

Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools

Keynotes

You can download the individual Keynote sections of *Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes* (as listed in the following Table of Contents) from the [Keynotes Explained](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm>) web page on the [Multicultural Education](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm) (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm>) site.

Published by



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Early Childhood Development

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Introduction

Context

At a global, national and local level the world is changing. On the one hand globalisation means we live in an increasingly interdependent world with economic and technological interdependence between societies and nations and improved communication between peoples. At the same time we are seeing, in some parts of the world, increasing ethnic and sectarian conflict creating great political instability and extreme hardship for minority groups. The extended conflicts in the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia and more recently in Northern Africa have swelled the numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who, fleeing oppression and political and economic instability, have sought settlement in more peaceful countries like Australia.

Schools in Victoria generally provide safe and supportive environments for their students with school policies and curriculum practices doing much to encourage positive relationships between students. Conflict in schools remains a reality, however, with some incidents of abuse or violence being fuelled by racist and prejudiced attitudes. Mistrust, fear of difference, lack of information and understandings of different cultures and faiths can lead to intolerance and prejudice sometimes resulting in violence.

The *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* articulated the importance of schools developing in students a respect for cultural diversity.

Schooling should be socially just, so that:

all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally.

The report of the UNESCO conference *Education for Shared Values and for Intercultural and Interfaith Understanding* (UNESCO, 2005), called on education systems to, “incorporate common and agreed values into curricula and to prepare education content capable of promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding” (Susan Pascoe, Keynote address to 2005 National Values Education Forum).

Schools can do much through their curriculum to develop in students an understanding of culture and a respect for diversity, which goes beyond a superficial understanding of aspects of culture and develops in students a capacity to view the world as others see it.

Culture means the way we see and do things. Culture is the set of shared meanings or the ways people agree to be (behave, act, respond) in order to respond to new and familiar situations in their lives. Culture becomes the filter through which people interpret reality and perceive their future. As such any particular culture represents a coherent but distinctive way of looking at the world.

(Brisbane Catholic Education, 1999. *Cultural literacy across the curriculum: A Frameworkframework*,. pp. 7-8)

For many in our community, religion is an essential aspect of their cultural identity. Although Christianity is still the major religion in Australia, other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, are growing at a more rapid rate. Fostering understanding and respect between different faith traditions, which share core values of tolerance, respect and compassion for others is an important aspect of educating our students to live peacefully and harmoniously in a culturally diverse society.

There is...a major responsibility and challenge for schools in Australia and worldwide to integrate principles, values and perspectives of inter-faith dialogue toward building a culture of peace into the curriculum and all dimensions of school life

(Professor Toh Swee-Hin, Director of the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre and Laureate, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, 2000).

Purpose of the materials

Sometimes teachers are unprepared for outbursts of prejudiced behaviour or racist opinions, or are uninformed about students' cultures and religions. In these situations, teachers and other students can respond in ways that may make things worse. The keynotes aim to:

- contribute to teachers' understanding of conflict and prejudice and ways of dealing effectively with them
- suggest action that school communities can take both to prevent conflict and to respond to it
- provide teachers with information on religions, which traditionally are associated with the Middle East
- provide teachers with basic information on the most statistically significant religions represented in Australian society
- provide ideas for related classroom activities.

Although the original focus of the keynotes was the Middle East, the number of religions has been expanded to include information about other significant religious communities in Australia. It is expected that teachers will use Keynotes 3–10 to familiarise themselves with students' cultural and religious backgrounds and will build these perspectives into classroom programs. The source materials on different religious communities are also suitable for use by senior students.

The materials

The Keynotes were originally developed to accompany the text, *Combating Prejudice in Schools, The Middle East in Focus*, first published in 1992. They have been substantially revised and updated.

Keynote 1 provides a theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence, and makes suggestions as to how schools should address the issue.

Keynote 2 provides a framework for a whole-school approach to combating racism and prejudice in schools, which has been adapted from *Racism. No Way!* It includes an audit of school policy and practices, which schools can use for planning and monitoring purposes.

Keynotes 3 to 11 are a series of succinct fact sheets providing information about significant religions represented in Australia. Sub-sections provide information on the origins, early history and spread of the religions, essential beliefs, religious observances, major festivals and celebrations, population, community structure and organisations in Australia. The section, *Considerations for Schools*, suggests aspects of the culture and religion schools need to be mindful of when developing policies and programs.

The Keynotes also contain suggestions for classroom activities. These are not age-specific, so teachers will need to choose and adapt activities as appropriate for their students. These Keynotes are intended for use by teachers from Prep to Year 12.

Titles include:

Keynote 1	Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools
Keynote 2	A Whole-school approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice
Keynote 3	The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Keynote 4	The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism
Keynote 5	The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians
Keynote 6	The Abrahamic Religions: Islam
Keynote 7	Arabs and Muslims in Australia
Keynote 8	Indian Religions: Hinduism
Keynote 9	Indian Religions: Sikhism
Keynote 10	Indian Religions: Buddhism
Keynote 11	Bahá'í Faith

Legislative and policy framework

Legislation

The materials are consistent with the following state and federal legislation, which supports racial and religious tolerance and diversity, and prohibits vilification and discrimination on the grounds of race, culture or religious belief or activity:

- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*
- *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.*

Policy

Policy documents outlining school responsibilities in relation to supporting equity and diversity include:

- [The Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools \(1997\)](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/Mpolicy.pdf) (PDF, 60KB)
(<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/Mpolicy.pdf>)
- [Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools \(2001\)](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/GuidelinesforSchools.pdf) (PDF, 408KB)
(<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/GuidelinesforSchools.pdf>)
- [Guidelines for Developing the Student Code of Conduct](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/conduct.pdf) (PDF, 196KB)
(<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/conduct.pdf>)
- [Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/FWSSstudent.pdf) (PDF, 115KB)
(<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/FWSSstudent.pdf>).

Values education

The materials and suggested activities are consistent with, and support, the nine values outlined in the [National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools](#) (Commonwealth of Australia 2005) (<http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8758>).

- Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion
- Honesty and Trustworthiness
- Doing Your Best
- Freedom
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Integrity
- Care and Compassion
- Fair Go.

These values are particularly relevant in a global, national and local community context.

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The overview to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VCAA 5, 2005) states that to succeed in a rapidly changing, globally-orientated world, “all students need to develop the capacities to:

- manage themselves as individuals and in relation to others,
- understand the world in which they live; and
- act effectively in that world.”

The source material and classroom suggestions in the Keynotes support curriculum programs that enable students to meet the Victorian Essential Learning Standards in the three strands of learning. They relate in particular to the following domains:

- Civics and Citizenship
- Interpersonal Development
- English
- The Humanities – History
- The Humanities – Geography
- Communication
- LOTE
- The Arts.

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools

Why people fight

Different theories are offered for the causes of violence and aggression. Human behaviour is complex and no one theory holds all the answers.

It is important not to equate violence with aggression. A person may behave aggressively without being violent. Aggression is a behaviour characterised by verbal or physical attack. It may be appropriate and self-protective or destructive and violent.

Some people believe that fighting between individuals and groups is instinctive and inevitable with aggression being used to maintain the dominance of an individual or a group over limited resources or territory. It is an instinct shared by people and animals. The 'aggression as instinct' theory is an extension of the 'survival of the fittest' theory.

This explanation, however, overlooks the capacity of people to change behaviour and to develop and implement moral codes to govern the way people relate to one another.

An extension of the 'violence as instinct' argument comes from psychoanalytic theory: violence is essentially determined by unresolved conflicts or thwarted impulses within the individual. Freud, for example, asserted that "... It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulse to self-destruction".

This explanation is criticised on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge social processes and conditions that influence behaviours and beliefs.

The third theory of aggression moves away from the idea of violence as instinct to violence as a result of an external stimulus or obstacle which creates a build-up of frustration in the individual or group when they are prevented from having their basic needs and desires met. Collective violence, for example, can arise when a group feels frustrated because members believe they are not receiving their fair entitlement to goods, resources, cultural recognition or political power. This explanation of violence stresses social contexts, such as inequality among groups or contested cultural norms that lead to struggles for power or become rallying points for change.

It appears that an element of frustration is often connected with violent behaviour but the explanation overlooks the fact that frustration does not always result in individual or collective violence. Experience shows, however, that collective violence increases when there is high unemployment, increased poverty and international tension.

Struggles for power are often accompanied by ideologies of racial or ethnic superiority claiming some pre-existing order of merit among groups. This view justifies violence on the grounds that rational argument and the use of fair processes in settling disputes are not relevant because of the entrenched positions people inevitably adopt. Although the causes of the recent conflicts in

the Sudan for example are complex, ethnic tensions have been both a contributing factor and a result of the conflict.

A fourth theory, the Social Learning Theory, maintains that aggressive behaviour is learned behaviour. When witnesses of violent behaviour see someone achieve satisfaction through violence, they become more willing to use violence themselves to achieve their ends. An influential study of aggression in children (Bandura 1973) found that children who had witnessed adults committing violent acts were significantly more likely to commit acts of aggression themselves. This applied also to violent acts seen on film. Social learning theorists do not accept that violence is instinctive. They point to examples of societies in which aggression is largely absent and to examples of violent behaviour both collective and individual in which frustration was not the motive. They admit that frustration can be a possible trigger for violence, but claim that aggression is learned behaviour rather than an automatic response to frustration.

Social learning theorists maintain that if people find rewards in violence, either through achieving their goals or through acting out their anger without harmful consequences, they are increasingly likely to be violent in the future. Others can become caught up in the violence cycle. When violence becomes common in a society, it becomes more likely that others will choose to model themselves on the violent participants (Gurr, 1970, pages 172–173).

Conflict resolution

Conflict is an ordinary part of everyday living. It is integral to living in groups, making decisions, solving problems and therefore, not necessarily bad. It can produce new ideas, broader perspectives and creative interaction among people who initially disagree.

Using violence to deal with conflict, however, is unlikely to resolve the root cause. In fact, it is likely to exacerbate the situation and create additional conflict.

The protracted conflict in the Middle East shows that violence as a solution to conflict is thoroughly destructive to all parties. It has caused deepening rancour in the wider Muslim world and this has led to an environment where fanatical extremists have been able to recruit people to their causes, particularly among those experiencing deprivation, inequality and a deep sense of injustice. Acts of terrorism in the USA, Bali, Spain Britain and India, and the consequent U.S. interventions in the Middle East have broadened the conflict to encompass much of the globe. The negative social, economic and political effects of these events will last well beyond the cessation of war. The casualties of these conflicts and others around the globe include the large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers who are living in uncertain conditions in countries of asylum waiting for resettlement.

Schools in a democratic society have a responsibility to teach students the value of cooperative and non-violent forms of conflict resolution and to help them develop and practise the relevant skills.

What schools can do

Develop clear, inclusive policy

Schools need to develop clear definitions of harassment, bullying and violence and have clear policies for preventing and responding to them.

School policy-making and planning should be a cooperative undertaking focusing on issues of social justice including values education, multicultural education, human rights, gender equity, peace education, Koori education, and programs specifically targeted at meeting the needs of students from language backgrounds other than English. A whole-school approach to student welfare and discipline needs to be adopted by all members of the school community.

Model non-violent conflict resolution

Students learn as much by observing significant adults as they do by being told what to do. If teachers and parents shout at kids or each other and regularly play power games there is every chance that young people will adopt similar methods of resolving conflict.

When families and schools demonstrate through their daily interactions that all people deserve respect and that decisions are made by groups rather than by individuals acting in their own interests, young people are more likely to come to value that way of behaving.

Young people cannot be expected to promote and encourage the peaceful resolution of conflicts if they do not see conflict resolution principles and strategies being modelled by adults in all areas of their lives, including business, sport, entertainment and personal relationships. Adults play a part in making the environment more peaceful by practicing non-violent conflict resolution when minor or major disputes arise in their daily lives.

Have clear sanctions against violence in classrooms and playgrounds

All schools have codes of conduct that apply to members of the school community, including staff and students. These include rights and responsibilities of staff and students, and rules and consequences for misbehaviour. Many schools have specific rules and consequences that relate to violent behaviour. Effective codes of conduct are living documents: written in simple language, frequently revisited and reviewed by staff, students and parents, and applied consistently.

Effective schools have a range of agreed preventive and responsive strategies that all staff apply before principals use their powers under the Education Regulations to suspend a student who displays violent behaviour.

Teach about the resolution of conflict

In the past, many schools shied away from curriculum content dealing with conflict, with the exception of wars involving the British Empire or Australia and its allies. Classroom approaches tended to be nationalistic or ethnocentric, presenting 'our' side more sympathetically than might be justified by historical evidence that has since emerged. Issues that perhaps reflected badly on 'our side' tended to be avoided. The treatment of Indigenous Australians in early colonial history provides one such example.

Today, teachers are more aware that conflict resolution can be studied in a variety of curriculum areas. The learning domains of Interpersonal Development, Civics and Citizenship, and Humanities – History are particularly fertile areas for studying conflict resolution in the family, school and community, within the legal system and other social institutions. Conflict resolution can also be studied from an historical perspective. Media treatment of issues such as family violence, sexual harassment and racist violence at home and abroad, challenges schools to make a conscious effort to help students make sense of their world.

This is a long-term task for schools, not something that can be done in any one area of the curriculum or by one teacher acting in isolation from the whole-school plan. Components of a whole-school approach to student welfare and discipline will include aspects of the following:

- values education such as those identified in the [National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8758) (Commonwealth of Australia 2005) (<http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8758>).
- social and emotional wellbeing training including: building self-confidence, self-esteem and trust, forming positive relationships with adults and peers, managing anger and coping with stress
- communication skills necessary for working effectively in groups, e.g. active listening
- cooperative learning strategies
- models of decision making
- intercultural studies
- civics and citizenship education: principles and practice underlying our civic institutions in Australia and development of skills necessary to interact effectively with the community
- conflict management and resolution strategies for staff and students, e.g. problem solving and mediation
- conflict resolution skills, e.g. managing emotions, defining the problem, developing options, appropriate assertiveness, negotiation and mediation
- anti-bullying programs, e.g. peer support and building resilience

- peace education including historical perspectives and non-violent strategies such as Gandhi's core principles
- anti-racism education.

Selected teaching strategies

All the following ideas require careful planning and sensitive teacher supervision.

- **Role play:** Walking in other people's shoes; taking turns at being the victim and the aggressor; role play stages of conflict from conflict to win/win resolution; ways to negotiate; active listening.
- **Simulation:** Creating a risky situation, but with safety.
- **Verbal self-defence:** Contrived insults and protective responses; learning how to say no; developing "I feel ... and I want" Statements, e.g. "I feel annoyed when you keep bumping my desk. I want you to stop."
- **Teach appropriate language** and register to help minimise conflict.
- Use **graphic organisers** to map the conflict. What is the issue? Who is involved? What are their needs? What are their concerns/fears/anxieties?
- **Survey attitudes:** Is it okay for parents to hit their children? Is war ever justified?
- **Debates:** "The pen is mightier than the sword until you run out of ink"; "Why should I negotiate when I'm bigger than he/she is?"
- **Interpreting body language:** What you say is not necessarily what you mean; the significance of eye contact is not the same in all cultures.
- **Workshops and vignettes:** Use case studies to stimulate class discussion and sharpen tools of analysis.
- **Analyse media reports:** Deal with conflict from a linguistic point of view, content, views presented and graphics.

Skills for better relationships

The following skills need to be developed and practised through a variety of strategies and contexts:

- allow each person a chance to speak
- build trust
- respect other people's right to be heard and don't interrupt them
- practise active listening

- stick to the point
- don't blame
- separate ideas and behaviour from the person
- ask questions to clearly establish issue
- acknowledge feelings: check back to clarify understanding, allow silences and notice body language
- summarise to make sure you agree on the facts
- listen to feelings as well as facts
- share your own feelings
- emphasise points of agreement as well as clarify points of disagreement
- keep individual personal experiences confidential to the group
- respect others' cultural traditions, values and languages
- always support one another
- be sensitive to the hidden curriculum in the group process
- become aware of the effects of non-verbal behaviour, e.g. aggressive stance or expression
- be alert to manipulative strategies used by others
- give up 'getting your own way' (exercising power over) and look for a better group solution (sharing power with)
- assert your own rights without infringing those of others
- try to have all people participating equally
- be creative in looking for options
- find a solution that meets the needs of both parties.

Escalating conflict

Conflict tends to escalate if:

- exposed emotion such as anger and frustration increases
- a perceived threat increases
- more people get involved and begin choosing sides

- students involved were not friends before the conflict
- students have few peacemaking skills at their disposal
- there is a perception that a party involved in the conflict is not being treated fairly.

Reducing conflict

Conflict can be reduced if:

- attention is focused on the problem, not the participants
- the participants are removed to a more neutral space
- there is a decrease in exposed emotion and perceived threat
- the students were friends before the conflict occurred
- the participants know how to make peace, or have someone to help them do so.

Useful websites

The [Values for Australian Schooling Kit](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/) can be found online at the Australian Government's Values Education website.
(<http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/>)

[Bullying. No Way!](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/ideasbox/schools/) is an anti-bullying education resource with examples of whole school approaches that show how schools interact with their local communities
(<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/ideasbox/schools/>).

[Mind Matters](http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/) is a resource and professional development program designed to support Australian secondary schools in promoting and protecting the social and emotional wellbeing of members of school communities
(<http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/>).

[Kids matter](http://www.apapdc.edu.au/kidsmatter/) is a whole-school approach that aims to improve the mental health and well-being of primary school students
(<http://www.apapdc.edu.au/kidsmatter/>).

[Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/) is an anti-racism education resource for Australian schools with lesson ideas, games and a library (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>).

[Safe Schools are Effective Schools](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/strategies.htm) outlines policy, practice, strategies and resources for Victorian government schools
(<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/strategies.htm>).

[Bullying Online](http://www.bullying.co.uk/) is a resource from the United Kingdom with sections for schools, parents and young people (<http://www.bullying.co.uk/>).

[Bullying at school](http://www.scre.ac.uk/bully/index.html) includes information from the University of Glasgow, Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) (<http://www.scre.ac.uk/bully/index.html>).

[Bullying in schools and what to do about it](http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/) is a resource based on research undertaken by Dr Ken Rigby, University of South Australia (www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/).

[ABC's Behind the News - London Terrorism](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/btn/teachers/activitysheets/ep18/0719terrorism.pdf) (PDF, 70KB), a worksheet discussing appropriate classroom responses to acts of terrorism, specifically the London bombings. It draws on state education department guidelines (<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/btn/teachers/activitysheets/ep18/0719terrorism.pdf>).

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© Revised edition published by the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2006. First published by the Department of School Education with the State Board of Education, Victoria, with support from the Commonwealth Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1992.

Keynote 2 – A Whole-school Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice

Introduction

Throughout history, certain groups and individuals within our society have suffered discrimination and hurt as a result of prejudiced and racist attitudes.

It is clear that racism is present in Australian schools. Racist incidents most commonly reported are name-calling, teasing, exclusion, verbal abuse and bullying. However racism is also linked to violence in schools, either as part of the harassment or in retaliation to it. (*Racism, No Way!* pp. 9–10).

The role that schools play in the construction and transmission of social values gives them a unique opportunity to influence the kind of society in which we live. Efforts of individual teachers, supported by a whole-school approach, can substantially contribute to the development of a harmonious society free from racism.

Understanding and valuing cultural diversity are the key components for a whole-school approach to countering racism. It is now recognised, however, that overcoming racism at an individual and institutional level is a more complex task than just teaching about cultural difference and the negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice, important though these are.

A whole-school approach can include:

- teaching about racism, its causes, manifestation, effects on victims and perpetrators, and ways to overcome it
- developing in students a commitment to values of tolerance, inclusion, fairness and social responsibility, and giving them the skills to act according to those values
- developing in students an understanding of the key roles of colonisation and migration in shaping the history of Australia
- developing in students an understanding of the role of race, culture, language and religion in determining individual identity and a sense of community
- developing and applying skills of critical analysis and critical literacy to media reporting and other texts on issues related to race
- critically examining school practices and student achievement data and taking action to ensure that no individual student or groups of students are being treated in a disadvantageous way
- working cooperatively with parents/caregivers and the community to monitor racism and develop strategies to combat it.

Care of students at times of crisis

In general, a whole-school approach to celebrating diversity and addressing community issues is appropriate. However, at times of heightened tension or conflict – either international, such as the Iraq invasion, or local, such as the Cronulla riots – particular groups of students may need special support. In schools where there are young people or staff members from countries affected, anxieties may be heightened by concerns for relatives and friends. Students from Islamic or Arabic speaking backgrounds may fear a repeat of the backlash against members of these communities, such as that experienced after September 11 and the Bali bombings. For others who have fled conflict in their countries of origin, including students from the Balkans, the Middle East, Horn of Africa or Northern Africa, traumatic memories may be revived. Particular attention may need to be given to engaging and maintaining the confidence of these members of the school community.

Racist attitudes

It is possible that some members of staff may hold racist attitudes. They need to be reminded of their responsibility to act in accordance with the terms of their employment and the Staff Code of Conduct. Their attitudes should not be allowed to negatively affect school policy, the school ethos or outcomes for individual students.

Framework for countering racism

The following framework for countering racism and prejudice has been adapted from *Racism. No Way!*

Six areas for action have been identified as a focus for action at both the school and system level.

Other texts supporting a whole-school approach to combating racism can be found in the Select Bibliography accompanying this material.

Summary of Responsibilities

Education systems

Schools:

- principals
- school executive.

Members of the school community:

- teachers and other school staff
- students
- parents, caregivers and community.

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Areas for action:

- policies and guidelines
- curriculum and pedagogy
- training and development
- student support and development
- parent and community involvement
- monitoring and reporting.

Responsibilities of Education Systems

Policies and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review institutional policies, procedures and practices to ensure they do not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against any individual or group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, culture, language or religion. • Establish policies and guidelines which clearly articulate principles and procedures to counter racism, including clear procedures for the resolution of complaints of racism. • Review recruitment, selection and promotion procedures to ensure that they are culturally inclusive and encourage the employment of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. • Establish policies that support more equitable participation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in schooling.
Curriculum and pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide curriculum and resources which challenge racist attitudes and behaviours and increase students' understanding of racism. • Provide curriculum and resources which recognise and value the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, languages and societies. • Provide programs to support students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. • Review curriculum, assessment practices and resources to ensure that they are inclusive of the educational needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
Training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training programs in valuing diversity, cross-cultural understanding and strategies to counter racism. • Provide support and training for teachers in culturally inclusive teaching practice and program design. • Provide training for staff in supporting students who are involved in racist incidents. • Enhance workplace productivity and service provision by fully utilising the skills, talents and varying perspectives of staff from diverse backgrounds. • Provide leadership and management training to staff from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
Student support and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines for student representative bodies to ensure they are inclusive and provide a balanced representation. • Provide training for student representative bodies in cross-cultural understanding and strategies to counter racism. • Provide opportunities for students to become involved in developing and evaluating system-wide initiatives to counter racism. • Provide student support services that are appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
Parent and community involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage representation of parent and community groups from diverse cultural and language backgrounds in the development and evaluation of policies, guidelines and procedures. • Provide support to schools to ensure they are able to communicate effectively with their diverse communities, including the use of interpreters, translators and community support staff. • Encourage schools and their communities to celebrate key community events. • Establish community consultation and advisory mechanisms on racism in education and barriers to participation for identified student groups.
Monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop system-wide procedures for monitoring and reporting on initiatives to counter racism. • Monitor the educational outcomes for identified groups of students compared to those of the population as a whole. • Monitor the incidence and resolution of complaints of racism within systems and schools. • Monitor the participation of staff in training programs designed to counter racism.

Responsibilities of Schools

Policies and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement school policies, procedures and practices that do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against any individual or group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, culture, language or religion. • Implement initiatives to ensure that all members of the school community staff, students, parents or caregivers - understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to racist behaviour and in contributing towards the development of schools which value diversity and are free of racism. • Ensure effective mechanisms are in place for reporting on and responding to incidents of racism and that all staff, students and parents are aware of the procedures and how to access them. • Involve students, parents and community members in policy development and review.
Curriculum and pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement teaching and learning programs which challenge racist attitudes and behaviour and increase students' understanding of the effects of racism and discrimination. • Implement teaching and learning programs to increase students' understandings of reconciliation, multiculturalism and cultural diversity. • Evaluate all teaching and learning materials and assessment practices to ensure they are not biased and are inclusive of the needs of all students. • Implement teaching and learning programs which address the specific cultural and linguistic needs of students.
Training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate whole school education programs to counter racism into school training and development plans. • Encourage all staff to participate in valuing diversity and cross-cultural awareness training and to examine their own behaviour for discrimination. • Promote good practice through supporting staff to share expertise in strategies to counter racism.
Student support and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage teachers to participate in inclusive curriculum training programs and to critically evaluate their own teaching practice for cultural inclusiveness. • Encourage the participation of all students on student representative bodies so that they reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school. • Encourage students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to participate in student leadership and development programs. • Provide opportunities for students from all backgrounds to discuss issues of racism, cultural diversity and reconciliation. • Provide student support services that are appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse groups and information on educational pathways that is free of cultural stereotyping. • Promote good examples of student involvement in developing successful initiatives to counter racism.
Parent and community involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to parents and community members on their rights and responsibilities in relation to racism and education to counter racism. • Draw on community resources and skills in the development of activities to counter racism, school planning and decision-making processes. • Use interpreters, translations and community support staff in partnership with teachers to provide information to parents in a language they understand. • Encourage the participation of parents and community members of all backgrounds in all school activities including activities to counter racism, school planning and decision-making processes and representation on parent and community bodies.
Monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and review whole-school data and information relating to the progress of identified groups of students to inform development of teaching and learning programs. • Determine responsibilities for monitoring and reporting on racism and the incidence and resolution of complaints within the school. • Conduct periodic assessments of the effectiveness of parent and community consultation mechanisms. • Seek feedback on effectiveness of education initiatives to counter racism and report on outcomes.

Responsibilities of Members of the School Community

Teachers and Other School Staff

Know your rights and responsibilities

- Reflect on your own opinions and views on Australian identity.
- Be aware of your own rights and responsibilities in relation to racial discrimination.

Challenge racism whenever it occurs

- Teach students what racist behaviour is and set clear expectations in terms of non-racist behaviour.
- Challenge racist attitudes conveyed in the community, media and in popular culture.
- When you see racist behaviour deal with it immediately wherever and whenever it occurs.
- Teach students about their rights and responsibilities in relation to racial discrimination.
- Encourage students to report racist behaviour.

Be a positive role model

- Model inclusive, positive, non-racist behaviour in the classroom, playground and staff room.
- Be consistent and fair in applying school policies and procedures.
- Foster sensitivity to other people's practices and beliefs.
- Share information about your own cultural background.

Assess your own attitudes, behaviours and training needs

- Identify your own training needs in relation to education to counter racism; cultural understanding; and inclusive teaching practice.
- Be open to staff development opportunities which aim to increase cross-cultural understanding.
- Obtain factual information about racism and its effects.
- Consider debates on topical issues such as reconciliation and immigration and form your own opinions based on the facts.
- Evaluate your own teaching practice as well as teaching and learning materials for bias and sensitivity.

Recognise and value cultural diversity

- Establish classroom practices that reflect and value the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Find out about the cultural and language backgrounds of the students in your school.
- Treat students as individuals. Don't make assumptions based on stereotypes of particular groups.
- Learn to pronounce students' names correctly.
- Encourage students to maintain their own cultural identities and their home language.
- Allow students to use their first language.

- Discuss the importance of Reconciliation and cultural diversity.

Create an inclusive learning environment

- Seek out, use and share learning resources which include the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Incorporate material which challenges racist attitudes and facilitates cultural understanding into teaching and learning activities where appropriate.
- Make sure students from all backgrounds feel confident to participate in class.
- Seek language support for students who need it.
- Encourage positive interaction between students of different backgrounds.
- Make sure assessment tasks do not discriminate against some groups of students.
- Ensure verbal instructions are easily understood by all students.
- Recognise Aboriginal English as an acceptable variation of Australian English.
- Refer to all students and groups living in Australia as 'Australian'.

Encourage the involvement of parents and community members from all backgrounds

- Encourage parents and caregivers from all communities to participate in school activities.
- Make use of translations, interpreters and language support staff.
- Seek feedback from parents and caregivers in relation to the effectiveness of classroom activities and their child's progress.

Students

Know your rights and responsibilities

- Be aware of your own rights and responsibilities in relation to racial discrimination.
- Think about your own behaviour to make sure that you don't discriminate against others.

Take a firm stand against racism

- Don't accept racist opinions – challenge them.
- Refuse to participate in racist behaviour.
- If you hear other students telling a racist joke, point out to them that it might hurt other people's feelings.
- Tell teachers if you see students bullying others or calling them racist names.
- Report to teachers any racist material you find.

Learn about other cultures and share what you know

- Find out about other cultures and languages.
- Be proud of your own culture and home language.
- Learn about the cultures of others in your school and share information about your own culture.

- Try to include students from different backgrounds in classroom and playground activities.
- Share with your family and friends what you know about cultural diversity and racism.
- Join in activities that celebrate cultural diversity and Reconciliation.

Form your own opinions

- Think about what you read, see on television and hear on the radio about different groups of people – is it fair?
- Make up your own mind about issues such as Reconciliation and immigration and base your opinion on the facts.
- Challenge stereotypes about different groups of people.

Parents, Community and Caregivers

Know your rights and responsibilities

- Reflect on your own attitudes and behaviour towards people from different backgrounds.
- Ask for information in a language you understand.
- Ensure you have information about school policies, curriculum and school activities.

Be a positive role model

- Take a firm stand against racism.
- Model inclusive, positive behaviour.
- Be open to other people's beliefs and practices.
- Try to include people from different backgrounds in your circle of friends.
- Ensure your child knows their rights and responsibilities in relation to non-racist behaviour.
- Encourage your child to challenge racist behaviour and attitudes.
- Encourage your child to be interested in other cultures and languages.
- Encourage your child to be proud of their own background and heritage and to value those of others.
- Encourage your child to use their first language.
- Encourage your child to practise speaking, reading and writing Standard Australian English.

Get involved in school activities

- Be willing to participate in school activities.
- Become involved in school meetings, planning and decision-making processes.
- Join in activities designed to counter racism and celebrate cultural diversity.

Combating racism and prejudice audit

	Areas for action	Yes	No	Review
Policies and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does our school implement school policies, procedures and practices that do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against any individual or group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, culture, language or religion? Have we implemented initiatives to ensure that all members of the school community staff, students, parents or caregivers - understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to racist behaviour and in contributing towards the development of schools which value diversity and are free of racism? Are effective mechanisms in place for reporting on, and responding to, incidents of racism and are all staff, students and parents aware of the procedures and how to access them? Are students, parents and community members involved in policy development and review? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum and pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we implement teaching and learning programs which challenge racist attitudes and behaviour and increase students' understanding of the effects of racism and discrimination? Do our teaching and learning programs increase students' understandings of Reconciliation, multiculturalism and cultural diversity? Do we regularly evaluate all teaching and learning materials and assessment practices to ensure they are not biased and are inclusive of the needs of all students? Do our teaching and learning programs address the specific cultural and linguistic needs of students? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are whole-school education programs to counter racism reflected in school training and development plans? Are staff encouraged to participate in valuing diversity and cross-cultural awareness training and to examine their own behaviour for discrimination? Are staff encouraged to share expertise in strategies to counter racism? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student support and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are teachers encouraged to participate in inclusive curriculum training programs and to critically evaluate their own teaching practice for cultural inclusiveness? Do we encourage and support the participation of all students on student representative bodies so that they reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school? Do we encourage and support the participation of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in student leadership and development programs? Do we provide opportunities for students from all backgrounds to discuss issues of racism, cultural diversity and Reconciliation? Do we provide student support services that are appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse groups and information on educational pathways that is free of cultural stereotyping? Do we promote good examples of student involvement in developing successful initiatives to counter racism? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Parent and community involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we provide information to parents and community members on their rights and responsibilities in relation to racism and education to counter racism? • Do we draw on community resources and skills in the development of activities to counter racism, school planning and decision-making processes? • Do we use interpreters, translations and community support staff in partnership with teachers to provide information to parents in a language they understand? • Do we encourage the participation of parents and community members of all backgrounds in all school activities including activities to counter racism, school planning and decision-making processes and representation on parent and community bodies? 			
Monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we regularly investigate and review whole-school data and information relating to the progress of identified groups of students and use it to inform development of teaching and learning programs? • Do we designate responsibilities for monitoring and reporting on racism and the incidence and resolution of complaints within the school? • Do we conduct periodic assessments on the effectiveness of parent and community consultation mechanisms? • Do we seek feedback on effectiveness of education initiatives to counter racism and report on outcomes? 	□	□	□

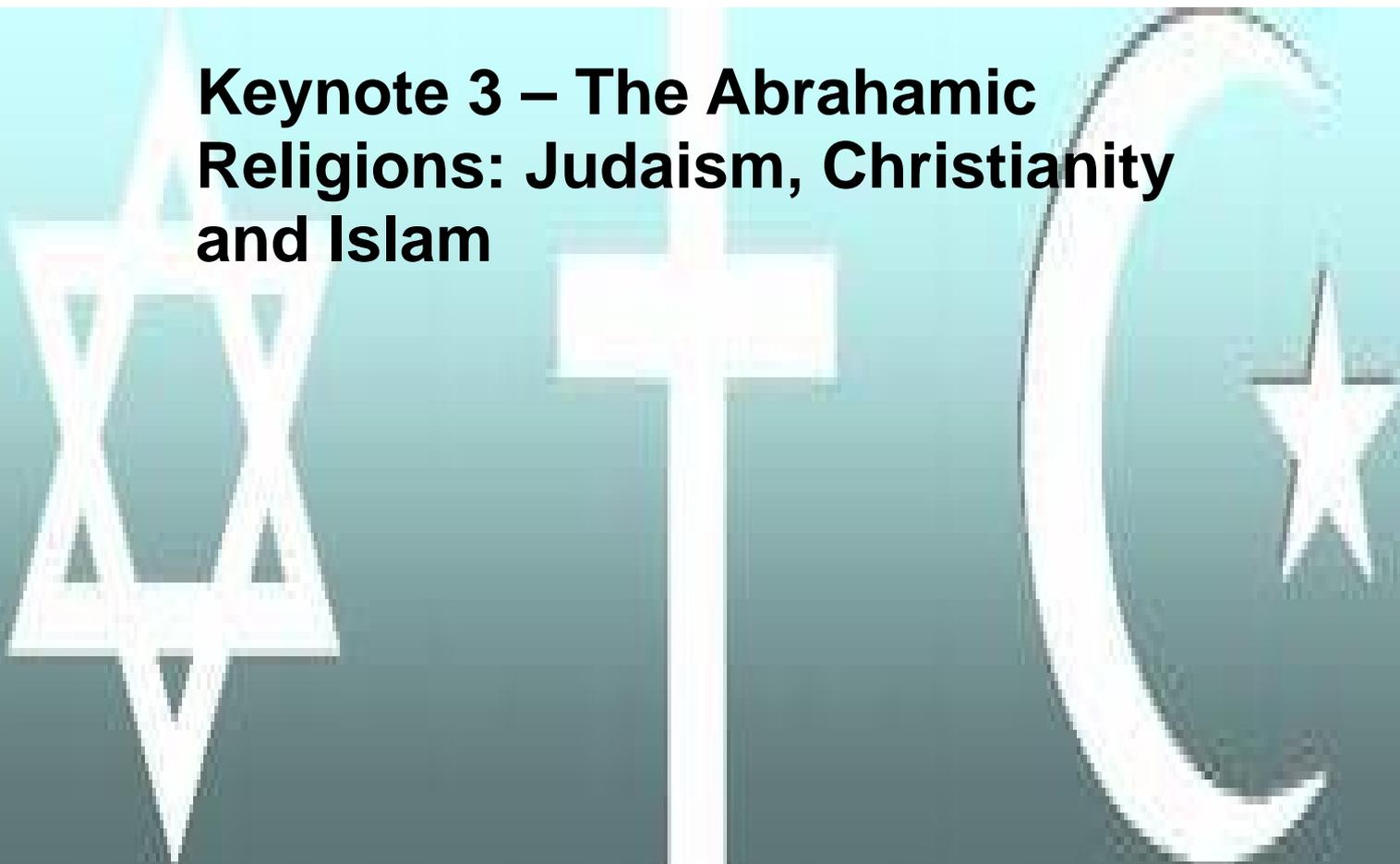
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© Revised edition published by the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2006. The framework for countering racism is from pp. 27–31 of *Racism. No Way!*, published for the Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers by the NSW Department of Education and Training, 2000.

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam



Introduction

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are significant world religions. While Christianity has been the majority religion of Australia since the European displacement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there have also been significant Jewish and Muslim communities throughout Australia.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a common origin in what we now refer to as the Middle East and share geographical and historical roots. These three religions are sometimes referred to as Semitic religions.

The word Semitic describes the languages and cultures of the people who came from the Middle East. Although vastly different in many respects, the three religions share common elements. Not least among these are a belief in one God and life after death in some form; a shared belief in creation; a shared history through the early prophets; and a common source of sacred writings. All three are Prophetic religions that believe in divine guidance.

The ancient city of Jerusalem, in modern day Israel, is sacred to all three religions. Seventh century Islam recognised these common links by describing both Jews and Christians as '**Peoples of the Book**' and allowing them freedom to worship under Islamic rule.

Over time, cultural, social and political changes contribute to shaping a religion and its practice. People of any faith would prefer their religion to be judged on the essence of their belief and their sacred texts rather than on the expression of particular individuals or groups considered representative of their religion. Christians would prefer not to be judged on the Spanish inquisition, the Crusades, the practices of early missionaries or on the bigotry and hatred of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Likewise many Muslims are concerned that they are being judged on the actions of the terrorists, Osama bin Laden and other fundamentalist extremists who use Holy Scriptures to justify atrocities.

Harassment and acts of prejudice directed at centres of worship, groups and individuals have occurred at various times in Australia's history. The National Inquiry into Racist Violence identified young males of Anglo-Saxon background as the main perpetrators of prejudiced behaviour. Prejudiced behaviour is most often based on ignorance of the groups perpetrators profess to hate and their great fear of the threat of people they consider different.

International conflict, such as the terrorist activities in the USA and Europe, and the consequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, have resulted in an upsurge of religious prejudice directed towards groups considered to be connected with the conflict in some way.

The Bali bombings had a particular impact on race relations in Australia. Hence fire bombs, vandalism and graffiti have occurred at mosques, synagogues and public buildings, and harassment of individuals, particularly Muslim women identified by their Islamic dress. Even those who are not connected in any way to the conflicts can be caught up in aggressive acts of this kind. The Sikh community has been concerned that its members have been subjected to racist violence and abuse because of the turbans and head coverings they wear.

Lebanese Christians and other Arabic Christians have also been targets for racist attacks because they have been assumed to be Muslim.

As a matter of course, teachers should contribute some balance to media stories, which are often negative, and ensure that students apply skills of critical analysis to media reporting. It is important that students have accurate information so they are able to develop positive attitudes towards other groups.

The ways in which Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda have used Al Jazeera as a channel for propaganda makes an interesting counterbalance to the news coming from US media outlets. The appearance of derogatory and insensitive cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad appeared in some press of some countries is another example of the role the media can play in exacerbating and inflaming prejudiced attitudes. The Cronulla riots of 2006 provide another example of the impact of media coverage closer to home. The fallout from the riots is continuing, as can be seen in recent sanctions imposed on broadcaster Alan Jones for his comments at the time.

Sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam

The following information about the common origins of people perceived as diametrically opposed and different is a small start in closing the information gap about religions originating in the Middle East.

Note: Date references used are CE (Common Era) and BCE (Before Common Era).

The Hebrew Bible of Judaism is significant in principle, and sacred to the followers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. However, each religious community has additional sacred texts that are also accorded respect and reverence.

Many of these sacred texts are not well known outside the particular religious community. Often it is not appreciated that despite their differences, these religions do have some historical links.

Because the Quran is considered to be the most perfect use of Arabic and a sacred language for Muslims, it is universally respected throughout the Muslim world even though only 18 percent of the world's Muslims speak Arabic as their first language. Even though Jewish tradition suggests that one should pray in whatever language you know, it is custom to read the Torah in Hebrew and then comment on it and translate it. In religious education, Jews and Muslims study Hebrew and Arabic respectively.

The Holy Books

The following is a very basic overview. For more information on these texts, see the relevant individual Keynote chapters and bibliographies

	JUDAISM:	CHRISTIANITY:	ISLAM:
	The Hebrew Bible – Tanach	The Christian Bible- Old and New Testaments	The Quran
AUTHORITY OF THE BOOK	The Hebrew Bible is the primary source of the Jewish religion	The four Gospels of the New Testament are acknowledged as preserving the teachings of Jesus, passed on to his companions	God's last and complete message given to humanity through the Prophet Muhammad
LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURES	Always read in Hebrew in the service	Read in translation in various languages	Always read in Arabic
SECTIONS OF SCRIPTURES	24 Books in three sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torah (Law) • Nevim (Prophets) • Ketuvim (Writings) 	66 Books in two sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Testament (39 Books). Contains the books of the Tanach. • New Testament (27 Books) – Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelations 	114 chapters (Suras), each organised and sequenced according to the direction of the Prophet. The Suras are not chronologically ordered (Sura 96 was the first revealed to Muhammad)
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT	The Hebrew Bible is a library of ancient books that were written between 1000BCE and 200 BCE. It contains books of history, ritual ethics, law, poetry and philosophy	The Christian Old Testament is taken from the Hebrew Bible. The Gospels of the New Testament were mostly all written in the first century CE by followers associated with the Apostles of Jesus	During the 23 years of prophet-hood, the Prophet dictated the revelations to his disciples. The Gospels and the Hebrew Bible are respected in principle as part of God's word, but Muslims believe they do not contain the truth of the message intact.

Significant festivals/observances

These festivals are not equivalent to each other, but are considered by many to be the most significant on the calendar to each religion. For more information on festivals, see individual Keynotes chapters.

	Pesach (Passover)	Lent leading to Easter	Ramadan leading to Eid-ul-Fitr
Spiritual Significance	Passover recalls the Exodus from Egypt (in the 13 th Century BCE) and celebrates freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert to prepare for his Ministry. • Period of reflection on the life and sacrifice of Jesus at Easter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allah revealed the first part of the Quran to Muhammad • Period of reflection on the Quran
Period of Time	Seven days beginning with Seder night	Forty days (excluding Sundays in the west and including Sundays in the east)	One month
Fasting and Abstinence	Thorough cleaning of the house to remove all traces of old food precedes Pesach. Only unleavened bread (matzo/matzah) is eaten, symbolising the hastily baked bread of slavery	Traditionally Christians abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Abstinence and fasting is generally followed more strictly in Eastern Christianity	Abstain from all food, drink and sexual relations between dawn and sunset
Celebrations and Observances associated with the Festival	Commemorative and symbolic meal (Seder) is prepared and eaten on the eve of the festival. It includes the narration of the Exodus story, songs and debate about the meaning of the deliverance from slavery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midnight service to mark the Resurrection • Eggs exchanged as symbols of new life on Easter Sunday • Special meal with extended family (Eastern Church in particular) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayers at the mosque • Children given sweets and gifts • Visits and special meals with extended family

In the classroom

Discuss the importance of:

- places of worship
- religious leaders
- literacy
- education

in transmitting the sacred scriptures to communities in the past.

Discuss ways in which the sacred scriptures are transmitted in different religions. For example:

- singing
- chanting
- reading silently or aloud
- recitation
- acting.

Compare the role of the following in different religions:

- rabbi
- priest
- minister
- imam.

Investigate the location of scriptures in a sacred building and the rituals associated with their use, particularly when the scripture is to be read (ritual garments in Judaism, incense and use of the pulpit in Christianity, ritual washing in Islam).

Explore the languages and scripts of the scriptures today and in the past. The Hebrew Bible is only read in its original form (Hebrew and the Quran only in the original Arabic) although people may study them in translation to increase understanding. The Christian Bible is usually read in translation in the language of the community and may have particular authorised versions. Investigate the differences in versions of the Christian Bible.

Consider the various forms the scriptures are recorded on. For example: scrolls, and the materials they were originally recorded (for example, stone tablets, or parchment).

Study quotes from sacred texts of each religion. Ask students to predict the religion or the source and make comparisons between them.

Draw a timeline of the three religions. Include significant events such as:

- the birth and death of Abraham, Moses, Christ and Muhammad
- the beginning and spread of religions.

Other religions could be added to the timeline, including Aboriginal spirituality.

Do a jigsaw reading activity in which students read and present findings about points of similarity and differences with the three religions.

Discuss the significance of the major ceremonies, celebrations and festivals and consider the similarities.

Have students research the observance of each festival under particular headings with particular emphasis on the role of children.

Have students prepare written questions about a religion they have studied or presentation they have heard. Students invite a practising member or member of clergy from various faiths to speak about their beliefs and to answer the prepared questions which may be forwarded in advance. For further research and information see [Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/) (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>).

Investigate the [Really Big Beliefs Project](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/index.html) website and text for ideas for further activities. (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/index.html>)

Explore the Interfaith network. Consider an Interfaith forum.

Participate in *Celebrate our Cultural Diversity Week* and [Cultural Diversity Quest](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/events/questawards.htm) activities (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/events/questawards.htm>).

NOTE: Any copies of sacred scriptures brought into the classroom should be treated with respect. Scriptures should not be studied or read as just another style of literature. The religious importance and cultural context should be explained.

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Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism



Introduction

Judaism, Islam and Christianity trace their origins to the religion revealed by the Prophet Abraham and have much in common, hence the name Abrahamic religions. All three religions believe in one God, prescribe a way of life for humanity and believe in life after death in some form. They share a common history and reverence for preceding sacred stories, which gives them their links as 'People of the Book' – a phrase coined by seventh century CE Islamic rulers.

Jewish people are citizens of many Western countries and have been a significant component of Australia's population ever since the First Fleet. However, longstanding and racist prejudice against Jews and stereotyping is ongoing and has biblical, historical, cultural and sociological origins. Conflict in the Middle East often results in harassment and attacks on Jewish individuals and institutions in Australia, even though they may have had no connection with those events.

To describe the Jews as a 'race' is a major inaccuracy. The Jews, who have also been known as Israelites or Hebrews during their 4000-year history, began as a branch of the Semitic people, which included Canaanites, Syrians, Phoenicians, Jebusites and others. However, for the past 1900 years, Jews have been scattered across many parts of the world and have lived amongst many other peoples.

At various times, Jewish communities have lived under oppression and with harsh laws limiting land ownership and occupations, and restricting other activities. However, where this occurred it did not destroy Jewish scholarship or culture. A religion based on a way of life, with strong personal and family observance, has contributed to the survival of one of the world's oldest religions.

To be Jewish is an identity both of religion and birth. Anyone who believes in the One God, obeys the religious laws and follows Jewish traditions can choose to be a Jew. However, it must be said, that the simplest way to be a Jew is to be born into a Jewish family and have a Jewish education. It is, therefore, more accurate to describe Jews as a *people* for this includes both those with religious beliefs and those who are aware of their Jewish roots, but who do not practise the religion.

Jews have played a significant role in the development of Australia's civic, commercial and intellectual life. It is important that teachers continue to remind students of the different cultural and religious backgrounds and contributions of all people in our society.

Origins and historical background

The story of the Jewish people began about 4000 years ago in the Middle East with Abraham, who was told by God to teach that there is only one true God, Yahweh, who created the world. Abraham's covenant with God was continued by his descendants who became the 12 tribes of Israel; the people chosen by God to spread the monotheistic religion throughout the region.

Many years later when famine forced the Israelites to go to Egypt and slavery, another leader, Moses, emerged to lead them back to the land promised by God to Abraham. The story is recorded in the second book of the Bible (Exodus). A succession of judges, prophets and kings who ruled the Israelites are described in further books of the Bible.

King David (1000 BCE) extended the kingdom of the Israelites and captured the City of Jerusalem and made it his capital. The Psalms of David are still used by Jews and Christians today. David's son, King Solomon, built a great temple in Jerusalem to house the *Ark of the Covenant*. This Ark contained the books of Moses, and it became a religious and national shrine. After Solomon, the Israelite kingdom broke up; ten tribes forming the kingdom of Israel and two forming the kingdom of Judea.

From this period, teachers such as Elijah and Isaiah struggled to have the people keep the covenant of Moses. Eventually the disunity allowed the Assyrians to overcome and enslave the Israelites. Later the Babylonians overran Judea, destroyed the temple and exiled the Jews.

The Judeans kept their religion alive, re-established Jewish life in Israel and later rebuilt the temple, only to have it destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The Western Wall, all that remains of the second temple, is still considered a holy place today.

A civil war and Roman invasion caused the Diaspora or dispersal of most of the Jews. Many settled in other parts of the Roman Empire in Europe and became known as the Ashkenazim (of Germanic influence), while those who settled in southern Europe, North Africa and the East were known as Sephardim (of Spanish influence). Aspects of Jewish life and religious practice were inevitably influenced by the cultures in which Jews found themselves. Arabic poetry and music made an indelible impression on Sephardic prayers, for example (Epstein and Thomas).

Throughout the ages, Jews were often savagely persecuted for their religion and most hoped to return to the Promised Land. A common toast at Jewish gatherings is 'next year in Jerusalem'.

Over seven or eight centuries, small numbers of Jews were able to make this return. The rise of Zionism in the 19th century and mass migration of Jews escaping the horrors of the Nazis and European fascism culminated in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Jews came from all over the world to settle there. They joined small Jewish communities that had continued to live in Palestine, but in the process millions of Arab Palestinians were displaced, creating ongoing conflict in the region.

Branches of Judaism

As with all religions there are diverse ways of practising Judaism and interpreting religious law. In Australia there are about 65 synagogues, representing Jewish religious practice from Strict Orthodoxy to Reform Judaism (known in Australia as Liberal or Progressive Judaism). Community leaders suggest religious Jews can be broadly divided into Orthodox or traditional (40 percent), Liberal or Progressive (40 percent), and non-practising (20 percent). (*Religious diversity*, [Living in Harmony](http://www.harmony.gov.au) (<http://www.harmony.gov.au>))

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism is predicated on the strict observance of the 613 *mitzvot* - commandments found in the Torah. These order life in the home, in the world and in the synagogue and define relationships between people and between people and God. This is the traditional stream of Judaism as practised for thousands of years. In Australia, as throughout the world, the majority of Jews would identify with Orthodox Judaism even if they are not particularly observant or if they only occasionally attend a synagogue.

Within Orthodox Judaism are other important streams such as Chassidism and Modern Orthodoxy.

Progressive or Reform Judaism

Progressive or Reform Judaism is less than 200 years old and evolved out of the Enlightenment. It seeks to reconcile the demands of tradition with the moral and ethical values of modern life. It encourages reinterpretation of laws relating to issues like the status of women, the style and content of prayer and the meaning and observances of the Sabbath in the context of modern life.

There is a wide spectrum of practise and philosophy in both orthodox and progressive Judaism. The orthodox community includes a strong ultra-orthodox element and a Chasidic stream built around charismatic 'rebbe's' - as against rabbis. The non-orthodox community includes the Conservative Movement and the Reform Movement. In Australia and elsewhere there are also secular Jews who are not religious but identify themselves, culturally, as Jewish.

(Adapted from *The Jewish Museum of Australia Education Kit*).

The beliefs of Judaism

The following information lists the key elements of Jewish faith. However readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources, such as those listed in the Select Bibliography at the end of the Keynotes.

The Jewish belief is that there is one true God to worship, the creator of the universe, who listens to the prayers of all individuals and assures a future eternal existence. The name of God is so holy it can never be spoken, so is referred to in many different ways.

Judaism teaches that Jews must love God and respect all creation. This is a constant struggle for humanity because God has given people the ability to do both good and evil. God will forgive sins if people are truly repentant.

An important Jewish teaching is the special relationship between God and the people chosen to receive His laws. This means Jews have special duties and obligations to perform to keep this covenant and be an example to others. Judaism is not a religion that actively seeks converts and it recognises that Christians and Muslims already share the same view of God.

Judaism's sacred books tell of a future Redeemer, or Messiah, sent by God to bring peace to mankind. As there is still interpersonal violence, conflict and war, Jews believe the Messiah has not yet come.

Jews believe that life after death is 'God's business'. At a funeral the mourners recite the Kaddish prayer, which says "God's will be done and may God's Kingdom come soon in our lifetime and in the lifetime of our children". Judaism is very much a life-centred religion with less emphasis on the afterlife than Christianity and Islam.

Sacred texts

The sacred books of Judaism have guided Jews for centuries. The oldest sacred book is the *Tanach*, sacred also to Christians (as the Old Testament) and to Muslims. The first five books form the *Torah* scrolls, the revealed word of God, which is kept in the *Ark of the Covenant* in the synagogue. Part of the Torah is read each Sabbath from hand-inscribed special parchment. The Torah is the basis of the Jewish religion and the source of its faith. It is treated with infinite respect.

Another group of holy books was written and compiled by the early rabbis (scholars) from the second century CE and brought together in the *Talmud* in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. It covers almost every subject and is a legal code as well as a book of religious customs, and has moulded Jewish life and thought.

Structure and organisation

Judaism is not hierarchical. The local synagogue is at the heart of Jewish religious activity, led by a rabbi (a trained, ordained teacher). Rabbis are not priests – all worshippers can approach God without an intermediary. The only requirement for a public service of worship is the presence of ten Jewish adults above the age of 13. Orthodox Judaism specifies that these adults be male. Liberal Judaism accepts female rabbis.

Religious observances

Synagogue

The sacred building for the Jews is the *synagogue*; a house of prayer and study and a community centre. Services for the Sabbath, high holy days, bar mitzvah, weddings and funerals are held there. The rabbi is the religious leader of the community.

The synagogue is built around the reading desk. From that desk, the prayer book is read and the Torah scrolls are placed. The scrolls will be kept within the *Ark*, which is literally a 'holy cupboard'. Certain parts of synagogue design are also prescribed in the Torah, but synagogues have differed according to the times and cultures in which they were built, while taking these prescriptions into account.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath, the only festival mentioned in the *Ten Commandments*, is observed from sunset on Friday evening until nightfall on Saturday evening.

According to tradition, it is a reminder of creation and that all creatures are entitled to a day free from work. It is marked by services at the synagogue and a family meal.

A Sabbath family ceremony called *Kiddush* involves the blessing of bread, drinking wine and blessing the day. *Havdalah*, a further family ritual, marks the end of the Sabbath and welcomes in the new week.

Rites of passage

Jewish babies are named at birth. Males are circumcised on the eighth day in a naming ceremony.

On reaching the age of 13, a male is accepted into the adult community in a ceremony, the *bar mitzvah* (which literally means *Son of the Commandment*), in the synagogue, at which he reads a section of the Torah in Hebrew.

In non-orthodox Judaism, girls join the adult community in exactly the same ceremony, the *bat mitzvah*, at the age of 12.

Dietary Laws

Jewish food laws are based on permitted (kosher) and forbidden flesh as listed in the Bible (Leviticus). Included among the latter are pork, shellfish and birds of prey. Animals for food must be killed humanely, and meat and milk products must not be eaten together; for example, a meat sandwich is not buttered.

Dress

Orthodox Jewish men always cover their heads by wearing a skullcap known in Hebrew as a *kippah* or in Yiddish as a *yarmulke*.

Festivals

The Jewish calendar

While the general calendar is based on the sun, the Jewish calendar is based on the moon and the sun and dates back to the Babylonian exile.

Normally, the year has 12 lunar months of 29 or 30 days. Each month begins with the appearance of the new moon. It takes 354 days for the moon to circle the earth 12 times. About every third year a 13th month is added to make up the difference from the solar year.

Different cultures mark their beginnings from what they consider seminal events. The Jewish calendar began from the creation of the world according to biblical chronology. That was 3,760 years before the general calendar began. Therefore the year 2000 is 5,760 in the Jewish calendar. It should be noted that very few Jews would take that date literally.

Jews count days from sundown to sundown which is why Jewish holidays and the Sabbath begin at sundown the day before.

Festivals and celebrations

The Jewish year, based on a lunar-solar calendar, is marked by celebrations and commemorations of the history of the religion and commitments to God.

Rosh Hashanah, New Year, is a solemn occasion celebrating the creation, but also a day of judgment calling for all Jews to renew their covenant with God.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar is a day of fasting and prayer for forgiveness.

Succot, Feast of the Tabernacles, is a harvest festival including Simhat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Torah.

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is a joyous historical festival celebrating Jewish survival in ancient Israel.

Pesach, Passover, marks the escape from slavery in ancient Egypt and the return to the Promised Land (Israel).

Shavuot celebrates the receiving and acceptance of the Ten Commandments as the basic Constitution of the Jewish people.

Purim, an historical festival, recalls the story of Esther and the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia.

Jewish settlement in Australia

Jews from Britain were amongst the first European settlers in Australia and were the first non-Christian group in the colonies. Jews were represented among the convicts and the free settlers. By 1828, there were 100 Jews in the colony and the first synagogue was formally established in 1837 (Dacy). By the 1840s there were small but growing Jewish communities in New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, South Australia and Western Australia – an estimated total of 1200, or 0.5 per cent of the total population

The real beginnings of Jewish settlement in Victoria date from 1839 with the arrival of the immigrant ship from England, the "Hope". During that first year, Jewish immigrants gathered in a private home for worship at the time of the Jewish High Holydays. In 1840, the numbers of Jewish immigrants were sufficient to form a 'minyan'.

Unlike Sydney, where Jewish life from 1880 revolved around the Great Synagogue, the community in Melbourne was less centralised. Three well-established synagogues emerged in Melbourne, the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation (1844), the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation (founded 1855) and the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation (founded 1871 – Dacy).

The Gold Rush of the 1850s attracted a number of Jewish immigrants to Australia. Most did not fossick for gold but became storekeepers and hawkers on the goldfields. This expansion in the population inevitably led to the establishment of synagogues in many parts of country Victoria: Bendigo 1856, Geelong 1860, and Ballarat 1861. Census figures show that between 1851 and 1861, the Jewish community almost tripled in size, growing to 5,486 persons. With the decline of the supply of gold, the towns' Jewish populations moved to the cities.

The community was active in civic life and well represented among Members of Parliament. John Levi was the first MP for St Kilda. Sir Isaac Isaacs, who had been born in the colony, became the Governor-General of Australia in 1931 after a distinguished career as a Member of Parliament and High Court Justice. A strong patriotism saw many Jewish ANZAC enlistments (442 from Victoria), including Sir John Monash, perhaps Australia's most famous General.

The British origins of Australia's Jewish community had been supplemented by Eastern European Jewish migration in the period before and after World War I. These Jews did not speak English and came to escape poverty and prejudice. They settled in working-class Carlton and nearby suburbs in contrast to the well-established families of British origin with their established businesses and professions, but they soon became part of the vibrant and hard-working Jewish community.

Helena Rubinstein, who came from Poland in 1891, established a beauty salon in Melbourne. The creams and cosmetics she manufactured led to a cosmetics industry that expanded to continental Europe and the United States. Another Russian immigrant, Sidney Myer, established his first drapery shop in Bendigo in 1900, which grew into the Myer Emporium in Bourke Street.

The period before and especially after World War II brought further migration from Europe and cultural diversity and richness to the Jewish community. Between 1938 and 1961 Australian Jewry almost trebled in size. Melbourne's Jewish population rose from 8,904 in 1933 to 14,218 in 1947 and 23,448 in 1954.

Before 1933 the Australian Jewish community was actually decreasing in size, After 1933 this situation changed completely.....Before the war Australia absorbed 7,000–8,000 refugees from Nazism, many from Austria. Of these, more than 5,000 arrived in 1939 itself, so that they became known as 'the thirty-niners'.

The largest number of immigrants arrived in the period after World War II, in the years between 1946 and 1961, the vast majority being Holocaust survivors. Between 1946 and 1954 more than 17,000 Jews arrived from Europe and Shanghai. A further 10,000 had arrived by 1961, with a significant number coming after the Hungarian uprising of 1956. A small number of Egyptian Jews also arrived in that period as refugees from the persecution which followed the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy and the subsequent Suez Crisis.

Australian Jewish History, New South Wales Board of Jewish Education.

The Holocaust is a tragic reminder of an outcome of prejudice and racism. The families of thousands of Jews in Australia were destroyed in Europe during World War II. A permanent memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was erected in the Melbourne General Cemetery in 1962 and the victims are remembered on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day in April.

By the 1960s, only 3.6 per cent of Australia's Jews lived outside the six capital cities, and only 0.9 per cent lived in rural areas. (*Jews in Australia* – see Bibliography). Nowadays, nearly all Jewish communities are in the larger coastal cities

Recent Jewish immigrants to Australia have included Russians, Poles and South Africans, South Americans and former Israelis – with a smaller number from Israel. Jews have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to all aspects of Australian life. For example, the painter Louis Kahan and the author Judah Waten were leaders in the arts in the post-World War II era, while Sir Zelman Cowen was a pre-eminent academic before becoming Governor-General. Author David Martin has carried the tradition in intellectual life. Other leaders in the community have included: Sydney D Einfeld, Professor Julius Stone, Sir Isaac Isaacs, Isi Leibler and Professor Peter Baume. Jews have been well represented amongst business leaders and philanthropists, for example: the Smorgon family, the Myer family, Frank Lowy and Richard Pratt. Australian Jewry continues to contribute to, and benefit from, the wider community, while enriching the multiculturalism of present-day Australia.

Population: Jews in Australia

Since 1933, the Australian Jewish community has approximately quadrupled with the census of 2001 recording a total of 83,985. Geographically, 90 percent of the total Jewish community is concentrated in Melbourne and Sydney with a population of 45,000–50,000 and 45,000 respectively. Apart from Israel, Australia is one of the few Jewish communities that is actually growing.

There are also Jews in Perth (the third-largest Jewish community), Canberra, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Adelaide, Hobart and Launceston. There are smaller communities in some regional cities but few in country areas.

Major birthplaces for Australian Jews

As can be seen in the table below Australian born Jews are now the largest group among Australian Jews. The data does not, however, record ancestry. Other significant countries of birth include countries of recent arrival such as South Africa (second-largest group), Israel (third-largest group) Poland (fifth-largest group) and Jews from the former USSR. England, perhaps surprisingly, is the fourth-largest birthplace for Jews in Australia.

Table 4.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Jews

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	39,940	46.4
South Africa	10,473	12.5
Israel	3886	4.6
United Kingdom	3885	4.6
Poland	3839	4.6
Russian Federation	2930	3.5
Ukraine	2441	2.9
Hungary	1736	2.1
United States	1592	1.9
Germany	1571	1.9
Other	12,692	15.1
Total	83,985	100.0

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Major birthplaces for Victorian Jews

The majority of Victorian Jews are Australian born. Poland is the birthplace of the largest group of overseas born Jews. There are also significant populations from Poland, South Africa, the former USSR and Israel.

In 2001 there were 2,716 Israel-born people in Victoria. Almost 70% were Jewish and 13% were Christian (Immigration Museum).

Table 4.2 Major birthplaces for Victorian Jews

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	19,729	54.3
Poland	2832	7.8
South Africa	2682	7.4
Russian Federation	1858	5.1
Ukraine	1432	3.9
United Kingdom	1410	3.9
Germany	819	2.3
United States	613	1.7
Hungary	540	1.5
Other	4430	12.2
Total	36,345	100

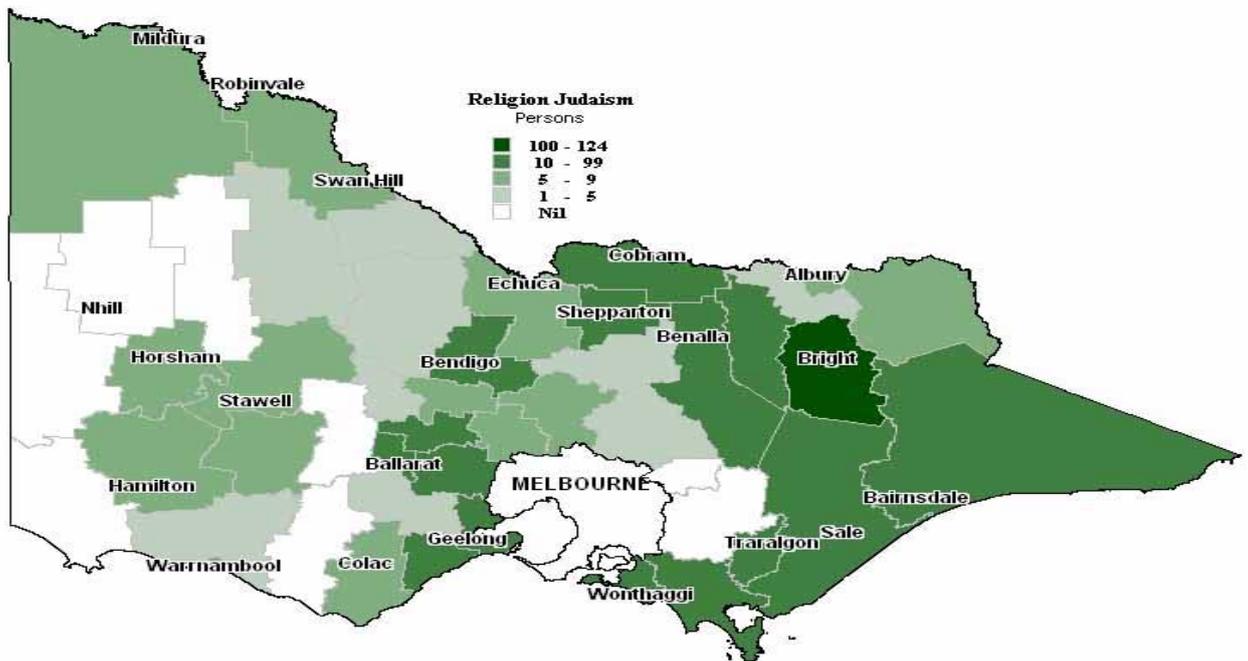
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Distribution of Jews in Victoria: 2001

Comparatively few Jews live in country Victoria. The largest population recorded in the 2001 census was in the Alpine area where there were approximately 100 recorded. This figure, however, may reflect the number of Jews on vacation rather than permanent residents.

Distribution of Jews non-metropolitan Victoria: 2001

Figure 4.1 Distribution of Jews: non-metropolitan Victoria 2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

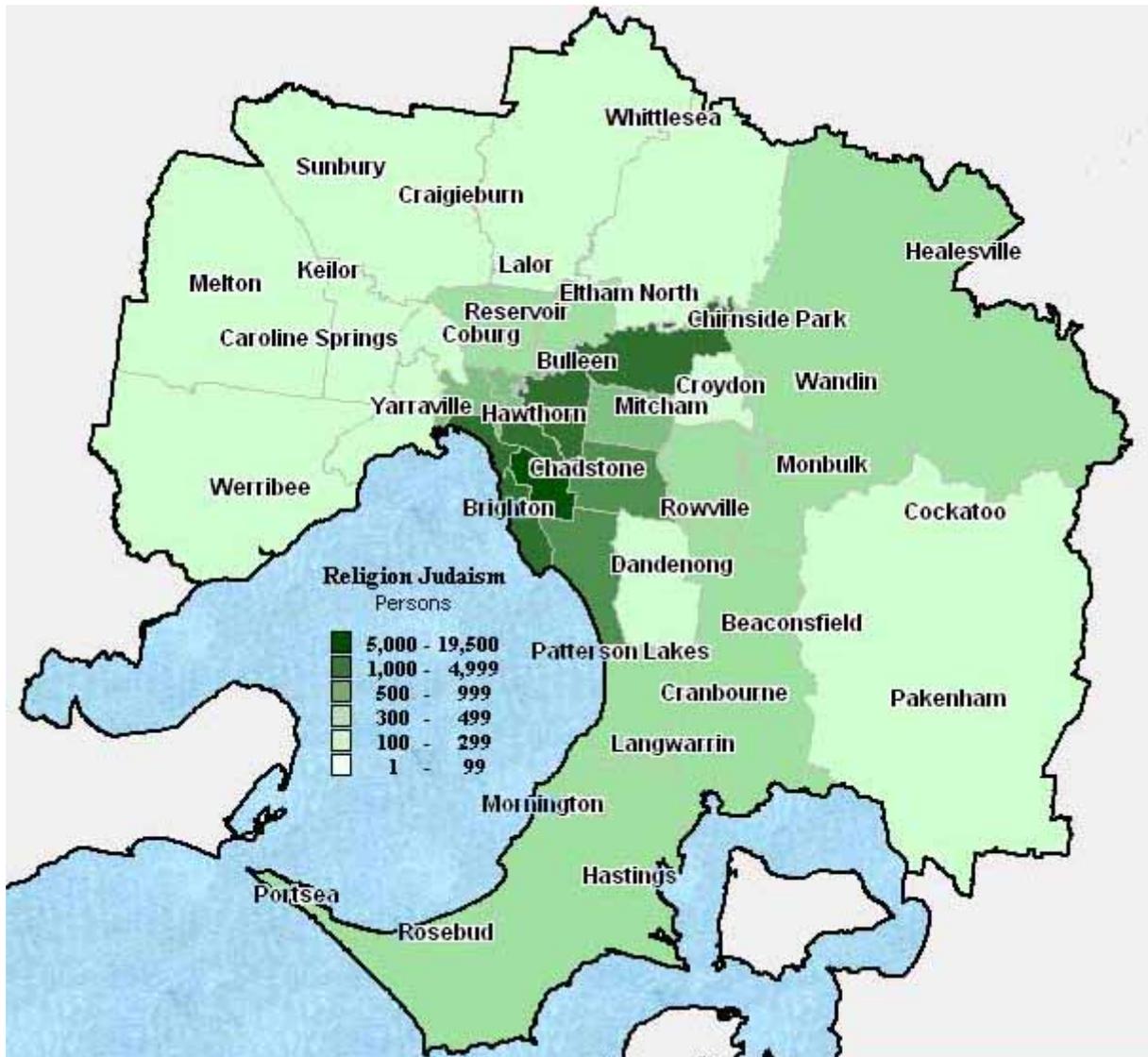
Distribution of Jews: Melbourne 2001

In Melbourne, about 75 percent of the Jewish community lives south of the Yarra River in a belt running from South Yarra and Toorak to Moorabbin and Glen Iris, and centring in Caulfield and St. Kilda. In the local government area of Glen Eira which has the largest concentration of Jews, 16.6 percent of the population are Jewish.

There is a second area of Jewish settlement in north-eastern Melbourne, with synagogues and community centres in Doncaster and Kew.

Figure 4.2 Distribution of Jews: Melbourne 2001

[TOTAL NUMBER=37,781]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Community organisations

The following information is adapted from the [New South Wales Board of Jewish Education](http://www.bje.org.au/teens) (<http://www.bje.org.au/teens>).

National

The [Executive Council of Australian Jewry](http://www.ecaj.org.au) (ECAJ) (www.ecaj.org.au) was established in 1944. It is the official representative organisation and spokesperson for the Australian Jewish Community. Its constituents are the umbrella Jewish bodies in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Hobart and the ACT. It is affiliated with the Australasian Union of Jewish Students and the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia and is the official representative for Australian Jewry on matters of lay concern,

including immigration, anti-defamation, public relations and Jewish education. The ECAJ is also active in interfaith dialogue.

State

The [Jewish Community Council of Victoria](http://www.jccv.org.au) is the umbrella organisation in Victoria and has 50 affiliate bodies (<http://www.jccv.org.au/overview.htm>).

Local

For a list of synagogues in Melbourne, visit [Jewish Community Council of Victoria community directory - synagogues](http://www.jccv.org.au/dir-syn.htm) (<http://www.jccv.org.au/dir-syn.htm>).

Other organisations

There are a range of other organisations which serve Jewish communities in Australia, including:

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
PO Box 344 Curtin, ACT 2605
Phone: 02 6282 5755
Fax: 02 6282 5734

Executive Council of Australian Jewry
JCCV Office
306 Hawthorn Rd.,
Caulfield South VIC 3162
Phone 03 9272 5566
Fax 03 9272 5560

Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs
Phone 03 9272 5585
Fax 03 9272 5589

Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council
2nd Floor, 578 St Kilda Rd.,
Melbourne VIC 3004
Phone 03 9529 5022
Fax 03 9529 8571

Federation of Australian Jewish Community Services
Level 3, 332 Oxford St.,
Bondi Junction NSW 2010
Phone 02 9369 1400
Fax 02 9369 5455

Considerations for schools

Schools need to be sensitive to the beliefs and practices of different cultures, races and religions when determining uniform/dress policy. School uniform policy needs to accommodate dress requirements of Jews in relation to the wearing of skullcaps. Orthodox Jewish men generally cover their heads by wearing a skullcap known in Hebrew as a *kippah* or in Yiddish as a *yarmulke*.

Schools also need to ensure that Jewish dietary laws are accommodated in school canteens and when planning school activities that involve food, such as camps and school parties.

Jewish festivals and celebrations like those of other religions should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Read some stories from the Old Testament and discuss them in relation to the history of the Jewish people. Make sure students are aware that these books are sacred books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Read the story of Esther, which is the basis of the Purim festival. Write and perform a Purim Spiel.

Note: *Purim Spiel* is a play traditionally performed at *Purim* retelling the story of Esther, and often written specially for that particular year. It is meant to be a hilarious melodrama with loud audience participation in the form of cheering and hissing or booing of hero, heroine and villain.

Have students identify places and dates of significance in the history of Judaism on a map and show the movements of Jews throughout history.

Discuss the term anti-Semitism for its original and current meaning.

Note: Jews are not the only Semitic people,

Investigate rituals associated with the Sabbath.

Investigate the observance of various celebrations of the Jewish calendar.

Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions:

- What is similar in Jewish lifecycle events to practices of other cultures and religions?
- What is similar in Jewish belief and ritual to practices of other religions?
- What is similar in the rhythm of the Jewish year to their own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Study the history of, and rationale for, the various solar and lunar calendars.

Arrange a visit to a synagogue and a speaker to explain the building and Jewish rituals.

Compare the design, decoration and function of a synagogue with other religious buildings such as a:

- mosque
- cathedral
- church
- mandir
- Buddhist temple.

Arrange a visit to the Holocaust Centre, or the Jewish Museum.

Arrange a visit to the travelling [Courage to Care](http://www.couragetocare.com.au/) exhibition or with other groups in the community arrange for the *Courage to Care* exhibition to visit your area (<http://www.couragetocare.com.au/>) accessed May 2008.

Research the history of well-known Jewish figures in our community e.g. Sir Zelman Cowen.

Research common Jewish names and their biblical origins.

Investigate the common and different naming (and spelling) traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and regional variations within these traditions.

Research Jewish foods for special occasions. Make some simple festival foods e.g. latkes – potato pancakes for *Channukah*, or charoset – a sweet spread of nuts and apple symbolising the mortar used in the construction of the pyramids by the Jews as slaves in Egypt.

Consider the implications of Jewish dietary restrictions in terms of canteen menus, food and technology classes, etc.

Investigate and make a Dreidel, (a four-sided top with Hebrew letters on each side). Play the Driedel, the game played by children at Channuka.

Australian Multicultural Foundation [Believing in Harmony](http://www.amf.net.au/rsch_research_harmony.shtml) project, a Commonwealth Government initiative aimed at providing students with a better understanding of a range of religions (http://www.amf.net.au/rsch_research_harmony.shtml).

Useful websites

[New South Wales Board of Jewish Education, Kids](http://www.bje.org.au/kids/), presents all aspects of Judaism for Australian primary school students (<http://www.bje.org.au/kids/>).

[New South Wales Board of Jewish Education, Teens](http://www.bje.org.au/teens/), is a resource for teens with an excellent overview of Australian history of Judaism (<http://www.bje.org.au/teens/>)

[Jewish Virtual Library, Synagogues of the World: Australia](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/synaaustralia.html) contains photos of Australia's early and current synagogues (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/synaaustralia.html>)

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© Revised edition published by the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2006. First published by the Department of School Education with the State Board of Education, Victoria, and with support from the Commonwealth Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1992.

Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians



Introduction

According to the most recent Australian census, among Victorians of Arabic-speaking background, there are almost as many people of Christian faith as there are of Islamic faith. The majority of Victoria's Muslims come from other regional backgrounds (see *Keynote 7*).

Many of the Middle Eastern Christian communities have a long history with close links to the early Christian Church, which like Judaism and Islam, originated in the Middle East.

Just as there are differences in all faiths in religious practice and social and cultural influences, the Christian Churches of the Middle East have a range of variations not dissimilar to the differences between the various Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches we are more aware of in Australia.

The recognition that Australia is not an exclusively Christian country is reflected in the representation and participation of a number of faiths at state occasions, gradual changes in legal matters such as swearing in of witnesses in courts, and in the conduct of marriage, divorce and burial rites.

The major Christian Churches in Australia have sought dialogue between the many Christian faiths, such as the Eastern and Orthodox Churches, and with other faiths.

Many people are not aware of the beliefs and practices in the range of faiths represented in Australia, including the many Christian faiths. As part of their task of preparing students for effective community relations within a multi-faith society, teachers can help students become informed about faiths represented in Australian society.

Branches of Eastern Christian Churches

The major branches of the Eastern Christian churches are shown below

Table 5.1 Eastern Christian Churches

The Assyrian Church of the East	The Oriental Orthodox Churches (Non-Chalcedonian)	The Eastern Orthodox Churches Separated from the Western (Roman) church in 1054 (The Great Schism)		
Broke away in 431 CE. This church is not linked to the Oriental Orthodox or Eastern Orthodox Churches	Broke away in 451 CE as a result of the Council of Chalcedon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armenian Apostolic Church • Coptic Orthodox Church • Ethiopian Orthodox Church • Eritrean Orthodox Church • Indian Orthodox Church (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church) • Syriac Orthodox Church (Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch) 	The Four Ancient Patriarchs	Autocephalous Churches	Autonomous
		Constantinople Alexandria Antioch Jerusalem	Russia Serbia Romania Bulgaria Georgia Cyprus Greece Poland Albania	Czech Republic and Slovakia Sinai Finland Japan China

Table 5.2 Eastern Catholic and Protestant Churches

Eastern Catholic Churches	Eastern Protestant Churches
<p>Catholic counterparts to the Assyrian Church of the East:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaldean Catholic Church • Syro-Malaba Catholic Church <p>Catholic counterparts to the Oriental Orthodox Churches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armenian Catholic Church • Coptic Catholic Church • Ethiopian Catholic Church • Syrian Catholic Church • Syro-Malankara Catholic Church <p>Catholic counterparts to Eastern Orthodox Churches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melkite Catholic Church • Ukrainian Catholic Church • Ruthenian Catholic Church • Romanian Catholic Church • Greek Catholic Church • Byzantine Catholics of Former Yugoslavia • Bulgarian Catholic Church • Slovak Catholic Church • Hungarian Catholic Church <p>Catholic churches with no counterpart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maronite Catholic Church • Italo-Albanian Catholic Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelical Church of Egypt • Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East • Episcopal Church in the Sudan • Evangelical Church in the Sudan • Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan • Synod of the Evangelical Church in Iran • National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon • National Evangelical Union of Lebanon • Presbyterian Church in the Sudan • The Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East • Protestant Church of Algeria • Eglise Reformee de France en Tunisie • National Evangelical Church in Kuwait

Origins and historical background

The beginnings of Christianity came about with the founding of the Church in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when his followers received the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost (Acts 2: 1–4). This time is marked in the division of the western calendar into periods of Before Christ (BC) and Anno Domini (AD) (Latin for ‘in the year of our Lord’). Common Era (CE) or Before Common Era (BCE) are alternative terms that are more acceptable to people of other faiths.

The first period of the Church was one of persecution, as Christians under the Roman Empire fulfilled the message of Jesus to spread his message to all

nations. Following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 312 CE, the Edict of Milan in 313 enabled Christians to practise their faith openly, free from persecution. Constantine established a capital, Constantinople (now Istanbul), in the eastern part of the Empire and organised a great Church Council at Nicaea. The Council met seven times between 325 and 387 CE to develop the Church's administration and liturgy.

The Church was organised into regional communities called Patriarchates, with a senior bishop holding the title of Patriarch. Apart from Rome and Constantinople, other influential patriarchates were Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

Eastern Christianity as we know it today is the result of three major splits from the early unified church. Two of these splits took place in the 5th Century CE and the third, known as the Great Schism, in the 11th Century CE.

The Assyrian Church of the East

The Assyrian Church of the East, based in Persia, was the first to break away in 431 CE after the third Ecumenical Council, the Council of Ephesus. The Church recognises only the first two Ecumenical Councils, and does not recognise any of those that followed.

In addition to the doctrinal issues, another factor in the breakaway was the Persian Christians' need to distance themselves from the official church of the Roman Empire, with which Persia was frequently at war. In this way they were able to maintain their Christian faith while avoiding suspicions that they were collaborating with the Roman enemy.

The Church of the East was always a minority in Persia, but it flourished for many centuries and expanded through missionary activity into India, Tibet, China and Mongolia.

After the area was conquered by Muslim Arabs, the Church diminished, and was further weakened by the formation of a Catholic counterpart known as the Chaldean Catholic Church. World War I and the aftermath of the British withdrawal from Iraq in 1933 led to reprisals against Assyrians in Turkey and Iraq, which resulted in the Assyrian Patriarch seeking exile in the United States.

The Church was split in the 1960s by a dispute about the hereditary succession of Patriarchs. The two opposing sides have held recent meetings, but the rift has not yet been healed. In recent times the Church has also sought closer ties with the Chaldean Catholic and Roman Catholic churches.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

This was the next church to break away, in 451. Like the Assyrian Church of the East, which broke away as a result of the third Ecumenical Council, the Oriental Orthodox Churches' breakaway can be traced back to the fourth Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedon. As such, the Churches are also referred to as Non-Chalcedonian and the Old Oriental Churches.

The rejection of the Council of Chalcedon and the subsequent split was due to arguments of Christology – how the divine and human nature of Jesus is regarded. This issue was a major factor in the Assyrian Church's breakaway 20 years earlier.

It is commonly accepted today that the differences between the Oriental Orthodox and those churches that accept Chalcedon are only verbal and that both profess the same faith in Christ using different formulas.

In the period following Chalcedon, those who rejected the Council's teaching made up a significant portion of the Christians in the Byzantine Empire. Today, however, they are greatly reduced in number. Some of these churches have existed for centuries in areas where there is a non-Christian majority, and more recently have suffered from many decades of persecution by communist governments.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

Following the disintegration of the Roman Empire, there was no longer a unifying political regime or administration. The Western Empire was conquered and dismembered by various non-Christian tribes, making communication difficult.

Meanwhile the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire continued to flourish for some time. Travel difficulties and ignorance of the other's language (the Western Church's dominant language was Latin, while in the East it was Greek), hindered serious discussion between Rome and Constantinople, and this affected Church relations.

For 500 years after the first two breakaways from the unified church, the Chalcedonian churches of East (Constantinople) and West (Rome) maintained a somewhat fragile union.

Finally, a dispute arose concerning the authority of the senior patriarchate in Rome to decide matters for the whole Church on the basis that Rome was the most honoured and respected capital, and it was there that the apostles Peter and Paul had been martyred. This and other differences with respect to church administration and creed led to a rift between Constantinople and Rome and ultimately to the separation of the Eastern (Orthodox) Church from the Western (Roman Catholic) Church in 1054 CE (the Great Schism).

The rift was perhaps most seriously expressed during the fourth Crusade in 1204 CE, when French, Venetian and German Crusaders sacked and pillaged Constantinople and the Christian Orthodox and Jewish communities on their way to combat the Muslim (infidel) conquerors of the Holy Land.

The development of the Western Church, from which the majority of Christian Churches in Australia have evolved, is perhaps better known than that of the Eastern, largely Orthodox, Church.

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE and the Islamic conquest of much of the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Spain, the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire were severely reduced and the most important

patriarchates of the Eastern Orthodox Church – Constantinople, Jerusalem and Antioch – came under Muslim rule.

The Orthodox were able to worship as before, but without civil or political power, until the decline of the Islamic empire in the seventh and eighth centuries when missionary activity brought Serbia, Russia and Bulgaria into the Orthodox Church.

The organisation of the early Orthodox Church was retained through the patriarchs of its various communities (often national) being linked by similar liturgy and meeting in council to clarify and proclaim the Church's teaching.

In 1453 CE, the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople and the unity of the Eastern Church under Constantinople was broken. Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Albania and Greece also fell to the Ottomans and their Orthodox Churches existed individually under Muslim rule until the 19th century.

The lack of a single authority within the Eastern Church over such a long period, and the reduced opportunity to debate or implement change, contributed to the survival of the Orthodox Churches with little change through five centuries.

The Eastern Catholic Churches

The split between Rome and Constantinople saw much missionary activity in the east by the Roman Catholic Church. This led to the formation of Eastern Catholic Churches, which recognized the jurisdiction of Rome but maintained their own traditions.

Eventually, segments of nearly all the Eastern churches came into union with Rome. In the process of coming under the jurisdiction of Rome, many Eastern Catholic churches lost contact with their roots, a situation they have recently begun to address. Many Orthodox churches see the presence of these churches as an obstacle to reconciliation with the Catholic Church as they came about from efforts to split Orthodox communities.

Each Eastern Catholic patriarchal church has the right to choose its own Patriarch, but they remain under the jurisdiction of the Pope.

The Eastern Protestant Churches

The various Orthodox and Catholic Churches of the Middle East can trace their origins from the early history of the Christian Church in which the region played such a significant role. Protestant Churches of the Middle East have a more recent origin from western Protestant missionaries who travelled to the Middle East last century following the decline in power of the Ottomans.

While the Christian Church is somewhat different today, its members believe it witnesses the same truths and is inspired by the same Spirit as the early Christian Church.

Characteristics of Eastern Christian Churches

It is difficult to generalise about the range of Eastern Christian Churches, but some features can be identified that relate to the culture of the region and the close link with the early Christian Church. These include the following:

- most of the churches use services that are centuries old, though these vary in the way they are performed
- singing is generally unaccompanied and people generally stand grouped together in fellowship during the services
- men and women segregate more often than in western churches, perhaps due to the cultural influence of Judaism where men and women gather separately in sacred buildings. The early Christian tradition, evidenced in one of the oldest Christian churches, Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople (completed in 537 CE), had areas for women upstairs and men downstairs
- the influence of Byzantine and Islamic art is appreciable in many Eastern Church buildings
- Holy Week and Easter services are, by far, the most significant times in the religious calendar for most Christians of Eastern Churches. Christmas does not assume the importance it does in many Western Churches.

Population: Christian denominations in Australia

In the 2001 Australian census, almost 12.8 million people stated they were Christians.

Christianity arrived in Australia with European settlement in 1788 and quickly became the dominant religious faith in the country. But this categorisation disguises a wide range of beliefs and organisational structures, with dozens of different denominations included under this heading.

In 2001, the largest single denomination was the Western or Roman Catholic Church, with almost 5 million adherents. There were 3.9 million Anglicans, 1.2 million Uniting Church and 624,887 Presbyterians. Although much smaller than the major Christian denominations, churches from the Middle East, such as the Melkite (3,082, a 339% increase) and Maronite Catholic (31,770, a 124% increase) and the Antiochian Orthodox, (7524,an 89% increase) were the fastest growing.

Over half-a-million Australians identified with one of the Orthodox faiths, with by far the largest being the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia. Other national Orthodox churches with significant numbers include the Macedonian, Serbian and Russian. There are also 18,000 Australian members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The first Orthodox service in Australia took place at Sydney's Kirribilli Point during Easter 1820. The first Orthodox Church in Australia, 'Holy Trinity', was opened in the Sydney suburb of Surrey Hills in 1898, built by a small number of people from various Orthodox backgrounds.

(Adapted from *Religious Diversity, You, Me, Australian, Living in Harmony*)

Middle Eastern Christian settlement in Australia

The first wave of migrants from Lebanon commenced around 1880, although there were some earlier arrivals. These early immigrants were known as Syrians but they were classified as Turks by the colonial governments of the day. The area now known as Lebanon was still under Ottoman control.

Early immigrants from Lebanon (around 1880) were Christians including Maronites, Orthodox and Melkites. A small number of Druze settled in South Australia. In Australia, many Lebanese Christians supported the existing Orthodox and Catholic communities. The first Melkite Church was established in 1895, the first Maronite Church in 1897 and the first Orthodox Church in 1901.

Adapted from [Racism. No Way!, Fact Sheet: Australian Communities: Lebanese Australians](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/55.html)

(<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/55.html>)

Considerations for schools

Although CASES 21 does not collect information on religion of students, it is important that the school is aware of religious beliefs and practices for observant students of different religions.

Dietary practices and laws vary with different branches of Christianity. Some Christians fast and abstain from certain foods at significant times during the year. These could be marked on the class calendar and other staff alerted to avoid such activities as sausage sizzles, overnight camps, strenuous sports and the usual canteen orders.

Do you know the religious backgrounds of your students and the shades of difference even within a faith?

Christians from Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches may follow the Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian one, so children may be absent from school to attend, for example, Easter services, when Easter on the two calendars does not coincide.

Name days are more important than birthdays for communities of many Eastern Churches. These are celebrated on the day of a saint after whom the child is named.

In the Classroom

Arrange visits to Eastern churches in your community and have a church member available to explain the features of the Church and the services held.

Have students interview someone from a different religious community. Devise interview questions that will bring out religious practices, their beliefs and the importance of their religion in their lives.

Set group assignments for students to research similarities and differences among Christian Churches (particularly those represented in the local community) under headings appropriate for their age level. Local or visiting members of Churches may agree to be interviewed.

Compare the rituals and celebrations of different denominations for Holy Week and Christmas.

Develop a thematic study of time and calendars, the history and background of the Gregorian and Julian calendars, the contribution of Arabic astronomers, calendars of other religions and the significance of the sun and moon in our measurement of time.

Investigate the stories of the saints after whom students are named and family and religious naming traditions.

Prepare and make posters illustrating the significance of religious artefacts and traditions in homes, such as icons, votive lamps, crucifixes, prayer, rituals and ceremonies.

Compare the “rules” of different religions. Discuss areas of commonality and difference. Use graphic organisers, e.g. Venn diagram, adapted from [The Really Big Beliefs Project](#) (PDF, 50KB) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/pdf/lesson6.pdf>).

Devise other activities suggested in [The Really Big Beliefs Project](#) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html>)

Bibliography

[Living in Harmony](#), an Australian Government initiative designed to encourage all Australians to contribute to, and build upon Australia's social cohesion (<http://www.harmony.gov.au>) accessed May 2008.

© Revised edition published by the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2006. First published by the Department of School Education with the State Board of Education, Victoria, and with support from the Commonwealth Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1992.

Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam



Introduction

Islam, Judaism and Christianity trace their origins to religion revealed by the Prophet Abraham and have much in common. All three believe in one God, prescribe a way of life for humanity, and believe in life after death. They share a common history and reverence for particular sacred stories, which gives them links and recognition as *People of the Book*.

Islam is one of the largest world religions with 22 percent of the world's population.

While followers of Islam are linked by the essential beliefs of their faith, there is great individual and cultural diversity among its followers. The same diversity is reflected in Islam's growing communities in Australia.

Of the total number of Muslims around the world, most live in South Asia (416 million), Sub-Saharan Africa (254 million), in the Middle East (252 million) and Southeast Asia (239 million). There are also significant Muslim populations in Central Asia (76 million), Eastern Europe (21 million) and Western Europe (13 million), especially France, and North America (5 million). In the Balkans, the Muslim population is approximately 8 million, mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania (70% of the population) and Republic of Macedonia. There are 1 million Muslims in South America. (Bedah and El Matrah, p 54)

Only about 18 percent of Muslims live in the Arab world. The 10 countries with the largest Muslim populations, in descending order, are: Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Nigeria, China, and Ethiopia. Of these, only Egypt is an Arab country (Bedah and El Matrah).

Within most religions there are a variety of groups whose practices identify them as belonging to one shade of difference or another. Many of these differences have evolved over many centuries and have been shaped by the history of different regions.

All religions would wish to be viewed for their beliefs as defined in sacred texts and laws and not by the expression of any one group or individual claiming to speak in the name of the faith. Islam should not be judged by the behaviour of extremist groups.

Some of the conflict in the Middle East is reported to be based on religious differences:

- between faiths, for example, between Jews and Muslims
- within faiths, for example, between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims or supposed Muslim fundamentalists in Iran and Iraq, and
- between liberal and fundamentalist Jews in Israel.

To accept such a simplistic explanation of conflict, however, is to deny the significant influence of economic, international, political, cultural, territorial and nationalistic factors. Without accurate information about the religious groups

purportedly in conflict, the complexities of conflict are too easily explained by stereotyping the groups.

Media treatment of the events since 9/11 reflects the Australian community's lack of knowledge about the beliefs of Islam and Muslims in Australia. There seems to be a general feeling that Islam is 'foreign' and promotes conflict and war. This is somewhat like blaming the beliefs of Christianity for deaths during the Crusades or assuming that other well-known contemporary figures who act from a Christian background represent the Christian faith of all cultures and branches.

Attitudes to different groups can be manipulated by media interest in portraying the exotic image that emphasises difference rather than images that show the common humanity of people. Impressions of Muslim societies may be based on stereotypes built up through media interest in portraying Muslim women as heavily veiled and archaically dressed as part of a religion and society that represses women. Political repression practised by dictatorial governments, should not be confused with religious repression. In fact, Islam specifies modest dress for both men and women and the dress code of Muslim women is a personal choice. Many Muslim women enjoy high levels of personal freedom in countries that respect human rights.

It is important that students are assisted to view all cultures and faiths in an open way which breaks down stereotyping about particular cultures and faiths. Islamic groups in Australia have a strong record of religious and community harmony despite wide cultural and language differences.

As a significant religion in the Australian community, it is important that students have knowledge of Islam along with knowledge of other religions.

Origins and historical background

Islam is the youngest of the Semitic religions. It was founded by the prophet Muhammad in 570 CE but has its roots in the time of Abraham. Abraham established the settlement which today is the city of Makkah (Mecca) and built the Ka'ba or "house of God", the holy site Muslims visit during their visit to Mecca.

During a religious retreat, Muhammad, a descendant of Abraham through his son Ishmael, received a revelation from God through the angel Gabriel. These revelations which continued for 23 years became the basis of the Qur'an.

The persecution which met Muhammad and his small group of followers, led him to migrate to the city of Madinah (Medina). This migration in 622 marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. By the time of the prophet's death, Islam had spread to much of the Arabic world.

Within a few years, political and military conquests had brought much of North Africa and the Middle East under the control of the Muslim state. Motivations for the conquests were political rather than religious but conversions to Islam inevitably followed. Within 100 years of the death of the prophet, Islam had spread to Spain and southern France in the West and China in the East.

Islam encouraged scholarship: “seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman”, and from about the beginning of the eighth century onwards, Muslim scholars established many institutions of learning, scientific laboratories and libraries.

The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature and history. Many crucial systems such as algebra were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. (“Many Faiths, One People”, p. 22)

Branches of Islam

There are far fewer different Islamic groups than there are Christian denominations, perhaps explained by the long period of unity in the Middle East and the use of Arabic as the language of the faith. This provides a common language for communication between the many cultures that have embraced Islam. The differences within the faith tend to be political rather than theological. The obligations of every Muslim are the same.

Some Muslims may identify themselves as Muslim but may not observe the rituals or regulations. They are considered ‘cultural’ or ‘nominal’ Muslims. (Saeed, Professor Abdullah, (2004) p.28 *Australian Muslims: Their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions*).

Some people are converts to Islam. The main Islamic groups are listed below.

Sunni

Sunni Muslims believe that authority in Islam is only found within the Quran and the writings deriving from the Prophet Muhammad. Significant people in Islam, such as the Imam (spiritual leader of a community), are leaders but without absolute authority. A greater part of the Islamic world (about 85 percent) is Sunni, a name derived from the Sunna (practice of the Prophet).

Shi'ite

Shi'a Islam believes that authority is found in leaders who are descendants of the Prophet and that every generation of Muslims raises up a spiritual leader who leads the community while they wait for the return of ‘the Expected One’ to carry on the leadership established by the Prophet Muhammad. The majority of Shi'ite Muslims come from Iran, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Small communities of Shi'a exist throughout the world.

Sufi

Sufism began with Islamic mystics in what is present-day Iraq. Sufis seek to be at one with God by the exclusion of external sensations. They practise meditation, chants and rhythmic repetitive dance movements to heighten their spiritual communion. Sufis are part of both Sunni and Shi'ite groups.

Other groups with origins in Islam:

Alawi

Alawite was the name given to this group early this century. Unlike other groups, the Alawites possess a liturgy and observe a number of the festivals associated with Jesus, such as his birth and death. They also use names associated with Christianity as well as Islamic names. The Alawites are a smaller group who practise their religion in private.

Druze

The Druze believe that the Quran contains esoteric as well as literal meaning. Truth is made up of the inner as well as outer meaning. Religious gatherings are held in seclusion on Thursday evenings, not on Friday as for Muslims. Qualified women are admitted to religious leadership.

The beliefs of Islam

The following information lists some elements of the Islamic faith and readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources such as those listed in the Bibliography that is part of these project materials.

Belief in one God

A belief in one God ... is central to Islam. According to Islam, God has four fundamental functions: creation, sustenance, guidance and judgement. The ultimate purpose of humanity is to be in the “service of God” to worship him alone and to construct an ethical social order” (Australian Police, Multicultural Advisory Bureau, A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity).

Islam teaches that because of humanity’s moral weakness, God sent prophets to teach both individuals and nations correct moral and spiritual behaviour. Muslims believe in all prophets of God from Adam and Abraham (*Ibrahim*) to Jesus (*Isa*) and finally Muhammad.

Like Christians and Jews, Muslims believe that this life is only a trial preparation for the next realm of existence.

Muslims believe in the Day of Judgement, freedom of choice and individual accountability for actions.

Religious observances

Five pillars of Islam

Islam has five essential religious principles, often known as the foundations or pillars of Islam.

Declaration of faith (*shahadah*): ‘There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. Note, the use of the word Allah is not confined to Muslims; it is Arabic for God, and, as such, is used by Arabic speakers of various religious affiliation.

Prayer (*salat*): Obligatory prayers are performed five times a day. They can be performed anywhere if people are unable to pray in a mosque. On Fridays Muslims attend congregational prayer at the mosque where the Imam (religious leader) preaches and reads from the Quran.

Almsgiving (*zakat*): a percentage of income is contributed for distribution to the poor. The word *zakat* means both purification and growth.

Fasting (*sawm*): Muslims are expected to fast during the month of Ramadan, from dawn until sundown, abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, the month that the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. Ramadan is a time of piety and self discipline.

Pilgrimage (*hadj*): The annual pilgrimage to Mecca is an obligation only for those who can physically and financially afford it once in their lifetime.

The holy day for Muslims begins on Friday and special services are held at the mosque.

Islam does not have a hierarchical priesthood. The Imam is the spiritual leader and is chosen by the community. Traditionally, imams are community leaders, as well as religious leaders and spiritual counsellors.

Sacred texts

Islam is a total way of life prescribed in sacred texts revealed by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel over 23 years.

The **Quran** (literally, that which is recited) is a record of the exact words revealed by God to Muhammad and written in purest Arabic. It contains the accounts of the revelations, the stories of the prophets and the Divine Laws (*Sharia*, the ‘right way’), which apply in all places and circumstances. Although there are differing views, many Muslims believe the Qur’an was finally put into written form around AD 650.

The **Sunna** contains all the traditions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad that have become models to be followed by Muslims. These texts must be studied by all Muslims throughout their lives, for they determine responsibilities and accountabilities to Allah.

Moral Code

Islamic law defines what is halal (permitted by God), what is haram (prohibited by God), and what is makruh (detestable).

The Islamic moral code is defined by what is halal and what is haram.

Killing, stealing, adultery or sex outside marriage, gambling, wasteful consumption, bribery, spreading gossip, pornography, prostitution and intoxicants are prohibited.

Muslims do not endorse or participate in forms of entertainment that promote what is considered haram.

Islamic law

The Sharia Islamic law, is derived from the Qur'an. It is a comprehensive system of laws addressing religious, moral and social issues.

Structure and organisation

Islam does not have a hierarchy of clergy nor any intermediaries between God and the individual, as in some other faiths. The Imam is an individual with a great knowledge of Islam who is chosen to be the religious leader. He is usually salaried to serve the community like the clergy, rabbi or priests in other faiths.

An imam leads the congregation in prayer but he is not a priest in the sense of being ordained. In Islam there are no sacraments or rites which only a religiously qualified person can perform.

Muslims have developed various models and traditions on the role of imams in an increasingly complex world of diaspora communities and Islamic states. In Australia, where Muslims come from a multitude of countries and religious traditions, there has not been agreement among the Muslim population as to what role imams will play and if a formal Islamic structure will represent Muslims. Generally, imams have provided some form of leadership for their respective ethnic/sectarian communities or their immediate geographical community. (Bedah and El Matrah)

In Australia, imams frequently find themselves called upon to act as community counsellors and arbiters on questions of religious law, community representatives and welfare officers as well as prayer leaders. (Bedah and El Matrah)

Life cycle in Islamic cultures

Birth

When a baby is born the call to prayer is whispered in one ear and the prayer beginning 'God is most great' is whispered in the other so that the first word the child hears is the name of Allah.

Children are given a Muslim name, most often those mentioned in the Holy Quran, the names of Muhammad or his relatives and early leaders of Islam. Hence names such as Muhammad, Ali, Ahmet, Fatima and Aminah are common. Islam does not believe in original sin and babies are considered to be born pure so the sacrament of baptism is unnecessary.

Growing up

Circumcision of boys occurs before the age of 12 and represents adherence to the Prophet's instructions to take all measures for hygienic and healthy growing. It is an occasion for joy and festivity. Female circumcision is not an Islamic prescription or based on any authentic Islamic source, but has been a cultural practice in some African and Asian countries.

Among the most inalienable rights of the child in Islam is the right to life. Preservation of the child's life is the third commandment in Islam. Responsibility for, and compassion towards, the child is a matter of religious importance as well as a social concern.

Marriage

Marriage in Islam is a contract, not a sacrament. It is considered a very serious commitment because God is a party to the marriage contract, which is made by the couple in front of witnesses in a mosque or in the home of one of the couple.

Monogamy is the usual form of relationship; however polygamy is permitted with the agreement of the parties and if all wives are treated equally. Polygamy is no longer a common practice in most Islamic countries.

Divorce

Divorce is considered the last resort in marital disputes and the Quran provides guidance for steps to be taken to try and have differences resolved. Both men and women have the right to divorce.

Birth control

Birth control is allowed in Islam as long as it does not harm the body. Having children, it is believed, is a matter of God's will, whatever the circumstances. Abortion, however, is considered to be wrong except in cases where the safety of the mother and child is at risk. It should be noted that different schools of Islam hold varying views on whether other reasons for abortion are permitted.

Interaction between males and females

Muslim children are encouraged from an early age to avoid interacting alone with members of the opposite sex outside the family, particularly from the age of puberty. This is related to the concept of honour of the family and the need to protect the integrity and honour of both men and women.

Festivals

Muslim calendar

The Muslim calendar is lunar and approximately 11 days shorter than the internationally-accepted calendar. Newspapers in Islamic countries carry the dates of both calendars. The star and crescent are common signs of Islam and are used on the flag of many Islamic countries. One explanation of the symbol is connected with the lunar calendar and the symbolism of rebirth associated with the moon. Anyone who has been in the Middle East is aware of the clarity of the crescent moon in the desert sky.

Ramadan

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar is of major importance for Muslims. It is a month of fasting between dawn and sunset and a time when Muslims pay particular attention to religious obligations.

Eid Al-Fitr

This festival marks the end of the fast of Ramadan and is celebrated by prayers, gatherings of families and friends and festive food. It is a time for new clothes and presents for children. In Islamic countries it is the occasion of a three-day holiday. In Australia many Muslims may take a day off work or school if it falls on a weekday; some of the festivities may be deferred to the weekend.

Eid Al-Adhha

This is the second major festival in Islam and is celebrated two lunar months and nine days after Eid Al-Fitr. It is a festival of sacrifice – its origins remember the prophet Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his son for God's will. It is celebrated with family and community gatherings and is as significant as Eid Al-Fitr.

Other feasts of the year include:

- **Lailat al Qadr**, the night on which the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad and revealed the first message of God to him.
- **Lailat al Isra and Miraj**, the night of Muhammad's journey to Jerusalem and ascent to heaven.
- **Ashura**, which commemorates the day Prophet Mousa and his followers were saved.

Customs

Place of females in Islam

A Muslim female is entitled to freedom of expression. In Islam's history, women have been leaders, soldiers, traders and breadwinners. They have expressed their opinions and participated in serious discussion. Women's rights are upheld in the Holy Quran in matters of marriage and divorce, property and inheritance, and economic security. Education is a mandatory duty for all Muslims, but it is tempered by individual, cultural, economic and family considerations.

Different rules for men and women

Many of the differences in the treatment of Muslim men and women are based on cultural and socio-economic factors rather than religion. Women across the world experience gender inequality, and people who suggest that women are oppressed in Islam, often lose sight of the mistreatment of women and discrimination against them in other cultures and communities.

Islamic dress code and behaviour

The practice of dressing and behaving modestly is considered by some non-Muslims as evidence of repression. The Holy Quran specifies modest dress for both men and women, but there is diversity in how this is interpreted. Some Muslim women wear a hijab (hair covering), while others believe they can demonstrate modesty and their commitment to God without one.

Modesty for Muslims reflects religious and cultural mores about how individuals present themselves, particularly in relation to elders and teachers for whom respect is given and guidance is expected.

Members of the Islamic community explain that modest dress assists the woman to be respected for her mind and not her physical form, and protects her from the dictates of fashion. They also value expression of a universal sisterhood and identity among Muslim women.

The dress code of Muslim women is a personal declaration of their dedication to God – hence the great variety in practice and interpretation in dress. After puberty many women cover the body, except for the face and hands, so that physical beauty and form is not displayed.

In Australia, the most identifiable aspect of Muslim female dress is the hijab (head covering), but there is a great range of dress style in a religion that encompasses so many different cultural traditions. In Turkey, which is a secular state, the hijab is not permitted in schools and the public service, though it is an individual choice in private life. Tunisia's government also prohibits the wearing of hijab in public places and offices. In Australia, many Turkish women wear a dark long coat and a colourful scarf. Muslim women from Lebanon generally choose a white scarf, and those from the Indian subcontinent and Northern Africa wear clothes and scarves of a rich pattern and colour.

Purdah (complete veil and covering), is not a requirement of Islam, but an interpretation of dress requirement by some Islamic scholars. It is adopted by some groups in a small number of countries.

Muslim women and girls wearing their hijab often suffer harassment and ill-informed comments despite it being accepted that in a democratic society anyone can wear clothes of their choice provided they do not offend accepted codes of decency.

Muslim men may also be identified by particular religious dress which includes the 'sunnah hat', otherwise known as a skull cap.

Food

Islamic dietary principles are based on the teaching of the Prophet that to maintain a pure heart and a sound mind, and to nourish the soul, special care should be taken of the body. Islam teaches that what is pure in itself and good may be lawful diet if taken in moderation.

Islam has particular dietary guidelines prescribed in the Quran. Haram is that which is unlawful. This includes the flesh of the pig in any form.

Food that is lawful is halal. Muslims are allowed to eat meat that has been slaughtered according to Islamic ritual, which invokes God's understanding that the animal is killed only because of the human need for sustenance. If halal meat is not available, meat from Jewish or Christian butchers is acceptable, though many Muslims would be reluctant to buy such meat regularly.

Islam also prohibits intoxicants.

Schools should ensure that all students are aware of, and respect, the rights of others to feel that their cultural and religious backgrounds are legitimate. The perceived divergences from the mainstream are not so different from the way most families and religious groups celebrate, reflect, pass on traditions and beliefs, and go about their lives in the wider community.

Settlement and history in Australia

Early history

The religion of Islam has been part of Australian history since before European settlement. The map of Java of Muhammad Ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, 820 CE, shows Cape York Peninsula, a v-shaped Gulf of Carpentaria and a curved Arnhem Land. A later map of Abu Isak Al-Farisi Istakhari, 934 CE, also includes an outline of the northern coast of Australia.

From the late 1600s until the early 20th century, Muslim trepangers and traders from Sulawesi (in present Indonesia) visited northern Australia for six months each year during the wet season.

There were Muslims among the first settlers of Norfolk Island, an Australian Territory, from 1796. Along with other settlers, they were given land grants in Tasmania in 1818 when the Norfolk Island settlement closed.

Muslim Afghans opened up the interior of the continent in the 1800s by carrying water and food supplies to mining camps, stations and missions, and materials for inland railways and the Overland Telegraph (1872). The train to Alice Springs is called The Ghan in recognition of the Afghan cameleers. Adelaide Mosque was built in 1885 and the Perth Mosque 20 years later (AMES).

Australia's first mosque was built at Marree in northern South Australia in 1861. The first major mosque was built in Adelaide in 1890. Another was built in Broken Hill (New South Wales) in 1891 (DFAT *Islam in Australia*).

Twentieth century

In the early part of the twentieth century, Muslims from north-west India (now Pakistan) served rural and outback communities as hawkers. They were seen as the more reliable and trustworthy itinerants as their religion forbade alcohol or meat that had not been ritually slaughtered, so they were welcomed and given hospitality on farms they served.

After World War I, Muslims from the Balkans (Europeans) were able to migrate, and the second national census in 1911 recorded 4971 Muslims, an increase of approximately 2000 from 1901. However this dropped to just under 2000 in the 1921 and 1933, despite some migration. This decline was due to the departure of many earlier Muslims when they were denied the right to settle permanently in Australia and descendants of those married to Australian women were unable to practise or maintain their religion.

Muslim Albanians migrated in the late 1930s and early 1940s and others came from the Balkans in the immediate post-war period. Coming from farming and merchant backgrounds, they settled in country Victoria as well as Melbourne. For many years, these Muslims gathered in Melbourne for Ramadan, but it was not until the late 1950s that the first Muslim organisations were formed. A significant Albanian settlement in Shepparton from the pre-war period did not have a mosque until 1959.

The White Australia policy restricted migration from Asia (and therefore Muslims from other than European countries such as Yugoslavia, Poland and Cyprus) until the policy was relaxed in the 1960s. After that, Muslims from Turkey, and those from Pakistan, India, Malaysia etc., who had skills and professions were able to meet immigration requirements. In recent years immigration policies have allowed migration and refugees from a wider range of countries and cultural and religious backgrounds.

The Australian Federation of Islamic Societies (AFIS) was formed in 1964.

The Islamic community in Australia was, in 1964, only a very small community of Turkish, Arab, Bosnian, Fijian Indian, Pakistani and some smaller ethnic groups, which were too small to form any larger body or community such as Indonesian and Chinese. There were, however,

enough people concerned about preserving their faith to begin a loose federation of the various communities across the country. The AFIS was formed and this small organisation administered the affairs of the community, especially in terms of raising money to build mosques and schools. (Bedah and El Matrah)

Among thousands of Asian students studying in Australia, a significant number are from Muslim backgrounds, particularly from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

A great majority of migrants from Turkey are Muslims. They are the largest group of overseas-born students of Muslim background in our schools (see Keynote 7 for further information).

Many new immigrants from North Africa, the former Yugoslav state of Bosnia and Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria are Muslims.

Note: For further information on Muslims in Australia see Keynote 7 on *Arabs and Muslims in Australia*

Population Data – see Keynote 7 on *Arabs and Muslims in Australia*.

Community organisations

Like other religious groups and community organisations in Australia, Islamic communities are organised at a local, state and national level. Islamic societies are proud of their democratic traditions.

There are 25 Islamic schools in Australia attended by 12,000–15,000 students. (Jonas).

A range of organisations provide religious, educational and welfare services to Australian Muslims.

Local

Membership on Islamic societies is open to all Muslims. Fees are determined by the local society. Office bearers who manage the affairs of the society are elected by members.

A mosque may be run by an ethnically-based society, but will still be attended by local Muslims regardless of ethnicity.

Many Islamic societies have premises bought by the communities. In Victoria there are Islamic societies in Brunswick, Broadmeadows, Carlton, Campbellfield, Coburg, Dallas, Doncaster, Deer Park, Doveton, Fawkner, Fitzroy, Footscray, Dandenong, Heidelberg West, Hoppers Crossing, Huntingdale, Kensington, Keysborough, Lysterfield, Maidstone, Meadow Heights, Newport, Noble Park, Springvale, Preston, Reservoir, Sunshine, Thomastown and West Melbourne. In regional Victoria there are societies in Albury-Wodonga, Mildura, Shepparton and Geelong.

Societies include the Fijian Islamic Society, the Afghan Islamic Society, the Somali Islamic Society, the Oromo Islamic Society, the Harare Islamic Society (the latter two formed by East African communities), the Islamic Cultural Centre (mainly South African), the Sri Lankan Islamic Society and the Malaysian Islamic Society.

The Islamic Women's Welfare Council, the Coburg Islamic Women's Society, Muslim Women of Australia and Young Muslims of Australia are among Victorian Islamic organisations.

For a more detailed listing of community organisations in Victoria, visit:

- [Islamic Council of Victoria](http://www.icv.org.au/) (<http://www.icv.org.au/>)
- [Australian Federation of Islamic Councils](http://www.afic.com.au/sm02vic.htm) (<http://www.afic.com.au/sm02vic.htm>).

State

Each state and territory in Australia, including Christmas Island, has an Islamic Council with which societies are affiliated or associated. Not all societies are affiliated.

State Councils are managed by an executive committee, which is elected biannually at general meetings of affiliated societies. Regular meetings are held to discuss issues and make policy on matters of concern to the Muslim community.

A Board of Imams meets regularly to discuss matters of concern, to make policy on religious matters, and to make recommendations to the State Councils.

The Islamic Council of Victoria is the peak body for Muslim organisations in Victoria with 26 member organisations located throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. For more information, visit the website of the [Islamic Council of Victoria](http://www.icv.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=4&Itemid=26) (http://www.icv.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=4&Itemid=26).

National

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) is the national body whose two office-bearers are elected by state councils every two years. Since the 1970s, AFIC has been the main advocacy body for Muslim Australians at federal level. A National Congress is held each year at which issues of national concern are discussed and policy decisions made. It is attended by delegates of every affiliated society.

Considerations for Schools

Religious observances

Muslims may pray at the mosque or wherever they are, at prayer times. At least one of the obligatory prayer times falls during school hours, and the provision of a private area for prayer and facilities for ritual ablutions would be appreciated by Muslim families.

The Holy Quran (sometimes called the Koran), like all holy books, should be treated with reverence.

Ramadan is a month-long period of fasting during daylight hours and a period of special religious observance. Particular consideration should be given to students during this period. For example, avoid planning school celebrations or class parties to coincide with Ramadan. Attendance at evening meetings during Ramadan is difficult for parents.

Arabic is both a sacred and secular language to Muslims and its use should be treated with respect.

Canteen, home economics and school party menus should consider Muslim dietary laws, particularly the need to exclude pork products such as ham, salami and bacon. Students and their parents would wish to know if certain foods contain pork, particularly those with a combination of ingredients such as casseroles, soups and fried rice. Many Muslims are also particular about only eating meat that is slaughtered in a halal manner. Students may therefore lack the confidence to try unknown dishes.

Female dress

Islam specifies modest dress for men and women. The hijab (hair covering) for women is part of a personal commitment to God. It is not a decorative item to be removed during sport or other activities. Purdah, total face covering is not a requirement of Islam, but can be a choice. Modesty of dress when visiting a family can influence the relationship that could be established with the family.

Many Muslim girls find school uniform an appropriate form of dress that accords with their beliefs. They may like to wear longer hems and sleeves (leaving the dress loose-fitting), long pants or socks, and add a hijab (head covering).

Attitudes to dress and behaviour can affect Muslim students' participation in sport and activities such as drama. Public changing rooms, and the wearing of shorts and other sports clothes, particularly bathers, can embarrass a student and present difficulties that the individual is often loathe to express. Long sleeves and track pants for sport, segregated classes for swimming, and privacy in change rooms should be considered and discussed with students and parents.

Note: It is important that other students are aware of the reasons for this difference in dress and behaviour codes so that no students suffer ridicule.

Relationships between the sexes

Muslim family attitudes to unsupervised interaction between males and females should be considered in relation to school activities, in particular excursions, social events and camps.

A Muslim woman is not required to adopt her husband's name on marriage, although her children will have their father's name. Many women of Muslim background may follow cultural traditions and change their name on marriage, especially in Australia.

Islam gives considerable guidance about interaction between males and females, particularly from the onset of puberty.

In a non-segregated class, less formal or less directly supervised activities, such as sport, drama, camps etc. may be a cause of disquiet for some families.

Many Muslim women are unwilling to attend functions such as parent-teacher interviews without being accompanied by a male relative. In the context of shift work, this may cause difficulties for Muslim families.

Home visits and interviews should also be considered in this context. However a teacher visiting a lone adult of the opposite sex at home could cause some degree of discomfort.

Hand-shaking between males and females is not a custom in Muslim and many Middle Eastern communities. It may cause embarrassment if you offer your hand to a member of the opposite sex.

Home and family

Family structures are well defined in Muslim cultures and it is important that senior family members are greeted formally first, usually beginning with the head of the household. Children are greeted last, usually in a hierarchy of age, though the males often take precedence over females.

A Middle Eastern practice (not specifically Muslim) is the removal of shoes before entering a house. This is often not expected of visitors, but should be anticipated. Removal of footwear and ritual washing is an essential preparation for prayer and for entering the mosque. Visitors to a mosque should cover their arms and hair as a mark of respect.

In Islamic and many Middle Eastern cultures, traditional welcomes often have a formality of refreshment and social ritual before the purpose of the interaction is begun.

Note: The spelling of many Arabic names and terms vary according to the transliteration preferred. For example, the Quran is also transliterated as Koran, Eid as Id, Ramadan as Ramazan, Ahmet as Ahmed, and so on.

Respect for teachers

Teachers are accorded great respect by Muslims and learning is emphasised in specific terms in the Quran. Perceived incidents of disrespect for a teacher are considered very serious.

School practices

Consult Muslim parents about excursions and sport programs, and ensure they understand the purpose of these activities and are reassured about the degree of supervision. Where possible, organise girls-only and boys-only camps and swimming programs.

Ensure that food provided as part of school activities meet Muslim dietary laws. Provide lists of ingredients where necessary.

Invite a Muslim community speaker to discuss issues and strategies with staff and student representatives that will maximise student and family participation in school life.

In the classroom

Investigate the contribution of early Muslim scholars to fields of astronomy, medicine, mathematics and philosophy.

Have students identify places of significance in the history of Islam on a map and show with dates the spread of Islam.

Identify countries of significant Islamic populations on a world map.

Invite an Arabic speaker to discuss and demonstrate the Arabic language and study the calligraphic styles and decorative use of the language.

Study the impact of the modern world on dress customs throughout the world.

Point out the different dress traditions and acceptability within any community, such as the hat and gloves our mothers had to wear on formal occasions.

Compare the relative value students place on the dictates of fashion and on peer group pressure to conform to an alternative view, such as that of Muslim women.

Invite a speaker from a Muslim Women's organisation to speak about women in their community and to answer questions.

Discuss the issue of stereotyping in relation to clothes and appearance.

Set group or individual research topics on beliefs of various religious groups in Australia.

Develop a theme on aspects of many religions, focusing on similarities and differences such as architecture and layout of sacred buildings, major festivals and observances, dietary laws and traditions, organisational structure, etc.

Investigate the [Australian Multicultural Foundation Believing in Harmony](http://www.amf.net.au/rsch_research_harmony.shtml) project which aims to give students a better understanding of a range of religions (http://www.amf.net.au/rsch_research_harmony.shtml).

Investigate the common and different naming (and spelling) traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and regional variations within these traditions.

Discuss the importance of various religious observances such as Ramadan.

Discuss the diversity of different backgrounds of Muslims in Australia.

Encourage students in the class to consider the similarities and differences in their family traditions.

Investigate the observance of the various celebrations of the Islamic calendar. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions:

- What is similar in Islamic life cycle events and practices to other cultures and religions?
- What is similar in Islamic belief and ritual and practices to other religions?
- What is similar in the rhythm of the Islamic year to their own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Find opportunities in various classes and subjects to present some of the facts about Muslims and Islam in Australia.

Analyse media reports about Muslims to determine point of view and detect bias and stereotyping.

Set group research or assignments on Islamic groups in Australia, including:

- cultural groups in the local community
- similarities and differences in religious beliefs
- major observances
- religions of the Middle East.

Build a geographical picture of people from countries of Islamic origin and migration to Australia.

Organise visits to places of worship.

Prepare a calendar of major religious observances of Middle Eastern and Islamic groups in Australia and discuss these during the year.

Invite speakers from Islamic and Middle Eastern organisations to talk about their community organisations and activities. Have students prepare questions and discuss their appropriateness.

Set a writing topic about being a minority in an imagined society.

Have students or a community member talk about their initial experience as a newly-arrived Muslim.

Have students read some of the children's and young adult literature recommended in the Bibliography that is written by or about other cultural groups.

Set a history topic on the role of Muslim camel drivers and hawkers in the life of outback Australia.

Discuss the issue of minority groups in a community and have students identify an experience in which they were a minority. A number of the [The Really Big Beliefs](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html) activities would be relevant to a discussion of this topic (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html>).

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First published by the Department of School Education with the State Board of Education, Victoria, and with support from the Commonwealth Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1992.

Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia



Introduction

When talking about Arabs and Muslims, we are faced with a variety of definitions and terms describing regions and identities. The complexities of changes in names and boundaries of countries are of particular interest. Cultural and religious identities and different ways of describing regions require sensitive and well-informed teachers. The regions, religions and cultures that are the focus of this set of Keynotes are those with links with the Middle East and Central Asia, and include Muslims from South and East Asia, Africa and Europe.

A popular misconception is that all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arabs. In fact, of the 1300 million Muslims in the world, more than 80 percent are non-Arab (Saeed, p.10). It is similar to saying all Christians are Catholic and come from Rome. Such inaccuracies do little for the dignity of the communities concerned and possibly hinder community relations. It is worth noting here a common misconception around the word *Allah*. Many people think of *Allah* as an Islamic term but, as the Arabic word for God, it is used by Arabic speakers of all denominations to refer to their god.

Arabic and Muslim community members wish to point out that in Australia their communities have a high level of citizenship and live in harmony with each other and with the wider community. The conflicts in different parts of the world so vividly presented to us in the media often leave students with a simplistic impression of the causes of conflict. Inaccurate or incomplete information contributes to negative stereotyping of people.

Who are Arab Australians?

Dr William Jonas AM, in his report, *Isma – Listen. National Consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians* summed up the difficulties with ascribing identity.

Determining exact numbers and cultural identity of Arabic background Australians can be complex as nationality is not always synonymous with cultural identity or ethnicity. For example, some Iraqis identify their ethnicity as Kurdish not Arab. Similarly, some Lebanese-born Christians identify as Phoenician (Jonas). Limiting a definition of 'Arab Australian' to people born in Arab countries would have excluded Arabic-speaking Australians from places like Ethiopia and Eritrea which are not usually defined as 'Arab' countries.

The term 'Arab Australian' refers broadly to people bound by a common language (Arabic) and a common cultural heritage which can be traced back to the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa. 'Arab Australians' includes all those who identify with this group and live in Australia, either as a permanent resident or with temporary resident status.

Population data: Arabs in Australia

Arab Australians are a diverse group. The most common country of origin of Arab Australians is Lebanon followed by Egypt, Iraq and Syria. More recently arrived communities tend to be smaller in number and come from a wider range of Middle Eastern and North African countries such as Iraq, Sudan and Somalia.

The 2001 Census noted that there were 209,372 people who spoke Arabic across Australia (ABS 2001), which makes Arabic the fourth largest language other than English, spoken at home in Australia.

Most Arab Australians live in New South Wales and Victoria with smaller populations in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. A relatively small proportion lives in the Northern Territory, Tasmania or the ACT. Arab Australians live mainly in urban areas and are concentrated in specific parts of cities such as Sydney's south-west and Melbourne's north-western suburbs (Jonas – from ABS data).

Arab immigration accounts for eight percent of the total migration to Australia. According to the 2001 Census, 162,283 Australians (0.8% of Australia's population) were born in the 22 Arab League nations. Another 120,000 Australian-born people have at least one parent born in an Arab country.

Religious affiliation of Arab Australians

For various reasons, migrants from Middle Eastern countries have been largely Christian. Chain migration from Lebanon, particularly up to 1975, tended to attract the Christian relatives of earlier Lebanese settlers. Migration from Egypt included many persons of Greek and Maltese backgrounds. Members of some Middle Eastern Christian groups, such as Copts from Egypt and Assyrians from Iraq came to Australia to escape persecution or discrimination. Many members of Australia's small Palestinian community are Christians.

From the last census it appears that the majority of Arab Australians are Christian. For example, 55 percent of Lebanese-born Australians are Christian (the main groups are Maronite and Melkite Catholics), while 41 percent are Muslim (predominantly Sunni) with smaller numbers of Shi'ites, Druze and Alawi. (Jonas from ABS data 2001).

Religious affiliation of Arabic background Victorians

In Victoria, according to the 2001 census, there were similar numbers of Christians and Muslims among people of Arabic background. Christians were more likely to be concentrated in the metropolitan areas whereas in non-metropolitan areas, the percentage of Muslims to Christians among Arab Australians was significantly higher. No other religious affiliation was significant.

Table 7.1 Arabic Language by Religion Victoria.

Religion	Melbourne		Other		Victoria Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Catholic	10,085	22	175	12	10,260	22
Greek Orthodox	3,272	7	63	4	3,335	7
Macedonian Orthodox	-	0	-	0	-	0
Other Christian	7,711	17	134	9	7,845	17
Total Christian	21,068	46	372	25	21,440	45
Buddhism	58	0	21	1	79	0
Hinduism	3	0	3	0	6	0
Islam	21,918	48	955	65	22,873	48
Judaism	23	0	3	0	26	0
Other Religions	733	2	20	1	753	2
No Religion	345	1	33	2	378	1
Religious belief nfd or inadequately defined	294	1	38	3	332	1
Not Stated	1,294	3	24	2	1,318	3
Total	45,736	100	1,469	100	47,205	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Population data: Muslims in Australia

The most recent Australian census in 2001 recorded a remarkable rate of growth in Australia's Muslim population. The census listed 281,576 Australian Muslims, an increase of some 40 percent in five years, compared to an increase in the total Australian population of only 5.7 percent for the same period. Of this growth, 40 percent came from natural birth and 60 percent from migration.

The Australian Muslim population almost doubled between 1991 and 2001.

Australian Muslims are a very young population: almost 50 percent are aged 24 and under (compared to 35 percent of non-Muslim Australians).

The largest birthplace group of Australian Muslims (approx 103,000) is the second generation Australian-born. Most of Australia's Muslims were born in countries outside the Middle East.

Although the largest single overseas-born Muslim group in Australia is from Lebanon, Arab Muslims as a whole are outnumbered by Muslims from a wide variety of countries, such as Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of Muslim migrants and refugees who have arrived from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Horn of Africa, Bangladesh and Malaysia. Australia's Muslim community is in fact drawn from more than 70 different countries.

In Victoria, the largest group of overseas born Muslims is from Turkey. There is also a significant group from Cyprus and emerging birthplaces include the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia.

Australian Muslims live mostly in the cities. Sydney has 48 percent of the population and Melbourne 31 percent.

Major birthplaces for Australian Muslim

Table 7.2 Major birthplaces for Australian Muslims

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	102,566	36.4
Lebanon	29,231	10.4
Turkey	23,923	8.3
Afghanistan	9923	3.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9892	3.5
Pakistan	9238	3.3
Indonesia	8087	2.9
Iraq	7749	2.8
Bangladesh	7596	2.7
Iran	6353	2.3
Other	67,372	23.9
Total	281,576	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Major birthplaces for Victorian Muslims

Table 7.3 Major birthplaces for Victorian Muslims

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	34,219	39.7
Turkey	12,374	14.0
Lebanon	6317	7.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3844	4.3
Afghanistan	3153	3.6
Cyprus	2344	2.7
Somalia	2253	2.5
Pakistan	2150	2.4
FYROM	2131	2.4
Iraq	1743	2.0
Indonesia	1706	1.9
Iran	1211	1.4
Other	14,995	17.0
Total	88,440	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Languages spoken by Australian Muslims

The three main languages spoken at home by Australian Muslims are Arabic, Turkish and English.

Approximately 95,000 Muslims in Australia use Arabic, 45,000 use Turkish, and 32,000 use English as their language at home.

87 percent of Australian Muslims speak English in addition to another language.

Arabic speaking students in Victorian schools

Our school communities have significant numbers of both Arabic-speaking students and Muslim students. The following snapshot of Arabic-speaking background students in Victorian schools shows their distribution across the state and their country of birth. The information is taken from the August 2005

School Census. The School Census does not include data on religious background.

From the table below it can be seen that Arabic speakers are concentrated in the metropolitan area with almost half of the state's total attending Northern Metropolitan Region schools. Students from Sudan, a recent group of refugee arrivals, were the largest group with large concentrations in Southern and Western regions. Students from Lebanon were the next largest group. There is a significant population of Iraqi students in Hume.

Note: Data from the Sudan may be skewed slightly as some of the African languages, which may be first languages spoken by the Sudanese, are not recorded either by the ABS or CASES.

Arabic speakers in Victorian government schools

Table 7.4 Arabic speakers in Vic govt schools by region and country of birth – Aug 2005

Birth Country	Total	BSW	EMR	Gippsland	Grampians	Hume	Loddon Mallee	NMR	SMR	WMR
Afghanistan	4								4	
Algeria	9							7		2
Australia	5853	4	338	3	11	112	9	3306	621	1449
Austria	2							2		
Canada	5		2							3
China	1		1							
Djibouti	2							1		1
Egypt	124	2	26		1			24	42	29
Eritrea	37							13	4	20
Ethiopia	15		4					3	6	2
Gaza and West Bank	10		3					5	2	
Greece	5							2	1	2
India	3							2		1
Indonesia	2							2		
Iran	80		1			24	5	40	2	8
Iraq	569	2	20			152	16	305	44	30
Israel	5							2		3
Italy	4								4	
Jordan	57		14			3		17	2	21
Kenya	19		5					1	7	6
Kuwait	95		29			34	1	26	3	2

Birth Country	Total	BSW	EMR	Gippsland	Grampians	Hume	Loddon Mallee	NMR	SMR	WMR
Lebanon	274	4	10		1	2	2	104	54	97
Liberia	1								1	
Libya	12						1	3	1	7
Malaysia	1							1		
Maldives	2							2		
Malta	1							1		
Morocco	6		3					3		
New Zealand	27		4		3		1	7	1	11
Oman	4							4		
Pakistan	14		2					5	4	3
Qatar	2							1		1
Russian Federation	1								1	
Samoa	1								1	
Saudi Arabia	135	1	6			22	1	60	26	19
Somalia	2									2
South Africa	1		1							
Sudan	819	8	98					91	368	254
Syria	43	1	3			5		29	3	2
Thailand	1							1		
Turkey	5							5		
UAE	17		5					2	3	7
UK	2		1				1			
USA	8		2					5		1
Venezuela	1							1		
Yemen	10	2			2			6		
Yugoslavia (FRY)	1								1	
Total	8292	24	578	3	18	354	37	4089	1206	1983

Source: Language Background Other than English survey 2005.

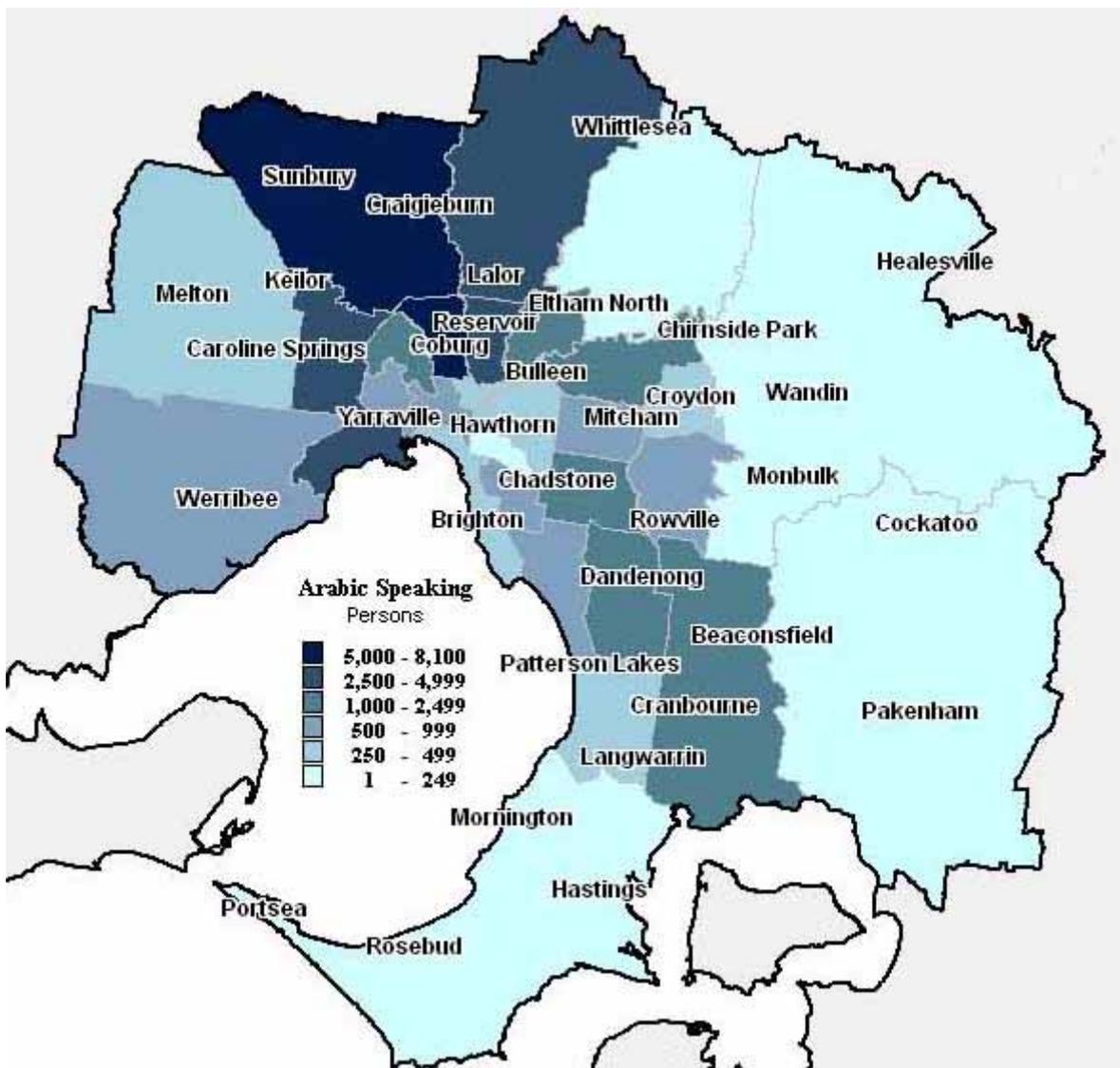
Distribution of Arabic speakers in Victoria

The two maps below show the distribution of Arabic speakers in Victoria based on the 2001 census. Predictably, they show a similar pattern to the school census data. The greatest concentration of Arabic speakers in the metropolitan area is in the north and north-west, particularly in Hume and Moreland LGAs.

In regional Victoria there are smaller, but significant populations in Greater Shepparton, Geelong, Moira (Cobram, Yarrawonga) and Mildura LGAs.

Figure 7.1 Distribution of Arabic Speakers: Melbourne 2001

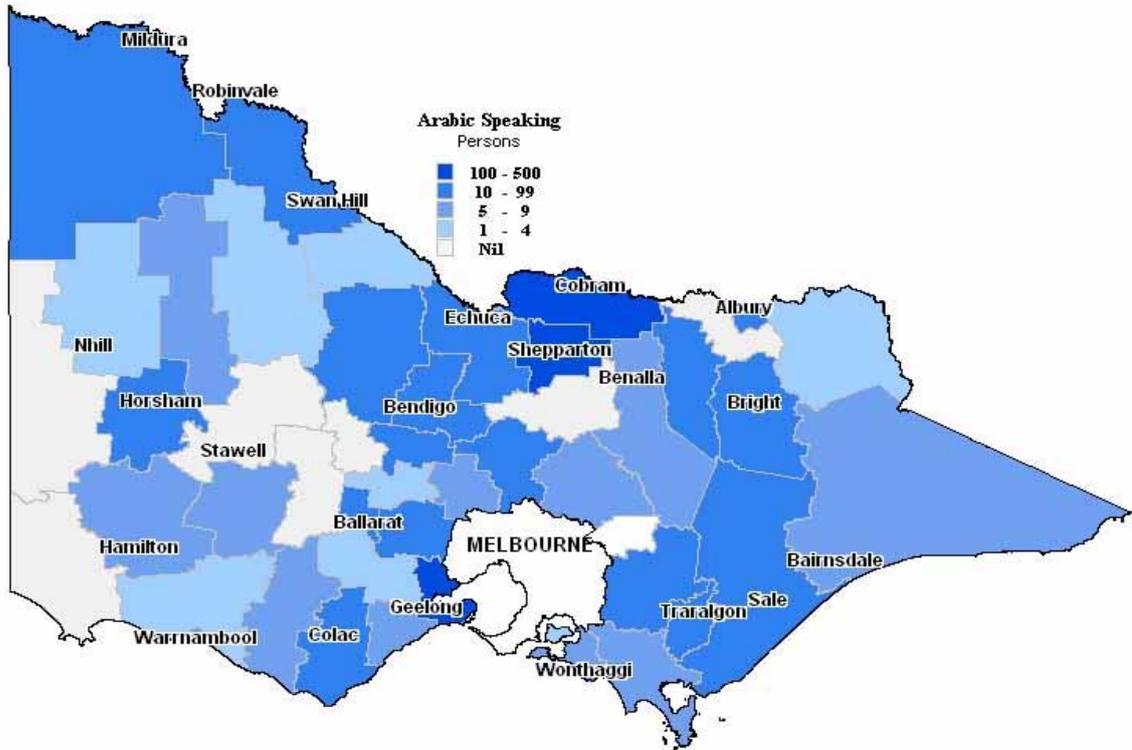
[Total Number = 45,787]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing

Figure 7.2 Distribution of Arabic Speakers : non-metropolitan Victoria 2001

[TOTAL NUMBER =1,402]



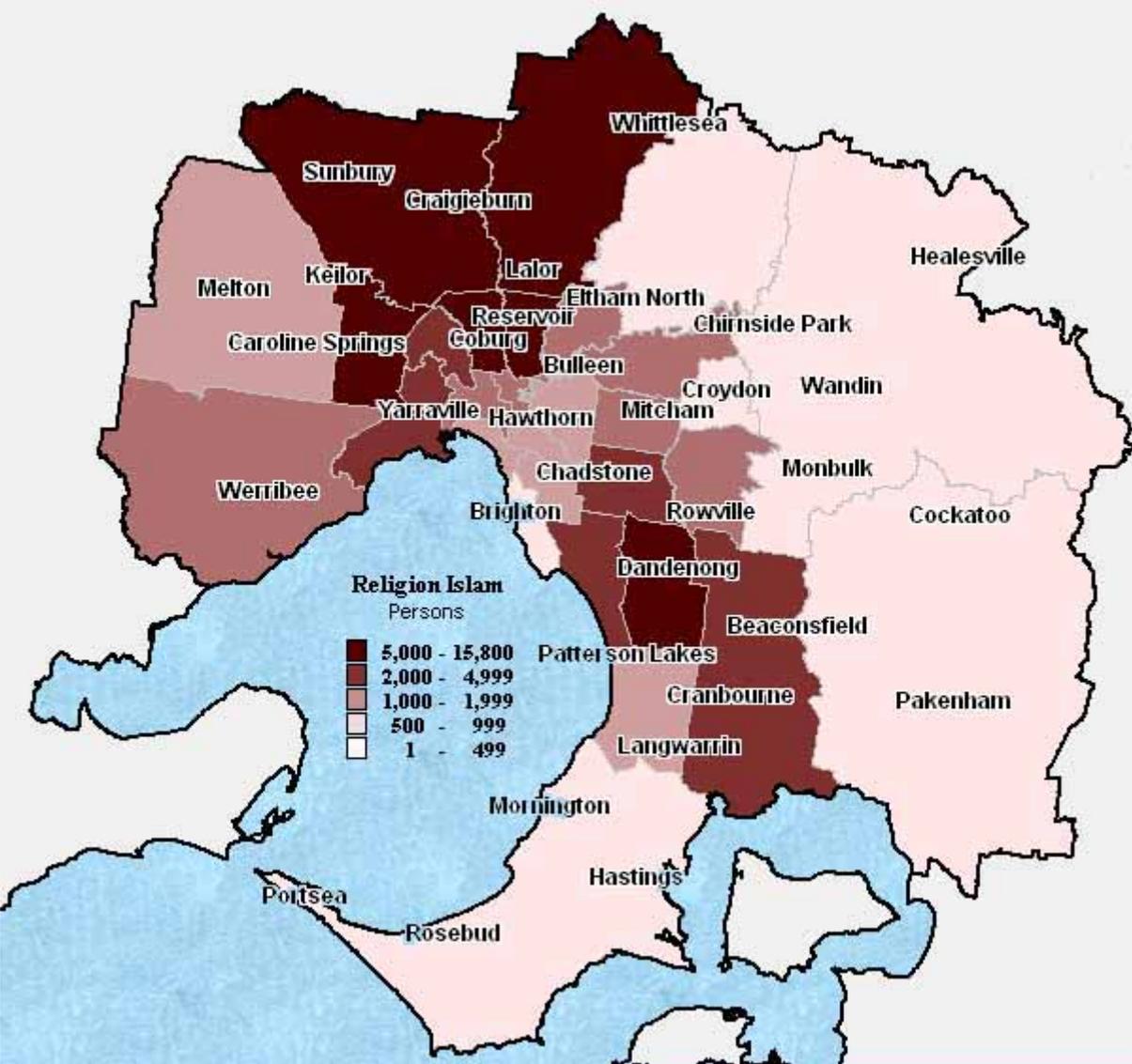
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Distribution of Muslims in Victoria

The largest concentrations of Muslims in Victoria are in Melbourne’s north and north-west in the LGAs of Whittlesea, Hume, Brimbank, Darebin and Moreland. There is also a significant population in Greater Dandenong. Populations can be clustered in particular suburbs. For example, thirty-three percent of the population of Meadow Heights is Muslim.

Muslims, unlike other minority religions in Victoria, do have a tradition of settlement in non-metropolitan regions. Figure 7.4 shows a significant settlement pattern in larger regional towns and cities in the Mildura, Shepparton, La Trobe, Ballarat, Geelong and Albury-Wodonga LGAs.

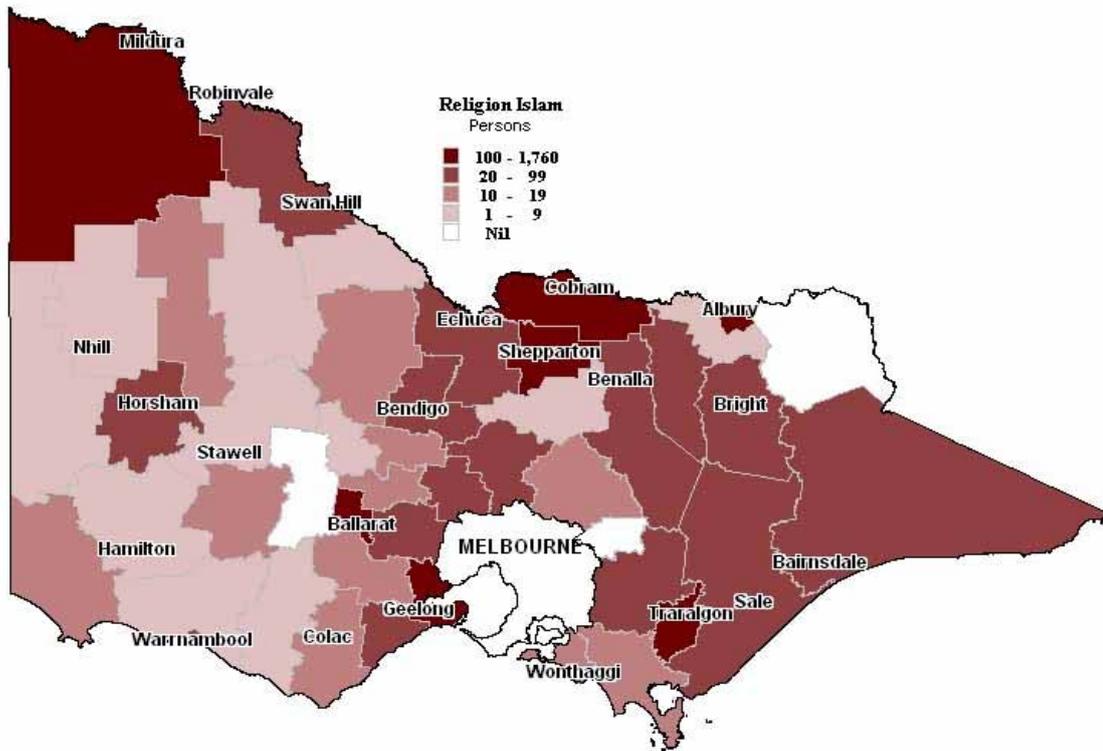
Figure 7.3 Distribution of Muslims Metropolitan area 2001
[TOTAL NUMBER = 87,755]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 7.4 Distribution of Muslims: Victoria by Local Government Area

[TOTAL NUMBER = 4995]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing

School census data: selected countries

The following data, drawn from a school census taken in August 2005 provides information on distribution of students from a range of Middle Eastern countries and countries that are known to have significant Muslim populations. The data is offered for interest only. No definitive conclusions can be drawn from the data about the numbers of Muslim students in our schools.

Table 7.5 Student Birthplace by Region

Birth Country	Total	Barwon South Western	Eastern Metropolitan	Gippsland	Grampians	Hume	Loddon Mallee	Northern Metropolitan	Southern Metropolitan	Western Metropolitan
Afghanistan	893	2	111		1	9	4	52	665	49
Albania	166	4	2			72	1	16	38	33
Bangladesh	147	2	34	4	1	2	6	21	45	32
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1050	59	56	2		4		108	498	323
Egypt	166	4	37		1		1	42	49	32
Ethiopia	341	6	14	4	1	1	4	47	93	171
Indonesia	516	13	196	4	2		10	107	101	83
Iran	397	12	179			24	5	98	48	31
Iraq	1049	2	30			155	15	755	52	40
Kuwait	122		43			34	1	29	12	3
Lebanon	263	5	17		1	2	2	115	43	78
Pakistan	428	2	61	2	10	9	1	95	171	77
Saudi Arabia	191	3	22	1		22	2	76	33	32
Somalia	579		25					308	16	230
Sudan	1762	26	223				1	171	661	680
Turkey	487	6	24			22	26	250	92	67
Total	8557	146	1074	17	17	356	79	2290	2617	1961

Arab and Muslim settlement in Australia

Note: the following material was provided by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs during the Gulf War to contribute accurate information about the region and people of those backgrounds in Australia.

Migration to Australia from the Arab countries of the Middle East commenced in the nineteenth century, mainly from Christian communities in what is now Lebanon. The first significant groups of Muslim settlers in nineteenth century Australia were Afghan and Pakistani camel drivers who helped to open up the arid regions of outback Australia. Thus, Australia's first settlers from Arab countries were, in general, not Muslims, and our first Muslim settlers were, in the main, not Arabs.

For various reasons, migrants from Middle Eastern countries have been largely Christian. Chain migration from Lebanon, particularly up to 1975, tended to draw the Christian relatives of earlier Lebanese settlers. Migration from Egypt included many persons of Greek and Maltese backgrounds. Members of some Middle Eastern Christian groups, such as Copts from Egypt and Assyrians from Iraq came to Australia to escape persecution or discrimination. Many members of Australia's small Palestinian community are Christians.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade explains the growth and nature of the Australian Muslim population in these terms.

Between 1947 and 1971 the Muslim population increased from 2,704 to 22,311, as European Muslims, mainly Cypriot Turks sought a new life in Australia. Lebanese migrants, many of whom were Muslims, began arriving in larger numbers after the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 (Islam in Australia)

Among thousands of Asian students studying in Australia, a significant number are from Muslim backgrounds particularly from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Many new immigrants are from North Africa, the former Yugoslav state of Bosnia and Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria are Muslims.

There have been many high-profile and successful members of the broad Arabic community in Australia. These include Professor Marie Bashir (Governor of New South Wales), Steve Bracks (Premier of Victoria), David Malouf (author) and Hazem El Masri (rugby league player).

Common misconceptions

Identity

Do not assume that the identity you ascribe to someone is the identity they choose for themselves.

Not everyone who comes from the Middle East or who is an Arabic speaker sees themselves as Arab.

A believer in Islam is a Muslim, not a Mohammedan (as has been incorrectly described in many texts in the past).

A Muslim is not always an Arab and might not even speak Arabic.

A speaker of Arabic is not necessarily an Arab.

A Muslim also has a cultural identity in addition to religious identity.

Names and pronunciation vary with different cultures. Transliterated spelling of the same name may vary between those of, for example, Turkish and Arabic background.

Considerations for schools

Check your curriculum and identify gaps and opportunities to introduce community relations and cultural and religious awareness of the whole Australian community. This is as important, possibly even more important, for schools with few students of different cultural and religious backgrounds as it is for schools with significantly diverse populations.

Check your school population and make sure all members of staff know the correct identity of students and their families.

Ensure that the school and students are aware of significant observances of students and their families. The month of Ramadan is an important Muslim observance for example (see Keynote 6 for more information).

Muslim celebrations, like festivals of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Analyse media reports and correct any inaccurate or misleading statements. Identify what information is missing and redress this to present a balanced picture. Analysis of a collection of press clippings relating to the Cronulla riots or the Iraq war would be a valuable exercise.

Conduct periodic 'Did-you-know?' exercises in class based on information provided in this collection of Keynotes.

Use whatever opportunities arise in your regular classes to correct misleading statements and to present balanced additional information.

Prepare and display 'Did-you-know?' posters around the school to introduce and present accurate information about Arabic, Muslim and other cultures represented in Australia, particularly those in the news.

Consider a unit of work based on immigration or census data that traces the settlement and demographic history of particular groups. Consider reasons for settlement in particular areas and supports needed.

Ensure that the broad range of cultural and religious origins of migrants to Australia pre and post-European settlement are acknowledged. Ensure that students are reminded of the displacement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when teaching about European settlement of Australia.

For further classroom activities related to Islam see Keynote 6.

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Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism



Introduction

Hinduism, the third largest world religion after Christianity and Islam is one of the oldest religions. Hinduism has incorporated a wide variety of religious beliefs and modes of worship over thousands of years of its development and has adapted to the influences of other religions. Hinduism is not confined to one book or one prophet. Various sages, saints and social reformers have influenced its development from ancient to modern times.

Eighty percent of more than a billion Indians are Hindus. India is a multicultural and multilingual society and has achieved 'unity in diversity' through the common thread of Hindu culture. The basic principle of equality of all religions has been manifested in the presence in India for centuries of all religions and creeds.

Nepal and Bali are the only other predominantly Hindu communities, but in ancient and modern times Hindus have migrated to other parts of the world, including Sri Lanka, Africa and Malaysia. There are about 94,000 Hindus in Australasia.

Origins and historical background

The name 'Hindu' is derived from the name of a river in north India – Sindhu or Indus. It was first used by Zoroastrians and later popularised by Persian Muslims. The roots of Hinduism, however, stretch back 5,000 years to the religious practices of the Dravidian people of the Indus Valley, which is now part of Pakistan.

Archeological findings indicate the worship of female goddesses as symbols of fertility and rebirth, the image of the bull as a symbol of strength and virility, the depiction of gods and goddesses in ceramic figurines and the importance of ritual bathing – all of which are still relevant to Hinduism today.

New cultural and religious traditions blended with old when Aryan tribes from Persia, migrated to north-west India sometime between 1000–2000 BCE bringing with them the bedrock of the Hindu belief system: hymns and scriptures called *Veda* or 'the Knowledge'. Aryan gods were male, and they had a system of social order which placed priests (*Brahmin/Brahman*) at the top.

By the 7th century BCE, Aryans and indigenous Dravidian people from The Indus Valley had migrated across India to the Ganges valley. Questioning of the Brahmin's spiritual authority, which excluded lower classes from religious rituals led to the beginnings of a more individualised form of religious life of meditation and self sacrifice, the way of the **ascetic**.

Between 800 and 400 BCE, philosophical texts known as the *Upanishads*, the last book of the *Veda* (the Hindu Scriptures) were written by the ascetics. The *Upanishads* are largely dialogues with a spiritual master or guru.

From the 12th to 19th centuries CE, Hinduism was influenced by the arrival of first, Islam, and then British colonial rule. "Revivalist and reformist movements

within Hinduism appeared and Hindus themselves travelled more and travelled further than at any time in the past” (Australian Broadcasting Commission, “Religion and Ethics, Hinduism”).

Settlement and history in Australia

Small numbers of Indians came to Australia during the 19th century.

Indian crews from the Bay of Bengal came to Australia on trading ships soon after 1788 and others came later as labourers in convict ships. A few Hindus came to live and work in Australia under the system of recruiting indentured labour in the 1830s; some came as camel drivers and some as itinerant merchants or hawkers. There were very few women or children among the immigrants and many men travelled back and forth to their original homelands, some returning permanently. By 1896 a firm of merchants from Hyderabad in India had branches in Melbourne. In 1898 about thirty merchants from Sindh settled in Melbourne, including Mr. Pamammull. He began as an opal polisher and established an opal trading enterprise which is continued today by his third and fourth generation descendants. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). “An introduction to Hinduism in Australia” (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

By 1911 there were an estimated 1,000 Hindus in Australia (Racism. No Way!). The imposition of the “White Australia Policy” in 1901, however, meant there was very little immigration from Asia until the policy was rescinded in the mid-1960s.

The more relaxed immigration policy in Australia... facilitated the arrival of professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and technicians. Teachers also arrived to set up retreat centres, organise networks and make converts. Their arrival was part of a renewed interest in Indian religion among the people of the west. (Christian Research Association, “Hindus change over time”)

Immigration of Hindus to Australia further increased in the 1980s after two military style coups in Fiji and political upheavals in Sri Lanka and some African states increased the number of South Asians and people of Indian descent seeking to leave their homes. Hindus represented 0.14 percent of the population in 1986 and 0.26 percent in 1991 (Christian Research Association from ABS data).

Throughout the 1990s, Hinduism became one of Australia’s fastest-growing religious groups. Between 1991 and 1996 an additional 34,687 people migrated from southern Asia and Hindus represented 0.38 percent of the Australian population.

The first Hindu temple was established in an old church in Auburn in Sydney in 1979. “Hinduism in an organised sense, however, did not take real root in Australia until the opening of the first authentic Hindu temple at Helensburgh south of Sydney in 1985” (Cahill, p.48).

Other groups associated with Hinduism in Australia have included:

- the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda (Vedanta) Mission and Order, and the Transcendental Meditation movement, both beginning in 1964
- the Hare Krishna movement
- the Siddha Yoga movement, which established ashrams around Australia
- the Divine Light Mission
- the Rajneeshis. (Cahill, p.48)

There has also been a growth in a number of different schools of yoga that focus on meditation and spiritual development.

Beliefs

Within Hinduism there are many variations in both beliefs and ways of life. The following beliefs form the foundation of Hinduism.

Dharma, the Sanskrit equivalent of 'religion', means duty and pervades all aspects of life. Hindus believe that every person has their own dharma or duty according to their background and caste which includes worshipping God, working hard and not hurting other people and animals.

Karma represents the theory of cause and effect. If an individual disturbs the natural order of things through wrongdoing they will reap the consequences in this and later lives.

Samsara is commonly known as reincarnation. Hindus believe that human life is cyclic. After death, the soul leaves the body and is reborn in the body of another person, animal, or mineral. Samsara represents the cycle of life, death and rebirth which is affected by a person's karma. Hindus believe that the souls of plants, animals and people are all the same, hence their respect for all life.

Moksha (salvation) Hindus strive for the state of moksha which means release from the cycles of birth and rebirth. Pursuing spiritual realisation or "reaching the God within you" through meditation and renunciation is the ultimate goal of life. There are four yogas or paths people may take to achieve moksha. They are the paths of knowledge, meditation, devotion and good works. The paths are interdependent and mingle throughout a person's life. Self-realisation can also be reached while performing one's duties towards family and society.

Hindus believe that no single religion offers the only way to salvation. All are equal as paths to oneness with the Supreme Being.

Three main gods

Hindus believe that there may be many manifestations of the one universal God.

Though there are many gods in Hinduism, Hindus believe there is one Supreme Being, Brahman, who is the source of all existence. There is some difference within Hinduism, however, about the nature of that Supreme Being. Most Hindus say that God is beyond name and form, but that God can be worshipped through a variety of forms. They see all the numerous gods and goddesses of Hinduism as many different manifestations of the one God. Other Hindus believe that the one God is really Lord Shiva and that other gods are lesser divinities. Still others believe that Lord Vishnu is the one true God and all others are demigods. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). "An introduction to Hinduism in Australia" (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

There are three main gods in Hinduism today:

- *Brahma* (the creator)
- *Lord Vishnu* (the preserver)
- *Lord Shiva* (the destroyer).

Vishnu is said to have had 10 incarnations including Rama and Krishna, the 7th and 8th incarnations, and Gautama, or Buddha (the founder of Buddhism), who is venerated as the 9th incarnation.

Lord Vishnu's wife is *Lakshmi*, the goddess of beauty and prosperity. Lord Shiva's wife is *Parvati* who represents his power or *shakti*. She is the Mother Goddess and is further manifested as *Durga* who destroys evil and as *Kali* who calms fears.

Shiva and *Parvati's* son is the much loved *Ganesha* who represents wisdom and freedom from obstacles.

Four stages of life

There are four stages of life as a Hindu:

- as a student
- as a family person
- as a semi-retired or detached person
- as one who has renounced everything for the service of society.

The role as a family person or a householder is the main period of life for the fulfilment of personal and social responsibilities.

Sacred Texts

The Vedas

The *Vedas* are the oldest of the Hindu holy books. The *Vedas* go back to 1200 BCE but were not written down until about 1400 CE. They were written in Sanskrit and are believed to be among the oldest texts. Hindus believe the revelations came from God and are the basic truths which never change.

The basic principles in the *Vedas* are:

- God is one, the wise call Him by different names.
- The whole world is, or should be, a family.
- Religion is for the happiness of many and welfare of all.
- The soul is immortal and man is divine.
- Man is never satisfied by wealth. Spiritual or self-realisation should be the aim of life.

Laws of Manu

Instructions about how Hindus should live their lives are contained in 2685 verses in the books of the Laws of Manu which were written down before 300CE. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). “An introduction to Hinduism in Australia” (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Philosophy and literature

Important texts for Hindus include:

- *Bhagavad-Gita* (the Song of the Lord), 700 verses explaining the essential philosophy and practice of Hinduism
- Various commentaries on the Vedic literatures called *smritis* and the mythological stories called *puranas* form the continuous source of Hindu philosophy and practice
- *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the two main epics that have influenced the life of Hindus and which form the basis of beliefs and ideas.

The caste system

Hinduism divided society into four *varnas* or groups:

- *Brahmins* (priests)
- *Kshatriyas* (soldiers and rulers)
- *Vaishyas* (shopkeepers, traders and farmers)
- *Shudras* (servants for the other three).

People outside the *varnas* were called the *Dalit*, considered outcasts and performed the lowest tasks.

The *varna* a person is born into, is the result of good and bad deeds or karma in previous lives.

This caste system was outlawed in India in 1949 but it remains a significant force.

(Adapted from [Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). “An introduction to Hinduism in Australia” (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Religious Observances

Hindu priests are traditionally members of the Brahmin caste. However, the caste system was outlawed in India in 1949 and recent court decisions have confirmed that members of any caste who have received the appropriate training are entitled to be priests.

There are three types of priests – temple priests, family priests and preachers or lecturers. The family priests visit individual families on demand and conduct various ceremonies from birth to death.

Worship

Daily prayer and occasional fasting are a part of Hindu ritual, but vary according to one's personal belief and ability.

Hindu temples are called **mandir**. Although Hindu temples are built to honour a specific god or goddess, there are shrines to other deities in each temple. The temple of Radha-Krishna in St Kilda, built by the Hare Krishnas, is visited by all Hindus on important occasions. The Hindu Society of Victoria built a temple in Carrum Downs for the two main gods Shiva and Vishnu.

Visits to a temple are not obligatory, but Hindus do visit a temple on special occasions. Pilgrimage is part of religious life and Hindus visit temples of all gods and goddesses as a family tradition, irrespective of their personal deity.

Most Hindus have small personal shrines at home with images of their chosen gods and goddesses. The daily worship procedure, called *puja*, consists of treating these images like specially invited guests, bathing them, offering them cloth, incense, flowers and food.

The symbol used for Hinduism is the Sanskrit letters for the sound Aum (pronounced Ah-oo-m) which represents God. Aum begins and ends all prayers, chants and hymns.

Rites of passages

There are 16 rites or *samskars* that must take place in the life of a Hindu from conception to death. These include the naming ceremony, investiture of the sacred thread, marriage and death. Most of the rituals are in the Sanskrit language and require the services of a priest.

Naming of the child

This ceremony, performed by a priest, may be done 10 or 11 days after birth, though some families defer it.

The Ceremony of the Sacred Thread (Upanayana)

This example marks the passage into adolescence and the religious community for a male Hindu. Only males from the three upper castes participate.

Vivaha

Wedding celebrations in Hindu tradition are elaborate events, involving considerable preparation. The ceremony and the celebrations may last up to three days. Marriage is a match between families, as well as between bride and groom. They are frequently arranged.

Antyes ti (funeral rites)

Cremation is the traditional form of funeral.

Tarpan

In the two-week period preceding the Navarathri festival, men honour their deceased ancestors with offerings of water with sesame seeds.

Festivals

Hindu calendar

The Hindu calendar is basically lunar. The new year begins in March or April when the moon enters the first house. Each month starts on the first day after the no-moon day. An additional calendar month is observed to bring it in line with the more scientific solar calendar.

Diwali is the most important Hindu festival. It celebrates the return of *Rama* and *Sita* from exile and also the day Mother Goddess destroyed the demon *Mahisha*. It is a time for honouring the goddess *Lakshmi*, settling accounts and making up quarrels and arguments. Houses are cleaned and decorated with rows of little lamps called *divas*. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). "An introduction to Hinduism in Australia" (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Other festivals include:

- *Shivarati* or the night of the Lord Shiva (February)
- *Holi*, celebrating the arrival of spring in India, but in Australia the time of harvest with bonfires and feasts. (March)
- *Ramanavmi*, the birthday of Rama (March/April),
- *Janamasthami*, the birth of Krishna (August/September),
- The Ganesh Festival (September),
- The Victory of Goddess Durga over the evil Vijayadashami (October)
- *Navatri*, celebrating the worship of the Mother Goddess and her victory over evil
- *Purnima*, honouring the teachers
- *Raksha Bandhan*, honouring the relationship between brothers and sisters.

Customs

Food

Many Hindus are vegetarian. Cows are sacred to Hindus because they represent the earth which is said to be a goddess and, like the earth, the cow takes little, just grass, and gives much in return. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). "An introduction to Hinduism in Australia" (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Hindu names

There can be up to four parts to Hindu names as follows:

- first or personal name, for example Lalita (female) or Naresh (male) which is used by family and friends
- complimentary name, for example Devi (female) or Lal (male) used only in a polite form of address and never on its own
- father's personal name, for example Jayendra or Mohan, to differentiate between large numbers of people who may share a family or caste name
- family or caste name, for example Sharma or Patel, used as a surname and taken by women on marriage and by children.

Population data: Hindus in Australia

In the 2001 census, 95,473 recorded Hinduism as their religion. While still representing only 0.51 percent of the total population, Hinduism is one of the fastest growing religions in Australia with a 41.9 percent increase between the 1996 census and the 2001 census (ABS). Of those, the majority (51 460) lived in New South Wales.

Major birthplaces for Australian Hindus

As can be seen from the tables below, the majority of Hindus come from India and Fiji with significant numbers from Sri Lanka. There is also a growing number of Australian-born people identifying themselves as Hindu.

Table 8.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Hindus

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
India	31,398	33.5
Fiji	19,748	20.7
Australia	16,570	17.4
Sri Lanka	10,206	10.7
Malaysia	2251	2.4
South Africa	2241	2.3
Nepal	1717	1.8
Singapore	1303	1.4
United Kingdom	1095	1.1
New Zealand	1024	1.1
Other	7369	7.7
Total	95,462	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Major birthplaces for Victorian Hindus

The Victorian population follows a similar pattern for the whole of Australia in relation to birthplaces of its Hindu population.

Table 8.2 Major birthplaces for Victorian Hindus

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
India	9628	39.0
Australia	4165	17.0
Fiji	3438	14.0
Sri Lanka	3270	13.0
Malaysia	622	2.5
South Africa	479	1.9
Singapore	309	1.3
New Zealand	237	0.9
United Kingdom	232	0.9
Other	2004	7.7
Total	24,383	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

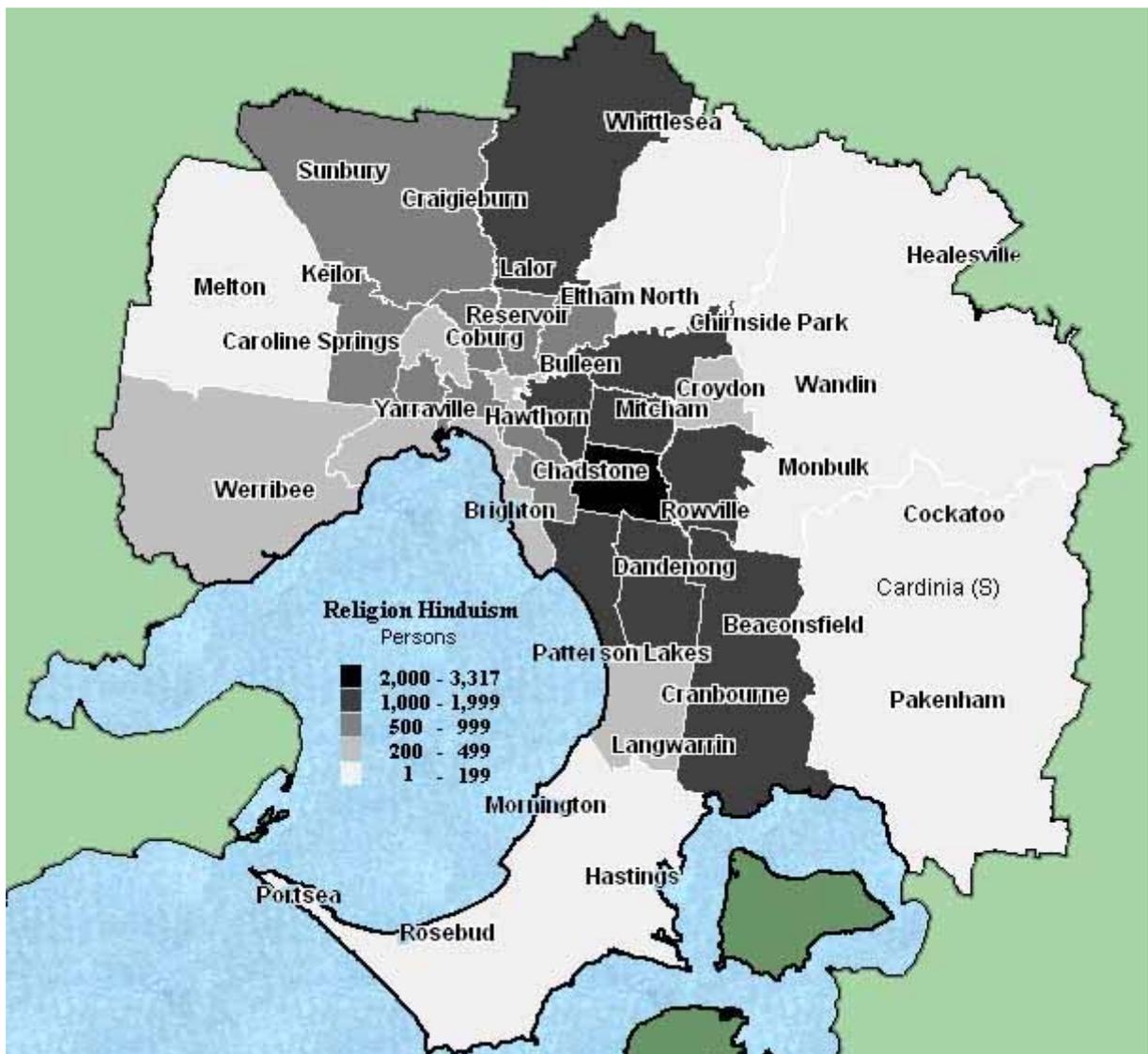
Distribution of Hindus in Victoria

As can be seen from the maps below, most Hindus live in the metropolitan area (96 percent). The only other significant population is in the Greater Geelong Area with smaller populations in regional centres like Bendigo and Shepparton.

In the metropolitan area, the greatest concentration is around Monash, probably reflecting the student population.

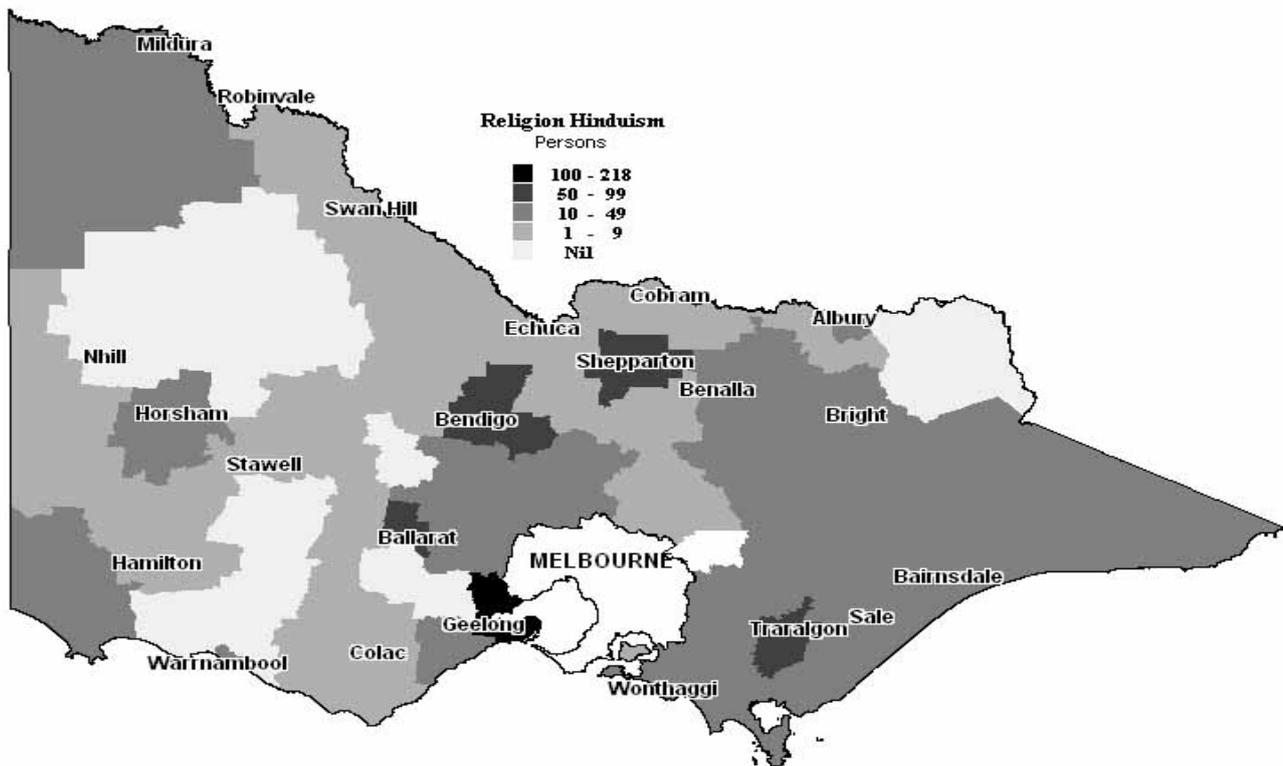
Figure 8.1 Distribution of Hindus: Melbourne 2001

[TOTAL POPULATION = 23,339]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 8.2 Distribution of Hindus: non-metropolitan Victoria 2001
(TOTAL POPULATION = 933]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Community Organisations

State

The Hindu Society of Victoria was established in 1982 and the Temple was consecrated in 1994. The group has also built a library.

For a list of Hindu temples in Victoria see:

- [Hindu Council of Australia: Australian Hindu Temples](http://www.hindu council.com.au/ahtl.html)
(<http://www.hindu council.com.au/ahtl.html>)
- [Hindu Foundation of Australia: Australian Temples, Hindu Temples in Australia](http://www.hindunet.com.au/australian_temples.html)
(http://www.hindunet.com.au/australian_temples.html)

National

The [Hindu Council of Australia](http://www.hindu council.com.au/) (<http://www.hindu council.com.au/>) was set up as an umbrella organisation for Hindu Associations at federal level. It aims to

have responsibility for acting as the representative of the Australian-Hindu community in dealings with the state and federal governments, as well as being a point of contact for other organisations and institutions.

Considerations for Schools

The Hindu faith does not observe any compulsory fasting periods. Sraavan is the month of fasting (July/August) and some individuals may choose to fast at different times during this month. Some Hindus will refrain from consuming grain at this time.

Many Hindus are vegetarian and also avoid eggs and dairy products. School activities involving food should consider Hindu dietary practices, particularly the need to exclude beef products. Canteens should provide a range of vegetarian foods and provide a list of ingredients for foods that use a combination of ingredients.

Acknowledge major Hindu festivals and celebrations. Of these, Diwali is the most important.

There are certain rules which must be observed when entering a temple. Shoes must be removed and women should cover their heads. Non-Hindus are welcome in temples provided they show respect and observe the rules.

When visiting a Hindu home, care should be taken not to enter the part of the home reserved for worship unless invited to do so.

Washing is important in Hindu life, including washing hands and rinsing the mouth before and after meals.

Clothing for PE or swimming needs to be appropriate for the activity, while at the same time ensuring modesty and dignity are respected.

In the classroom

Research the role that pilgrimages play in Hinduism and the particular places of significance for pilgrims. Research the significance and the particular god or goddesses or events associated with each place.

Research the attributes of Hindu gods and goddesses and the ways they are depicted.

Make a family tree of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Research the history of the caste system and its status in modern India.

Investigate the ceremonies (*samskara*) associated with rites of passage at different points in a Hindu's life.

Study the symbols associated with Hinduism and their significance e.g. Om or Aum, the lotus, the cow and the swastika.

Investigate Hindu floor paintings, their purpose, typical designs, and the media used. Have students design their own examples.

Make Diwali cards.

Investigate the functions, exterior and interior design and decoration of Hindu temples.

Study excerpts from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The [Asia Education Foundation](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au) has a series of lesson plans on line based on the Ramayana, with links to sites containing texts and graphics (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/anthol/impress/imprstud.htm#characters>).

Study Hindu festivals as they are observed in Bali.

Discuss the diversity of different backgrounds of Hindus in Australia.

Investigate the development of new Hindu movements in Australia.

Investigate the observance of the various celebrations of the Hindu calendar. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions

What is similar in Hindu life cycle events and practices to other cultures and religions?

What is similar in Hindu belief and ritual to practices of other religions?

What is similar in the rhythm of the Hindu year to students' own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Compare the design, decoration and function of a Hindu *mandir* (temple) with a synagogue, mosque, cathedral, church, and Sikh *gurdwara*. [Racism no way, "Lesson ideas, Australia's Religious Diversity"](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/lesson_ideas/20020124_42.html) has related teaching resources (http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/lesson_ideas/20020124_42.html)

Compare the "rules" of different religions. Discuss areas of commonality and difference. Use graphic organisers, e.g. Venn diagram, adapted from Lesson Six of [The Really Big Beliefs Project](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/pdf/lesson6.pdf) (PDF, 50KB) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/pdf/lesson6.pdf>).

Useful websites

[Hindu Foundation of Australia](http://www.hindunet.com.au/hindu_foundation.htm)

(http://www.hindunet.com.au/hindu_foundation.htm), providing a wide range of content, including information on Australian temples and organisations.

[Shri Shiva-Vishnu Temple](http://www.hsvshivavishnu.org.au/) at Carrum Downs

(<http://www.hsvshivavishnu.org.au/>)

[University of Wyoming: Hinduism](http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/hinduism/index.htm)

(<http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/hinduism/index.htm>), useful overview of Hinduism from the Religious Studies program at the University of Wyoming.

[BBC Religion & Ethics – Hinduism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/index.shtml)

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/index.shtml>).

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(http://www.amf.net.au/rsch_research_religionDiversityCohesion.shtml) accessed June 22nd 2004. The following reports are available for download from this web page:

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Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism



Introduction

Sikhism is the youngest of the world's four great monotheistic religions. The fifth largest religion in the world, it was founded in the 15th century by Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1539) in the Punjab, a part of India which is now in Pakistan.

'Sikh' is Punjabi for 'disciple' and the Sikhs are disciples of Guru Nanak. Sikhs believe that the one, living God created the universe, sustains it and, in the end, will destroy it. Sikhs follow the teachings of the 10 Sikh Gurus that are enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh holy book.

There are almost 23 million Sikhs, 80 percent of whom live in the Punjab state in north-west India where the faith began. There are also about 400,000 in the UK, 350,000 in the United States, 300,000 in Canada and smaller communities in Europe, Africa, South-east Asia and Australia. ([Racism. No Way!, "An introduction to Sikhism"](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/31.html))
(<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/31.html>).

Sikhism contains elements of both Hinduism and Islam. "From Hinduism it adopts the doctrine of reincarnation and karma and from Islam stems its monotheism and rejection of the caste system" (Arquilevich).

Sikhism rejects worship of idols and religious rituals. It regards men and women as equal and advocates tolerance of all religions. It should be noted that many Sikhs reject, and indeed find offensive, the view of borrowing from Hinduism and Islam, and believe their religion was directly revealed by God.

Origins and history of Sikhism

The spiritual founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, was born a Hindu (1469) at a time when the Muslims ruled India. Moved by his own profound experience of God, he began to spread a simple message which begins with...

Ek Ong Kar: there is One God, named Truth, Creator, without fear, without enmity, timeless, immortal, is neither born, nor dies self-existent, is revealed by the Grace of the Guru. Truth in the beginning, truth through the ages, true now, truth shall ever be... (Guru Granth Sahib p.1).

Guru Nanak is responsible for the saying "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim", which has since become one of the pillars of Sikhism.

Guru Nanak went on long tours throughout India and the Middle East to spread his message through discussions and hymn-singing. He set up centres of worship and stressed the values of spiritual life and the practice of meditation in his teachings.

Guru Nanak raised a strong voice against tyranny and the exploitation of ordinary people by rulers and priests. He gave concrete expression to his ideas on unity, equality and fraternity through the institution of *sangat* (assembly for worship) and *pangat* (a line of devotees seated on the floor to eat meals from the *langar* or community kitchen).

The Hindu caste system divided people strictly into social groups but Guru Nanak taught that all people were equal. His followers came from all social groups but they learned, meditated, sang hymns and ate together. ([Racism. No Way!, "An introduction to Sikhism"](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/31.html))
(<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/31.html>).

In his 50th year, Guru Nanak and his followers built a settlement called *Kartapur* on the banks of the Ravi River in the Punjab where they erected the first Sikh temple. Just before Guru Nanak passed away he nominated one of his closest followers, Guru Angad as his successor. This established a pattern for the appointment of a succession of nine Gurus who led the movement until 1708. The nine successor Gurus elucidated, developed and applied to socio-political situations what was revealed and taught by Guru Nanak. Sikhism is based on the teachings of these ten Gurus as recorded in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Guru Angad, the second Guru, gave a definitive distinction to the teachings of Guru Nanak and had them recorded in a special modified script called *Gurmukhi*, which he perfected.

Guru Amardas followed Guru Angad and developed the institution of common dining, which brought about a profound revolution shaking the foundations of the caste system. Guru Amardas worked for the betterment of women and appointed them as preachers. He forbade the practice of 'purdah' (the veiling of women) and 'satti' (self immolation by women on the funeral pyre of their husband).

Guru Ram Das succeeded Guru Amardas and founded the city of Amritsar. He started construction of Sikhism's holiest shrine, the *Harmandir Sahib*, popularly known as the Golden Temple.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan, consolidated Amritsar as the capital of the Sikh world, and compiled the first authorised Sikh collection of sacred spiritual scriptures, known as the *Adi Granth*. Guru Arjan was executed in 1606 by the Emperor.

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan proved to be a turning point in the history of the Sikh faith. It marked the beginning of a period of Sikh militarism as they sought to defend their faith.

The sixth Guru, Hargobind, adorned himself with two swords of *Miri* and *Piri* symbolizing spiritual and temporal authorities. This denotes a basic principle of the Sikh religion that the spiritual and temporal aspects of life cannot be separated.

The ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, assumed power after the untimely death of the eighth Guru at the age of eight. The Guru championed religious freedom, not just of Sikhs, but of Muslims and Hindus. He challenged the forced conversions of Hindus to Islam and was then threatened with death if he himself refused to convert. He was executed in 1675 for refusing the ultimatum and is particularly revered for sacrificing his life for the religious freedom of another faith.

Before his death, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, transferred his authority as Guru to the Sikh community and to the Sikh holy book, the *Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib*, to which he had made some final additions. He initiated five soldiers, known as the Five Beloved, into a new community order called the *Khalsa*. Today, this term is used for the society of fully committed adult members of the Sikh community.

Sikhs had always regarded the Punjab region in northern India as their spiritual home. In 1799 they gained control of the Punjab, and a stable period of Sikh rule ensued for 40 years. A period of British colonial rule followed in which the Sikhs continued to be an important political and religious force.

When British colonial rule of India ceased in 1947 and the country was partitioned into a mostly Muslim Pakistan and a mostly Hindu India, part of the Punjab fell into Pakistan. This led to a mass migration of Sikhs (and Hindus) from Pakistan to India and a reverse migration of Muslims.

The 20th century saw many Sikhs leave the Punjab area and the spread of the Sikh faith.

Beliefs

Sikhs share with Hindus a belief in:

- *karma*, the sum of one's good and bad deeds
- reincarnation
- *samsara*, the repetitive cycle of birth and death

However, Sikhs reject the caste system of the Hindu religion and believe that everyone has equal status in the eyes of God. Sikhs are prohibited from worshipping idols, images, or icons.

Sikhs believe in the theory of transmigration. Having passed through all of the lower forms of life, humankind is now in the most developed stage of sentient beings – those able to help themselves through self-will and the spiritual side of human nature. The objective of Sikhs is to gain 'union' with God and attain *anand* (bliss) before and after death.

Concept of God

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith that believes God is the only 'Absolute One', who created the entire universe. God's relationship with man is that of Creator and created. He is benevolent and looks after His creation lovingly.

Doctrines

A basic doctrine of Sikh faith is that all 10 Gurus were one in spirit. Another doctrine is that the Message is the real Guru, not a physical body. This explains the conferment of the Guruship to the Guru Granth Sahib, in which God's word is enshrined, as revealed through the Gurus.

The doctrine of *miri-piri* is based on the basic principle of the Sikh religion that the spiritual and temporal aspects of life cannot be separated.

The Sikh doctrine proclaims freedom from caste bondage, from the shadows of past birth, superstitions, false notions of lineage and the stigma of so-called low occupations.

Nature of the World

Sikhs believe the world to be real. Guru Nanak says, 'Real are Thy continents and universes. Real are the worlds and the forms created by Thee'.

Cosmology and Cosmogony

Guru Nanak says that there are hundreds of thousands of other worlds and universes. It is a futile exercise trying to guess their number.

Goal of life

The Sikh ideal is to become a *Gurmukh*, one who is completely attuned to God's will. His love for God is expressed in the form of altruistic deeds or service to mankind.

The Sikh Path

The Gurus preached that worldly activities are no hindrance to spiritual progress. Rather, they are complementary and essential to each other.

The Truth

The Guru says, 'Truth is higher than everything. Higher still is truthful living or the practice of truth in life'.

Emphasis on Deeds

Love of God has to be translated into love of humanity. Love can be expressed only through altruistic deeds. Guru Nanak says, 'Approval or rejection in the court of God is determined only on the basis of one's actions in this life'.

Equality and Justice

The Sikh religion does not sanction any discrimination based on caste, colour or sex. God is the Father and all human beings are His children. Women are considered equal with men in all spheres: social, political and religious.

A Sikh should be just in dealings with others, dispense full justice when in authority, and fight for justice for the oppressed, the downtrodden and the weak. For this, the Sikh should be spiritually inspired and physically fit. A Sikh has to try to live as a saint-soldier.

Guru Nanak never claimed that only his disciples could get salvation. He said whosoever meditates upon one God, the Formless, will get salvation.

Sacred texts

The Guru Granth Sahib

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is the sacred Scripture of the Sikhs. It contains the compositions of the Sikh Gurus, panegyrics of the various bards who attended the Gurus, and also some hymns of Hindu and Muslim saints.

Every copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is an exact replica of the original and is always 1,430 pages long.

Sikhs regard the message of the scriptures as the present-day embodiment of the Sikh Guru, so they treat the *Guru Granth Sahib* with the respect and devotion they would give a human Guru.

Religious observances

Sikhs generally reject religious practices associated with the ideas of sacrament and ritual, pilgrimage and fasting. Worship is confined to prayer, reading of Scriptures, singing of hymns and meditation.

The Sikh place of worship is called a *gurdwara* which means Guru's door. Every *gurdwara* has the *Guru Granth Sahib* on a special cot (*manji*) on a throne (*takht*) at the front of the room used for worship (the *diwan* hall). There is always a kitchen and a dining room because sharing a meal (*langar*) together after the service is an essential part of Sikh worship. (*Racism. No Way!*, "An introduction to Sikhism").

There is no ordained ministry, although some people (*granthi*, sometimes referred to as priests) are trained to read and expound the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which lies at the centre of Sikh ritual.

A Sikh can worship at any time during the day but expected prayer times are before sunrise and sunset and before going to bed.

Rites of passage

Certain ceremonies hold special religious significance in the life of the Sikh.

The naming ceremony

Babies are named in a religious service at the temple. The Scriptures are opened to a randomly chosen page, and the first letter of the first word is identified as the first letter of the baby's name. The family then chooses a name that is common to the sex of the child. The name Singh (lion) is added for boys; the name Kaur (princess), for girls.

Pahul/Amrit (baptism)

The Amrit ceremony is the initiation rite introduced by Guru Gobind Singh when he founded the Khalsa in 1699. Amrit is usually administered to those who volunteer to follow the path and can occur at any age.

The initiates, men and women or boys and girls, take Amrit. Amrit is prepared with water to which some sugar is stirred with a khanda (a double edged sword) and prayers recited. This is then sprinkled on to the head, the eyes and given to drink.

Those who have taken Amrit are referred to as the Khalsa. Khalsa or saint-soldiers are committed to a code of ethical conduct. The Khalsa is required to wear the five articles of faith at all times (see below- Sikh dress) Wearing these articles is mandatory. N.B. It is estimated that only around 10 to 15 percent of Sikhs are baptised.

Marriage

Any respected Sikh may perform the ceremony of marriage. Weddings may be conducted in the temple or in a family home. There is no divorce in the Sikh religion, though civil divorce is permitted. Traditionally, marriages were arranged by families.

Death ceremony

For Sikhs, birth and death are closely associated. A person has simply discarded his or body, but the soul lives on. It has a new beginning, having either realised God, or is reborn for another opportunity to reach God.

After death the body is bathed and dressed and taken to the Crematorium. Before cremation a prayer is offered seeking salvation for the departed soul. After the cremation, the relatives and friends go to the Gurdwara to read a passage from Guru Granth Sahib. Possibly the following day the ashes are

collected and immersed in flowing water in the nearest river or sea. It is forbidden to erect a monument over the remains of the dead.

A complete reading of Guru Granth Sahib is done either at home or in the Gurdwara, and a final *Ardas* or prayer for the salvation of the departed soul and for strength for the relatives to accept God's will is offered.

Festivals

Sikhs use the same lunar calendar as Hindus and share some of the same holidays which they celebrate in a distinctive way.

Gurpurbs

Gurpurbs are festivals that are associated with the lives of the Gurus. The most important are:

- **the birthday of Guru Nanak**, founder of Sikhism (April or November)
- **the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh**, founder of the Khalsa (January)
- **the martyrdom of Guru Arjan** (June)
- **the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur** (November/December)
- **First installation of Guru Granth Sahib**, after completion of Guru Granth Sahib in 1604 Guru Arjan installed it in Harmnadir Sahib, the Golden Temple. This event is celebrated on 1st of September of each year.
- **Guru Granth Sahib proclaimed as Eternal Guru of the Sikhs**, Guru Gobind Singh before passing away ordained Guru Granth Sahib as the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs in 1708. This event is celebrated on 20th of October each year.

Festivals coinciding with Hindu festivals

Vaisakhi is the Sikh New Year festival and is celebrated on April 13 or 14th. It also commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was born as a collective faith.

Diwali is the Festival of Light and is held in October or November. Sikhs give the festival a special meaning by celebrating the release of Guru Hargobind from imprisonment at Gwalior.

Hola Mahalla occurs in March and coincides with *Holi*, the Hindu festival of colours. Guru Gobind Singh started this festival as a day for Sikhs to practise their military exercises and hold mock battles.

Customs

Sikh dress

Women of the Sikh faith wear a head covering. Men of the Sikh faith are particularly easy to identify because they have a full beard and keep their hair uncut and contained in a turban. Sikh boys wear their hair in a modified version of the adult style.

Every baptised Sikh male and female makes a vow to wear the Five 'Ks': Each of the Five Ks has a particular religious significance.

1. *Kesh* – uncut hair and beard, and a turban (the crown of spirituality).
2. *Kangha* – a wooden comb.
3. *Kashaira* – specially made short-type underwear.
4. *Kara* – a steel bracelet around the wrist.
5. *Kirpan* – the holy sword.

Food

Guru Nanak is reputed to have said religion “is not incompatible with laughing, eating, playing and dressing well” .

Many Sikhs are vegetarians although some eat meat. Even if they are not vegetarian, Sikhs tend not to eat beef. They are forbidden to eat any meat which has been ritually slaughtered e.g. halal or kosher.

Place of women in Sikhism

From the beginning of Sikhism women have been regarded as equals. A Sikh woman was considered to have the same soul as a man and an equal right to grow spiritually.

A Sikh woman can lead religious congregations, work as a Granthi (priest) or a preacher and participate freely in all religious, cultural, social, political and secular activities.

Service

Sewa, the practice of service to others is an important element of Sikh behaviour.

Communal dining

Langar, the practice of community dining was established by Guru Nanak as an expression of equality of all peoples. Sharing a meal which men and women have prepared together follows a worship service.

Settlement and history in Australia

The following information is from [Racism. No Way! "An introduction to Sikhism"](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/31.html). (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/31.html>)

It is difficult to separate the history of early Sikh arrivals in Australia from that of others from South Asia. It appears that the first Sikhs came sometime after the 1830s to work as shepherds and farm labourers. In the 1860s cameleers commonly called 'Ghans' (short for Afghans) were brought to Australia. Amongst them were many Sikhs. Other Sikhs arrived as free settlers and worked as hawkers and were joined by some of the earlier cameleers. Some hawkers became so successful they had their own stores. In 1890 Baba Ram Singh and Otim (Uttam) Singh arrived and in 1907 established "The People Stores". Baba Ram Singh lived to be 106. He is thought to have brought the first *Guru Granth Sahib* to Australia in the early 1920s.

In the 1890s nearly 250 Sikhs worked on the sugar cane fields in Queensland. Others worked clearing bushland and establishing pastures for sheep and cattle. Later some Sikhs moved south to the New South Wales north coast, continued farming, established communities and built Australia's first purpose-built *gurdwara* in Woolgoolga.

In the 1960s, Australia's first two Sikh temples were built north of Coffs Harbour, NSW.

From 1901 until the 1970s Government policy made immigration for Sikhs difficult and there were few new arrivals. However, since then Sikh settlers mainly from India and Sri Lanka but also from other countries including Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Kenya, Uganda and the United Kingdom have come to Australia.

Population: Sikhs in Australia

Major birthplaces of Sikhs in Australia

The census of 2001, recorded 17,381 Sikhs in Australia, a 44.4 percent increase in population since 1996 which makes it amongst the fastest growing religions in Australia. The following birthplaces were recorded as significant.

Table 9.1 Major birthplaces of Sikhs in Australia

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
India	9736	56.0
Australia	4040	23.2
Malaysia	1181	6.8
Singapore	517	3.0
United Kingdom	513	3.0
Kenya	246	1.4
Fiji	223	1.3
New Zealand	175	1.0
Pakistan	63	0.4
Thailand	45	0.3
Other	642	3.7
Total	17,381	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Community organisations

Sikh communities are organised around temples (*gurdwaras*) and tend to be congregationally structured. There are also state-level organisations.

Currently in Victoria there are *gurdwaras* in Cranbourne, Keysborough, Blackburn and Craigieburn. There are also Sikh congregations meeting in Shepparton and Werribee.

The Melbourne Sikh Youth Wing, initiated by the Sikh Welfare Council of Victoria, is now a stand-alone Youth Wing which organises activities throughout the year.

The Victorian Sikh Association (VSA) is the longest continuously serving Sikh community group in Victoria. The VSA aims to promote sporting, social and cultural events to improve and foster links between its members and the wider Australian community.

Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria (SICV) was formed in 2002 with the view to represent Sikhs in multi-faith platforms in Victoria. SICV promotes and works for dialogue, respect and understanding among all religions. Its objective is to promote a culture of peace and harmony within multicultural Australia.

For a list of Sikh temples in Australia, see [Sikhs in Australia: List of Gurdwaras in Australia](http://www.sikh.com.au/gur_list/australia.htm) (http://www.sikh.com.au/gur_list/australia.htm) accessed May 2008.

Considerations for schools

Schools should be sensitive to the beliefs and practices of different cultures, races and religions when determining uniform policy. Uniform policy needs to accommodate dress requirements of Sikh males and females particularly in relation to head coverings and the wearing of the Kara bracelet.

Dietary practices of Sikhs vary. Sikhs will not eat meat that has been ritually slaughtered such as halal or kosher. Many Sikhs are vegetarians and most will not eat beef. Providing a range of vegetarian foods in the school canteen and for other school activities is advised. Provide lists of ingredients where necessary.

Sikh celebrations and festivals, like those of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Research Sikh holy places (takhts) and their significance.

Research the Golden Temple of Amritsar, its design, history and importance to Sikhs.

Investigate the meaning and significance of the Five Ks in the Sikh religion.

Have students identify places of significance in the history of Sikhism on a map and show with dates the movements of Sikhs across the world.

Set a history topic on the Sikh wars.

Investigate the observance of various celebrations of Sikhs throughout the lunar year. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions.

What is similar in Sikh life cycle events to practices of other cultures and religions?

What is similar in Sikh beliefs, rituals and practices to other religions?

What is similar in the rhythm of the Sikh year to students' own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Compare the design, decoration and function of a Sikh *gurdwara* with a:

- Hindu *mandir* (temple)
- synagogue
- mosque
- cathedral
- church.

Organise a visit to a *gurdwara*.

Invite speakers from the Sikh community to talk about their religion, community organisations and activities. Have students prepare and discuss questions they would like to ask.

Investigate the symbols of Sikhism and their significance e.g. the sword, dagger and shield emblem

Compare rites of passage in Sikhism with those of other religions.

Have students read some of the children's and young adult literature recommended in the Bibliography that is written by or about other cultural groups.

Discuss the issue of minority groups in a community and have students identify an experience in which they were a minority. A number of [The Really Big Beliefs Project: Classroom Activities](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html) would be relevant to a discussion of this topic (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html>).

Set a writing topic about being a minority in an imagined society.

Compare the “rules” of different religions. Discuss areas of commonality and difference. Use graphic organisers, e.g. Venn diagram, adapted from Lesson 6 in the [The Really Big Beliefs Project](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/index.html) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/index.html>).

Investigate the roles and rights of women in Sikhism. Compare the roles and rights of women in different religions.

Useful websites

Additional information about Sikhism can be found at:

- [The SikhNetwork](http://www.sikhnet.com/) (<http://www.sikhnet.com/>)
- [BBC Religion & Ethics: Sikhism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/) (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/>)
- [All About Sikhs](http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/) (<http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/>)

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- "Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia"
- "Australian Muslims: their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions"
- "Constructing a Local Multifaith Network"

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (September 2003) *The People of Australia*.

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[Racism. No way: Fact Sheets, An introduction to SIKHISM in Australia](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html) (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>) accessed June 20th 2006.

Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism



Introduction

Buddhism, the second largest and fastest growing religion in Australia, was founded in north-eastern India in the 6th century BCE on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha or 'Enlightened One'.

Because Buddhism does not entail a belief in a creator God it is sometimes referred to as a philosophy rather than a religion. It is a tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development: it espouses the path to enlightenment through the practice and development of morality, meditation, compassion and wisdom.

Buddhism is now over 2,500 years old and has upward of 350 million followers worldwide. Until 100 years ago, Buddhism was mainly an Asian philosophy but increasingly it is gaining adherents in Europe, America and Australia.

Although there are many different forms of Buddhism, all Buddhists follow the same basic teachings: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path. All traditions are characterised by non-violence, lack of dogma, tolerance of differences, and, usually, by the practice of meditation.

Buddhists have no belief in higher deities, but propose a path towards freedom from suffering, or individual enlightenment, through deep reflection on the nature of existence. This focus on self-redemption makes it qualitatively quite different from other belief systems which base themselves around concepts of divine mercy or grace. Buddhists strive for a deep insight into the true nature of life and do not worship gods or deities. (Australian Broadcasting Commission)

Buddhism has shown great flexibility in adapting to different cultures, at the same time keeping the essential teachings of the Buddha intact.

Origins and historical background

Siddhartha Gautama was born into the royal family of a small kingdom on the Indian-Nepalese border. According to the traditional story, he had a privileged upbringing but after a realisation that life includes the harsh facts of old age, sickness and death, he was motivated to leave his sheltered life and become a seeker after Truth in the Indian tradition of the wandering holy man. He became very adept at meditation under various teachers, and then took up ascetic practices.

According to the traditional account (first written down in the 3rd century BC) Gautama followed an ascetic life for six years before deciding that a middle path between mortification and indulgence of the body provided the best hope of achieving enlightenment.

After six years of searching and meditation Gautama finally realized 'the truth'. According to legend, while sitting alone under a banyan tree, he passed through the four stages of meditative trance, attained enlightenment, and thereafter began to teach. He travelled throughout the Ganges plain, gathering disciples and founding two monastic communities (*sangha*) which continued to expound his teachings after his death.

Buddhism spread rapidly in the 3rd century BCE when Samrat Ashoka Maurya, whose empire covered the greater area of northern India (including present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan), was converted to Buddhism. He sent missionaries not only to all parts of India but also to Sri Lanka, southern and south-east Asia.

By the first century Buddhism had expanded into China. From there it travelled to Korea and on to Japan around CE 600. Buddhism also took hold in Tibet during the 600s.

The Buddhist presence in India began to decline from about the 7th Century CE and by the 13th century it had all but disappeared.

Although Buddhism spread throughout Asia it remained virtually unknown in the West until recent times. The expansion of Buddhism in the West is due firstly to Western scholars who became interested in the ideas of Buddhism and secondly to Asian immigrants and refugees who settled in the west and helped to establish Buddhist centres.

Many Tibetans, for example, fled their country after the Chinese takeover in 1959 and the wars in Indochina in the 1950s and 1960s led many Vietnamese, Cambodians and Lao to move to and settle in Europe, Australia and America.

Branches of Buddhism

There are three main branches of Buddhism. Each branch has many sects within it:

- **Theravada Buddhism**, the school of Buddhism found in Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia
- **Mahayana Buddhism**, the school of Buddhism found in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam
- **Vajrayana Buddhism**, the school of Buddhism found in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Mongolia.

Theravada Buddhists believe the individual alone is responsible for his/her salvation. There is a strong emphasis on meditation, the eighth step in the Noble Eight-fold Path, as a means to enlightenment (see below). Because of this emphasis, Theravada Buddhism emphasises monasticism, but is

practised by lay supporters who take responsibility for supporting monks and nuns and attempt to live a life of morality, generosity and detachment.

Mahayana Buddhists believe that religious growth and salvation can be nurtured through assistance from others, namely wise beings or *bodhisattva*. Bodhisattvas are persons beyond this world who have achieved enlightenment but who have delayed entrance to *Nirvana* in order to extend compassion and guidance to others still on the way.

Vajrayana, more popularly called Tibetan Buddhism, grew out of Mahayana Buddhism and was influenced by the ancient Bon religion of Tibet. Their teachers (Lamas) are said to be reincarnations of holy teachers who lived in earlier times. The spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists is the Dalai Lama who is believed to be the reincarnation of the bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara.

Zen Buddhism, which originated in China, grew out of Mahayana Buddhism. It has had a major impact in Japan and places emphasis on meditation rather than on scriptures or bodhisattvas as a means to enlightenment. Zen Buddhists maintain that direct experience alone leads to the truth.

Beliefs

The following information includes some elements of Buddhist beliefs and teachings. Readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources such as those listed in the Bibliography for a more comprehensive account.

The starting point for Buddhism is mankind's suffering. The goal of all Buddhists is to attain enlightenment which means to be fully awake to the reality of life and to have an understanding of why there is suffering in the world and how it may be overcome.

Buddhists do not believe in a creator God or a saviour God. The relationship between a Buddha and his disciples and followers is that of teacher and student.

All branches of Buddhism believe in Nirvana as the ultimate goal.

The supreme goal of Buddhism is to reach Nirvana by following the *Dharma* (the teachings). This path can ultimately break the cycle of *samsara* whereby, after death, one is reborn (reincarnated) in another form. The form depends on the karma one has acquired through life (see below). The cycle of *samsara* stops once nirvana is reached.

Buddhism teaches that all life is interconnected, so compassion for all living things is natural and important.

Karma

"The notion of Karma is based on the idea that the intention behind every action has an effect and similar actions will lead to similar results. The effects

of karma may be long or short term but these effects will nonetheless come to transpire either in this life or the next life, or over several lives. Rebirth is part of the continuous process of change, so that not only are we reborn after death, we are reborn every moment" (Vasi p.2).

Dharma

Dharma is the path which follows the Buddha's teaching, and which will ultimately lead to enlightenment. The Dharma teaches that compassion for self and others through an understanding of The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path leads to release from fear and ignorance. The path involves embracing the teaching of the Buddha and applying that understanding to everyday life.

Sangha

The Buddha stated that interaction with others who are on the same path is essential for practice. *Sangha* refers to that community. In the original teaching and in current Theravada communities, the Sangha refers only to the monks, nuns and other ordained teachers. The concept of Sangha is more broadly interpreted in many Mahayana and Western groups to include all those who follow the Dharma.

The Four Noble Truths

In his first sermon after attaining enlightenment, the Buddha taught the "Four Noble Truths," which form the foundation of belief for all branches of Buddhism:

1. Dukkha

Suffering exists: All of life is marked by suffering and has many causes: loss, sickness, pain, failure, the impermanence of pleasure.

2. Samudaya

Suffering is caused by desire and attachment. It can take many forms: craving of sensual pleasures; the desire for fame; the desire to avoid unpleasant sensations, like fear, anger or jealousy.

3. Nirodha

There is an end to suffering. Suffering ends with the final liberation of Nirvana. The mind experiences freedom, liberation and non-attachment. It lets go of any desire or craving.

4. Magga

The way to end suffering and attain enlightenment is to follow the Eight-fold Path.

The Noble Eight-fold Path

The Noble Eight-fold Path defines the Buddhist way of life and the practices of Buddhism.

The Noble Path represents the Middle Way. Those who follow it avoid the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification, and live a balanced life in which material welfare and spiritual well-being run parallel and are complementary.

- Right understanding
 - Right thoughts
 - Right speech
 - Right actions
 - Right mindfulness
 - Right effort
 - Right livelihood
 - Right concentration
- } Wisdom
- } Morality
- } Meditation

Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are not commandments in the strict sense but provide basic ethical guidelines. They prohibit intentional killing, stealing, telling lies, sexual misbehaviour and the use of intoxicants.

The Buddhist Council website is a useful reference for teachers and students, in particular, [The History, Philosophy and Practice of Buddhism: The Three Jewels and Five Precepts](http://www.buddha101.com/p_jewels_frames.htm) (http://www.buddha101.com/p_jewels_frames.htm).

Sacred texts

A large numbers of Buddhist scriptures, religious and other texts are revered by different traditions. After the death of the Buddha his closest disciples gathered to recall and recite the master's teachings. Those teachings were transmitted orally until they were recorded in written form as the **Tripitaka**.

Tripitaka

The Tripitaka is the earliest collection of Buddhist teachings and the only text recognized as canonical by Theravada Buddhists. These scriptures were compiled by Sri Lankans in the Indian language Pali. Tripitaka means 'three baskets'. The text was originally written on long, narrow leaves which were

sewn at the edges, then grouped into bunches and stored in baskets. The first basket contains laws governing the life of a monk or nun, the second contains the Buddha's direct teachings and the third, commentaries on his teachings. (Arquilevich, p.183). The collection of writings comprises 50 volumes.

Mahayana Sutras

Mahayana Buddhism recognises the Tripitaka as a foundation text, but adds to it the Sutras, which contain specifically Mahayana thought. Most of the Mahayana Sutras, which number over two thousand, were written between 200 BCE and 200 CE, the period in which Mahayana Buddhism developed.

Zen Buddhism rejects scriptures as an ineffective path to enlightenment.

Structure and organisation

There is no single organization or church governing the Buddhist religion. Rather than a hierarchically-ordered structure, Buddhism is practised through a wide range of temples and small groups, each of which may have its own structure.

The foundation of any Buddhist organisation is the *Three Jewels of Buddhism*: Buddha, the teacher, Dharma, the teaching, and Sangha, the community. The responsibility of the organisation is to venerate the Buddha, to venerate his teaching and to support the religious community.

Buddhist practitioners include monks and nuns who have been ordained. Buddhist communities involve both lay and ordained members. Monasteries and communities may have a hierarchy based on the point one has reached on the path to enlightenment.

In Australia, Buddhist Councils have been established in some states to further communication between individual groups and provide a point of liaison for governments and the community generally.

Religious observances

Buddhist religious practices and rituals vary depending on the tradition and culture of different sects.

Because Buddhism is focused on the internal life, it does not require the same strict religious observance and ritual as some faiths. Buddhists can worship at home or at a temple. Most Buddhists will however, visit the temple regularly.

One of the central daily rites of lay Buddhism is the generosity. Theravada laity makes this offering in the form of food to their monks and nuns. Mahayana laity also include offerings to the Buddha as part of the morning or evening worship.

A basic ritual is prostration or bowing before the statue of the Buddha.

Meditation

The practice of meditation is central to nearly all forms of Buddhism. It is through meditation that one can reach nirvana, or enlightenment. Meditation is the central focus of Zen Buddhism and the only way to liberation from samsara in Theravada Buddhism. *Mandalas* which involve creating and meditating on diagrams of symbolic meaning are a key aspect of the meditative practice of Tibetan Buddhists.

Mantras

Mantras or chants are an important aspect of devotional practice. Mantras consist of one or more sounds which are intended to focus the mind. 'Om', the most sacred sound originated in Hinduism. The mantra, 'Om Mani Padme Hum' translated means 'the jewel in the lotus' or 'the heart of the teaching' (Arquilevich, p. 202).

Places of worship

Buddhist religious buildings are called temples, *stupas* and *wats*. Temples or meeting houses are the focus for community life. They contain a shrine where meditation and religious ceremonies take place and often provide accommodation for monks and nuns. Buddhist temples come in many shapes for example, the pagodas of China and Japan.

In their design, Buddhist temples symbolise the five elements: fire, air, earth, (symbolised by the square base), water and wisdom (symbolised by the pinnacle at the top).

Stupas, which are traditionally bell-shaped, are built to hold relics, sacred texts and other items. They are a centre for pilgrimage and practice. An important Stupa in Australia is the Buddha Relic Stupa at the Phuoc Hue Monastery in Wetherill Park, New South Wales, a seven-storey stupa, built to house crystals which devotees believe were formed from the remains of the Buddha upon his death 2600 years ago. Another large stupa under construction is the Atisha Centre near Bendigo.

Pagodas are monuments, usually very decorative, consisting of a number of stories and eight sides. These are commonly associated with North-east Asia.

Most Buddhists have a shrine in their homes where there may be a statue, candles, incense and a vase of flowers and where family meditation and ceremonies take place and offerings are made.

Some Buddhist groups maintain refuges with a temple and accommodation for people on retreats.

Festivals

Some holy days are specific to a particular Buddhist tradition or ethnic group.

Most Buddhists, with the exception of the Japanese, use the Lunar Calendar.

The dates of Buddhist festivals vary from country to country and between Buddhist traditions.

Mahayana Buddhists have festivals to honour the Bodhisattvas, enlightened beings dedicated to the practice of compassion. Important among these is Avalokiteshvara, who in female form is known as *Kuan Yin*.

Some significant festivals

Vesak or Visakah Puja ('Buddha Day')

Vesak is the major Buddhist festival of the year as it celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. It is held on the first full moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June.

Magha Puja Day (Fourfold Assembly or 'Sangha Day')

Magha Puja Day takes place on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March). It commemorates the Buddha's ordination of 1250 enlightened monks

Asalha Puja Day ('Dhamma Day')

Asalha Puja commemorates the Buddha's first sermon. It is held on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month (approximately July).

Pavarana Day

This day marks the conclusion of the rainy season. In the following month, the *kathina* ceremony is held, during which the laity gather to make formal offerings of robe cloth and other requisites to the Sangha.

Ullambana Day (Ancestor Day)

It is celebrated throughout the Mahayana tradition from the first to the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. It honours ancestors.

Further information on Buddhist festivals can be found at [Buddhanet](http://www.buddhanet.net/festival.htm), "[Buddhist Ceremonies, Festivals and Special Days](http://www.buddhanet.net/festival.htm)" (<http://www.buddhanet.net/festival.htm>).

The [Buddhist Council of New South Wales](http://www.buddhistcouncil.org/) publishes a list of festival dates for Australia (<http://www.buddhistcouncil.org/>).

Customs

Since the time of the Buddha, Buddhism has developed a variety of customs within the different branches and integrated many regional religious rituals and customs into it as it spread throughout the world. The precept of adapting to local customs is an integral part of Buddhism.

The following customs are relevant to all branches.

Venerating the Buddha

Honouring the Buddha through meditating on his qualities and perhaps through making offerings to relics or images of the Buddha and through bowing before his image.

Exchange of gifts

In the Theravada tradition, Buddhist laypersons often give gifts to Buddhist monks and nuns, but giving is also encouraged more generally, to one another and to good causes.

Giving to monks is also thought to benefit lay people and to win them merit.

Rites of Passage

Buddhism, unlike other religions, has few specific Buddhist ceremonies to mark rites of passage. There are no special Buddhist rituals for the celebration of weddings and births, for example. Blessings of the monks, however, are often sought at major life transitions.

Monks preside over ordinations, funerals, and death commemoration rites.

In the Theravada tradition, ordination is a puberty or coming-of-age rite. Theravada monks also preside over birthday and new-house blessing rites. Ex-monks, elders in the lay community, perform the rituals for childbirth and marriage” (Lester).

Settlement and history in Australia

Although it is unclear when Buddhism first came to Australia it is likely that there was contact between the early Hindu-Buddhist civilisations of Indonesia and the Aboriginal people of northern Australia. It is also possible that ships from the exploration fleets of the Chinese Ming emperors which landed on islands to the north of Arnhem Land may have reached the mainland of Australia between 1405 and 1433.

Gold rushes of the 1850s brought Chinese Buddhists to Australia.

From 1848 Chinese labourers arrived to work on the Victorian goldfields, some of whom had Buddhist beliefs but most of whom

eventually returned to China. “Victoria had the greatest Buddhist population at 27,000 in 1857. In 1891 Buddhists represented 1.2 per cent of the Australian population. By 1911, however the total number had fallen to just 3, 269 or 0.07 per cent. This decline was in part due to decreased demand and opportunities within the gold industry. Many Chinese returned to their homeland. However, the introduction of the 'White Australia Policy' also had a significant impact. (Christian Research Association)

The first permanent Buddhist community was established in the 1870s by Sinhalese migrants from Sri Lanka who came to work on Queensland sugar plantations and in the Thursday Island pearling industry. By the 1890s the Thursday Island community was about 500 strong, a temple was built, festivals were celebrated and a monk was said to have visited to officiate. There were also mainly Japanese Shinto Buddhist communities in Broome and Darwin.

The first half of the 20th century saw the beginnings of a tradition of Western Buddhism.

From Federation in 1901 until the 1960s the number of Buddhists in Australia remained small but significant with the establishment of various societies and centres, and visits from overseas monks and nuns. A small but significant tradition of lay Buddhism among the Anglo-European community took root in the 1920s. In 1952, the Buddhist Society of NSW was formed, and their Queensland and Victorian counterparts in 1953. These organisations sponsored and supported visits from Buddhist monks in Asia. The first Buddhist monastery was set up in 1971 in the Blue Mountains in NSW (ABC).

A small circle of Western Buddhists also formed in Melbourne in 1925, and Australia's first female solicitor, Marie Byles, gave public lectures on Buddhism after World War II.

From the 1970s until the present, immigration from South-east Asia has been a key factor in the growth of Buddhism in Australia. “Initially the migrants joined already established Buddhist centres, and later formed their own temples which catered for both their cultural and religious needs” (Vasi, p. 7).

Buddhism is now Australia's second largest religion after Christianity. In 1991, nearly one-third of Australia's Buddhists were born in Vietnam. National Vietnamese Buddhist temples began to be established in the 1980s and in 1981, the senior Vietnamese Buddhist monk, the Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue, arrived in Australia to form the Vietnamese Buddhist Federation of Australia. This organisation, now known as the United Vietnamese Congregations of Australia, has branch temples in all Australian states except Tasmania

The 1970s also saw the introduction of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism into Australia. Following the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the repression of Buddhism in 1959, many Buddhist monasteries were destroyed and

large numbers of nuns and monks were forced to flee Tibet; some of these Lamas came to Australia, the first arriving in 1974. This was followed by the opening of many Tibetan Buddhist centres in Australia. By 1980, some claimed that Melbourne had more Tibetan Buddhists per head of the population than any other city in the Western world (Vasic, p. 21).

From 1991–96, the number of people identified as Buddhist grew by 43 percent, mainly through immigration. The 2001 Census recorded 358,000 people identifying Buddhism as their religion.

All three main traditions of Buddhism are represented in Australia.

Except where acknowledged the above information has largely been drawn from [Racism. No Way! “An introduction to BUDDHISM in Australia”](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/25.html) (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/25.html>).

Population: Buddhists in Australia

In 1981, there were over 35,000 Buddhists in Australia representing 0.24 percent of the population. By 2001, Buddhists had reached almost 360, 000 or 1.9 percent of the population. This represents an increase of 158,000 in the five years since the previous census in 1996 and an increase as a proportion of the population, by 0.78 percent.

Buddhism is now the fastest growing religion in Australia with 79.1 percent growth since last census. During the same period there was a 75.5 percent increase in the number of Buddhists in Victoria. The population grew from 62,898 in 1996 to 111,664 in 2001.

Ethnic Buddhists comprise the majority of Buddhists in Victoria, and Australia-wide. Much of the growth of Buddhism in Australia is due to Asian immigration; some is as a result of Australians adopting Buddhism.

Major birthplaces for Australian Buddhists

As can be seen from the tables below, although Vietnam is by far the largest birthplace of overseas-born Buddhists, Australia is the largest birthplace of Buddhists overall. The data, however, does not show whether the Australian-born are children of Asian migrants or converts to Buddhism. Shiva Vasi in *Profile and Contribution of Buddhists in Victoria* concludes that, “Most Australian Buddhists are immigrants from Asian countries and their children but there is a significant following amongst other Australians” (Vasi).

Table 10.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Buddhists

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Australia	93,135	26.0
Vietnam	90,347	25.2
China	27,779	7.8
Malaysia	20,056	5.6
Cambodia	18,037	5.0
Thailand	17,672	4.9
Sri Lanka	13,857	3.9
Taiwan	9783	2.7
Japan	7644	2.1
Hong Kong	7548	2.1
Other	51960	14.5
Total	357,818	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Major birthplaces for Victorian Buddhist

In general, the birthplace countries for Victorian Buddhists are similar to those for the whole of Australia. Vietnamese-born, however, exceed Australian born, and Sri Lanka is the third largest birthplace with 6.5 percent of the total.

Table 10.2 Major birthplaces for Victorian Buddhists

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Vietnam	33,145	29.7
Australia	27,979	25.1
Sri Lanka	7303	6.5
China	6948	6.2
Cambodia	6945	6.2
Malaysia	6796	6.1
Thailand	4189	3.7
Hong Kong	2010	1.8
Taiwan	1930	1.7
Indonesia	1670	1.5
Other	12,763	11.4
Total	111,675	100

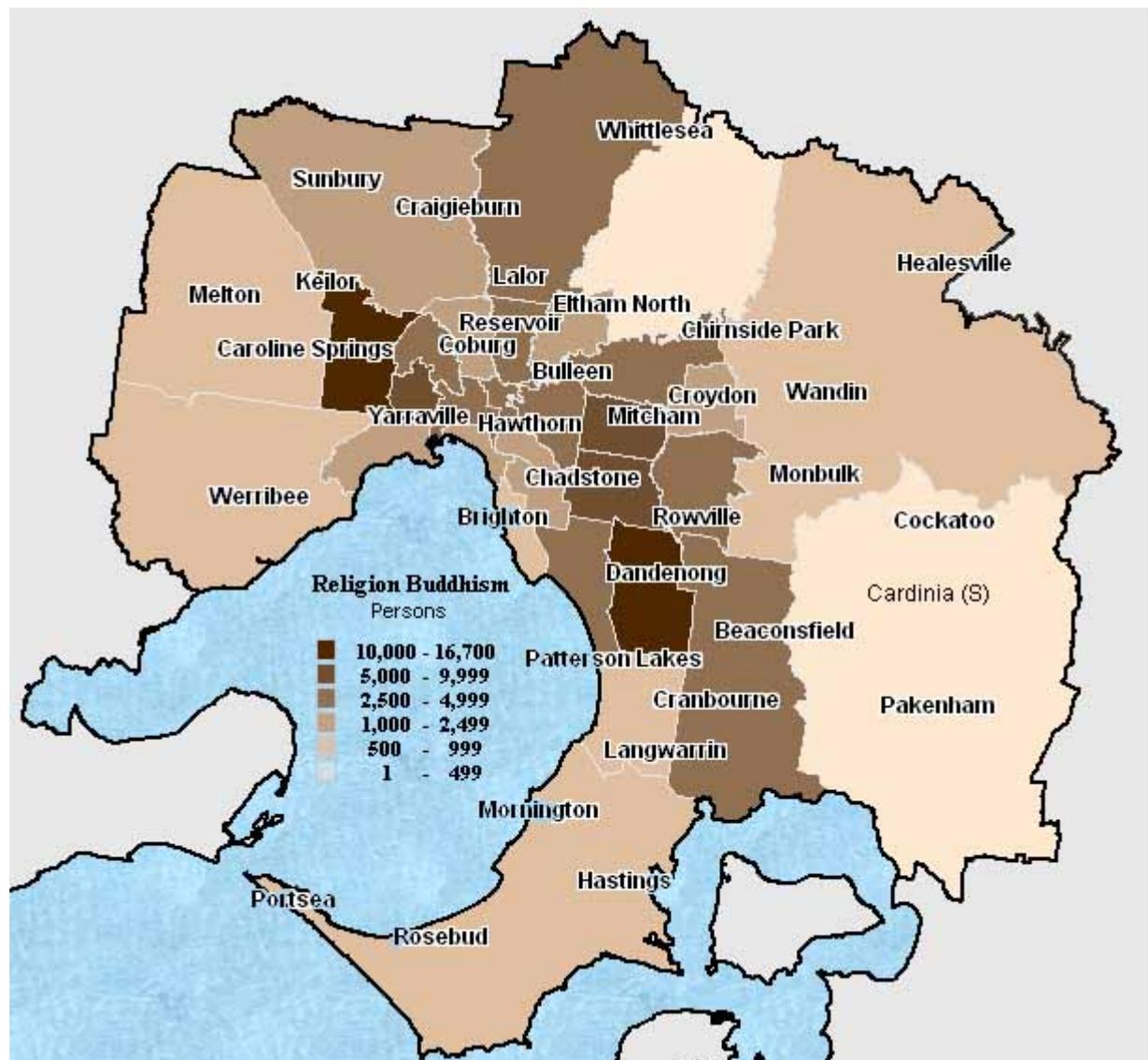
Source: "The People of Victoria: Statistics from the 2001 Census" (2003), p. 85, jointly published by Department of Immigration and Citizenship and Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department for Victorian Communities.

Distribution of Buddhists in Melbourne

As with most religious minorities, the Buddhist population is concentrated in the metropolitan area (percent), with greater concentrations in Maribyrnong and Greater Dandenong local government areas. The only significant concentration outside the metropolitan area is in the Greater Geelong locality.

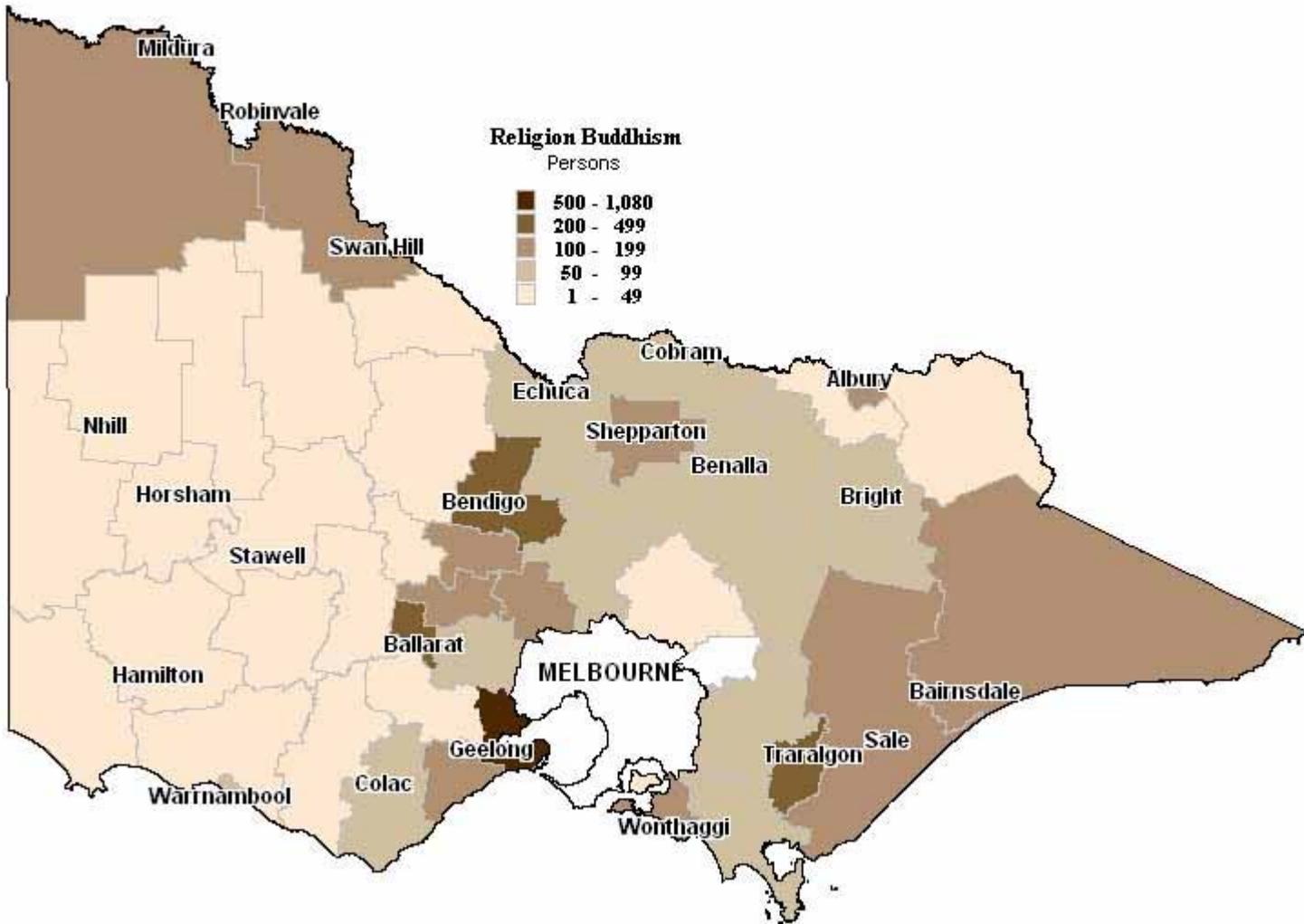
Figure 10.1 Distribution of Buddhists in Melbourne

[TOTAL NUMBER =106,574]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 10.2 Distribution of Buddhists non-metropolitan Victoria
[TOTAL NUMBER = 4,925]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Community organisations

National

The Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils represents Buddhism at a national level. It was established in May 2003 and is comprised of the State Buddhist Councils of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Visit the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, [Australian Buddhist News](#) (www.buddhistcouncil.org.au).

State

The [Buddhist Council of Victoria](#) (<http://www.bcvic.org.au/>) came into being in 1996. The council is both a representative body and a lobbying and liaison organisation that represents the Buddhist community to other religious organisations, community groups and government departments. It also provides a religious instruction program to primary schools and functions as a point of contact and referral.

Forty-one groups are members of the council, with roughly an equal number of ethnic and Western Buddhist groups. Membership of the Buddhist Council of Victoria is voluntary and not all Buddhist groups choose to become a member.

Local

According to a list compiled by the Buddhist Council of Victoria in 2001, there were 96 Buddhist centres in Victoria compared with approximately 45 groups in 1991. Most temples are ethnically based and offer a variety of religious, education and cultural activities. Some offer accredited language and culture courses. Many temples operate youth groups and offer part-time language and culture classes. Some offer religious instruction services to schools and will provide speakers on aspects of Buddhism.

Most temples offer a range of welfare services which may include prison and hospital visiting, settlement support for newly-arrived migrants, support for overseas students, temporary accommodation, and drug and alcohol dependency counselling.

For a detailed description of the organisation and activities of sixteen Victorian Buddhist organisations see [Profile and Contribution of Buddhists in Victoria](#) (<http://www.bcvic.org.au/html/history.html>).

For a list of Buddhist organisations in Victoria visit the [Buddhist Council of Victoria](#) website (<http://www.bcvic.org.au/>).

Considerations for schools

Dietary habits for Buddhists vary. It is a matter for individual conscience, although different traditions and cultures interpret the precepts differently. Some Buddhists are vegetarians, some will avoid meat and eggs, and others will eat meat but not beef. Some Mahayana Buddhists from China and Vietnam also avoid eating strong-smelling plants such as onions, shallots, chives and leeks. It is advisable to ensure that vegetarian options are available in the school canteen or for school functions such as parties and that ingredient lists are available.

Buddhists remove their shoes as a sign of respect when entering a temple. Visitors should do the same.

Holy books, the Tripitaka, in particular should be treated with respect.

Buddhist festivals, like festivals of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Have students identify places of significance in the history of Buddhism on a map and show with dates the spread of Buddhism.

Identify countries of significant Buddhist populations on a world map. Show the different branches of Buddhism.

Investigate the significance of the Silk Road in the spread of Buddhism.

Investigate the observance of the various celebrations of Buddhists throughout the lunar year. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions:

- What is similar in Buddhist life cycle events and practices to other cultures and religions?
- What is similar in Buddhist beliefs and rituals to practices of other religions?
- What is similar in the rhythm of the Buddhist year to students' own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Organise a visit to a Buddhist temple, a place of worship. Arrange for a speaker to explain the rituals and activities that take place there.

Compare the design, decoration and function of different kinds of Buddhist temples, for example the wat in Thailand with a:

- Hindu mandir
- synagogue
- mosque
- cathedral
- church.

Use a study of Buddhist art to trace the spread of Buddhism in Asia. In this series of lessons on the National Geographic website, students study and compare and contrast famous Buddhist art and Buddhist sites in Asia. See [National Geographic: Xpeditions, Lesson Plans, The Spread of Buddhism](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/06/g912/buddhism.html) (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/06/g912/buddhism.html>).

Investigate the symbols of Buddhism such as the dharma, (wheel of life) the lotus flower, images of Buddha, and the Bodhi tree.

Investigate the significance of Mandalas in Buddhism and study some designs. Have students create their own mandalas.

Invite speakers from a Buddhist community to talk about their religion, community organisation and activities. Have students prepare questions and discuss their appropriateness.

Investigate the connection between martial arts and Zen Buddhism. Arrange for a speaker to demonstrate and talk about martial arts and teach basic principles and movements.

Investigate the practice of meditation in the context of Buddhism and more broadly.

Discuss the issue of minority groups in a community and have students identify an experience in which they were a minority. A number of [The Really Big Beliefs Project: Classroom Activities](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html) would be relevant to a discussion of this topic (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html>).

Have students read some of the children's and young adult literature recommended in the Bibliography that is written by or about other cultural groups.

Have students explore their own cultural assumptions by writing from the viewpoint of different characters in different cultural contexts, e.g. write a story about a Buddhist boy who is to become a novice monk.

Compare statistics for different religions in Australia and then consider and research the reasons for the growth of Buddhism in Australia, see [Lotuses and Lights: Statistics on Buddhism in Australia, Student Worksheet](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotus1.htm) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotus1.htm>).

Have students:

- identify major world religions founded on the Asian continent
- describe major characteristics of world religions
- describe factors that influence the spread or decline of religions in a region.

To further explore Theravada Buddhism in Thai Daily Life, including information for teachers and activities for students see: [Asia Education Foundation, Access Asia: Thailand, Lotuses and Lights](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotinfo.htm) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotinfo.htm>).

Debate the role of women in different religions.

Useful websites

[Buddhanet](http://www.buddhanet.net/) is a major Buddhist information site (<http://www.buddhanet.net/>).

Some Buddhist images are available on [Khon Kaen, Gateway to Isaan: Khon Kaen National Museum](http://www.khonkaen.com/english/attractions/museum.asp) (<http://www.khonkaen.com/english/attractions/museum.asp>).

A good general description of historical and customary aspects of Buddhism in Thailand is available at [Mahidol University, Thailand, Buddhist Scriptures Information Retrieval: Buddhism, An Introduction](http://www.mahidol.ac.th/budsir/buddhism.htm) (<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/budsir/buddhism.htm>).

[Friends of the Western Buddhist Order](http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo.html) (<http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo.html>) provide information on history and practices of Buddhism in Western countries and lists of contacts in Australia.

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- "Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia"
- "Australian Muslims: their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions"
- "Constructing a Local Multifaith Network"

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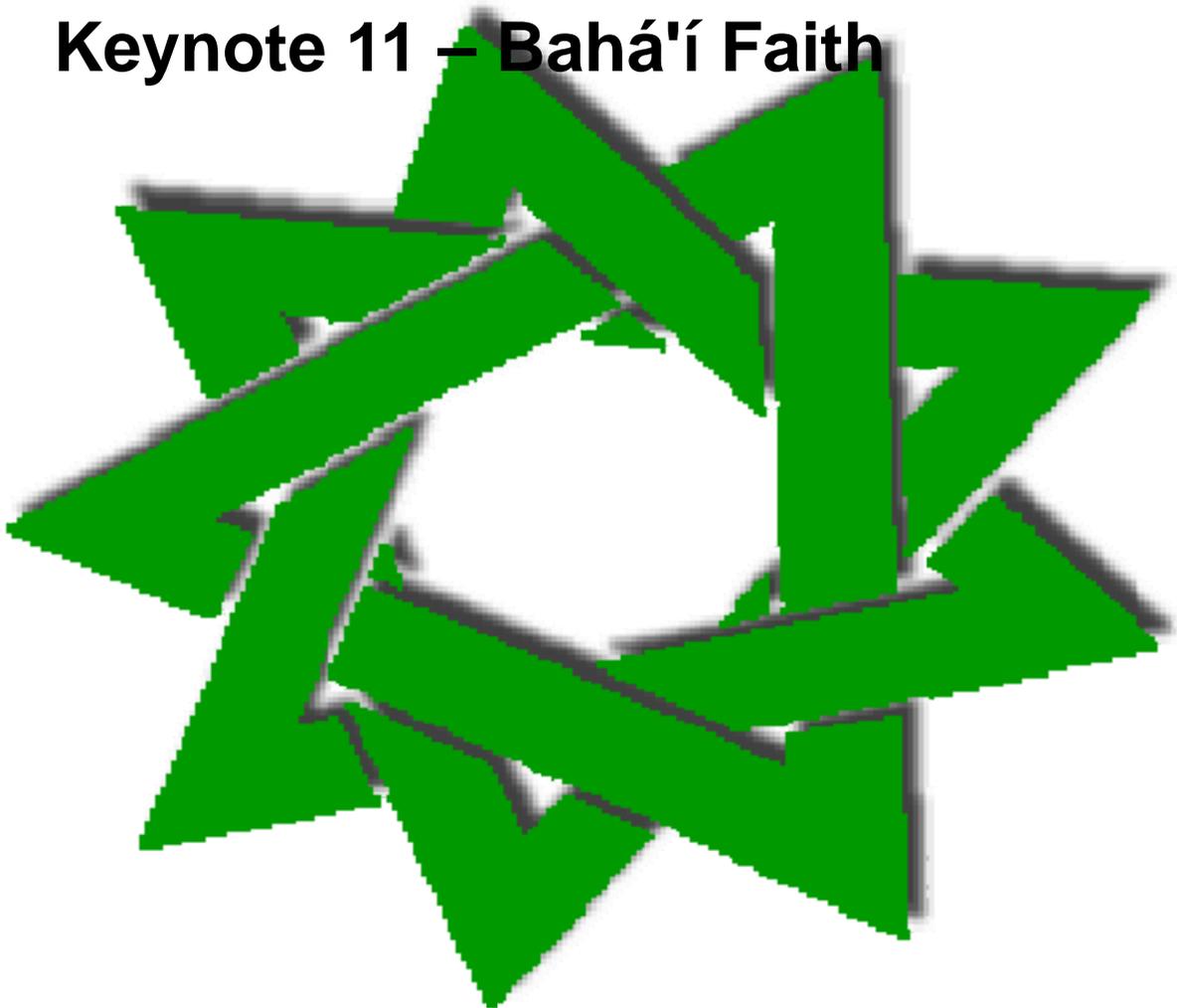
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Keynote 11 – Bahá'í Faith



Introduction

The Bahá'í Faith, which originated in Persia 150 years ago, is the youngest of the world's independent monotheistic religions.

As Christianity had its roots in Judaism, the roots of the Bahá'í faith lie in Shia Islam. The Bahá'í faith recognises the divine nature of prophets of other religions, but Bahá'ís believe that its founder Baha'u'llah, was the manifestation of God promised by all religions, sent for a new era to redeem the world and to interpret God's will.

The word Bahá'í derives from Baha meaning glory or splendour and signifies a follower of Bahá'u'lláh.

The faith has over six million adherents (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002) spread throughout the world in more than 230 countries and territories making it the second most widespread religion.

Most Bahá'ís live in Asia (3.6 million), Africa (1.8 million), and Latin America (900,000). Some sources estimate that India has the largest Bahá'í community with 2.2 million followed by Iran with 350,000, and the USA with 150,000 (The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2004).

The largest population of Bahá'í in the Pacific is in Papua New Guinea.

The Bahá'í faith is still viewed by many Muslims as a breakaway sect of Islam and in Iran, its country of origin, the followers of the religion have been persecuted at different points in history.

Consistent with its beliefs, the Bahá'í faith has a strong social agenda and is active in such areas as interfaith dialogue, human rights advocacy, support for aid and development projects, working for the advancement of women and global governance.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of the United States, has been represented at the United Nations since 1947 and the faith has a long tradition of working with the United Nations, see: [Baha'is at the United Nations](http://www.bahai.us/bahai-united-nations) (<http://www.bahai.us/bahai-united-nations>).

Origins and historical background

In 1844 in Iran, Mirza-Ali Muhammad (1820–50), a Sufi Muslim, proclaimed himself to be the *Báb* (gate) of God and announced the coming of a new prophet. This contravened an essential teaching of Islam, that the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet of God. The Báb and his followers were persecuted by the Muslim hierarchy and the Báb was eventually executed.

In 1863, one of the Báb's followers, Mirza Husain Ali (1817-92), a 19th century Persian nobleman revealed that he was the prophet proclaimed by the Báb. He called himself Baha'u'llah (Glory of God). Two years after the Báb's death,

Bahá'u'lláh and some of his followers were accused of taking part in the attempted assassination of the Shah of Persia. In prison in Tehran, Bahá'u'lláh had what he believed was a divine vision anointing him as the new messenger of God.

He was released into exile, spending the remainder of his life in places such as Baghdad, Constantinople and Palestine where he wrote his teachings and revelations, some in letters to rulers of other countries. Before his life ended in 1892 in Acca in Palestine, the Bahá'í religion had spread beyond Persia and the Ottoman Empire to the Caucasus, Turkistan, India, Burma, Egypt and the Sudan.

After Baha'u'llah's death his son and appointed successor, Abdu'l-Baha, spread Bahá'í teachings in Europe and North America, and established the world headquarters of the Bahá'í faith in Haifa (now in Israel). He developed Bahá'í ideas of social reform and international justice and expounded on Bahá'í beliefs through a series of letters.

Abdu'l-Baha was succeeded by his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi in 1921. He continued missionary work and the development of the administrative structure which currently directs the Bahá'í faith.

Shoghi Effendi translated the most important of Baha'u'llah's scriptures into English, wrote extensive interpretations and explanations of the Baha'i teachings and oversaw the spread of the Baha'i Faith worldwide through a global missionary program known as the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963).

When Shoghi Effendi died in 1957 without nominating a successor, the leadership of the faith passed to elected groups of believers who continued the work of the Ten Year Crusade which culminated in the election of the first Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel in 1963.

The Bahá'í faith has continued to expand, particularly in south-west Asia. There are over 70,000 centres worldwide, the largest in India, Africa and South America, although there is also a presence in Europe, the Middle East, North America, south-east Asia and Oceania.

Members of the Bahá'í Faith are still persecuted in Iran, where the government does not recognise the religion (Australian Broadcasting Commission, "Religion and Ethics, Bahá'ís").

Branches of Bahá'í faith

There are no sectarian divisions with the Bahá'í movement. The Faith maintains a commitment to religious harmony and unity. "Religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind" (Abdul'l Baha).

Bahá'í beliefs and teachings

The following information includes some elements of Bahá'í beliefs and teachings. Readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources such as those listed in the Bibliography for a more complete account.

Oneness of God

Central to Bahá'í teachings is the idea of “oneness” of God. There is only one God, though people of different religions may call Him by different names. We can never really understand the true nature of God: we can only learn about God through His creation and His messengers.

Oneness of religion

Bahá'ís believe that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin. God has sent messengers at different times and places according to the needs of the people and the times.

Divine messengers have included Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Baha'u'llah.

Bahá'ís believe that this process of ‘progressive revelation’ will continue but that a new manifestation will not occur prior to 1000 years after Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

Oneness of humanity

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens” (Bahá'u'lláh).

Bahá'ís believe that all people are equal in the eyes of God. Prejudice and racial distinction are seen as unnatural. Bahá'ís are expected to work towards the elimination of discrimination in their countries.

Bahá'ís affirm the desirability of the ‘unity in diversity’ principle, which states that while recognizing the unity of mankind, cultural diversity should be celebrated. “The diversity of colours in a rose garden adds to the charm and beauty of the scene as variety enhances unity” (Abdu'l-Bahá).

Gender equality is an essential belief. "There must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment." (Abdu'l-Bahá,)

To Bahá'ís, achieving equality of the sexes requires fundamental change in society. More than allowing women to compete on equal terms, it means the creation of a society in which the masculine and feminine elements are more evenly balanced; in which competition, boldness and leadership are balanced with compassion, consultation and cooperation. The peace and well-being of humanity depend on the establishment of true equality between women and men. [The Baha'i Faith in Australia](http://www.bahai.org.au) (<http://www.bahai.org.au>).

Other beliefs and teachings

The immortality of the soul

At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spirit world which is viewed as "a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe – and not some physically remote or removed place."

Universal education

Bahá'ís believe that ignorance perpetuates prejudice and has been a principal reason for the decline of societies throughout history. Bahá'í scriptures state that every human has the right to literacy and deserves an education.

The compatibility of science and religion

"Religion and Science are inter-twined with each other and cannot be separated. These are the two wings with which humanity must fly." Religion and science should work together to advance the well-being and progress of humanity.

World unity

Humanity is a single race, which should be united in one global society.

Work as worship

Work performed in the spirit of service is a form of worship.

Social principles

The principles underlying the faith include:

- full equality between women and men in all departments of life and at every level of society
- harmony between science and religion as two complementary systems of knowledge that must work together to advance the well-being and progress of humanity
- the elimination of all forms of prejudice
- the establishment of a world commonwealth of nations
- recognition of the common origin and fundamental unity of purpose of all religions
- spiritual solutions to economic problems and the removal of economic barriers and restrictions
- the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty
- the adoption of a world auxiliary language, a world script, a uniform and universal system of currency and of weights and measures.

Source: [Bahá'í Faith](http://www.bahai.us), the official website of the Bahá'ís of the United States (<http://www.bahai.us>).

Sacred texts

The Bahá'í scriptures consist of the books, essays and letters written by Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi. The most holy text is the Kitab-i-Aqbas, the book of laws for the Bahá'í Faith written by Baha'u'llah.

Among the better known writings of Baha'u'llah are:

- The Most Holy Book
- The Book of Certitude
- Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah
- The Hidden Words
- The Seven Valleys.

More information about sacred texts is available from [Religious Tolerance: THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH, Beliefs and practices](http://www.religioustolerance.org/bahai3.htm) (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/bahai3.htm>).

Structure and organisation

The Bahá'í community has no clergy. Following an administrative framework set down by Baha'u'llah, the faith is organized around a set of elected governing councils which operate at the local, national and international levels. Election is by secret ballot. Electioneering is forbidden and there is no system of nominations.

Spiritual assemblies

A local community of nine or more adult members can form a local spiritual assembly which annually elects a nine-member local spiritual assembly.

The local spiritual assembly coordinates community activities, represents the Bahá'í community on an official level, enrolls new members, provides pastoral care and conducts Bahá'í marriages and funerals.

Worldwide, there are about 20,000 local spiritual assemblies. There are approximately 200 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia.

More information about spiritual assemblies is available from [United Communities of Spirit: The Bahá'í Faith](http://origin.org/ucs/sbcr/bahai.cfm) (<http://origin.org/ucs/sbcr/bahai.cfm>).

Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice is the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. The nine members of this body are elected every five years by the national spiritual assemblies. Although the equality of women is an essential tenet of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'í law states that women are not eligible to be chosen.

The Universal House of Justice today oversees the growth and development of the global Bahá'í community. Some of its responsibilities include:

- adapting aspects of the Bahá'í Faith not explicitly covered in the Bahá'í sacred texts in accordance with the needs of society
- legislating on matters promoting the spiritual qualities that characterise Bahá'í life individually and collectively
- preserving the Bahá'í Sacred Texts
- defending and protecting the global Bahá'í community
- preserving and developing the world spiritual and administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith
- encouraging the growth and maturation of the Bahá'í community
- exerting a positive influence on the general welfare of humankind.

(Adapted from [Wikipedia, Universal House of Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_House_of_Justice)
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_House_of_Justice))

Religious observances

The Bahá'í faith has no clergy or sacraments and virtually no rituals. Independent investigation of truth, private prayer, collective discussion and action are all ways in which Bahá'ís observe their religion.

There are only three Bahá'í rituals:

- obligatory daily prayers
- reciting the prayer for the dead at a funeral
- the simple marriage rite.

Rather than a weekly worship service, most Bahá'í communities hold a monthly program called "feast" that includes worship, community consultation and social activities.

Bahá'ís also hold special worship events on holy days and festivals.

When Bahá'ís come together in communal worship, there are no congregational prayers. One person will recite prayers on behalf of everyone present. There will be spiritual readings from Bahá'í sources but readings may also include spiritual texts from other religions.

The services really are an expression of that central belief of the Baha'i faith, that religious truth is one and that divine revelation is a continual and a progressive process. So in the Baha'i services at the House of Worship we read from the official scriptures of all the world's great faiths; Hindu teachings, the Buddhist teachings, from the Old and New Testaments and from the Koran, and then of course from the Baha'i

writings themselves. So in that way we express that teaching by honouring all the faiths.

Phillip Hinton, speaking on the ABC Encounter program "An Exploration of the Bahá'í Faith", 27th August 2006.

The 19-day Feast

The 19-day feast (*d.iyafat-i-navazdah-ruzih*) is the monthly Bahá'í community meeting when adherents gather to pray, discuss, consult on social issues and administrative matters, and plan social activities. The feast is held every 19 days in each Baha'i community, usually on the first day of each Bahá'í month.

The feast is the most important occasion for communication between Baha'i administrative institutions and members of the Faith.

Prayers

Daily private prayer is a religious obligation for all Bahá'ís from the age of 15. Each day, one of three obligatory prayers should be said:

- a short prayer recited once every 24 hours between noon and sunset
- a medium prayer recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon and in the evening
- a long prayer recited once in every 24 hours at any time.

Prayers by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá are used by Bahá'ís at their meetings.

As they are regarded as the words of God, no change can be made to the words. It is acceptable for Bahá'ís to make up their own prayers for use in their private prayer.

Prayer is not seen as an end in itself nor as sufficient on its own for a Bahá'í to grow spiritually,

Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential (Bahá'í writings).

Work

Performing useful work is not only required but considered a form of worship.

Fasting

Adult Bahá'ís in good health fast each year from March 2 through March 20 abstaining from both food and drink from sunrise to sunset,

The sick, elderly and very young are exempt from fasting, as are pregnant or nursing mothers, travellers and those doing heavy physical work.

Meditation

Meditating for a period each day is seen as one way of making spiritual progress in the Bahá'í faith.

Meditate profoundly, that the secret of things unseen may be revealed unto you, that you may inhale the sweetness of a spiritual and imperishable fragrance... (Bahá'u'lláh)

Places of worship

Most Bahá'í meetings occur in individuals' homes, local Bahá'í centres or rented facilities.

There are currently seven Bahá'í *Houses of Worship*, one per continent, with an eighth under construction in Chile.

Each temple has its own distinctive design, but conforms to the requirement of Bahá'í law that all Bahá'í Houses of Worship must have nine sides and doors and a central dome.

For Baha'is, the number nine symbolises completeness and fulfilment, concepts which they believe are embodied in their religion. The nine doors signify the openness of the Faith to comers of all religions.

The House of Worship at Ingleside in Sydney was officially dedicated in 1961 ([House of Worship](http://www.bahai.org.au/scripts/WebObjects.exe/BNO.woa/wa/pages?page=who_we_are/house_of_worship.html) (http://www.bahai.org.au/scripts/WebObjects.exe/BNO.woa/wa/pages?page=who_we_are/house_of_worship.html)).

Further information on Houses of Worship around the world can be found at [Wikipedia: Bahá'í House of Worship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD_House_of_Worship) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD_House_of_Worship)

Festivals

The Bahá'í Calendar

The Bahá'í calendar is based on the calendar established by the Báb. The year consists of 19 months of 19 days, with four or five intercalary days, to make a full solar year.

Each month is named after one of the attributes of God, i.e. Splendour, Glory, Beauty, Grandeur, etc.

The Bahá'í week is seven days, with each day of the week also named after an attribute of God e.g. Istiqlál (Independence), Kamál (Perfection) and 'Idál (Justice).

Bahá'ís observe 11 Holy Days throughout the year. These days commemorate important anniversaries in the history of the faith.

Bahá'í days begin and end at sunset.

Holy Days

During the year, nine days are designated Holy Days on which Bahá'í should suspend work.

21 March Naw Rúz, the Bahá'í New Year. Naw Rúz is celebrated as a day of festivity, gift giving or celebration with community, family and friends. The festival comes at the end of the 19-day fast.

21 April First Day of Ridvan. The 12-day Festival of Ridvan commemorates Baha'u'llah's public declaration of His mission in the Garden of Ridvan in Baghdad in 1863. The first, ninth and twelfth days are regarded as particularly holy.

29 April Ninth Day of Ridvan.

2 May Twelfth Day of Ridvan.

23 May Declaration of the Báb. The Báb was the forerunner of Baha'u'llah. This day marks the anniversary of the Báb's declaration of His mission in 1844.

29 May Ascension of Baha'u'llah. This day marks the passing of Baha'u'llah in 1892.

9 July Martyrdom of the Bab. The Bab was executed by firing squad in Tabriz on this day in 1850.

20 October Birth of the Báb.

12 November Birth of Baha'u'llah.

Other special days

26 Feb to 1 March Ayyam-i-Ha, the Intercalary Days, reserved for charity, gift-giving and festivities.

2–20 March Fasting month, during which Bahá'í over the age of 15 years do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset.

26 November Day of the Covenant. This day celebrates Baha'u'llah's appointment of His son, Abdu'l-Baha, as the Centre of the Covenant, to whom His followers should turn after His passing. Suspension of work is not obligatory on this holy day.

28 November Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha. This day marks the passing of Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, in 1921. Suspension of work is not obligatory on this holy day.

For more information about festivals, see the [Australian Bahá'í](http://www.bahai.org.au) website (<http://www.bahai.org.au>).

Customs

Rites of passage

There is no formal naming ceremony in the Bahá'í faith.

Children of Bahá'í parents are encouraged to conduct a personal, independent investigation before making a commitment to enter the Bahá'í faith. At the age of 15, they can choose to enter the faith or not.

Marriage is conditional on the consent of both parties and their parents. The only essential of the marriage ceremony is that both partners say "We will all, verily, abide by the will of God" in front of witnesses.

When a Bahá'í dies, the body should be buried within one hour's journey from the place of death, and as soon as possible after death. Embalming and cremation are prohibited unless required by law.

Relationships between men and women

The principle of equality of the sexes is an essential tenet of the faith. Women participate fully in decision making within the family and within the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies.

Roles are not seen as identical however. Mothers for example are considered to have a special role as the first educators of their children.

The Bahá'í faith prescribes monogamy and promotes chastity outside marriage. Divorce is discouraged. Bahá'í law requires a year of trial separation before divorce.

Other laws and customs

Gambling and use of alcohol and narcotics is prohibited.

The number nine has significant importance in the Bahá'í Faith. The Arabic word *baha's* numerical value is nine. Nine, as the highest single-digit number, is a symbol of completeness.

Bahá'í are forbidden to join political parties and are expected to respect the authority of established governments and its laws except when there is a direct conflict with Bahá'í law.

Bahá'ís cannot accept political appointments or run for elected office.

Settlement and history in Australia

The Bahá'í Faith was brought to Australia by Clara and Hyde Dunn, an English-Irish couple who arrived in Sydney from America on 10 April 1920.

Hyde Dunn gave talks about the Bahá'í Faith as he worked his way around the Australian continent as a travelling salesman. Gradually a small Bahá'í community grew up in different centres around the country. The first Australians to become Bahá'ís, late in 1922, were Oswald Whitaker, a Sydney optometrist, and Effie Baker, a Melbourne photographer.

By 1934, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand was established, a national governing council elected by representatives of the Bahá'ís scattered across Australia and New Zealand.

In 1957, with the election of a separate National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand, the former body became the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia.

Plans were announced in 1957 to build a Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney. Officially dedicated in 1961, the Bahá'í Temple occupies a prominent position in Mona Vale on Sydney's northern beaches. It has been described by architectural historian Jennifer Taylor as one of four major religious edifices constructed in Sydney during the 20th century. It remains one of only seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world.

The gradual growth of the Bahá'í community in Australia accelerated with the resurgence of persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran that followed the 1979 revolution in the country of the religion's birth.

The Australian government was active in its defence of the human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran, and in March 1982 established a special humanitarian assistance program under which Iranian Bahá'í refugees were eligible to migrate to Australia. Over the succeeding years several thousand Iranian Bahá'ís came to Australia, enriching the size and diversity of the Australian Bahá'í community.

The Bahá'í community has had a long involvement in peace activities at the national and local level. Since 1994, the community's efforts to promote peace have focused on four main areas of activity: human rights, the advancement of women, global prosperity and moral development.

The Australian Bahá'í community today comprises people from diverse backgrounds and walks of life, reflecting the diversity of modern Australia.

(Adapted from [The Bahai Faith in Australia](http://www.bahai.org.au) (<http://www.bahai.org.au>))

Population: Bahá'ís in Australia

Approximately 11,000 Australians identified themselves as Bahá'í in the 2001 census which represented an increase of about 2000 or 23 percent in the five years since the previous census.

Major birthplaces for Australian Bahá'ís

Almost half (45 percent) of Australia's Bahá'ís come from Iran.

Australia-born is the next largest group, with significant populations from England, New Zealand and the United States.

Figure 11.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Bahá'í

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
Iran	4982	45.1
Australia	3700	33.5
United Kingdom	369	3.3
New Zealand	232	2.1
United States	155	1.4
Malaysia	131	1.2
India	103	0.9
Germany	70	0.6
Pakistan	61	0.6
Philippines	55	0.5
Other	1184	10.7
Total	11,042	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Population: Bahá'ís in Victoria

Victoria's total Bahá'í population in 2001 was 1,837. More than half of Victoria's Bahá'í population is from Iran. Although Iran is a predominantly Muslim country, 30 percent (957) of Victoria's Iran-born population was Bahai, and 38 per cent (1,211 persons) was Muslim.

Community organisations

National

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia administers the affairs of the Bahá'í community. Members are elected annually at a national convention attended by elected delegates from different states.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia national office is in the grounds of the Baha'i House of Worship in Sydney, contact details are:

Postal address: 173 Mona Vale Road, Ingleside, NSW 2101, Australia.

Telephone: (02) 9998 9222;

Fax: (02) 9998 9223; and by

Email: secretariat@bnc.bahai.org.au.

For further information on activities of the Bahá'í community in Australia visit the [Australian Bahá'í](http://www.bahai.org.au) website (<http://www.bahai.org.au>).

State

In November 2001, Regional Bahá'í Councils were established to represent the Baha'i community at the state and territory level in Australia.

Each Council has nine members with the exception of the Northern Territory which has five members. New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory share one Council.

For further information on the Bahá'í community in Victoria, contact their website through the national site at [Australian Bahá'í](http://www.bahai.org.au) (<http://www.bahai.org.au>).

Local

There are approximately 200 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia.

A Local Spiritual Assembly is elected in each local government area where there are nine or more adult Bahá'ís

The responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly include:

- organising local Bahá'í community activities
- pastoral support and spiritual guidance for members of the community
- overseeing Bahá'í education classes for children
- representing the Bahá'í community
- working with other community groups on common concerns.

The Baha'i community has been very active in bringing faith communities together. In Melbourne, the Cities of Dandenong and Moreland have led the way in moves to form inter-faith councils for

their municipalities, and now there are similar organizations in the Cities of Geelong, Hume and Kingston (Cahill, p. 86).

Considerations for schools

As prayer times for Bahá'í obligatory daily prayers can be interpreted broadly; no special arrangements are usually required.

Particular consideration should be given to students during the fasting period 2–20 March. Schools should take these students' needs into account when planning activities. Avoid celebrations involving food at these times when possible.

There are no particular dietary restrictions for Bahá'ís although some may be vegetarians.

Bahá'í holy days and celebrations, like those of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Have students identify places of significance in the history of the Bahá'í faith on a map and show with dates the spread of the faith.

Identify countries of significant Bahá'í populations on a world map.

Investigate the observance of various Bahá'í celebrations throughout the year. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions.

What is similar in Bahá'í beliefs and rituals to practices of other religions?

What is similar in the rhythm of the Bahá'í year to students' own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Compare the design, decoration and function of Bahá'í Houses of Worship with other kinds of temples, for example a:

- synagogue
- mosque
- cathedral
- church.

Investigate the symbols of the Bahá'í faith such as the number 9, the nine-pointed star and the ring stone symbol.

Research the role of women in the Bahá'í faith including historical figures such as Tahirih.

Compare the role that communal eating has in different religions in particular the Sikh and Bahá'í Faiths. What is the origin of the custom in each case?

Invite speakers from a Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly to talk about their faith, their community organisation and activities. Have students prepare questions and discuss their appropriateness

Discuss the issue of minority groups in a community and have students identify an experience in which they were a minority. A number of [The Really Big Beliefs Project: Classroom Activities](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html) would be relevant to a discussion of this topic (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html>).

Investigate the '[Peace Pack](http://www.perth.wa.bahai.org.au/peacepack/)' (<http://www.perth.wa.bahai.org.au/peacepack/>) developed by the Bahá'í community as a source of ideas for values education.

'Unity in our diversity' - use the Bahá'í principle as a starting point for discussion of what the principle means in the classroom, the school and the community. Develop a theme incorporating art, activities and drama.

Have students research and discuss Bahá'í attitudes to world governance, and support for a common auxiliary language. Use as preparation for a class debate.

Have students read some of the children's and young adult literature recommended in the bibliography that is written by, or about, other cultural groups.

Have students explore their own cultural assumptions by writing from the viewpoint of different characters in different cultural contexts.

Have students:

- identify major world religions
- describe major characteristics of world religions
- describe factors that influence the spread or decline of religions in a region.

Visit [Lotuses and Lights: Statistics on Buddhism in Australia, Student Worksheet](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotus1.htm) (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotus1.htm>)

Debate the role of women in different religions.

Useful websites

The BBC website is a useful source for information on Bahá'í belief and practice with external links, see: [BBC Religion & Ethics: Bahá'í](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/) (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/>).

The official website of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia provides general information on the faith and information relating to Bahá'í activities in Australia. It contains a list of Bahá'í holy days, see: [Australian Bahá'í](http://www.bahai.org.au) (<http://www.bahai.org.au>).

[Religious Tolerance: An unofficial group of essays about the Bahá'í Faith](http://www.religioustolerance.org/bahai.htm) (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/bahai.htm>).

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