christ (Messiah)

The anointed one. Messiah is used in the Jewish tradition to refer to the expected leader sent by God, who will bring salvation to God's people. Jesus' followers applied this title to him, and its Greek equivalent, Christ, is the source of the words Christian and Christianity.

Christmas

Festival commemorating the birth of **Jesus Christ** (25 December, in most **Churches**).

Church

(i) The whole community of Christians. (ii) The building in which Christians worship. (iii) A particular denomination.

Confession

Contrition; penance. (i) One of seven **sacraments** observed by some **Churches** whose priest confidentially hears a person's confession. (ii) An admission, by a Christian, of wrongdoing. (iii) A particular official statement (or profession) of faith.

Congregationalist

Member of a Christian body which believes that each local **church** is independent and self-governing under the authority of Christ.

Consubstantiation

Doctrine of the **Eucharist** associated with Luther, which holds that after consecration, the substances of the Body and Blood of **Jesus Christ** and of the bread and wine co-exist in union with each other.

Creed

Summary statement of religious beliefs, often recited in worship, especially the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

Crucifixion

Roman method of executing criminals and traitors by fastening them to a cross until they died of asphyxiation; used in the case of **Jesus Christ** and many who opposed the Romans.

Easter

Central Christian festival which celebrates the **resurrection** of **Jesus Christ** from the dead.

Ecumenism (Oikoumene)

Movement within the **Church** towards co-operation and eventual unity.

Episcopacy

System of **Church** government by bishops.

Epistle (Letter)

From the Greek word for letter. Several such letters or epistles, from Christian leaders to Christian Churches or individuals, are included in the **New Testament**.

Eucharist

Thanksgiving. A service celebrating the sacrificial death and **resurrection** of **Jesus Christ**, using elements of bread and wine (see **Holy Communion**).

Evangelical

Group, or **church**, placing particular emphasis on the **Gospel** and the scriptures as the sole authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Evangelist

A writer of one of the four **New Testament** Gospels; a preacher of the **gospel**.

Font

Receptacle to hold water used in **baptism**.

Free Churches

Non-conformist denominations, free from state control (used of 20 **Churches**).

Good Friday

The Friday in **Holy Week**. Commemorates the day Jesus died on the cross.

Gospel (Evangel)

(i) *Good news* (of salvation in **Jesus Christ**). (ii) An account of Jesus' life and work.

Grace

(i) The freely given and unmerited favour of God's love for humanity. (ii) Blessing. (iii) Prayer of thanks before or after meals.

Heaven

The place, or state, in which souls will be united with God after death.

Hell

The place, or state, in which souls will be separated from God after death.

Holy Communion

Central liturgical service observed by most **Churches** (see **Eucharist**, **Mass**, **Lord's Supper**, **Liturgy**). Recalls the last meal of Jesus, and celebrates his sacrificial and saving death

Holy Spirit

The third person of the Holy **Trinity**. Active as divine presence and power in the world, and in dwelling in believers to make them like Christ and empower them to do God's will.

Holy Week

The week before Easter, when Christians recall the last week of Jesus' life on Earth.

Icon or Ikon

Painting or mosaic of **Jesus Christ**, the Virgin Mary, a saint, or a **Church** feast. Used as an aid to devotion, usually in the **Orthodox** tradition.

Iconostasis

Screen, covered with **icons**, used in Eastern **Orthodox churches** to separate the sanctuary from the nave.

Incarnation

The doctrine that God took human form in **Jesus Christ**. It is also the belief that God in Christ is active in the **Church** and in the world.

Jesus Christ

The central figure of Christian history and devotion. The second person of the **Trinity**.

Justification by Faith

The doctrine that God forgives ('treats as just') those who repent and believe in **Jesus Christ**

Kerygma

The central message about Jesus proclaimed by the early Christians.

Kyrie (Greek)

O Lord. Addressed to Jesus, as in 'Kyrie eleison' (*Lord have mercy*).

Lectern

Stand supporting the Bible, often in the shape of an eagle.

Lectionary

List of scriptural passages for systematic reading throughout the year.

Lent

Penitential season. The 40 days leading up to **Easter**.

Liturgy

(i) Service of worship according to a prescribed ritual such as Evensong or **Eucharist**. (ii) Term used in the **Orthodox Church** for the Eucharist.

Logos

Word. Pre-existent Word of God incarnate as **Jesus Christ**.

Lord

Title used for Jesus to express his divine lordship over people, time and space.

Lord's Supper

Alternative term for **Eucharist** in some **Churches** (predominantly **Non-conformist**).

Lutheran

A major **Protestant Church** that receives its name from the 16th century German reformer, Martin Luther.

Mass

Term for the **Eucharist**, used by the **Roman Catholic** and other **Churches**.

Maundy Thursday

The Thursday in **Holy Week**. Commemorates the **Last Supper**.

Methodist

A Christian who belongs to the **Methodist Church**, which came into existence through the work of John Wesley in the 18th century.

Missal

Book containing words and ceremonial directions for saying **Mass**.

Mother of God

The title given to the Virgin Mary, mainly in the **Orthodox** and **Roman Catholic Churches**, to underline the Trinitarian belief that Jesus was truly God (in this context, God refers to God incarnate as seen in **Jesus Christ**).

New Testament

Collection of 27 books forming the second section of the **Canon** of Christian Scriptures.

Non-conformist

Term used to describe **Protestant** Christian bodies which became separated from the established **Church of England** in the 17th century.

Old Testament

That part of the **Canon** of Christian Scriptures which the **Church** shares with Judaism, comprising 39 books covering the Hebrew Canon, and in the case of certain denominations, some books of the **Apocrypha**.

Ordination

In episcopal **Churches**, the 'laying on of hands' on priests and deacons by a bishop. In non-episcopal **Churches**, the 'laying on of hands' on ministers by other representatives of the **Church**.

Orthodox

(i) The Eastern **Orthodox Church** consisting of national **Churches** (mainly Greek or Slav), including the ancient Eastern Patriarchates. They hold the common **Orthodox** faith, and are in communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. (ii) Conforming to the creeds sanctioned by the ecumenical councils, for example, Nicaea, Chalcedon.

Palm Sunday

The Sunday before **Easter**, commemorating the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem when he was acknowledged by crowds waving palm branches.

Paraclete (Comforter)

Advocate. Term used for the **Holy Spirit**.

Parousia

Presence. The Second Coming or return of **Jesus Christ**.

Passion

The sufferings of **Jesus Christ**, especially in the time leading up to his **crucifixion**.

Patriarch

Title for principal Eastern **Orthodox** bishops. Also used for early Israelite leaders such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

Pentecost (Whitsun)

The Greek name for the Jewish Festival of Weeks, or Shavuot, which comes seven weeks ('fifty days') after Passover. On the day of this feast, the followers of **Jesus** received the gift of the **Holy Spirit**.

Pentecostalist

A Christian who belongs to a **Church** that emphasises certain gifts which were granted to the first believers on the Day of **Pentecost** (such as the power to heal the sick and speak in tongues).

Pope

The Bishop of Rome, head of the **Roman Catholic Church**.

Presbyterian

A member of a **Church** that is governed by elders or 'presbyters'; the national Church of Scotland.

Protestant

That part of the **Church** which became distinct from the **Roman Catholic** and **Orthodox Churches** when their members professed (or 'protested' - hence Protestant) the centrality of the Bible and other beliefs. Members affirm that the Bible, under the guidance of the **Holy Spirit**, is the ultimate authority for Christian teaching.

Pulpit

An elevated platform from which sermons are preached.

Purgatory

In some traditions, a condition or state in which good souls receive spiritual cleansing after death, in preparation for **heaven**.

Quaker

A member of the Religious Society of Friends, established through the work of George Fox in the 17th century.

Reconciliation (Confession)

(i) **Sacrament** of the (Roman) **Catholic Church**, consisting of Contrition, **Confession** of sins, and **Absolution**. (ii) The human process of reconciling Christians with one another.

Redemption

Derived from the practice of paying the price of a slave's freedom; and so, the work of **Jesus Christ** in setting people free through his death.

Reformation

A 16th century reform movement that led to the formation of **Protestant Churches**. It emphasised the need to recover the initial beliefs and practices of the **Church**.

Resurrection

(i) The rising from the dead of **Jesus Christ** on the third day after the **crucifixion**. (ii) The rising from the dead of believers at the Last Day. (iii) The new, or risen, life of Christians.

Roman Catholic

That part of the **Church** owing loyalty to the Bishop of Rome, as distinct from **Orthodox** and **Protestant Churches**.

Sacrament

An outward sign of an inward blessing, as in **baptism** or the **Eucharist**.

Salvationist

A member of the Salvation Army founded by William and Catherine Booth in the 19th century.

Sanctification

The process by which a believer is made holy, to become like **Jesus Christ**.

Sin

(i) Act of rebellion or disobedience against the known will of God. (ii) An assessment of the human condition as disordered and in need of transformation.

Synoptic

Having a common viewpoint. It is applied to the presentation of **Jesus'** life in the first three gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke in contrast with that given in the Gospel of John.

Tabernacle

(i) A receptacle for the **Blessed Sacrament**, not immediately consumed but set aside or 'reserved' (mainly in **Roman Catholic** and **Eastern Orthodox Churches**). The presence of the consecrated elements is usually signalled by a continuously burning light. (ii) Term used by some denominations of their building.

Transubstantiation

Roman Catholic doctrine concerning the **Mass**, defined at the Lateran Council of 1215, and confirmed at the Council of Trent in 1551. This states that in the **Eucharist**, at the words of consecration, the substance of the bread and wine becomes the substance of the Body and Blood of **Jesus Christ**, and that he is thus present on the altar.

Trinity

Three persons in one God; doctrine of the three-fold nature of God - Father, Son and **Holy Spirit**.

Unction (Sacrament of the Sick)

The anointing with oil of a sick or dying person.

United Reformed Church

A Church formed by the union of English Congregationalists with the Presbyterian Church of England, and subsequently the Reformed Association of the Churches of Christ.

Vatican

The residence of the Pope in Rome, and the administrative centre of the Roman Catholic Church. The chief building of the Vatican is St Peter's Basilica, built on the traditional site of St Peter's tomb.

Virgin Birth

The doctrine of the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ by the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit and without the agency of a human father.

Buddhism Glossary

As Buddhism spread throughout the East, it came to be expressed in many different languages. Terms in the Sanskrit and Pali of India are in most common use in the West, although Japanese and Tibetan terms also occur frequently. Pali is the language of the texts of the Theravada school, whilst Sanskrit is used for general Mahayana. Zen Buddhism uses terms expressed in Japanese, and Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan. There is no preferred form. For convenience, the Pali term appears first, followed by the Sanskrit, except where otherwise indicated. Italicised phrases represent a literal translation. Bold type indicates that this is also a glossary entry.

Abhidhamma
Abhidharma
Further or higher teaching. The philosophy and psychology of Buddhism in abstract, systematic form.

Abhidhamma Pitaka
Abhidharma Pitaka
This is the third of the three principal sections of the canon of basic scripture. It is a systematic, philosophical and psychological treatment of the teachings given in the **Sutta Pitaka**.
Amitabha Amitayus (Sanskrit)
Also, Amida (Japanese). **Buddhas** having unlimited light and life respectively.

Anapanasati
Anapanasmrti
Mindfulness of the breath. The practice most usually associated with the development of concentration and calm, but also used in the training of **Vipassana** (insight).

Anatta
Anatman
No self; no soul. Insubstantiality; denial of a real or permanent self.

Anicca
Anitya
Impermanence; transience. Instability of all things, including the self.

Arahat, Arahant
Arhat
Enlightened disciple. The fourth and highest stage of Realisation recognised by the **Theravada** tradition. One whose mind is free from all greed, hatred and ignorance.

Asoka
Ashoka
Emperor of India in the 3rd century BCE.

Atta
Atman
Self; soul.

Bhikkhu
Bhikshu
Fully ordained Buddhist monk.

Bhikkhuni
Bhikshuni
Fully ordained Buddhist nun.

Bodhi Tree (Pali)
The tree (*ficus religiosa*) under which the **Buddha** realised Enlightenment. It is known as the Tree of Wisdom.

Bodhisatta (Pali)
A Wisdom Being. One intent on becoming, or destined to become, a **Buddha**. **Gotama**, before his Enlightenment as the historical Buddha.

Bodhisattva (Sanskrit)
A being destined for Enlightenment, who postpones final attainment of Buddhahood in order to help living beings (see **Mahayana**).

Brahma Viharas (Pali)
The four sublime states: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and evenness of mind.

Buddha
Buddha
Awakened or Enlightened One.

Dalai Lama (Tibetan)
Great Ocean. Spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people.

Dana
Dana
Generosity; giving; gift.

Dhamma
Dharma
Universal law; ultimate truth. The teachings of the **Buddha**. A key Buddhist term.

Dhammapada
Dharmapada
Famous scripture of 423 verses.

Dukkha
Duhkha
Suffering; ill; unsatisfactoriness; imperfection. The nature of existence according to the first Noble Truth.

Gompa (Tibetan)
Monastery; place of meditation.

Gotama
Gautama
Family name of the **Buddha**.

Jataka (Pali)
Birth story. Accounts of the previous lives of the **Buddha**.

Jhana

Dhyana

Also Ch'an (Chinese) and Zen (Japanese). Advanced meditation.

Kamma

Karma

Action. Intentional actions that affect one's circumstances in this and future lives. The Buddha's insistence that the effect depends on volition marks the Buddhist treatment of kamma as different from the Hindu understanding of karma

Karuna

Karuna

Compassion.

Kesa (Japanese)

The robe of a Buddhist monk, nun, or priest.

Khandha

Skandha

Heap; aggregate. The Five Khandhas together make up the 'person' (form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness).

Khanti

Kshanti

Patience; forbearance.

Kilesa

Klesa

Mental defilement or fire, such as greed, hatred or ignorance.

Koan (Japanese)

A technical term used in Zen

Buddhism referring to enigmatic or paradoxical questions used to develop intuition. Also refers to religious problems encountered in daily life.

Kwan-yin (Chinese)

Also, Kannon (Japanese). **Bodhisattva** of Compassion, depicted in female form. Identified with Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

Lama (Tibetan)

Teacher, or one who is revered.

Lotus Sutra (Sanskrit)

A scripture of major importance to various schools within the **Mahayana** tradition. It describes the virtues of the **Bodhisattva**, and emphasises that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and can attain Enlightenment (Nirvana).

Magga

Marga

Path, leading to cessation of suffering. The fourth Noble Truth.

Mahayana

Great Way or Vehicle. Teachings that spread from India into Tibet, parts of Asia and the Far East, characterised by the **Bodhisattva** ideal and the prominence given to the development of both compassion and wisdom.

Mala (Pali)

Also, Juzu (Japanese). String of 108 beads used in Buddhist practice (like a rosary).

Metta

Maitri

Loving kindness. A pure love which is neither grasping nor possessive.

Metta Sutta (Pali)

Buddhist scripture which describes the nature of loving kindness.

Metteya

Maitreya

One who has the nature of loving kindness. Name of the future **Buddha**.

Mudda

Mudra

Ritual gesture, as illustrated by the hands of **Buddha** images.

Mudita

Mudita

Sympathetic joy. Welcoming the good fortune of others.

Nibbana

Nirvana

Blowing out of the fires of greed, hatred and ignorance, and the state of secure perfect peace that follows. A key Buddhist term.

Nirodha

Nirodha

Cessation (of suffering). The third Noble Truth.

Panna

Prajna

Wisdom. Understanding the true nature of things.

Parami

Paramita

A perfection or virtue. One of the six or ten perfections necessary for the attainment of Buddhahood.

Parinibbana

Parinirvana

Final and complete **nirvana** reached at the passing away of a **Buddha**.

Patimokkha

Pratimoksha

The training rules of a monk or nun - 227 in the case of a **Theravada** monk.

Pitaka (Pali)

Basket. Collection of scriptures (see **Tipitaka**).

Rupa

Rupa

Form. Used of an image of the **Buddha**; also, the first of the Five **Khandhas**.

Sakyamuni

Shakyamuni

Sage of the Shakyas (the tribe of the **Buddha**). Title of the historical **Buddha**.

Samadhi
Samadhi
Meditative absorption. A state of deep meditation.

Samatha
Samatha
A state of concentrated calmness; meditation (see **Vipassana**).

Samsara
Samsara
Everyday life. The continual round of birth, sickness, old age and death which can be transcended by following the Eightfold Path and Buddhist teaching.

Samudaya
Samudaya
Arising; origin (of suffering). The second Noble Truth.

Sangha
Sangha
Community; assembly. Often used for the order of **bhikkhus** and **bhikkunis** in Theravadin countries. In the **Mahayana** countries, the Sangha includes lay devotees and priests, eg in Japan.

Sankhara
Samskara
Mental/karmic formation. The fourth of the five **Khandhas**.

Sanna
Samjna
Perception. Third of the five **Khandhas**.

Satori (Japanese)
Awakening. A term used in Zen Buddhism.

Siddattha
Siddhartha
Wish-fulfilled. The personal name of the historical Buddha.

Sila
Sila
Morality.

Sutta
Sutra
Text. The word of the **Buddha**.

Sutta Pitaka
Sutra Pitaka
The second of the three collections - principally of teachings - that comprise the canon of basic scripture.

Tanha
Trishna
Thirst; craving; desire (rooted in ignorance). Desire as the cause of suffering. The second Noble Truth.

Tathagata
Tathagata
Another epithet for the **Buddha**.

Theravada
Sthaviravada
Way of the elders. A principal school of Buddhism, established in Sri Lanka and South East Asia. Also found in the West.

Thupa/Cetiya
Stupa
Reliquary (including pagodas).

Tipitaka
Tripitaka
Three baskets. A threefold collection of texts (**Vinaya**, **Sutta**, **Abhidhamma**).

Tiratana
Triratna
The triple refuge. **Buddha**, the **Dhamma** and the **Sangha**. Another way of referring to the three jewels.

Tulku (Tibetan)
Reincarnated **Lama**.

Upaya (Pali)
Any skilful means, eg meditation on loving kindness, to overcome anger.

Upekkha
Upeksha
Equanimity; evenness of mind.

Vajrayana (Sanskrit)
Thunderbolt; Diamond Way.
Teachings promulgated later, mainly in India and Tibet. Another term for esoteric Buddhism.

Vedana (Pali)
Feeling. The second of the Five **Khandhas**.

Vihara (Pali)
Dwelling place; monastery.

Vinaya (Pali)
The rules of discipline of monastic life.

Vinaya Pitaka (Pali)
The first of the three collections of the canon of basic scripture, containing mostly the discipline for monks and nuns, with many stories and some teachings.

Vinnana
Vijnana
Consciousness. The fifth of the Five **Khandhas**.

Vipassana
Vipashyana
Insight into the true nature of things. A particular form of meditation (see **Samatha**).

Viriya
Virya
Energy; exertion.

Wesak

Vesak (Sinhalese)

Buddha Day. Name of a festival and a month. On the full moon of Wesak (in May or June), the birth, Enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha took place, although some schools celebrate only the birth at this time, e.g. **Zen**.

Zazen (Japanese)

Meditation while seated, as in **Zen** Buddhism.

Zen (Japanese)

Meditation. Derived from the Sanskrit 'dhyana'. A school of Mahayana Buddhism that developed in China and Japan.

Hinduism Glossary

The main references are to Sanskrit terminology, although variants are found and used in other Indian languages. Lakshmi, Laksmi, Vishnu or Visnu type variants are not always included because of their frequency. Many of these terms will also be found in books on Buddhism and Sikhism, but with somewhat different meanings.

Proper names and place names are only included in this list if variant forms are commonly used.

The preferred form appears first, followed by any variants.

Acharya

Acarya

One who teaches by example. Usually refers to a prominent or exemplary spiritual teacher.

Advaita

Adwaita

Non-dual. Refers to the impersonalistic philosophy which unqualifyingly equates God, the soul and matter.

Ahimsa

Ahinsa

Not killing. Non-violence; respect for life.

Artha

Economic development. The second aim of life.

Arti

Arati

Welcoming ceremony in which auspicious articles such as incense and lamps are offered to the deity or to saintly people.

Aryan

Noble. Refers to those who know the spiritual values of life. Scholars say it refers to the original inhabitants of the Sindhu region in India.

Ashram

Asram

A place set up for spiritual development.

Ashrama

Asrama

A stage of life (of which there are four) adopted according to material considerations, but ultimately as a means to spiritual realisation.

Atharva Veda

The fourth of the Vedas.

Atman

Atma

Self. Can refer to body, mind or soul, depending on context. Ultimately, it refers to the real self, the soul.

Aum

Om

The sacred symbol and sound representing the ultimate; the most sacred of Hindu words.

Avatar

Avatara

Avtara

One who descends. Refers to the descent of a deity, most commonly Vishnu. Sometimes it is translated as *incarnation* which, although inaccurate, may be the best English word available.

Ayodhya

Birthplace of Rama.

Bhagavad Gita

The Song of the Lord. Spoken by Krishna, this is the most important scripture for most Hindus. Tradition dates it back to 3,000 years BCE, though most scholars attribute it to the first millennium BCE. Considered an Upanishad.

Bhajan

Bhajana

Devotional hymn or song.

Bhakti

Devotion; love. Devotional form of Hinduism.

Bhakti-yoga

The path of loving devotion, aimed at developing pure love of God.

Brahma

A Hindu deity, considered one of the Trimurti, and in charge of creative power; not to be confused with Brahman or Brahmin.

Brahmachari

Brahmacari

Brahmacharin

Brahmacarin

One in the first stage of life, a celibate student of Vedic knowledge.

Brahmacharya

Brahmacarya

Also two words - Brahma and chari, cari, charin or carin

The first ashrama or stage of life.

Brahman

The ultimate reality, or the all-pervading reality; that from which everything emanates, in which it rests and into which it is ultimately dissolved.

Brahmin

Brahman

Brahmana

The first of the four varnas, the principal social groupings from which priests are drawn. Some writers, rather confusingly, use the spelling 'brahman', and the meaning only becomes clear in the context of a few sentences (see also Brahman and Brahma).

Darshan Shastras

Six systems of Hindu philosophy - Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta and Meemansa.

Dassehra

Dussehra

Dassera

Dashara

(Other variants are also found)
Ten days. Also called Vijay Dashami. Celebrates the victory of **Rama** on the tenth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Jyeshtha. As is often the case with Hindu festivals, followers may interpret the festival differently, for example, in connection with **Durga** (see **Navaratri**).

Dharma

Religion or religious duty is the usual translation into English, but literally it means *the intrinsic quality of the self or that which sustains one's existence*.

Dhoti

A garment made of natural fibre (usually cotton or silk), worn by males, which covers the lower body and legs.

Dhyana

Meditation.

Divali

Diwali

Dipavali

Deepavali

Festival of lights at the end of one year and beginning of the new year, according to one Hindu calendar.

Durga

Female deity. A form of the goddess **Parvati**; wife of **Shiva**.

Dvaita

Dwaita

Dual. Refers to the personalistic philosophy that differentiates between God, the soul and matter.

Dwarka

Dvarka

Dvaraka

Dwaraka

Pilgrimage site on the west coast of India.

Ganesha

Ganesh

Ganupati

Ganapati

A Hindu deity portrayed with an elephant's head - a sign of strength. The deity who removes obstacles.

Ganga

The Ganges. Most famous of all sacred rivers of India.

Gangotri

Source of the River Ganges.

Gotra

Exogamous group within **Jati**.

Grihastha

Gristhi

Grhastha

The second stage of Hindu life; one who belongs to that stage, that is, the householder (**grihasti**).

Guna

Rope; quality. Specifically refers to the three qualities of **sattva** (goodness), **rajas** (passion) and **tamas** (ignorance), which permeate and control matter.

Guru

Spiritual teacher, preceptor or enlightener.

Hanuman

The monkey warrior who faithfully served **Rama** and **Sita**. Also called **Pavansuta** (*son of the wind God*).

Havan

Also known as **Agnihotra**. The basis of many Hindu rituals used at weddings and on other ceremonial occasions; the ceremony or act of worship in which offerings of ghee and grains are made into fire.

Havan kund

The container, usually square or pyramid-shaped, in which the **havan** fire is burned.

Hitopadesh

Stories with a moral.

Holi

The festival of colours, celebrated in Spring.

Homa

Term often used interchangeably with **havan**.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

A religious group of the Vaishnava tradition.

Janeu

Jenoi

Sacred thread worn by Hindus who study under a **guru**.

Janmashtami

Janmashtmi

The birthday of **Krishna**, celebrated on the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of **Badra**.

Japa

Jap

The quiet or silent repetition of a mantra as a meditative process.

Jati

Caste is the usual translation, meaning occupational kinship group.

Jnana

Gyan

Knowledge.

Jnana-yoga

Gyan-yoga

The path of knowledge, that aims at liberation.

Kali

Kaali

Name given to that power of God which delivers justice - often represented by the Goddess Kali (a form of **Durga**).

Kali yuga

The fourth of the ages; the iron age or the age of quarrelling and hypocrisy.

Kama

The third of the four aims of life - regulated sense of enjoyment.

Karma

Action. Used of work to refer to the law of cause and effect.

Karma-yoga

The path of self-realisation through dedicating the fruits of one's work to God.

Kirtan

Songs of praise; corporate devotional singing, usually accompanied by musical instruments.

Krishna

Usually considered an **avatar** of **Vishnu**. One of the most popular of all Hindu deities in contemporary Britain. His teachings are found in the **Bhagavad Gita**.

Kshatriya

Khatri

Second of the four **varnas** of traditional Hindu society, the ruling or warrior class.

Lakshmi

Laksmi

The goddess of fortune.

Mahabharata

The Hindu epic that relates the story of the five Pandava princes. It includes the **Bhagavad Gita**.

Mala

Maala

Circle of stringed beads of wood or wool used in meditation.

Mandala

Mandal

A circle, area or community/group.

Mandir

Temple.

Mantra

That which delivers the mind. Refers to a short sacred text or prayer, often recited repetitiously.

Manusmriti

The laws of Manu. An ancient and important text on **Dharma**, including personal and social laws.

Marg

Path (see **Jnana yoga**, **Karma yoga** and **Bhakti yoga**).

Mata

Mother. Often associated with Hindu goddesses who represent **shakti** (power).

Mathura

Holy place connected with **Krishna**.

Maya

Not this. Usually, it refers to illusion, particularly where the permanent soul identifies itself with temporary matter, for example, the body. It can also mean *power*.

Moksha

Moksa

Ultimate liberation from the process of transmigration, the continuous cycle of birth and death.

Mundan

The head-shaving ceremony. Performed in the first or third year of life.

Murti

Moorti

Form. The image or deity used as a focus of worship. 'Idol' should definitely not be used, and 'statue' may also cause offence.

Navaratri

Navaratra

The Nine Nights Festival preceding

Dassehra, and held in honour of the goddess **Durga**.

Nirvana

The cessation of material existence.

Panchatantra

Part of the supplementary Vedic scriptures, composed of animal stories with a moral.

Parvati

The consort of **Shiva**, also known by other names such as **Durga**, **Devi**, etc.

Prahlada

Prahalada

A great devotee of **Vishnu**, connected with the festival of **Holi**.

Pranayam

Pranayama

Regulation of breath as a means of controlling the mind.

Prashad

Prasad

Prasada

Prashada

Sacred or sanctified food.

Pravachan

A lecture or talk, usually based on the scriptures.

Puja

Pooja

Worship. General term referring to a variety of practices in the home or **Mandir**.

Purana

Ancient. Part of the Smriti scriptures. Contains many of the well-known stories of Hinduism.

Raja Yoga**Raj Yoga**

Path of self-control and meditation to realise God.

Rajas

Passion or creative potency, one of the three **gunas** (qualities of material nature).

Rakhi**Raakhi**

A bracelet, usually made out of silk or cotton, tied to give protection and to strengthen the bond of mutual love.

Raksha Bandhan

The festival when women tie a decorative bracelet on their brothers' wrists.

Rama

The incarnation of the Lord, and hero of the **Ramayana** (avoid using the variant 'Ram' for obvious reasons).

Ramayana**Ramayan**

The Hindu epic that relates the story of **Rama** and **Sita**, composed by the sage Valmiki thousands of years ago.

Ramnavami**Ramnavmi**

The birthday festival of **Rama**.

Rig Veda**Rg or Rc Veda**

The first scripture of Hinduism, containing spiritual and scientific knowledge.

Rishi**Rsi****Risi**

A spiritually wise person. More specifically, one of the seven seers who received the divine wisdom.

Sadhana**Sadhan**

One's regulated spiritual practices or discipline.

Sadhu**Saddhu**

Holy man, ascetic.

Sama Veda

The **Veda** of chanting; material mainly from the **Rig Veda**, arranged for ritual chanting in worship.

Samsara**Sansara**

The world - the place where transmigration (the soul's passage through a series of lives in different species) occurs.

Samskar**Sanskar****Samskara**

Sacraments designed to initiate a new stage of life. There is usually a total of sixteen such rites of passage (though many schools of thought do not practise them all).

Sanatan Dharma

The eternal or imperishable religion; also known as Vedic Dharma.

Adherents often prefer this term to Hinduism since it characterises their belief in the revealed and universal nature of religion.

Sannyasa

The state of renunciation, the fourth stage of life.

Sannyasin**Samyasin****Samnyasin**

A renunciate who, having given up worldly affairs and attachments, has entered the fourth stage of life, often as a mendicant.

Sanskrit

Sacred language of the Hindu scriptures.

Saraswati

The power of knowledge, often represented by the goddess Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

Sattva**Sattwa**

Goodness, or the potency to sustain and nourish; one of the three **gunas**.

Seva**Sewa**

Service, either to the divine or to humanity.

Shaivism**Saivism**

The religion of Hindus who are devotees of **Shiva**.

Shakti**Sakti**

Energy or power, especially of a Hindu feminine deity.

Shiva**Siva**

(many variants - even Civa - have been found)

A Hindu god. The name means *kindly or auspicious*.

Shivaratri**Sivaratri**

The annual festival celebrated in February/March in honour of **Shiva**. Also called Mahashivaratri.

Shraddha**Sraddha**

Ceremony in which sanctified food is offered to the poor and needy in memory of departed ancestors.

**Shri
Sri**

Illustrious. Used as a title of respect, for example Shri Krishna. Also a respectful title for men. The feminine form is Shrimati (Mrs).

Shruti

Srti, Sruti

That which is heard. AA term specifically applied to the Four Vedas, including the Upanishads.

Sita

Seeta

The divine consort of Rama.

Smriti

Srti

That which is remembrered. Scriptures less ancient than the Vedas. Includes the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Sutra

Sutta

Short sayings or verses relating to various rituals, or encapsulating profound philosophical meaning.

Swami

Svami

Controller. Sometimes, more specifically, Goswami (*one who can control his/her senses*). An honorific title applied to a religious teacher or holy person, particularly the sannyasi.

Swastika

Svastika

From the Sanskrit for well-being; a mark of good fortune. The four arms signify the four directions (space), the four Vedas (knowledge), and the four stages (time) in the life cycle. Not to be confused with the Nazi symbol.

Tamas

Ignorance or destructive potency; the lowest of the three gunas.

Tilaka

Tilak

The mark made on the murti or on the forehead of a worshipper. It is a symbol of the power of God within.

Trimurti

The three deities. Refers to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who personify and control the three gunas. They represent and control the three functions of creation, preservation and destruction. 'Trinity' should be avoided.

Upanayana

Ceremony when the sacred thread is tied - to mark the start of learning with a guru.

Upanishad

Upanisad

To sit down near. A sacred text based on the teaching of a guru to a disciple. The Upanishads explain the teachings of the Vedas.

Vaishnavism

Vaisnavism

The religion of Hindus who are devotees of the god Vishnu.

Vaishya

Vaisya

The third of the four varnas of Hindu society, composed of merchants and farmers.

Vanaprastha

The third stage of life, typified by retirement and asceticism.

Vanaprasthi

Vanaprastha

Forest dweller. One who is in the third stage of life.

Varanasi

Banares

Benares

Kashi

Kasi

City on the river Ganges, sacred to Shiva. It is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites and also an ancient centre of learning.

Varna

Colour. The four principal divisions of Hindu society. It is important to note that the word 'caste' refers strictly to sub-divisions within each varna, and not to varnas themselves.

Varnashrama

Varnasrama Dharma

The system whereby society is divided into four varnas (divisions), and life into four ashramas (stages).

Varsha Pratipada

The day of Creation, celebrated as New Year's Day by many Hindus.

Veda

Knowledge. Specifically refers to the four Vedas, though any teaching which is consistent with the conclusions of these scriptures is also accepted as Vedic.

Vijay Dashmi

Vijaya Dashami

Another name for Dassehra.

Vishnu

Visnu

A Hindu god. With Brahma and Shiva forms the Trimurti.

Vrat

Vratam

Vow. Often including abstention from certain foods.

Vrindavan

Brindavan

Vrindavana

Brindaban

The sacred village connected with Krishna's pastimes as a youth.

Yajur Veda

One of the four **Vedas**, dealing with the knowledge of **karma**.

Yamuna

Jamuna

Jumna

Tributary of the River **Ganga** (*Ganges*), considered by many Hindus to be the most sacred of all holy rivers.

Yatra

Jatra

Pilgrimage. Usually to important sacred places in India.

Yoga

Communion; union of the soul with the Supreme, or a process which promotes that relationship. The English word 'yoke' is derived from yoga.

Yuga

Age, or extended period of time, of which there are four.

Islam Glossary

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. Therefore Arabic is the language of Islam, Islamic worship, theology, ethics and jurisprudence. Islam is inextricably linked with the Arabic language despite the variety of languages spoken by the believers.

For British teachers and pupils who have not encountered Islamic terms, this transliteration is a simplified version of that used by contemporary scholars. An apostrophe is used to indicate a pause. The reader will note that the words salah and zakah end in 'h' when they appear alone. When part of a phrase, these words are written with a 't' at the end, for example, Salat-ul-Zuhr, Zakat-ul-Fitr, as a guide to pronunciation.

Abd

Servant. As in Abdullah, servant of Allah.

Abu Bakr

The first **Khalifah**, successor to the leadership of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Adam

Adam (peace be upon him). The first man, and first Prophet of Allah.

Adhan

Call to prayer. From the same root, **Mu'adhin** (one who makes the call to prayer).

Aishah

One of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and daughter of **Abu Bakr**. (Radhi-Allahu-anhum - *may Allah be pleased with them*).

Akhirah

Everlasting life after death - the hereafter.

Akhlaq

Conduct, character, attitudes and ethics.

al-Amin

The Trustworthy. The name by which Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was generally known, even before the revelation of Islam.

al-Aqsa

Masjid-ul-Aqsa (*The Farthest Mosque*) in Jerusalem. Located near the Dome of the Rock.

al-Fatihah

The Opener. **Surah 1** of the **Qur'an**. Recited at least 17 times daily during the five times of **salah**. Also known as 'The Essence' of the Qur'an.

al-hamdu-li-Llah

All praise belongs to Allah. Frequently used as an expression of thanks to Allah.

al-Kafi

The title of the books of **Hadith** compiled by Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ibn-Yaqub Koleini, a **Shi'ah** scholar.

al-Khulafa-ur-Rashidun

The Rightly Guided Khalifahs. The first four successors to the leadership role of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They were **Abu Bakr**, **Umar**, **Uthman** and **Ali** (Radhi-Allahu-anhum - *may Allah be pleased with them*).

al-Madinah

Madinatu'n-Nabi (*The City of the Prophet*). The name given to **Yathrib** after the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) migrated there in 622 CE and founded the first Islamic state.

Ali

Cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); husband of **Fatimah Zahrah**; father of **Hassan**, **Hussein**, and **Zainab**; the fourth of 'al-

Khulafa-ur-Rashidun'

according to Sunnis, and the first successor accepted by Shi'ah Islam (Radhi-Allahu-anhum - *may Allah be pleased with them*).

Allah

The Islamic name for God in the Arabic language. Used in preference to the word God, this Arabic term is singular, has no plural, nor is it associated with masculine, feminine or neuter characteristics.

Allahu Akbar

Allah is most great.

Angels

Beings created by Allah from light. They have no free will and are completely obedient to Allah.

Ansar

Supporters. The Muslims of **al-Madinah**, who welcomed, helped and supported the Muslims who migrated from **Makkah**.

Arafat

A plain, a few kilometres from **Makkah**, where pilgrims gather to worship, pray and ask for forgiveness. This takes place on the ninth day of the Islamic month of **Dhul-Hijjah**, the day before **Id-ul-Adha**.

Asr (Salat-ul-Asr)

Mid-afternoon **salah** which may be performed from late afternoon until a short while before sunset.

As-Salamu-Alaykum

Peace be upon you. An Islamic greeting.

Ayah (sing.)

A unit within a **Surah** of the **Qur'an**.

Barakah

Blessings.

Bilal

The first **Mu'adhin** of Islam (see **Adhan**), a companion of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), formerly an Abyssinian slave (Radhi-Allahu-anhu - *may Allah be pleased with him*).

Bismillah

In the name of Allah.

Bismillah-ir-Rahman ir-Rahim

In the name of Allah - All Gracious, All Merciful. The preface to all **Surahs** of the **Qur'an** except the ninth one. It is usually said by Muslims before eating or beginning any action.

Dar-ul-Islam

House or abode of Islam. Sometimes used to refer to lands ruled by Islamic **Shari'ah**.

Da'wah

Call. Inviting people to Islam, whether by literal invitation and preaching, or by the example of good actions.

Dawud

David (peace be upon him). A Prophet of **Allah** to whom the **Zabur** (the Book of Psalms) was given.

Dhikr

Remembrance. Remembrance of **Allah** in one's heart or by reciting His names or sections from the **Qur'an**.

Dhimmi

A non-Muslim living freely under the protection of an Islamic state.

Dhul-Hijjah

The month of the Hajj, last month of the Islamic year.

Din

Way of life, religion together with its practices.

Din-ul-Fitrah

A description of Islam as the natural way of life.

Du'a

Varying forms of personal prayer and supplication.

Fajr (Salat-ul-Fajr)

Dawn **salah** which may be performed from dawn until just before sunrise.

Fard

Obligatory duty according to divine law, for example, offering **salah** five times a day.

Fatihah

See **al-Fatihah**.

Fatimah (al-Zahrah)

Daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); wife of **Ali**; mother of **Hassan**, **Hussein** and **Zainab** (Radhi-Allahu-anhum - *may Allah be pleased with them*).

Fatwa

The legal guidance of a pious, just, knowledgeable Muslim scholar and jurist, based on the **Qur'an**, **Sunnah** and Islamic **Shari'ah**.

Fiqh

Understanding. Islamic jurisprudence.

Ghusl

Greater ablution. Formal washing of the whole body prior to worship (see **Wudu**).

Hadith

Saying; report; account. The sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), as recounted by his household, progeny and companions. These are a major source of Islamic law. Some Hadith are referred to as **Hadith Qudsi** (*sacred Hadith*) having been divinely communicated to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Hafiz

Someone who knows the whole **Qur'an** by heart.

Hajar

Hagar. Wife of the Prophet **Ibrahim**, and mother of the Prophet **Isma'il** (peace be upon them).

Hajj

Annual pilgrimage to **Makkah**, which each Muslim must undertake at least once in a lifetime if he or she has the health and wealth. A Muslim male who has completed Hajj is called **Hajji**, and a female, **Hajjah**.

Halal

Any action or thing which is permitted or lawful.

Haram

Anything unlawful or not permitted.

Haram Sharif

The grand mosque in **Makkah**, which encompasses the **Ka'bah**, the hills of **Safa** and **Marwah** and the well of **Zamzam**.

Hijab

Veil. Often used to describe the head scarf or modest dress worn by women, who are required to cover everything except face and hands in the sight of anyone other than immediate family.

Hijrah

Departure; exit; emigration. The emigration of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from **Makkah** to **Madinah** in 622 CE. The Islamic calendar commences from this event.

Hira

The name of a place near **Makkah**, where the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) went for solitude and worship. It was there that he received the first revelation of the Qur'an.

Ibadah

All acts of worship. Any permissible action performed with the intention to obey Allah.

Iblis

The Jinn who defied Allah by refusing to bow to Adam (peace be upon him), and later became the tempter of all human beings (see **Shaytan**).

Ibrahim

Abraham (peace be upon him). A Prophet of Allah to whom the 'scrolls' were given.

Id

Recurring happiness. A religious holiday; a feast for thanking Allah and celebrating a happy occasion.

Id Mubarak

Id blessings! Greeting exchanged during Islamic celebrations.

Id-ul-Adha

Celebration of the sacrifice, commemorating the Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Isma'il for Allah (peace be upon them). Also known as Id-ul-Kabir - *the Greater Id* - and Qurban Bayram (Turkish) - *feast of sacrifice*.

Id-ul-Fitr

Celebration of breaking the fast on the day after Ramadan ends, which is also the first day of Shawal, the tenth Islamic month. Also known as Id-ul-Saghir - *the Lesser Id* - and Sheker Bayram (Turkish) - *sugar feast*.

Ihram

The state or condition entered into to perform either Hajj or Umrah. During this period, many normally permitted actions are placed out of bounds to Muslims. Also, the name of the two plain white unsewn cloths worn by male pilgrims to indicate the brotherhood, equality and purity of the pilgrim. For women, the dress of Ihram consists of their normal modest clothing.

Ijma

General consensus of scholars, expressed or tacit, on matters of law and practice.

Imam

Leader. A person who leads the communal prayer, or a founder of an Islamic school of jurisprudence. In Shi'ah Islam, Imam is also the title of

Ali (Radhi-Allahu-anhu - *may Allah be pleased with him*) and his successors.

Imamah

Office and function of an Imam. Religious authority in Shi'ah Islam; successor to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as leader of the Muslim community.

Iman

Faith.

Injil

Gospel. A book given to Prophet Isa (peace be upon him).

Iqamah

Call to stand up for salah.

Isa

Jesus. A Prophet of Allah, born of the virgin Mary (peace be upon them).

Isha (Salat-ul-Isha)

Evening salah which may be performed from just over an hour after sunset, until midnight.

Islam

Peace attained through willing obedience to Allah's divine guidance.

Isma'il

Ishmael. A Prophet of Allah. Son of the Prophet Ibrahim and Hajar (peace be upon them).

Isnad

Chain of transmission of each Hadith.

Jibril

Gabriel. The angel who delivered Allah's messages to His Prophets.

Jihad

Personal individual struggle against evil in the way of Allah. It can also be collective defence of the Muslim community.

Jinn

Being created by Allah from fire.

Jumu'ah (Salat-ul-Jumu'ah)

The weekly communal salah and attendance at the khutbah performed shortly after midday on Fridays.

Ka'bah

A cube-shaped structure in the centre of the grand mosque in Makkah. The first house built for the worship of the One True God.

Khadijah

First wife of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Mother of Fatimah Zahrah (Radhi-Allahu-anhum - *may Allah be pleased with them*).

Khalifah

Successor; inheritor; custodian; vice-regent (see al-Khulafa-ur-Rashidun).

Khilafah

The institution of the Khalifah.

Khums

Contribution (additional to **zakah**) of one fifth of surplus annual income paid by **Shi'ah** Muslims. **Sunni** Muslims only apply **Khums** to booty.

Khutbah

Speech. Talk delivered on special occasions such as the **Jumu'ah** and **Id** prayers.

Laylat-ul-Qadr

The Night of Power, when the first revelation of the **Qur'an** was made to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is believed to be one of the last ten nights of **Ramadan**.

Madinah See al-Madinah.

Maghrib (Salat-ul-Maghrib)

Sunset **salah** which is performed after sunset until daylight ends.

Mahdi, al-Muntazar

The (rightly) guided one who is awaited and will appear towards the end of time to lead the **Ummah** and restore justice on Earth. The one who is promised in the Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions.

Makkah

City where the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was born, and where the **Ka'bah** is located.

Maryam

Mary. The virgin mother of the Prophet **Isa** (peace be upon them).

Masjid

Place of prostration. Mosque.

Mihrab

Niche or alcove in a mosque wall, indicating the **Qiblah** - the direction of **Makkah**, towards which all Muslims face to perform **salah**.

Mina

Place near **Makkah**, where pilgrims stay on the 10th, 11th and 12th of **Dhul-Hijjah** and perform some of the activities of the **Hajj**.

Minbar

Rostrum; platform; dais. The stand from which the **Imam** delivers the **khutbah** or speech in the mosque or praying ground.

Miqat

Place appointed, at which pilgrims enter into the state of **ihram**.

Mi'raj

The ascent through the heavens of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Mu'adhin

Caller to prayer (see **Adhan**). Known in English as 'muezzin'.

Muhammad

Praised. Name of the final Prophet (peace be upon him).

Muharram

First month in the Islamic calendar, which is calculated from the time the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) migrated to **Yathrib (Madinah)**.

Musa

Moses (peace be upon him). A Prophet of **Allah** to whom the **Tawrah** (Torah) was given.

Mumin

Faithful. A believer, a practising Muslim who wholeheartedly yields to **Allah's** guiding wisdom and is thus in harmony with His will and at peace with himself and fellow creatures.

Muslim

One who claims to have accepted **Islam** by professing the **Shahadah**.

Muzdalifah

Place where pilgrims on **Hajj** stop for a time during the night of the day they spend at **Arafat**.

Nabi

Prophet of **Allah**.

Niyah

Intention. A legally required statement of intent, made prior to all acts of devotion such as **salah**, **Hajj** or **sawm**.

Qadar

Allah's complete and final control over the fulfilment of events or destiny.

Qiblah

Direction which Muslims face when performing **salah** - towards the **Ka'bah** (see **Mihrab**).

Qur'an

That which is read or recited. The Divine Book revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). **Allah's** final revelation to humankind.

Rak'ah

A unit of **salah**, made up of recitation, standing, bowing and two prostrations.

Ramadan

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which fasting is required from just before dawn until sunset, as ordered by Allah in the **Qur'an**.

Rasul

Messenger of **Allah**.

Sa'y

Walking and hastening between **Safa** and **Marwah**, as part of the **Hajj**, in remembrance of **Hajar's** search for water for her son **Isma'il** (peace be upon them).

Sadaqah

Voluntary payment or good action for charitable purposes.

Safa and Marwah

Two hills in **Makkah**, near the **Ka'bah**, now included within the grand mosque (see **Sa'y**).

Sahih al-Bukhari

The title of the books of **Hadith** compiled by Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, a **Sunni** scholar. The collection is described as Sahih (authentic).

Sahih Muslim

The title of the books of **Hadith** compiled by Abul Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, a **Sunni** scholar. The collection is described as Sahih (authentic).

Salah

Prescribed communication with, and worship of, **Allah**, performed under specific conditions, in the manner taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and recited in the Arabic language. The five daily times of salah are fixed by **Allah**.

Sawm

Fasting from just before dawn until sunset. Abstinence is required from all food and drink (including water) as well as smoking and conjugal relations.

Shahadah

Declaration of faith, which consists of the statement, 'There is no god except **Allah**, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'.

Shari'ah

Islamic law based upon the **Qur'an** and **Sunnah**.

Shaytan

Rebellious; proud. The devil (see **Iblis**)

Shi'ah

Followers. Muslims who believe in the **Imamah**, successorship of **Ali** (Radhi-Allahu-anhu - *may Allah be pleased with him*) after the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and eleven of his most pious, knowledgeable descendants.

Shirk

Association. Regarding anything as being equal or partner to **Allah**. Shirk is forbidden in Islam.

Shura

Consultation of the people in the management of religious and worldly affairs. A duty prescribed in the **Qur'an** to leaders at all levels, from family to government.

Sirah

Biographical writings about the conduct and example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Subhah

String of beads used to count recitations in worship.

Sunnah

Model practices, customs and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). This is found in both **Hadith** and **Sirah**.

Sunni

Muslims who believe in the successorship of **Abu Bakr**, **Umar**, **Uthman** and **Ali** (Radhi-Allahu-anhum - *may Allah be pleased with them*) after the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Surah

Division of the **Qur'an** (114 in all).

Takbir

Saying 'Allahu Akbar!' Recited during **salah**, **Id** and other celebratory occasions.

Tawaf

Walking seven times around the **Ka'bah** in worship of **Allah**. Also, a part of **Hajj** and **Umrah**.

Tawhid

Belief in the Oneness of **Allah** - absolute monotheism as practised in **Islam**.

Tawrah

The Torah. The book given to the Prophet **Musa** (Moses) (peace be upon him).

Ulama

Scholars of Islamic law and jurisprudence (sing. **Alim**).

Umar ibn ul-Khattab

The second Khalifah of Islam.

Ummah

Community. World-wide community of Muslims; the nation of Islam.

Umrah

Lesser pilgrimage which can be performed at any time of the year.

Uthman

The third Khalifah of Islam.

Wudu

Ablution before **salah**.

Yathrib

Town to which the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) migrated from **Makkah** (see **al-Madinah**).

Zabur

The Book of Psalms given to Prophet **Dawud** (David) (peace be upon him).

Zakah

Purification of wealth by payment of annual welfare due. An obligatory act of worship.

Zakat-ul-Fitr

Welfare payment at the end of Ramadan.

Zamzam

Name of the well adjacent to the Ka'bah in Makkah. The water first sprang in answer to Hajar's search and prayers (see Hajar and Sa'y).

Zuhr (Salat-ul-Zuhr)

Salah which can be performed after midday until afternoon.

Judaism Glossary

Most of the terms included in this section are Hebrew in origin. However, since the Jewish diaspora, many terms reflect the different countries where Jews have settled. For example, many words are in Yiddish, a common language (a mixture of German, Russian and Hebrew) developed by Jews throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The preferred form in this glossary uses the Sephardic pronunciation, which is equivalent to modern Hebrew as spoken in Israel today. As with all transliterations, there may be acceptable differences in the ways in which words are spelt.

The preferred form is given first, followed by any variants.

Afikomen (Greek)
Dessert. Portion of a **matzah** eaten near the end of the Seder.

Agadah
Aggadah
Telling. Rabbinical teachings on moral values.

Aleinu
Key prayer at the conclusion of each service.

Aliyah
To go up. (i) Being called to read the **Sefer Torah** in the **synagogue**. (ii) The migration of Jews to Israel.

Amidah
Standing. The standing prayer.

Aron Hakodesh
Holy Ark. The focal point of the synagogue, containing **Torah** scrolls.

Ashkenazim
Jews of Central and Eastern European origin.

Bar Mitzvah
Son of Commandment. A boy's coming of age at 13 years old, usually marked by a **synagogue** ceremony and family celebration.

Bat Mitzvah
Bat Chayil
Daughter of Commandment. As above, but for girls from 12 years old. May be marked differently between communities.

Bet ha Knesset
Beit ha Knesset
Shul
House of Assembly. **Synagogue**.

Bimah
Dais. Raised platform primarily for reading the **Torah** in the **synagogue**.

Brit Milah
Berit Milah
Bris
Circumcision.

Challah
Hallah
Enriched bread used particularly on **Shabbat** and during festivals.

Chazan
Hazzan
Cantor
Leader of reading, singing and chanting in the services of some **synagogues**.

Chumash
Five. The **Torah** in book form, used in the **synagogue** and the home.

Circumcision
Religious rite of **Brit Milah**, performed by a qualified **mohel** on all Jewish boys, usually on the eighth day after birth.

Gemara
Gemarah
Commentary on the **Mishnah** included in the **Talmud**.

Genizah
Storage place for damaged religious texts.

Haftarah
Completion. Passages from **Nevi'im** (Prophets) read in the **synagogue** (linked to weekly **Torah** and festival readings).

Hagadah
Haggadah
Telling. A book used at **Seder**.

Halakhah
Halacha
The Way. The code of conduct encompassing all aspects of Jewish life.

Hanukiah
Chanukiah
Menorah
Nine-branched **Hanukkah** lamp used at the festival of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah
Chanukah
Dedication. An eight-day festival of lights to celebrate the re-dedication of the temple following the Maccabean victory over the Greeks.

Hasid (plural Hasidim)
Chasid (plural Chasidim)
Pious. Member of the Orthodox movement of **Hasidism**.

Hasidism
Chasidism
A religious and social movement formed by Israel Baal Shem Tov (from the 18th century onwards).

Havdalah

Distinction. Ceremony marking the conclusion of **Shabbat**.

Hebrew

Ivrit

Ancient Semitic language; language of the **Tenakh** (Hebrew Scriptures) and used by Jews for prayer and study. Also, everyday language in Israel.

Huppah

Chuppah

Canopy used for a wedding ceremony, under which the bride and groom stand.

Israel

One who struggles with God. The phrase refers to the world-wide Jewish community; the land of Israel and the modern state of Israel.

Kabbalah

Cabala

Jewish mysticism.

Kaddish

Prayer publicly recited by mourners.

Kashrut

Laws relating to keeping a **kosher** home and lifestyle.

Ketubah

Ketubbah

Document that defines rights and obligations within Jewish marriage.

Ketuvim

Writings. Third section of the **Tenakh**.

Kibbutz (plural Kibbutzim)

Israeli collective village based on socialist principles.

Kiddush

Holy. A prayer sanctifying **Shabbat** and festival days, usually recited over wine.

Kippah

Yamulkah

Capel

Head covering worn during prayers, **Torah** study, etc. Some followers wear it constantly.

Knesset

Assembly. Israeli parliament.

Kol Nidrei

Kol Nidre

All vows. Prayer recited on the evening of **Yom Kippur**.

Korach

Name of the leader who defied **Moses** in the wilderness

Kosher

Kasher

Fit; proper. Foods permitted by Jewish dietary laws.

Ladino

Language used predominately by **Sephardim**.

Magen David

Shield of David, popularly called Star of David.

Maimonides

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204), a leading Jewish philosopher, medical writer and codifier of Jewish law.

Mashiach

Moshiach

Messiah

The anointed one who will herald in a new era for Judaism and all humankind.

Matzah (plural Matzot)

A flat cracker-like bread which has been baked before it rises; used at **Pesach**.

Menorah

Seven-branched candelabrum which was lit daily in the Temple.

Mezuzah

A scroll placed on door posts of Jewish homes, containing a section from the **Torah** and often enclosed in a decorative case.

Midrash

Collections of various Rabbinic commentaries on the **Tenakh**.

Mikveh

Ritual bath used for the immersion of people and objects.

Minyan

Quorum of ten men, over **Bar Mitzvah** age, required for a service. Progressive communities may include women but do not always require a minyan.

Mishnah

First writing down of the Oral Tradition. An authoritative document forming part of the **Talmud**, codified about 200 CE.

Mishkan

Dwelling. The original travelling sanctuary used prior to the building of the permanent Temple in Jerusalem.

Mitzvah (plural Mitzvot)

Commandment. The **Torah** contains 613 Mitzvot. Commonly used to describe good deeds.

Mohel

Person trained to perform **Brit Milah**.

Moshav (plural Moshavim)

Collective village or farm in Israel.

Ner Tamid

Eternal light. The perpetual light above the **Aron Hakodesh**.

Nevi'im

Prophets. Second section of the **Tenakh**.

Noachide Laws

Seven laws given to Noah after the flood, which are incumbent on all humankind. These laws form the foundation for a just society.

Parev

Parveh

Neutral foods, which are neither milk nor meat, for example, vegetables, eggs, fish.

Pesach

Passover

Festival commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. One of the three biblical pilgrim festivals. Pesach is celebrated in the spring.

Pikei Avot

Pirke Avoth

Sayings of the Fathers. Part of the **Mishnah** containing ethics of Rabbinical sages.

Pikuakh Nefesh

Save a soul. The setting aside of certain laws in order to save a life.

Pogrom

Organised attack on Jews, especially frequent in 19th and early 20th century Eastern Europe.

Purim

Festival commemorating the rescue of Persian Jewry as told in the Book of Esther.

Rabbi

My teacher. An ordained Jewish teacher. Often the religious leader of a Jewish community.

Rashi

Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (1040 - 1105). A French rabbinical scholar and leading commentator on the **Torah** and **Talmud**.

Rebbe

Rabbi. The term used by **Hasidim** for their religious leader.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Ha-Shanah

Head of the Year. Jewish New Year.

Seder

Order. A home-based ceremonial meal during **Pesach**, at which the Exodus from Egypt is recounted using the **Hagadah**.

Sefer Torah

Torah scroll. The five books of Moses hand-written on parchment and rolled to form a scroll.

Sephardim

Sefardim

Jews originating from Mediterranean countries, especially Spain, North Africa and the Middle East.

Shabbat

Shabbos

Day of spiritual renewal and rest commencing at sunset on Friday, terminating at nightfall on Saturday.

Shatnez

Shaatnez

Garments containing a forbidden mixture of wool and linen.

Shavuot

Weeks. One of three pilgrim festivals. Shavuot is celebrated in the summer, seven weeks after **Pesach**.

Shekhina

The divine presence.

Shema

Major Jewish prayer affirming belief in one God. The Shema is found in the **Torah**.

Shemot

Names. Seven holy names of God.

Shiva

Seven days of intense mourning following the burial of a close relation. During this period, all ordinary work is prohibited.

Shoah

Desolation. The suffering experienced by European Jews at the hands of the Nazis, including the systematic murder of six million Jews between 1933 and 1945.

Shofar

Ram's horn blown at the season of Rosh Hashanah

Siddur

Order. Daily prayer book.

Simchat Torah

Rejoicing of the law. Festival celebrating the completion and recommencement of the cycle of the weekly **Torah** reading.

Sukkah (plural Sukkot)

Tabernacle; booth. A temporary dwelling used during **Sukkot**.

Sukkot

One of three biblical pilgrim festivals, Sukkot is celebrated in the Autumn.

Synagogue

Shul

Bet Hakesset

Bet Hamidrash

Building for Jewish public prayer, study and assembly.

Tallit

Tallith

Prayer shawl. Four-cornered garment with fringes.

Talmud

Mishnah and **Gemara**, collected together.

Tefillah

Tefila

Self-judgement. Jewish prayer and meditation.

Tefillin

Tephilin

T'filin

Phylacteries

Small leather boxes containing passages from the **Torah**, strapped on the forehead and arm for morning prayers on weekdays.

Tenakh

Tanakh

The collected 24 books of the Jewish Bible, comprising three sections:

Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim

(Te;Na;Kh).

Teshuva

Repentance. Returning to God.

Tikkun Olam

Tikun

Care for the world and environment.

Torah

Law; teaching. The Five Books of Moses.

Tzedaka

Righteousness. An act of charity.

Tzitzit

Tzittzit

Fringes on the corners of the **Tallit**. Also commonly refers to the fringed undervest worn by some Jewish males.

Yad

Hand-held pointer used in reading the **Sefer Torah**.

Yahrzeit

Year-time. Anniversary of a death.

Yeshiva

College for study of the **Torah** and **Talmud**.

Yiddish

Language used predominantly by **Ashkenazim**.

Yishuv

Ingathering. The Jewish community of **Israel**.

Yom Hashoah

Day to commemorate the **Shoah**.

Yom Kippur

Day of Atonement. Fast day occurring on the tenth day after Rosh Hashanah; a solemn day of **Tefillah** and **Teshuva**.

Zionism

Political movement securing the Jewish return to the land of **Israel**.

Sikhism Glossary

Sikh terms are drawn from the Punjabi language, and the versions below are based upon that language. Many of these terms will also be found in books on Hinduism and Buddhism but with somewhat different meanings. As with all transliterations, there are problems which are difficult to resolve. This is particularly true when moving from the Gurmukhi script which has an alphabet of 35 letters, to the Roman alphabet which has only 26 letters. Names of persons and places are only included in this list if variant forms are commonly used.

Akal Purakh

The Eternal One. A designation frequently used of God by Guru Nanak.

Akal Takht

Akal Takhat
Throne of the Eternal; throne of the Timeless One. Building facing the Golden Temple in Amritsar, where Sikhs gather for political purposes.

Akhand Path

Continuous reading of the **Guru Granth Sahib** from beginning to end.

Amrit

Nectar. Sanctified liquid made of sugar and water, used in initiation ceremonies. **Amrit ceremony**

Amrit Sanskar

Amrit Pahul
Khande di Pahul
Sometimes just 'Amrit' or 'Taking Amrit' ('Amrit Chhakna')
The Sikh rite of initiation into the **Khalsa**. 'Baptism' should not be used.

Anand karaj

Anand Sanskar
Ceremony of bliss. Wedding ceremony.

Ardas

Prayer. The formal prayer offered at most religious acts.

Baisakhi

Vaisakhi
A major Sikh festival celebrating the formation of the **Khalsa**, 1699 CE.

Bangla Sahib

The site of the martyrdom of **Guru Har Krishan** (Delhi).

Bhai Khanaya

A Sikh commended by **Guru Gobind Singh** for serving water to the enemy wounded.

Bhai Lalo

A humble carpenter who opened his house to **Guru Nanak**. The **Guru** preferred Bhai Lalo's simple food to the offerings of a local rich merchant.

Chanani

Chandni
Canopy over the scriptures, used as a mark of respect.

Chauri

Chaur
Symbol of the authority of the **Guru Granth Sahib**. Fan waved over scriptures, made of yak hairs or nylon. It should not be called a 'fly whisk'.

Dasam Granth

Collection of compositions, some of which are attributed to the tenth Sikh **Guru**, compiled some years after his death.

Giani

A person learned in the Sikh scriptures.

Granthi

Reader of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, who officiates at ceremonies.

Gurbani

Bani
Vani
Divine word revealed by the Gurus. The **Shabads** contained in the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Gurdwara

Gurudwara
Sikh place of worship. Literally the 'doorway to the **Guru**'.

Gurmat

The Guru's guidance.

Gurmukh

One who lives by the **Guru's** teaching.

Gurmukhi

From the Guru's mouth. Name given to the script in which the scriptures and the Punjabi language are written.

Gurpurb

Gurpurab
A **Guru's** anniversary (birth or death). Also used for other anniversaries, for example, of the installation of the **Adi Granth**, 1604 CE.

Guru

Teacher. In Sikhism, the title of **Guru** is reserved for the ten human Gurus and the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Guru Arjan

The fifth **Guru** who was the first Sikh martyr (1563-1606).

**Guru Gobind Singh
Guru Govind Singh**
(Original name: **Guru Gobind Rai**)
Tenth Sikh Guru. It is important to note that the title 'Guru' must be used with all the Gurus' names. Sikhs usually use further terms of respect, for example **Guru Gobind Singh Ji** or **Guru Nanak Dev Ji**.

**Guru Granth Sahib
Adi Granth**
(‘Granth’ by itself should be avoided)
Primal collection of Sikh scriptures, compiled by **Guru Arjan** and given its final form by **Guru Gobind Singh**.

**Guru Har Gobind
Guru Hargobind
Guru Hargovind
Sixth Sikh Guru.**

**Guru Har Krishan
Guru Harkishan
Guru Harkrishan
Eighth Sikh Guru.**

Guru Nanak
The first **Guru** and the founder of the Sikh faith (1469-1539).

Guru Tegh Bahadur
The ninth **Guru** who was martyred for the principle of religious tolerance (1622-1675).

Haumai
Egoism. The major spiritual defect.

Hukam
God's will.

**Hukam
Vak**
Random reading taken for guidance from the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Ik Onkar
There is only One God. The first phrase of the **Mool Mantar**. It is also used as a symbol to decorate Sikh objects.

**Janamsakhi
Janam Sakhi**
Birth stories. Hagiographic life stories of a **Guru**, especially **Guru Nanak**.

Japji Sahib
A morning prayer, composed by **Guru Nanak**, which forms the first chapter of the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

**Jivan Mukht
Jivan Mukht**
Enlightened while in the material body; a spiritually enlightened person, freed from worldly bonds.

Kachera
Traditional underwear/shorts. One of the five Ks (see **panj kakke**).

Kakka
See **panj kakke**. Singular of the Punjabi letter K (plural ‘kakke’)

**Kangha
Kanga**
Comb worn in the hair. One of the five Ks (see **panj kakke**).

Kara
Steel band worn on the right wrist. One of the five Ks (see **panj kakke**).

**Karah parshad
Karah Prasad**
Sanctified food distributed at Sikh ceremonies.

Kaur
Princess. Name given to all Sikh females by **Guru Gobind Singh** (see **Singh**).

**Kesh
Kes**
Uncut hair. One of the five Ks (see **panj kakke**).

Khalsa
The community of the pure. The Sikh community.

Khanda
Double-edged sword used in the initiation ceremony. Also used as the emblem on the Sikh flag.

Kirat karna
Earning one's livelihood by one's own efforts.

Kirpan
Sword. One of the five Ks (see **panj kakke**). ‘Dagger’ should be avoided.

Kirtan
Devotional singing of the compositions found in the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Kirtan Sohila
A prayer said before retiring for sleep. It is also used at the cremation ceremony and when the **Guru Granth Sahib** is laid to rest.

Kurahit
Prohibitions, for example intoxicants.

**Langar
Guru ka Langar
Guru's kitchen**. The gurdwara dining hall and the food served in it.

**Mela
Fair**. Used of Sikh festivals which are not **gurpurbs**.

**Manji
Manji Sahib**
Small platform on which the scripture is placed.

**Manmukh
Munmukh**
Self-orientated (as opposed to **gurmukh**).

**Mool Mantar
Mul Mantar**
Basic teaching; essential teaching. The basic statement of belief at the beginning of the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Nam Simran
Nam Simaran
Naam Simran

Meditation on the divine name, using passages of scripture.

Nankana Sahib

Birthplace of **Guru Nanak**. Now in Pakistan.

Nishan Sahib

Sikh flag flown at **gurdwaras**.

Nit nem

The recitation of specified daily prayers.

Panj kakke

The five Ks. The symbols of Sikhism worn by Sikhs.

Panj piare

Panj Pyare (other forms may also be found)

The five beloved ones. Those first initiated into the **Khalsa**; those who perform the rite today.

Panth

The Sikh community.

Patases

Patashas

Sugar bubbles or crystals used to prepare **Amrit**.

Punjab

Panjab

Land of five rivers. The area of India in which Sikhism originated.

Ragi

Sikh musician who sings compositions from the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Rahit

Sikh obligations, for example, to meditate on God.

Rahit Maryada

Rehat Maryada

Sikh Code of Discipline.

Sadhsangat

Sangat

Congregation or assembly of Sikhs.

Sewa

Seva

Service directed at the **sadhsangat** and **gurdwara**, but also to humanity in general.

Shabad

Sabad

Shabd

Word. Hymn from the **Guru Granth Sahib**; the divine word.

Sikh

Learner; disciple. A person who believes in the ten Gurus and the **Guru Granth Sahib**, and who has no other religion.

Singh

Lion. Name adopted by Sikh males (see **kaur**).

Sis Ganj Sahib

The site of the martyrdom of **Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Delhi)

Vak

Vaak

A random reading taken for guidance from the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

Vand chhakna

Sharing one's time, talents and earnings with the less fortunate.

Waheguru

Wonderful Lord. A Sikh name for God.

Humanism Glossary

Humanism is a major ethical non-theistic tradition. This glossary is based on one provided by the British Humanist Association (www.humanism.org.uk)

Agnosticism

Open-mindedness or genuine doubt as to the truth of claims made for the reality or existence of God or any supernatural domain.
- Belief or assertion that God or gods lack convincing evidence and arguments. The word is formed from “a” (“without”) and “gnosis” (“knowledge”).

Atheism

Denial of the existence of God or gods. The word is formed from “a” (“without”) and “theos” (“deity, god”).

Ethics

Moral rules and principles to govern human conduct. Some religions see them as influenced by divine interventions; humanists consider them to be constructed solely by people working together in a society.

Faith

1. Frequently used to mean the same as religion.
2. Trust.

God

In some religions, the cause and support of all that is and the source of morality. Usually regarded as taking a direct interest in individuals in this life and judging them after death. Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Humanism and some Christians do not use the concept.

Humanism

A view of life, and a way of life, based solely on our understanding of the natural world, human feelings, intelligence and creativity and on a personal commitment to valuing and cooperating with

one another as fellow human beings. Humanists regard people as responsible both for themselves and for the societies and life stances that they create; they regard all life stances, including all religions, as human creations, without any supernatural input. They believe that this is the only life we have, so it is infinitely precious, and that by working together we can make it better for everyone.

Life stance

The style and content of an individual’s (or a community’s) relationship with that which is most ultimate in and guides their lives: the consequences for life that flow from this. The term encompasses both theistic and non-theistic positions without favouring one more than the other. Christianity and Islam are theistic life stances, for example, while Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Humanism are non-theistic life stances.

Naturalistic

A world view that does not use any notion of the divine or supernatural. Humanism is founded on a naturalistic world view, rather than a supernatural view: thus evolution provides an account of how we come to be as we are biologically and socially, while meaning and purpose are the creations of our shared imagination, feeling and story-telling.

Religion

A serious, examined way of life based on a set of beliefs and practices with one or more of the following dimensions: mythical, doctrinal, spiritual, ethical, ritual, social, symbolic, belief in a god, gods or the supernatural. Most humanists would say that humanism is not a religion but this is debatable on the basis of the definition above. Confucianism, Taoism and major strands of Buddhism and Jainism do not involve a god or gods, and there are non-theistic strands in Christianity and Hinduism.

Science

The enterprise of creating and organising human understanding of the natural world, including humanity, through open enquiry, imaginative theory devising, invited challenge and testing against evidence.

Secular

This word can be used in two different ways:

1. Excluding and rejecting religion.
2. A civil society in which government and its services are structured independently of religion organisations, which protects freedom of belief as it does other freedoms, and treats people equally.

Spiritual

The highest expression and activity of the human person deriving from whatever source.

“The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith.” (1)

Spirituality

“Spirituality refers to the inner nature of human beings often expressed in the search for meaning and purpose in life; the sense of personal value and values; reflections on the challenges life brings; and a sense of mystery and awe at the universe.” (2)

Supernatural

1. “Other-worldly” reality radically different from ordinary experience;
 2. From beyond the world as we know it;
 3. Hidden or occult.
- See also Naturalistic

Theistic

Involving a god or gods.

Ultimate Questions

Highest or deepest, or most searching and far-reaching, questions of meaning in life and death. (1) Some aspects of Religious Education are concerned with responses to Ultimate Questions. Many of the responses to these questions are theistic (e.g. Christianity, Islam). Others are non-theistic (e.g. Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Humanism.)

- (1) “*SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT - A DISCUSSION PAPER*”: National Curriculum Council (1993)
- (2) “*A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SYLLABUS FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS*”: Independent Schools Joint Council (1994)