



Meaningful Ageing  
AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN  
EDITION

# MULTIFAITH PRACTICES:

Guidelines for Community and Residential Aged Care

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We are the Australian peak body for spiritual care and ageing. Our vision is for every person to experience meaning, purpose and connectedness as they grow older. We create evidence-informed practical resources, deliver education services and promote the importance of integrated spiritual care across the care system. We are a membership-based, not-for-profit organisation. Membership is open to organisations who are providing support, care and/or accommodation for older people in Australia; Associate Membership is available to organisations outside of Australia.

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# Introduction

Australia is an amazingly multicultural society, and an ageing society. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the 2016 census “showed that the number of people aged 65 years and over had increased from one in every seven people in 2011 (14%), to nearly one in every six people (16%) in 2016. This proportion has increased steadily over the past century, from one in twenty-five people in 1911”. Over a third of people over 65 were born overseas, in particular Europe. Many of these people have gone on to have children, which is part of our multicultural story as new traditions are woven with the threads brought by parents, combined with experiences of growing up in Australia.

People over 65 identify with a range of religions, the most common being: Buddhism (1.4%), Christianity (70.3%), Hinduism (0.4%), Islam (0.6%), Judaism (0.6%), and Sikhism (0.1%). 16.1% chose no religion in the 2016 census.

The top languages other than English spoken at home by older people are (in order of largest percentage) Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Mandarin and Arabic. The ranking changes significantly for people under 65. Out of those five languages, people under 65 are more likely to speak Mandarin, Arabic or Cantonese than Greek or Italian.<sup>1</sup>

The aged care workforce is also very diverse, with over 32% of the direct care workforce in residential care, and 23% in community care, being born outside of Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside of this we have the reality that nearly a third of Australians overall identified as having ‘no religion’ in the ABS survey. Whilst 54% of the population still identify as having an association with Christianity, growth has continued in particular in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism.<sup>3</sup>

## What does all this mean for care services?

If we are truly committed to helping people to live and die well this means understanding each person in a way that honours who they have been, who they are now and who they are becoming. Lists of statistics on their own will not help us with this, but it can be useful to see the amazing mix of backgrounds brought by both the workforce and the older people they are supporting.

We need to be prepared to have the conversations and take the actions that matter most to each person. This means that if someone does identify with a particular religion, or indeed would like to explore a particular religion, that we give this all the space it deserves. Religious practices can speak to the deepest parts of our identity and offer a unique kind of support that cannot be otherwise accessed. They can be a place of profound solace, encouragement and hope even when we can longer speak for ourselves. It is our responsibility to make our best efforts to facilitate this for each person and their loved ones.

You will notice in the pages that follow that the role of family/significant others is often a feature of the way support should occur. Each group also has

many nuances, depending on the particularities of that person. All spiritual care should be grounded in the reality of that person, that time, that place and that network. This guide is a light to help you along the way as you creatively, compassionately and with courage engage with each religious tradition in the way that is most appropriate for the person and group you are supporting.

Finally, I trust you will enjoy the freedom this brings, as you take the morsel of knowledge provided by this short guide and engage openly with each person you meet. “Is this important for you?” can be a great place to start.

With thanks to our colleagues from over the oceans at Conrad Grebel for sharing their wonderful work that is the basis of this fair dinkum guide; and to the faith groups and experts in Australia who have given us confidence in its local application.

**Ilsa Hampton**  
CEO

**Meaningful Ageing Australia 2021**

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- 1 Reference: ABS <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0-2016-Main%20Features-Ageing%20Population-14> accessed 21 Oct 2020
  - 2 Reference: Mavromaras, Kostas, et al. “2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey – The Aged Care Workforce, 2016.” Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health, 2017.
  - 3 Reference: ABS <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0-2016-Main%20Features-Religion%20Data%20Summary-70> accessed 21 Oct 2020



## All groups

There are some important approaches to keep in mind when working with people from any background. Rather than repeating them in each section, here they are:

The information in this guide is just a starting point - to offer the best spiritual care for an older person it is always **best to ask** about an individual's particular tradition.

Caregivers should **first knock and announce** their arrival before entering the room.

It is important to be respectful of the **pronouns** that the older person uses. In some cases, they may use they/them/their rather than she/her/hers or he/him/his; or they may use 'she' when you assumed the right word would be 'he' and vice-versa. It is important to not assume anyone's gender identity and ask what pronouns they use.

## Gender

Throughout the guide, we have kept the phrase 'of the same gender' (and similar usage) to indicate a common understanding of the need to reduce discomfort in the intimate and end-of-life care of the older person. There is a growing awareness around gender identity and the pronouns that are used, for both the older person and those caring for them. Organisations are introducing this as part of their intake conversations.

In introducing personal pronouns in conversation, LGBTIQ+ Health Australia suggest the following: An easy way to do this is to introduce yourself by saying, "*My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my pronouns are \_\_\_\_\_*". You can then ask the person you are caring for and those caring for them their name and pronouns. The more that you do this the easier and more comfortable you will be asking.

With thanks to LGBTIQ+ Health Australia ([www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au](http://www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au)) and the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing ([www.culturaldiversity.com.au](http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au)) for their input.

## Definitions

### Traditions within religions – denomination

Most religions have different traditions, which have various ways of understanding and expressing their understanding of the core beliefs.

The word 'denomination' is common within Christianity, and refers to the specific type of church, for example, Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Baptist. Whilst denominations have much in common, there are also areas of difference, which may be quite significant for some individuals.

### Places of worship: Church, mosque, synagogue, temple

Usually describes the local, physical meeting place where believers meet to worship together.

### Religious leaders: Guru, imam, minister, monk, pastor, priest, vicar

Most religions have their leaders (organisational, spiritual, community), who serve their local community of fellow believers. They are likely to be trained in their role and 'ordained' (a form of special choosing) and it may even be their paid employment.

### Lay person/Laity

A member of a religious community, who is not formally ordained.

### Ministry

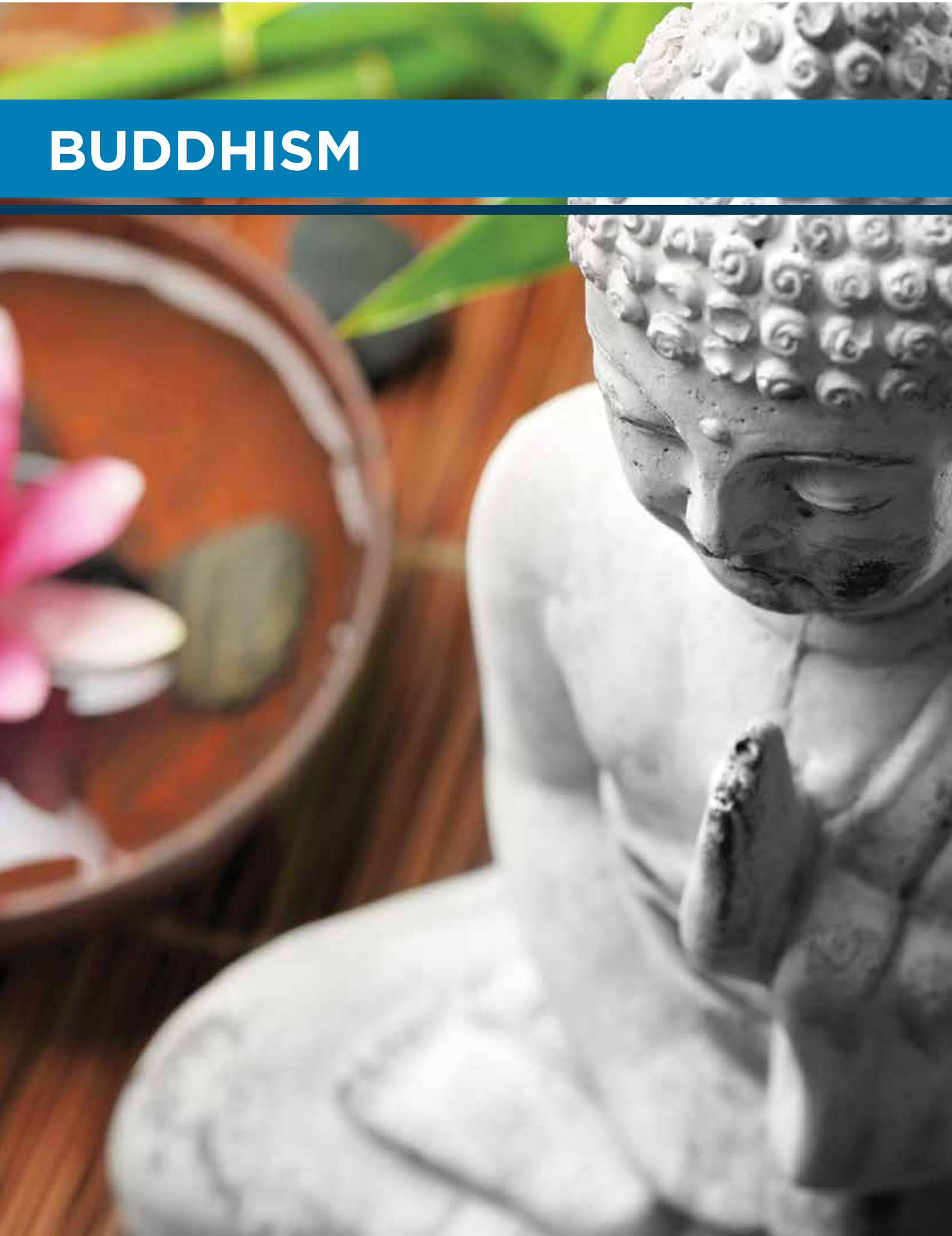
Similar to a sense of vocation or purpose, but with specifically religious connotations. A ministry can be personal, community level, or organisational. It can also refer to the life, work and teachings of the religion's founder and other spiritual/religious leaders.

### Scriptures/Sacred Texts

All religions have their own scriptures or sacred texts, such as the Bible, Qu'ran, and Torah. These are more than just physical books, and there may be many different views on how to respectfully handle them. For example, the Muslim Qu'ran should not be placed on the floor. If in any doubt, ask the person what is the most respectful approach to take. Many sacred texts are divided into chapters and verses to help reference and find their contents. For example, in the Christian New Testament, the book of Mark has 16 chapters, each having different numbers of verses. A reference to a particular verse might be Mark 13 (chapter): 1 (first verse).



# BUDDHISM





## Beliefs and values



There are three main Buddhist traditions:

- » **Theravada** (practiced primarily by people from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka)
- » **Mahayana** (practiced primarily by people from Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam)
- » **Vajrayana** (practiced primarily by people from Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Siberia, Bhutan, western China, and parts of India)

Buddhism is arguably the most diverse of the world's major religions. There are many differences among the three main Buddhist traditions, and groups within each tradition also have different practices. Many people in the 'West' now practice Buddhism, often in ways that are different from the practices in Asian Buddhist cultures. However, all forms of Buddhism are based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE) or "Buddha", The Enlightened One.

## Core beliefs include

Buddhas and various spiritual figures assist people in the quest for peace, but each person is ultimately responsible to learn perfect wisdom and compassion in order to reach enlightenment.

**Suffering:** Suffering occurs when people ignore the law of impermanence. Because all things in life are constantly changing (impermanence), suffering occurs when people try to hold on to the present.

**Self:** Because all things change, Buddhists do not believe in a permanent "self" or "soul." Most Buddhists believe that when they die they are reborn into an endless cycle driven by karma (the force of action caused from skilful or unskilful actions). This cycle ends only when greed, hatred, and delusion are completely eliminated. When this occurs, one has reached nirvana, a state of perfect peace that is beyond birth, death, life, or suffering. Nirvana can be reached through a combination of moral conduct or good behaviour, seeking wisdom, and meditation. The practice of reaching nirvana is very difficult, so the average Buddhist attempts to create good karma during life and seeks help from Buddhas and other spiritual figures at the time of death in the hope of a favourable rebirth into the next life.

**Morality:** Buddhist morality is based on five principles: not killing or harming any living thing; not taking anything that is not yours; not lying or speaking falsely; avoiding sexual misconduct; and avoiding the use of substances that could cloud the mind. Different traditions and different people interpret these guidelines in different ways. Monks and nuns live by many vows, called precepts, that vary from tradition to tradition.<sup>1</sup>

## Sacred texts

Buddhism is not a text-based religion. Although there are sacred texts (including the Sutras, the Sastras, and the Vinaya), the typical lay Buddhist does not usually read them.





## Holy days, holidays, and ritual observances



Buddhists celebrate a large range of holidays depending on the region they practice in, their traditions, and personal preferences. Local traditions are often more important than holy days that are recognised across the culture. The following list of holy days will not apply to every Buddhist, but provides some examples:

### For the Theravada Buddhist

**Vesakah Bucha:** This holy day marks the birth, awakening, and death of the Buddha. It is celebrated on the full moon in the month of May (in the Western calendar), and is marked by special food and festivals, as well as times of silence and meditation.

### For the Mahayana Buddhist

**Birth of the Buddha:** The timing of this holy day changes, but it usually falls on 8 April in the East Asian tradition.

**Enlightenment of the Buddha:** The timing of this holy day also changes, but it is often celebrated on 8 December in the East Asian tradition.

**Death of the Buddha:** Once again the timing changes, but it is often observed on 15 February in the East Asian tradition.

### For the Vajrayana Buddhist

**Losar:** This holy day celebrates the end of the year and the opportunity for a fresh beginning. In Asia this holiday includes dances and ceremonies by monks wearing costumes. The date of Losar changes according to the cycle of the moon but is often celebrated in February.

## Late life celebrations

### For the Theravada Buddhist

**Su kwan:** This ritual is intended to re-energise a person's spirit as a means of blessing or expressing good will to the person. The rituals may be performed by a cleric or an elder. While many Buddhists, particularly in Laos and Thailand, observe this, others consider this a non-Buddhist observance.

### For the Mahayana Buddhist:

Birthdays at ages 60, 70, 77, 80, 88, 90 and 99 are especially important milestones in some cultures. The 60th birthday, known as kanreki, is very important to some people in Japan.

## Caring practices during illness



- » Some Buddhists will refuse pain medication if they believe it will cloud their mind. Health care providers should be very specific when talking about medications that may affect an older person's awareness. However, mild painkillers may help a person to concentrate better if they are struggling with pain.
- » Many Buddhists, particularly those of Asian ancestry, also use alternative treatment options, such as traditional Chinese medicine.
- » Most older people will prefer a care provider who is the same gender, however this has more to do with Asian cultural practice than with Buddhism itself.





- » Some older people will ask for peace and quiet because of the importance of mindfulness to Buddhists.
- » Many Buddhists are vegetarian. This includes not eating animal by-products or taking medications that contain animal by-products.
- » Older people and family members might pray or chant quietly for long periods of time.
- » Buddhists often use prayer beads, and most find comfort in having a picture of the Buddha nearby. Burning incense and candles is a common practice, but if this is not permitted in the care home, a bouquet of flowers or electric candles may be offered instead.<sup>2</sup>

## End of life practices

- » Relatives want to be told when death seems near so they can make the necessary preparations.
- » Buddhists place great importance on preparing the mind for death and making the process of dying as peaceful as possible.<sup>3</sup> Some Buddhists prepare for death by practicing anticipatory death through meditation.
- » Leaving this life with a quiet and peaceful mind is important for a favourable rebirth.<sup>4</sup>
- » Anyone present with the dying person should provide hope and words of encouragement such as naming positive things the person has done in their life. Buddhist mantras may be whispered in the person's ear.
- » The dying person is encouraged to forgive themselves and others for any failures or mistakes.
- » As a person approaches death, team members should try not to disturb the older person's concentration. In Buddhism, death is a very important time of transition.
- » Near the time of death, a Buddhist's family may stand several feet away from the older person and they may appear unemotional. This too, is to prevent interrupting the older person's concentration.
- » The body should be left in place for as long as possible. If a Buddhist monk is available, prayers may be recited for approximately one hour afterwards, even if the body is not present.
- » A male family member ritually washes the deceased person's body and wraps it in burial cloths.
- » Some Southeast Asian traditions place a coin in the deceased person's mouth to buy passage into the afterlife.
- » A vase of flowers to honour the Buddha may be placed nearby. Some Buddhists believe that the conscious self remains with the body for three days, which is why cremation should not take place until three days after death.<sup>5</sup>



## Readings and prayers

A Buddhist's family members and/or monastic will likely choose their own prayers, and the following are examples of prayers and readings of some Buddhists.

Honour to Buddha, the supreme sage,  
the cosmic overlord who awakens  
all beings from drunken ignorance  
by manifesting the hundredfold light  
of truth's brilliant door.

- *the Seventh Dalai Lama*

### **Nine Bows**

Homage to all that is healing  
in a person's life,  
in Traditions,  
and in the world

Homage to all that is healing  
in the lives of Saints and Sages,  
in this practice,  
and in my own mind

Homage to all that is healing  
in the Stream of Ancestral Teachers,  
in the immediate Community of support,  
and in our positive motivations.

### **Taking and Giving Prayer I**

May I have the actual knowledge  
of the sufferings and needs that exist  
in other beings' lives everywhere  
and may that knowledge completely destroy  
whatever deluded self-preoccupation I have  
and may it never arise again.

May I then have a compassionate mind,  
and respond to them in a way that frees all of them  
from all of their suffering forever.

May they have every happiness,  
and the cause of happiness,  
and may that happiness last forever.



### A Buddhist Prayer for the Dead and Dying

Oh Buddhas and Bodhisattvas abiding in all directions,  
endowed with great compassion,  
endowed with foreknowledge,  
endowed with divine eye,  
endowed with love,  
affording protection to sentient beings,  
please come forth through the power of your great compassion,  
please accept these offerings, both actually presented and mentally created.

Oh Compassionate Ones, you who possess  
the wisdom of understanding,  
the love of compassion,  
the power of doing divine deeds,  
and of protecting in incomprehensible measure,  
[Name] is passing from this world to the next,  
he/she is taking a great leap,  
the light of this world has faded for him/her  
he/she has entered solitude with their karmic forces,  
he/she has gone into a vast silence,  
he/she is borne away by the great ocean of birth and death.

Oh Compassionate Ones, protect [Name] who is defenceless.  
Be to him/her like a mother and father.  
Oh Compassionate Ones, let not the force of your compassion  
be weak, but aid them.  
Let [Name] not go into the miserable states of existence.  
Forget not your ancient vows.

*Thank you to Tenpa Bejanke, Australian Sangha Association for input and comments for this section.*

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- 1 Interview with Ven. Dr. Jeff Wilson, Associate Professor of East Asian Studies, University of Waterloo. June 8, 2012. Dr. Wilson is an authority on Buddhist hospice and medical care, particularly in North America.
- 2 John Ehman, "Religious Diversity: Practical Points for Health Care Providers" at Penn Medicine: Pastoral Care & Education. [http://www.uphs.upenn.edu/pastoral/resed/diversity\\_points.html](http://www.uphs.upenn.edu/pastoral/resed/diversity_points.html)
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- 4 Ven. Pende Hawter, Spiritual Needs of the Dying: A Buddhist Perspective. Available at [http://www.buddhanet.net/spirit\\_d.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/spirit_d.htm)
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# CHRISTIANITY





## Beliefs and values



Christianity grew out of Judaism. It is based on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Christ is not a surname, but more of a title). The Western calendar traditionally uses Jesus' birth as the starting point. In general, Jesus is believed to have died around AD 30-33. His followers believe he was the long-awaited Messiah (anointed one of God) that was promised in the Jewish teachings. Jesus showed special compassion to the poor and outsiders, teaching unconditional love and forgiveness towards all people, including one's enemies. His ministry as a teacher and healer attracted a large number of followers. This success threatened the positions of other religious and political leaders of his day and led to his crucifixion. Three days after his death he was restored to life or "resurrected". His followers proclaim that in him God took on human form, and that through him humanity can experience forgiveness and salvation. Christians believe that as they live in right relationship to God and to others (Mark 12:30-31), and to creation (Genesis 1:28-31), God's way of love and peace is demonstrated to the world. Christians believe that after death there is a new life in communion with God. Most Christians agree that a central commandment of the Christian faith is: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27).<sup>1</sup>

There are many different branches within Christianity. The most common are: Catholic (including Roman, Maronite, Melkite, Chaldean, Syro-Malabar, Ukrainian Greek Catholic and other Eastern Catholic Churches); Eastern Orthodox (including Greek, Armenian, Coptic and other Orthodox Churches); mainline Protestant denominations (including Anglican, Baptist, Churches of Christ, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Uniting Church); Pentecostal (such as Hillsong, Australian Christian Churches); historic peace churches (such as Anabaptist/Mennonite and Quaker) and a variety of other denominations. There are many differences among these groups, generally along the lines of East and West, and Catholic and Protestant. A person who is Greek Orthodox will expect prayers and rituals that are very different from a Pentecostal older person. However, despite these differences there are similarities, and general principles and practices are described below.

## Sacred texts



All Christian groups accept the Old (Hebrew/Greek) and New (Greek) Testaments of the Bible as their sacred Scripture. Catholic and Orthodox older people will appreciate a Bible that includes the Apocrypha (a set of texts Protestants generally exclude). During times of illness or distress several of the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer are important to Christians. The Orthodox Church also views Holy Tradition as a Sacred Text; Holy Tradition includes the writings, teaching and acts of the apostles, saints, martyrs and founders of the Church.

## Holy days, holidays, and ritual observances



Some Christians observe special holidays and seasons, and some do not. The most common ones are listed below. Some have rituals and others do not.

**Lent:** Lent takes place in the forty days leading up to Easter. Christians prepare themselves for this season through prayer, penitence, and for some, fasting.

**Holy Thursday:** This marks the last meal (Last Supper) Jesus had with his disciples and from which the tradition of the Lord's Supper/Holy Communion/Eucharist commenced. It may also be called Maundy Thursday.



**Good Friday:** This marks the day Jesus was crucified and laid to rest in a tomb. Many Christians attend worship services on this day. Good Friday occurs in late March or April, two days before Easter.

**Easter Sunday:** This is the holiest day in the Christian calendar. It celebrates the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead. In Australia, it takes place on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Autumn equinox for all Christians. In the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches, this day is calculated differently and is often a week later. It is celebrated with joyful worship, music, and flowers. Often children colour or paint eggs, which symbolise new life, and receive chocolate Easter eggs.

**Christmas:** Christmas takes place on 25 December for most Christians, or on or around 7 January for the Eastern Orthodox. This holiday marks the birth of Jesus Christ. People usually give gifts, and this tradition is based on gifts the Magi or Wisemen brought to the baby Jesus.

**Holy Communion/Eucharist:** This is based on the Last Supper recorded in the New Testament Gospels Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25), and Luke (22:14-20) and is the central ritual of the Christian church. Most Christians believe that Jesus is present in the bread and wine and that eating and drinking the bread and wine unites them with Christ and each other in a special way. Christian denominations hold a variety of viewpoints on the meaning of Communion. Communion is typically offered by a priest, clergyperson, or a lay minister. Many denominations require the bread and wine to be blessed (or consecrated) by the priest or minister after which it may then be served by persons appointed to this task.

**Anointing of the sick:** This practice is connected to Jesus's compassion for the sick. A simple anointing includes making the sign of the Cross on the person's forehead with oil and saying, "I anoint you in the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit." The following prayer may be used: "May the God of love and mercy release you from suffering, forgive your sins, preserve you in goodness, and bring you to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ. Amen." This practice is intended to give the older person peace and strength and invoke God's presence in the life of the sick person in a special way. If a person asks to be anointed and a clergy person is not available, most Christian groups will accept another person. However, in most cases Catholics and Orthodox require a priest or bishop for anointing the sick.

**Baptism:** In most Christian groups, baptism occurs in infancy or in early adulthood, however some people may request a baptism later in life. In most denominations, baptism includes pouring or cupping a small amount of water on the individual's head and saying: "[Name], I baptise you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This may be followed with the Lord's Prayer. Baptism symbolises the forgiveness of sin, the acceptance of salvation, and marks one as a part of the church community. If someone requests baptism and a clergyperson is not available, anyone may baptise in an emergency.

**Feasts:** The Orthodox Church also celebrates the Feast of Annunciation (25 March) and the Feast of Dormition (15 August).

## Caring practices during illness

- » Most Christians appreciate a visit from their priest or minister.
- » Prayer is important. The Lord's Prayer/Our Father is familiar to all Christian groups.
- » For many Christians, Communion and/or anointing is especially important. Catholics and Orthodox may appreciate receiving the Sacrament of the Sick from their priest.





- » Music is important to most Christians. Caregivers can check with the older person and family to determine which hymns or songs would be most appreciated.
- » Family members often gather with the person who is dying. Most appreciate the presence of a chaplain or clergy and the offering of a reading or a prayer.

## End of life practices

- » Because Christians believe that human life flows entirely from God as a gift, after death, bodies are to be treated with great dignity and respect.<sup>2</sup>
- » After a death has occurred, most Christian groups appreciate a prayer for the deceased person and/or for the family. For an Orthodox Christian, you should call a priest to read prayers over the person once they have died.
- » Burial or cremation typically occurs 2-5 days after death, although Orthodox Christians are buried and not cremated.

## Readings and prayers

### Scripture readings for someone who is ill or dying:

- » Psalm 23; Psalm 27:1-5, 13-14; Psalm 46: 1-7, 10-11; Psalm 63:1-8; Psalm 91; Psalm 103: 1-5, 15-22; Psalm 130; Isaiah 46:3-4
- » Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:1-7; Romans 8:38-39

### The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

*Matthew 6:9-13. The version below is the traditional version, although there are more modern versions available.*

Our Father who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name.  
Your Kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our  
trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,  
for yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.\*  
Amen.

*\*(Roman Catholics and Orthodox omit this line)*

*Orthodox will also know the prayer 'The Lord Have Mercy'.*

### Prayers for someone who is sick or in distress:

Gracious God, you are loving and caring, and we trust you. Help us to know that you strengthen and hold us at all times. We pray now that you will grant to [Name] a strong faith, an inner peace, and a calm spirit. Touch [Name] with your renewing love, that he/she may know wholeness in you and that your light may shine through the darkness of this time of suffering. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>3</sup>



Support us, O Lord,  
all the day long of this troublous life,  
until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes,  
the busy world is hushed,  
the fever of life is over,  
and our work is done.  
Then, Lord, in your mercy grant us a safe lodging,  
a holy rest, and peace at the last;  
through Christ our lord.  
Amen.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Prayer for someone who is dying:**

Loving God, you are our refuge and strength. In the good days and in the days marked with pain you are with us. We pray now for [Name]. Grant to him/her faith, courage, and your loving presence for the journey from life to life. Let death come as peacefully as evening, promising a new morning of joy in company with Jesus Christ, the Lord of eternal life.  
Amen.

#### **Contemporary Meditations**

At the last, let it be a sweet good-bye.  
All business finished.  
All affairs tidied.  
All loose ends attended.  
All regrets squared away.  
All loved ones gathered.  
All words of love spoken.  
All life lived fully.  
One last look,  
one last squeeze of the hand,  
one last deep breath,  
one last sweet good-bye  
and a final eager step towards Jesus.

– *Carol Penner*





At the last kiss,  
at the final true laugh,  
at the bottom of the body's decline,  
at the mind's last conscious thought,  
at the moment when love vanishes,  
at the end of all remembering,  
be the God at the last.  
Be the God of wrinkled bodies and stooped shoulders,  
the God of vacant eyes and open mouths,  
the God of incontinence and shaking.  
Be the God who holds the hand,  
the God who soothes the brow,  
the God who whispers words of comfort  
and the God who hums a lullaby  
until the last sleep falls.

- Carol Penner<sup>5</sup>

### **Prayer for the Deceased**

Depart, O Christian soul, out of this world,  
In the name of God Almighty who created you;  
In the name of Jesus Christ who redeemed you;  
In the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you;  
May your rest be this day in peace,  
And your dwelling place in the Paradise of God.  
Amen.<sup>6</sup>

*Thank you to Assoc. Prof. Anthony Gooley, University of Notre Dame, Catholic Institute, Sydney and Catholic Healthcare Australia; Bishop Elpidios of Kyaneon - Archiepiscopal Vicar of Perth and Prof. Stephen Pickard, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University for input and comments for this section.*

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# HINDUISM





## Beliefs and values



Hindu traditions are thousands of years old, but there was no Hindu “religion”, as such, before British colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Hinduism’s history is closely connected to political and social developments within India, including the rise and fall of various kingdoms, colonial rule, and modern independence.<sup>2</sup> Today, Hinduism is a collection of many traditions and philosophies that are native to India. It includes several major sects or groups, and practices may differ depending on where one lives.

Hindus believe that time is cyclical and eternal, rather than linear with a final ending. Time cycles through successive ages (golden, silver, copper, and iron) and this series of ages is called Yuga. During the golden age, people followed and believed in dharma, which means following the law, one’s duty, and always observing truth, but in each age that followed (silver, copper and iron), the good qualities have decreased. According to Hindu tradition, we are now living in the fourth age, iron, also called Kali Yuga, which is an age of quarrels and deceit. It is believed the end of the iron age will lead to the dawning of another golden age.<sup>3</sup>

Personal spirituality is very important in Hinduism and many Hindus worship a large number of deities or gods. In terms of beliefs, some believe in a Hindu trinity (trimurti) which is made up of three deities: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer), and Shiva (the destroyer and regenerator). Some people believe in a form of monotheism, where all gods are manifestations or different forms of one true ultimate God. Hindus believe that God is personal and also transcendent, that is, above and beyond the entire world. It is called the brahman, or the ultimate ‘it’. Every individual possesses a part of that Brahman which is called the atman or the soul. The purpose of life is to become aware of the soul, or the True Self. Hindu sacred texts suggest Listening, Remembering, and Meditation as the three methods to discover that atman, one’s True Self. Even though the body dies, the True Self does not, and it cannot be destroyed. Hindus believe that death is a transitional stage for the True Self, and not the final end point. The True Self will either be reborn in a new body or will be united with Brahman.

### Hinduism includes the following main beliefs or concepts:

**Samsara:** All beings are reincarnated or reborn over and over again.

**Karma:** The results of our actions affect future lives.

**Dukkha:** Suffering causes endless rebirths.

**Moksha:** The True Self can only find liberation from this suffering through spiritual knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

## Sacred texts



The Hindu collection of sacred texts is collectively called “The Eternal Teachings”. There are two categories of texts within this collection: Shruti (that which was heard by the seers from God) texts are older and considered to be of divine origin, Smrti (that which is remembered) texts consist of knowledge acquired after the Shruti were recorded. Shruti generally refers to the Vedas, the Brahmanas, and the Upanishads and the Aranyakas (some Hindus also classify the Bhagavad Gita as shruti). Smrti generally refers to everything else: a vast collection of stories in the form of Puranas, epic texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, poetry, and other traditions.<sup>5</sup>



## Holy days, holidays, and ritual observances



**Diwali, Deepavali, or Festival of Lights:** This is the most popular Hindu festival. The word literally means “a row of lamps.” It is a reminder that just action brings victory, such as the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. During Diwali, Hindus exchange gifts with family and friends, and celebrate over four days that includes the Hindu New Year. People light oil lamps to represent that light has triumphed over darkness. On the day of Lakshmipujan, goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. Fireworks also represent the light, while frightening away evil spirits. Diwali falls in late Ashwin (usually September-October) and ends in early Kartika (October-November). It is necessary to check the date each year.

**Holi:** This is the Hindu spring festival called the Festival of Colours. People cover one another with coloured powder and throw coloured water. This symbolises breaking down barriers between people. There are many traditional stories associated with Holi, including one about God Krishna sporting with the milkmaids in the village. Another myth about Prahlada and the demoness Holika teaches that good wins over evil and is the reason why certain regions within India light bonfires to signify the destruction of the demoness.

**Rama Navami or Ramnavmi:** This holiday celebrates Lord Rama’s birthday and focuses on moral reflection and charity to others. Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu, and the hero of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana. Hindus read parts of this story in temples as a part of the celebration. Tradition states that Rama was born at noon, and Hindus chant special prayers at this time, and make offerings to a picture of baby Rama.

The food is shared as prasada with everyone. Hindus decorate their homes for this auspicious day, and place fruit and flowers on the family shrine, a space in Hindu homes dedicated to worship and meditation. The youngest female family member puts a tilak (red mark) on the other family members before they all join together in worship. This festival is celebrated in the Spring.<sup>6</sup>

## Caring practices during illness



- » It is both a cultural and religious practice for Hindus to visit people who are sick. Many Hindu older people will have a large number of visitors, including people outside of their immediate family. Traditional dictum says that visitors should be accommodated as much as possible.
- » Hinduism is very aware of the needs of an individual within the larger context of family, culture, and environment. Therefore, the family plays an active role in decisions dealing with care.
- » Hinduism emphasises respect for elders, and children have a strong responsibility toward their parents. It is a family obligation to care for the elderly and sick, and service providers should take this into consideration when developing care plans for a Hindu person.
- » Hindu older people may want to have religious statues or icons near them. Ganesha, the dancing Shiva (Nataraja), and Kali are some of the popular choices.
- » Prayer and meditation are important to most Hindus, but there are no set times for these to happen.
- » Purity is a principal concept in Hinduism, and bathing and cleanliness are very important. Oral hygiene can include brushing teeth, using a metal tongue scraper, and chewing mint leaves, cloves, or fennel seeds.
- » Most Hindus have morning rituals of cleaning and prayer. They brush their teeth immediately after waking up, followed by a shower, prayers, and then having their breakfast. Many Hindus will not eat until these morning rituals are completed.



- » Hindus traditionally eat with their right hand because the left hand is considered unclean. It is very important to wash hands before and after a meal. If a person needs help eating, use the right hand if touching the food directly. Either hand is acceptable if utensils are used.
- » Hindu spirituality includes a belief in non-violence, and for many this includes animals. Most Hindus are strict vegetarians. Most will eat dairy products, and some will eat meat, except for beef or pork. Cows are considered sacred, and pigs are considered unclean.
- » Some medications containing animal by-products may be forbidden for some Hindus. If there is no other option, healthcare providers should discuss the medication with the older person and their family.
- » Fasting is a common practice in Hinduism. It depends on the individual's beliefs as to which day a Hindu will fast. It is important to know each person's preference.
- » Many Hindus consume Ayurvedic medicine, which is highly regarded in India. It uses a combination of natural remedies and some Western medicine. Hinduism teaches that all illnesses (both physical and mental) have biological, psychological, and spiritual elements. Ayurvedic medicine is available in Australia, but Hindu older people may not tell healthcare providers if they are using these medications. In order to provide holistic health care it is important to know all the medications the person is taking.
- » Hindus may use vibhuti (holy ash) as a spiritual remedy. Vibhuti is used in religious worship, and many believe it contains protective, purifying, and healing properties when smeared on the skin, eaten in small amounts, or carried in a pouch near the body.
- » Modesty is very important to both Hindu men and women. Most Hindus will want a care provider of the same gender as the older person for examinations and procedures. Invasive examinations will need to be carefully explained to the older person and family.
- » Some Hindu women wear a sacred thread, gold chain, or ring around their neck. Many Hindu men wear a sacred thread across their chest. Some wear sacred tulsi beads around their necks. If these need to be removed for an examination or procedure, caregivers need to ask the older person's permission first.

## End of life practices

- » Previously, information about a terminal diagnosis was usually given to the family instead of the older person. Contemporary practice in Australia favours the older person receiving information and making decisions that may have a long-term effect on the family. In some traditions the family decides what information is given to the older person.
- » Most Hindus want their final words and thoughts to be about God. If the person is a believer, it is important to surround them with holy objects such as water from the Ganges, picture frames of their favourite gods or a recording of chants containing soothing Vedic mantras. Many Hindus who are non-believers (while maintaining their Hindu culture) may want other objects near them.
- » Dying at home has a particular religious significance and would likely be preferred by many Hindus.
- » The older person's oldest son (regardless of his age) is expected to be present before, during, and after death. The son's role in 'end of life care' is essential. If there is no son, an uncle or any other male friend may perform the rites. Other family members may also be present. In the absence of all of these, women including the wife or daughters have lately taken to performing these tasks.



- End-of-life rituals may include:
  - > Tying a sacred thread around the neck or wrist of the dead,
  - > Placing a sacred tulsi (holy basil) leaf on the departed person's tongue.
  - > Giving the departed person a few drops of water from the Ganges River.
- If sacred tulsi beads are worn around their neck, they must stay on their body at the time of death. If they need to be removed, they should be re-tied on the body's wrist (preferably the right wrist).
- Family members may wish to light a small lamp, or burn incense, near the deceased person. Traditionally, a lamp is burned beside the deceased person until the last of the Shraddha ceremony is performed on the twelfth day.
- Family members may wish to wash the deceased person's body.
- All jewellery, religious objects, and sacred threads should be left in place, if possible. Alternatively, such items are removed and donated to the poor. If it is necessary to remove any of these items, caregivers should ask family members first.
- Most Hindus observe thirteen days of mourning after death. Family members may require more time away from their normal lives than is common practice in Australia. During this time, Hindus perform ceremonies and pray together as a family and as a community.
- Hindus generally consider autopsies unacceptable but will usually give permission when it is required by law.
- It is important for Hindus to be cremated as soon as possible after death.<sup>7</sup>

## Readings and prayers

Readings and prayers are from the Bhagavad Gita and epics such as the Ramayana and other holy scriptures. Given the broad span of worship practices within Hinduism, it is important to check with the older person and/or the family to see if the following are suitable prayers for their tradition.

### Impermanence of Life

*(2:11-13)* The wise grieve not for those who live; and they grieve not for those who die – for the cycles of life and death shall continue.

As the mortal body goes through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age, it eventually dies and the soul wanders on to a new body.

*(2:20)* He the Atman, is never born, and he never dies. He is the eternity; he is for evermore. Never born and eternal, beyond times gone or to come, he does not die when the body dies.

*(2:22)* As one leaves an old garment and puts on ones that are new, the Spirit leaves this mortal body and then enters one that is new.



## Devotion to God

(2:47) Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work never for a reward; but never cease to do thy work. Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind – a peace that is everlasting.

(8:20-22) Beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is an Invisible, Higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away, this remains forever and ever. The Invisible is called the Everlasting and is the Highest Supreme. Those who reach it, will never return. This is my supreme abode. This Spirit Supreme, Arjuna, is attained by an ever-living love. In him, all living things have submerged, and from him, all things will originate.

## The Mrtyunjaya Mantra

Om. We worship and adore you, Oh, three-eyed one, Oh, Shiva. You are sweetness supreme, the fragrance of life who nourishes us, restores our health, and causes us to thrive. As in due course, the stem of the cucumber weakens, and the gourd is freed from the vine unnoticed, so free us from attachment and death, and do not withhold from us immortality.

*Thank you to Makarand Bhagwat, Hindu Council of Australia (Vic) for input and comments for this section.*

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# ISLAM







## Beliefs and values



Islam is a monotheistic (meaning belief in one God) religion, that began in the Middle East during the 7th century C.E., although its roots go back much further. The word Islam means “to submit oneself” and the word Muslim means “one who submits.” Therefore, a Muslim is one who submits to or serves Allah/God. The word Allah is the Arabic word for God and is also used by Arab Christians. Muslims, Christians and Jews worship the same God, and Abraham is the spiritual ancestor common to all three religions. Muslims believe in the absolute oneness of God/Allah, meaning that Allah has no other partners who share his divinity.

Islam is based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets sent by Allah, and Muslims believe he received and communicated God’s complete message to humans. Other prophets include Abraham, Moses and Jesus (Issa). Muslims consider Jesus (Issa) to be one of the most important prophets. Muslims say “‘alayhissalam” which means “peace be upon him” when they hear the name of a prophet or an archangel.

There are two main branches of Islam: Sunni and Shi’a. About 85% of Muslims are Sunni. There are significant differences between Sunnis and Shi’as, one difference being their views on the role of clergy. There are also many differences within each branch. There are also several other small sects, including Sufis who are Islamic mystics.

Islamic spirituality is expressed through living and acting according to God’s will, loving God with one’s whole being, and cleansing oneself from all evil traits.<sup>1</sup>

Muslim spiritual practices are expressed through Arkan Al Islam Al Khamisa (the Five Pillars of Islam):

**Al Shahadatan (Confession of Faith):** This declaration or profession of faith consists of two parts: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.” Belief in this statement and reciting this with conviction is central to being or becoming a Muslim.

**Al Salat (Prayer):** This is practiced five times a day facing Mecca or a little north or west from most areas of Australia. This prayer practice includes washing (wudu), ritual, and gestures.

**Al Sawm (Fasting):** This is practiced during the holy month of Ramadan during which Muslims fast each day from before sunrise until sunset. The fast is broken in the evening preferably with family, friends, and relatives.

**Al Zakat (Charity):** Each year, Muslims donate at least 2.5% of their average annual net wealth as obligatory charity to designated classes of people. However, those who receive the donation do not need to be Muslim.

**Al Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca):** Muslims who are physically and financially able make this pilgrimage trip at least once in their lives. A person who has made the pilgrimage receives the honoured title Hajji (for men) or Hajjah (for women). Using these titles is a sign of respect.

## Sacred texts



The Qur’an (Koran) is the primary book of divine guidance for Muslims. The original Arabic text is considered to be the final revelation containing Allah’s words spoken directly to the prophet Muhammad by Archangel Gabriel (Jibreel). Muslims also accept the Jewish Torah and Psalms, and the Christian Gospels as texts of God. The Qur’an refers to Jewish and Christian people as Ahl al-Kitab which means “people of the book” or “people of the Scripture”.



## Holy days, holidays, and ritual observances



Ramadan is the holy month of Islam and occurs each year in the ninth month of the calendar Hijri. The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar phases. This means that Ramadan does not occur at the same time annually; rather it is calculated for each year.

- » Muslims fast (sawm) from sun-up to sun-down during this month and use this time to reflect on their lives, purify their souls, refocus their attention to God, and practice self-sacrifice. Sawm literally means “to refrain”.
- » Fasting is not only avoiding food and drink but is a commitment of the believer’s entire body and soul. The tongue cannot speak harmful words, the eyes cannot look at haram (unlawful) things, the hand cannot commit sins, the ears cannot listen to gossip or obscene words, and the feet cannot go to places of sin.
- » During Ramadan, Muslims are expected to seek peace both within themselves and toward others, strengthen ties to family and friends, and do away with bad habits. Many Muslims give their Zakaat (charity) at this time.
- » During Ramadan you may wish a Muslim “Ramadan Mubarak” (Happy Ramadan or Blessed Ramadan). The appropriate response to this is “Allahu Akram” (Allah is most generous).
- » Eid al Fitr (Feast of breaking the fast): This is a three-day festival celebrating the end of Ramadan. It is a very social time, with much visiting, feasting, and parties. Special dishes are prepared, and family, relatives, friends, and neighbours are invited to join the celebration. Arab and Persian cultures place a strong emphasis on personal appearance. For Eid parties (which often have different sections for men and women), attendees wear formal clothes with lots of accessories, hair, and makeup. During Eid, it is appropriate to wish a Muslim “Eid Mubarak” (meaning Blessed Eid). Muslims often appreciate hearing this greeting from non-Muslims. Children often go from one house to another and receive small candies. Children also receive gifts for Eid.
- » Eid al Adha: (Feast of the Sacrifice) This occurs at the end of Hajj, (the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) and commemorates Abraham’s (Ibrahim) willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (Ismail) to God.
- » Because Muslim tradition focuses on religious rather than personal celebrations, many Muslims do not celebrate birthdays as in Australia. Most Muslim older people would be happy to receive birthday wishes, but caregivers should not be surprised if family and friends do not bring cake and presents.

## Caring practices during illness



- » Muslims may see their illness as purifying their sins and believe that enduring trials on Earth will result in greater Divine reward. Others might fear that their illness is Divine punishment.
- » Islam follows a halal diet (described below). It is best to ask the older person and their families about dietary restrictions.
  - Pork, bacon, ham, or any pork by-product (e.g. gelatin, which is used in many soups, yoghurt and margarine) is haram or forbidden.
  - Other than pork products, all meat is allowed if it is halal. This means that it is sacrificed according to Islamic law.
  - It is acceptable for Muslims to eat meat prepared by non-Muslims as long as it is halal, according to Surah al-Maida, v.5 in the Qur’an, and also Muhammad’s own practices as recorded in the hadith (Islamic traditions).



- There are no restrictions on seafood, vegetables, dairy products, or fruit.
- Alcohol is forbidden, even in cooking.
- » People who are unwell are not required to fast during Ramadan. However, many Muslims will want to try to participate even if they are ill. It may be helpful to have the family or other caregivers involved in negotiating fasting practices.
- » Many Muslims prefer to use their right hand for eating and drinking. If a person needs help eating, use the right hand if touching the food directly. Either hand is acceptable if utensils are used.
- » Modesty is extremely important for Muslim men and women. Genders are usually separated unless the person is a close relative. Most Muslims will want a carer that is the same gender. Only the areas on the body that require attention should be touched or exposed.
  - Some Muslim women will not allow a male worker to touch them. Older people who strictly follow these practices may find it challenging to let these rules go even for medical reasons.
  - Both Muslim men and women are required to dress modestly. While there is great diversity, many Muslim women wear the hijab (head covering), and other modest garments when in the company of men or in public.
- » Muslims perform ritual washing (Wudu) before prayer. Providing a basin of water at the bedside for a bedbound older person is appreciated. If a person is unable to wash with water, they are permitted to perform Taiem-mum which is a dry, symbolic cleansing.
- » In residential care, the person may prefer a chapel for prayer, or they may pray in their own rooms. Praying on a prayer rug is preferred, but a clean sheet or towel can also be used. If it is difficult for a resident to face Mecca to pray because the person is very ill and cannot turn to face Mecca, it is acceptable for the person to pray anywhere, facing any direction.
- » Family plays an important role in the life of an elderly or sick person, so it is not unusual for there to be a large number of visitors. It is considered a virtue to visit the sick.
- » Muslims will appreciate being assisted to perform Islamic acts of worship, including access to a Qur'an. An imam, (a Sunni Islamic spiritual leader), or a family member (or Christian clergy if neither are available) may recite portions of the Qur'an with the older person.<sup>2</sup>

## End of life practices

- » Muslims believe God predestines death's timing, prompting their acceptance of the dying phase.
- » A dying person should face Mecca, if possible, with the head elevated.
- » Death is considered a passing stage between this life and the life to come. Muslims believe that the spirit departs from the body at the time of death. Around the time of death, all family members, including children, gather to reaffirm the central beliefs of the Islamic faith with the dying person (Al Shahadatan).
- » A Muslim body is afforded the same dignity and respect as a living person. After death, only Muslims of the same gender, or a close relative of the opposite gender, may handle the body.
- » However, for practical purposes, there are some tasks that need to be attended to immediately after death. These may be performed by non-Muslim care staff who need to be of the same gender. These tasks are:
  - Eyes and mouth should be closed immediately.
  - The lower jaw should be tied to the head to keep the mouth closed.
  - Straighten the body.



- Do not cut the nails.
- Bind the feet together.

While these tasks are performed, family members and the imam (if present) pray.

- » Muslims are always buried, never cremated. Before burial, the body needs to be ritually washed and shrouded; these tasks are always to be performed by Muslims.
- » Most communities with a Muslim population have at least one designated person of each gender trained to oversee preparation of the body.
- » The body may be removed by a funeral director authorised by the Muslim community.
- » The funeral is a very simple ceremony, and usually occurs at a Mosque.<sup>3</sup>

## Readings and prayers <sup>4</sup>

Many Muslims recite the first chapter of the Qur'an (al Fatiha - "the Opening") daily as an essential part of the five daily prayers.

### **Al Fatiha**

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.  
Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the world;  
most Gracious, Most Merciful;  
Master of the Day of Judgment.  
Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek.  
Show us the straight way,  
the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,  
those whose portion is not wrath, and who go not astray.

### **For the Sick:**

You are the All-Powerful, Benevolent God.

We come before you not with confidence in ourselves but with full trust in you. You are the All Wise One who created [Name], who is before us in pain of body, distress of mind, and fearful in spirit. His/her illness is taking its toll upon him/her. We ask, Oh! Holy One, that you will be pleased to give [Name] patience to endure the pain in thankfulness to you.

May strength to cope with each day's burdens be granted him/her. We ask this not for ourselves but that his/her faith in you and submission to your will may not falter. Grant that faith will be sufficient unto the day when you summon all before the Judgment. On that Day, may [Name] be granted entry to Paradise. Insha'Allah (God willing).



### **For the Dying:**

There is no God but Allah, the Forbearing, the Generous.  
There is no God but Allah, the High, the Grand. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Seven Heavens and the Seven Earths and what is in them, between them, and beneath them. And the Lord of the Great Throne, and praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Universe.

*If possible, the dying person may recite:*

O Allah, forgive me, have mercy on me and unite me with the Most High Companion. None is worthy of praise beside Allah. Surely death has many hardships and difficulties. O Allah, help me in overcoming the throes and difficulties of death.

*After death: Recited by those who are present:*

O Allah, forgive [Name]; and raise his/her status in Paradise – the Garden among the rightly guided people; and be his/her representative among his/her people who he/she has left behind and forgive us and him/her. O Sustainer of the worlds. And O Allah, make his/her grace vast and accommodating and fill it with light.

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# JUDAISM





## Beliefs and values



Judaism, which gave rise to Christianity and Islam, began nearly 4,000 years ago in the land that is now Israel and Palestine. Abraham and Moses are important figures in Judaism. Judaism is based on the belief in one God and that human beings are created in the image of God. Human beings are given freedom of choice, and they serve as God's partners in completing creation. Jewish congregations range from the highly traditional (Hasidic, Ultra-Orthodox, and Modern Orthodox) to the liberal (the Reform and Reconstructionist branches) with conservative Jews falling somewhere between these two. Many Jews are not religiously observant, but identify strongly with Judaism from an ethical, cultural, or historical perspective. However, religious practices are often integrated into daily life and separating religious practice from Jewish culture can be difficult.

Authority within Judaism comes from its sacred writings, laws and traditions, instead of from any person or group. Jewish people are obliged to debate and wrestle with their sacred texts. Judaism stresses performance commandments (Mitzvot) rather than following a belief system. Religious Jews place emphasis on living a moral and ethical life rather than on eternal rewards. Judaism stresses human responsibility in this life rather than attributing life events to "God's will".

### A summary of core beliefs and values includes:<sup>1</sup>

- » God is both transcendent (above and beyond all of creation), and a divine presence.
- » God is timeless and eternal.
- » God chose Israel to carry out a unique responsibility in the world.
- » Obeying God's commandments is central to being a faithful Jew.
- » When this world becomes a place fit for the Divine, God will send a human Messiah who will bring an era of peace. (Messiah is understood differently among the various branches of Judaism, and it is also different from the Christian understanding of Messiah).
- » The family is the central unit of society.
- » Practicing charity is a legally binding obligation.
- » There is a strong commitment to education, learning and work.
- » Ceremony and tradition are very important.

## Sacred texts



The complete Jewish sacred text is called the Tanach. This includes the Torah (the five books of Moses, known as the Law), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Ketuvim (the Writings). The Tanach consists of the same books as the Old Testament in the Christian tradition, though ordered differently. Jewish sacred texts also include the Talmud, which is a collection of Jewish oral traditions interpreting the Torah.

## Holy days, holidays, and ritual observances



Holidays are very important to most Jewish people, especially Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. These holidays may affect the scheduling of medical procedures and may require dietary changes. All Jewish holidays begin and end at sundown:

**Weekly Shabbat (Sabbath):** This holy day occurs each week from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday and it is based on the text from Bereishit (Genesis): "So G-d blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it G-d rested from all the work that he had done in creation."



In care settings, observing Shabbat may affect travelling, using lifts, signing papers, preparing for funerals, and removing the body after death. Burial and grieving are not permitted on the Sabbath. “Shabbat Shalom”, wishing the person the peace of the Sabbath, is a customary greeting. Any other time, Shalom (meaning peace or wholeness/completeness) is a usual greeting and a farewell.

**Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year):** This is a time to think about mistakes of the past year and resolutions for the coming year. It is celebrated on the first and second of the month of Tishrei (in the Western calendar, Rosh Hashanah typically occurs in September). During this time Jewish people reflect on their actions and seek to make amends with each other and with God. Many people eat apples and honey in hope of a new year that is happy, pure, and free from previous mistakes. It is a time of both celebration and serious reflection and is marked by the sounding of the Shofar (ram’s horn) as a call for repentance.

**Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement):** Yom Kippur occurs on the tenth day of Tishrei (eight days after Rosh Hashanah), and is the most important holiday in the Jewish year. It is a solemn day, a time to reflect on and to repent and atone for sins of the past year. In Jewish tradition, this is the day God seals the Book of Life and Death for the coming year. The traditional greeting, “G’mar Chatimah Tovah” (May You Be Sealed for a Good Year) reflects the purpose of this day.

**Sukkot (Feast of Booths), Pesach (Passover), and Shavuot (Feast of Weeks):** These are the three major festivals associated with the Torah.

- » **Sukkot** is a harvest festival and begins five days after Yom Kippur.
- » **Pesach** occurs in the early spring and begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan. It commemorates the exodus of Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, as told in the book of Shemot (Exodus). On the first night of Pesach, Jewish families gather for an important ceremonial meal, called the Seder.
- » **Shavuot** occurs seven weeks after Pesach, and commemorates God giving the Torah (the five books of Moses) to Moses on Mount Sinai. Some Jewish people observe this holiday by studying the Torah throughout the entire first night of Shavuot.

**Chanukah:** This is an eight-day festival that commemorates the rededication and purification of the temple in 167 B.C. It begins on the 25th day of the month of Kislev (usually late November or December) and is celebrated by lighting a candle each night on the Menorah (candelabra). It is a minor holiday in Judaism, but sometimes receives much attention because it takes place close to the Christian holiday of Christmas.<sup>2</sup> Traditional games and gifts are a part of this holiday.

## Caring practices during illness

- » Most Jewish residents appreciate a visit from a rabbi (a Jewish religious leader).
- » Many Jewish men wear a yarmulke or kippah (skull cap) for prayer, some may wear it at all times. Some people may also wear prayer shawls and use Tefillin (phylacteries), which are two small boxes that contain verses from scripture and are worn on the forehead and forearm during prayer.
- » Jewish people may ask for a Minyan (a group of at least ten people) for prayer.
- » Some Jewish people follow a strict set of religious guidelines that prohibits work on the Sabbath or on religious holidays. This includes using certain tools, writing, adjusting a motorised bed, or pushing buttons to call a staff member. These restrictions are generally associated with Orthodox Judaism but may also be important for any Jewish older person.
- » Only life-saving medical procedures should be scheduled during the Sabbath or on religious holidays.







- » Jewish religious laws include a complex set of restrictions that can affect medical decisions. Exceptions are made to religious laws when it is a matter of saving a life. In Judaism “saving a life” is of the highest value. Some Jewish people may require a Kosher diet. This includes the special preparation of some food (such as beef), as well as the prohibition of some foods (such as pork and gelatin) and food combinations (such as beef served with dairy products).

## End of life practices

- » Death cannot be accelerated, but extraordinary measures to prolong life may be refused.
- » Withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining therapy is strongly debated within Judaism. Most Jewish families will wish to talk with a rabbi about the specific circumstances and decisions regarding end-of-life care.
- » Jewish people believe that a “good” death is one where the dying person has lived a long life, is surrounded by loved ones, and is at home.
- » A dying person should not be left alone. During the last minutes of life no one in the presence of the older person should leave except in an emergency. Watching over a person as they pass from this world to the next is considered a sign of great respect.
- » As death draws near, the first line of the Shema may be recited: “Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One.” Also, Psalm 23 and the entire Shema may be read.
- » A person may confess their sins to God directly and invoke God’s forgiveness.
- » Judaism teaches that the moment of the departure of the soul is one of the most sacred moments in a person’s life and is also one with great potential. The dying person, or those present, affirms God’s unity by saying the Shema, and performs Teshuva, an act of repentance. According to Judaism, people may repair, enhance, or resolve any aspect of their lives for as long as they live.<sup>3</sup>
- » After death, the person’s eyes and mouth are closed, preferably by a close relative, and a sheet is drawn over the face. The body should not be touched except to show honour, for example straightening the body if it is in an awkward position.
- » If possible, the windows should be opened.
- » A candle should be placed near the head of the deceased as a symbol of the human soul, and of God’s eternal presence. If death occurs on the Sabbath, this is not done.
- » Some Jewish groups do not permit the body to be moved on the Sabbath.
- » Judaism teaches that the soul does not completely leave this world until the body is buried, so the time between death and burial is a time of disorientation for the departed. The presence of others who show their care through respect and prayer is very comforting to the departed, and to the family.
- » Usually a family member or representative will accompany the body, at all times, until the burial occurs.
- » Care of the body is important, and some communities have a Chevra Kadisha, or a group of people dedicated to the holy work of caring for the body.
- » Friends and neighbours may sit Shiva with the family for seven days after the funeral, mourning with them and caring for their needs.
- » It is not appropriate to send flowers, but food is appreciated.
- » Jewish tradition prefers burial within 24 hours of death.<sup>4</sup>
- » When hearing about a death, many Jews say “Baruch Dayan Haemet” (Blessed is the true Judge). It acknowledges that this is beyond human understanding.



## Readings and Prayers

### **Mi Sheberach: May the One Who Blessed**

*(Traditional Prayer for the Sick)*

May the One who blessed our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and our foremothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael, and Leah, bless and heal [Name] the son/daughter of [Name]. May the Holy One blessed by G-d, be merciful and strengthen and heal him/her. Grant [Name] a complete and speedy recovery — healing of body and healing of soul, along with all the ill.

And let us say Amen.

The following Psalms may be appreciated:

*For the elderly:* Psalms 22, 38, 41, 71

*Psalms of Hope:* Psalms 23, 41, 71

*Psalms of Lament:* Psalms 22, 38, 88

### **Shema**

*(This is a prominent and familiar prayer in Judaism and is often recited morning and evening.)*

Hear, O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One.

You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for a reminder between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

And it will be, if you will diligently obey My commandments which I enjoin upon you this day, to love the L-rd your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give rain for your land at the proper time, the early rain and the late rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be sated. Take care lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then the L-rd's wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land which the L-rd gives you. Therefore, place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul, and bind them for a sign on your hand, and they



shall be for a reminder between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates – so that your days and the days of your children may be prolonged on the land which the L-rd swore to your fathers to give to them for as long as the heavens are above the earth.

The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach a thread of blue on the fringe of each corner. They shall be to you as Tzitzit, and you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of the L-rd and fulfill them, and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes by which you go astray – so that you may remember and fulfill all My commandments and be holy to your G-d. I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d; I, the L-rd, am your G-d. True.

## Viduy

*When death is near an individual may be encouraged to say a set of prayers called Viduy (confession). These are prayers that invoke God's mercy. It is important to know that saying Viduy does not mean that death is imminent, in fact it is best if the prayers can be recited with a clear mind. If the person is unable to pray, others may pray Viduy on the older person's behalf.*

“Upon you, O Lord my G-d and G-d of my ancestors, I acknowledge that my life and recovery depend upon you.

“May it be Your will to heal me. Yet, if You have decreed that I shall die of this affliction, may my death atone for all sins and transgressions which I have committed before you. Shelter me in the shadow of Your wings, grant me a share in the world-to-come. Protector of orphans and Guardian of widows protect my beloved family, with whose soul my own soul is bound.

“Into Your hand I commit my soul. You have redeemed me, O Lord G-d of truth. Hear O Israel: The Lord our G-d. The Lord is One.”



### **Kel Moleh Rachamim**

*(The traditional prayer for a funeral or memorial service)*

G-d, full of compassion, Who dwells on high, grant perfect rest beneath the shadow of thy divine presence in the exalted places among the holy and pure, who shine like the glow of the firmament for the soul of [Name], who went on to his/her eternal home. In the merit that we remember them and recall all their good deeds, may You, O G-d of mercy, shelter [Name] forever under the wings of Your divine presence. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life eternal, and grant that his/her memories ever inspire us to a noble and consecrated living. Amen.

### **The Kaddish**

A prayer of praise of God is also said in memory of the dead, as a way of affirming the goodness of the universe in the face of death.

*Thank you to Dr Philip Bliss OAM, Progressive Judaism Victoria and Rabbi Yoseph Nerenberg, Rabbinical Council of Victoria and Jewish Care for input and comments for this section.*

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# SIKHISM





## Beliefs and values

Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, was born in 1469 in Punjab, India. Nine Gurus or divine teachers followed him. Sikhs believe there is only One, Universal, Formless, Timeless Loving Creator of all people, who created the universe and all that is in it. "Sikh" means learner, and Sikhism is a disciplined path of conscious meditation of the One True Creator, earning an honest living, sharing with those less fortunate, and selfless service to humanity.<sup>1</sup> Though sometimes mistaken for members of a sect of Hinduism or Islam, Sikhs belong to a distinct religion, with its own unique, divine scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. The equality of all humanity is very important in Sikhism. An initiated Sikh (one who has completed the ceremony of initiation or "Amrit Sanchar") is known as a member of the Khalsa order.<sup>2</sup>



## Sacred texts

Sikh Holy Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, is considered as the Eternal living Guru, and is at the heart of Sikh worship and life. The presence of the Scripture, when placed on the altar in Gurudwara Sahib (Sikh place of worship), sanctifies the Gurudwara. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji contains devotional compositions and hymns. This extraordinary poetic treasure of sacred and practical wisdom contains not only the writings of the Sikh Gurus, but also, those of Muslim and Hindu saints as well. The holy text was written by the Gurus themselves.



## Observances

Sikh congregations throughout the world observe the following days

- » **Gupurab (Celebrating the Guru):** The anniversary of the life of Gurus are celebrated on different dates throughout the year.
- » **Vaisakhi (or Baisakhi):** This is one of the most important holidays for Sikhs and celebrates the creation of the Khalsa order in 1699 by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. It occurs in mid-April. A similar Vaisakhi cultural celebration occurs in Punjab, India (95% of Sikhs are of Punjab descendency), with fairs, music, song, dance and food.
- » **Martyrdom of the Gurus:** Sikhs commemorate the martyrdom of the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji and the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur Ji who gave their lives to uphold the Truth and Social Justice for others.
- » In October, Sikhs celebrate an enthronement day for Sri Guru Granth Sahib.
- » **Bandi Chhor Divas ("Day of Liberation")** is a Sikh holiday which coincides with the day of Diwali in October. The day commemorates the release of Guru Hargobind Sahib along with 52 other kings from the Gwalior Prison in the year 1619. Bandhi literally means to be imprisoned, chhor means to release, and divas means day. Thus, Bandhi Chhor Divas is a day of liberation for the Sikhs, when they celebrate the victory of good over evil. It commemorates the end of the year, and the Sixth Guru's return from captivity. Sikhs exchange gifts and sweets.
- » The end of November also commemorates the Sikh Faith founder Guru Nanak Dev's birthday.<sup>3</sup>





## Caring practices during illness



- » All initiated Sikhs wear the five Ks of Khalsa (listed below). When caring for a Sikh person it is important to keep the five Ks and their practices in mind:<sup>4</sup>
  - **Kesh:** uncut hair, often worn in a bun, and often covered with a turban. After removing their head covering, many Sikh people may wish to cover their head with another small covering (for example, small scarf or a surgical cap). A head covering should never be placed near shoes. Always ask the older person before removing any hair on the head or body.<sup>5</sup>
  - **Kangha:** a small comb that keeps the bun in place. If it must be removed for a medical reason, it should stay close to the older person's body.
  - **Kara:** a steel wrist bangle or bracelet. It was originally used to protect the arm from cuts from a bowstring, but it is now worn as a symbol of the unity of One True Creator. During surgery it should be covered but not removed. If it must be removed, it should remain close to the older person's body.
  - **Kirpan:** a short dagger or knife that symbolises Sikhs are prepared to fight injustice and protect the oppressed. Sikhs who wear kirpan, wear them at all times and removing it from them will cause distress. If it must be removed, the reasons should be clearly explained to the older person and family, and the kirpan must stay where the older person can see it.
  - **Kacchera:** white underpants or shorts that symbolise modesty and morality. When changing kacchera, one leg must stay in the old pair of kacchera until the other leg is inside the clean pair. This is important to remember when helping an older person to bathe or to change clothes.
- » Modesty and privacy are very important to Sikhs. A person's personal space should be respected, and they should only be touched when it is necessary.
- » In Indian culture, family members prefer to hear about medical news before the older person. It is better to share information in a subtle or delicate way than to directly tell the truth.<sup>6</sup>
- » If a person is praying, do not interrupt them for routine care.
- » While Sikhism permits receiving care from someone of a different gender, having a staff member that is the same gender is preferred.
- » Cleanliness is an important part of Sikh tradition. Caregivers should provide daily bathing and personal hygiene care, unless it is not possible for medical reasons. Hair, including male facial hair, should be combed at least once a day, and washed frequently.
- » It is a cultural and religious practice for Sikhs to visit the sick. Caregivers should try to accommodate visitors as much as possible. The extended family is as important to Sikhs as their immediate family.<sup>7</sup>
- » Many Sikhs are strict vegetarians abstaining from all meat, fish and eggs. However, vegetarian Sikhs do consume dairy products. Some Sikhs do not follow a vegetarian diet. Non-vegetarian Sikhs are not permitted to eat any meat that has been ritually slaughtered and should not be offered halal or kosher meals.<sup>8</sup> A Sikh person's family may wish to provide meals prepared at home.
- » Sikhs find it comforting to hear hymns or passages from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and visits from a Sikh Granthi (a designated ceremonial reader of the Sikh holy scripture or a Volunteer Sikh Chaplain). For more information please refer to *Sikh Patients in Hospital: Guide for Healthcare Professionals* <http://www.sikhinterfaithvic.org.au/guides.html>



## End of life practices

- » Sikhs are encouraged to accept death and illness as part of life and the will of God.
- » Cremation is usually performed quickly after a person dies. However, it can be delayed if the family is waiting for a close relative to arrive.
- » When someone is dying, it is important to sing Sikh hymns or read from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.
- » Family members will encourage the dying person to focus on the divine, and often recite the word Waheguru which means “Wondrous Enlightener”. At the time of death Waheguru is often recited.
- » Grieving is expressed with deep emotions but crying at the end of life is not permitted in Sikhism.<sup>9</sup>
- » After death, the body is washed and dressed in clean clothes, including, for the initiated Sikh, the five Ks of Khalsa.
- » The Sikh funeral is called Antaam Sanskaar or “Celebration of the Completion of Life.”
- » Funeral arrangements include Sadharan Paath or Akand Paath which means a complete reading of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

## Prayers and readings

### Sorath Mehalaa Panjva

He dispels the pains of countless incarnations, lending support to the dry and shrivelled mind.

Beholding His blessed vision, one is enraptured, when contemplating the Lord’s Name.

My physician is the Guru (Enlightener), the Universal Lord. Putting the medicine of His Remembrance and Name into my mouth, He cuts away the noose of Death.

The all-powerful, perfect Architect of Destiny, the Lord Himself is the Doer of deeds.

The Lord Himself saves His servant; Nanak takes the Support of His Name.

– *Sorath Raag, Fifth Guru*

### SriRaag Mehalaa Panjva

All things are received if the One is obtained.

The precious gift of this human life becomes fruitful when one recites the True Word of the Shabad.

Through the Enlightener, one who has such destiny written on his forehead enters the Mansion of the Lord’s Presence.

O my mind, focus your consciousness on the One Lord. Without the One, all else is worthless entanglements, emotional attachment to illusory Maya is completely false.





Hundreds of thousands of princely pleasures are enjoyed, if the True Enlightener bestows Grace of His Glance.

If He bestows the Lord's Name for even a moment, my mind and body are cooled and soothed.

Those who are preordained with such destiny, hold tightly to the True Enlightener's Feet and follow His path.

Fruitful is that moment, and fruitful is that time, when one embraces love for the True Lord.

Suffering and sorrow do not touch those who have the support of the Lord's Name.

Grasping their arm, the Guru lifts them up and out, and carries them across to the other side. Embellished and immaculate is that place where the Saints congregate.

Only that one finds shelter, who has met with the Perfect Guru. Nanak constructs his home upon that site where there is no death, birth, or old age.

– *Sri Raag, Fifth Guru*

Prayer is an important part of the daily routine of most Sikhs. Sikhs pray to seek God's help in recovering from illness. They remember Waheguru (God's name) to obtain peace and ask for forgiveness.

*Thank you to Jasbir Singh and Nirmal Singh, Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria for input and comments for this section.*

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## Additional resources

Access online versions and/or order copies of sacred texts from different traditions – please note there are usually multiple translations of different texts. Start with your usual supplier of materials, or preferred online store/app store. It is worth checking with the person about their preferences, or ask members of their family or faith community.

The main sacred texts are:

- » **Buddhism:** Sutras, the Sastras, and the Vinaya
- » **Christianity:** Holy Bible (The Bible, includes the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament)
- » **Hindusim:** Shruti and Smrti
- » **Islam:** Qur'an (Quran/Koran)
- » **Judaism:** Tanach (includes the Torah)/Hebrew Bible
- » **Sikhism:** Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji

## Meaningful Ageing Australia online resources

### National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care

Comprehensive principles covering a whole-of-organisation approach to spiritual care in aged care. There is also a wide library of documents and resources, including practical Implementation Tools for specific Guidelines.

<https://meaningfulageing.org.au/product/national-guidelines-for-spiritual-care-in-aged-care/>

### Resources Clearing House

A resource hub offering links and information across a wide range of subject areas, including specific religions.

<https://meaningfulageing.org.au/welcome-to-the-members-zone/resources-clearing-house/>

### Spiritual Care Consideration Series

Offers a range of information sheets for specific religions.

<https://meaningfulageing.org.au/product/spiritual-care-considerations-series/>



## Online resources

### Multifaith

#### **ABC Religion and Ethics**

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/guide-live-streamed-religious-services-australia/12138074>

A good starting point to find a wide range of different religious services streamed over the internet. Alternatively, you can search using the term 'streaming religious services'.

#### **BBC**

Religion & Ethics <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion>

#### **Patheos**

Hosting the Conversation on Faith. <http://www.patheos.com>

#### **Religion Dispatches**

<http://www.religiondispatches.org>

### Specific faith

#### **Australian National Imams Council (ANIC)**

<https://www.anic.org.au/>

#### **Australian Sangha Association**

<https://www.australiansangha.org/>

#### **Buddhism in Australia**

<https://www.buddhistcouncil.org/buddhism-in-australia/>

#### **Hindu Council of Australia**

<http://hinducouncil.com.au/>

#### **National Council of Churches Australia**

<https://www.ncca.org.au/>

#### **Progressive Judaism Victoria**

<https://www.pjv.org.au>

#### **Rabbinical Council of Victoria**

<https://www.rcv.org.au/>

#### **Sikh Council of Australia**

<http://www.sikhcouncil.org.au/>

#### **Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria**

<http://www.sikhinterfaithvic.org.au/>



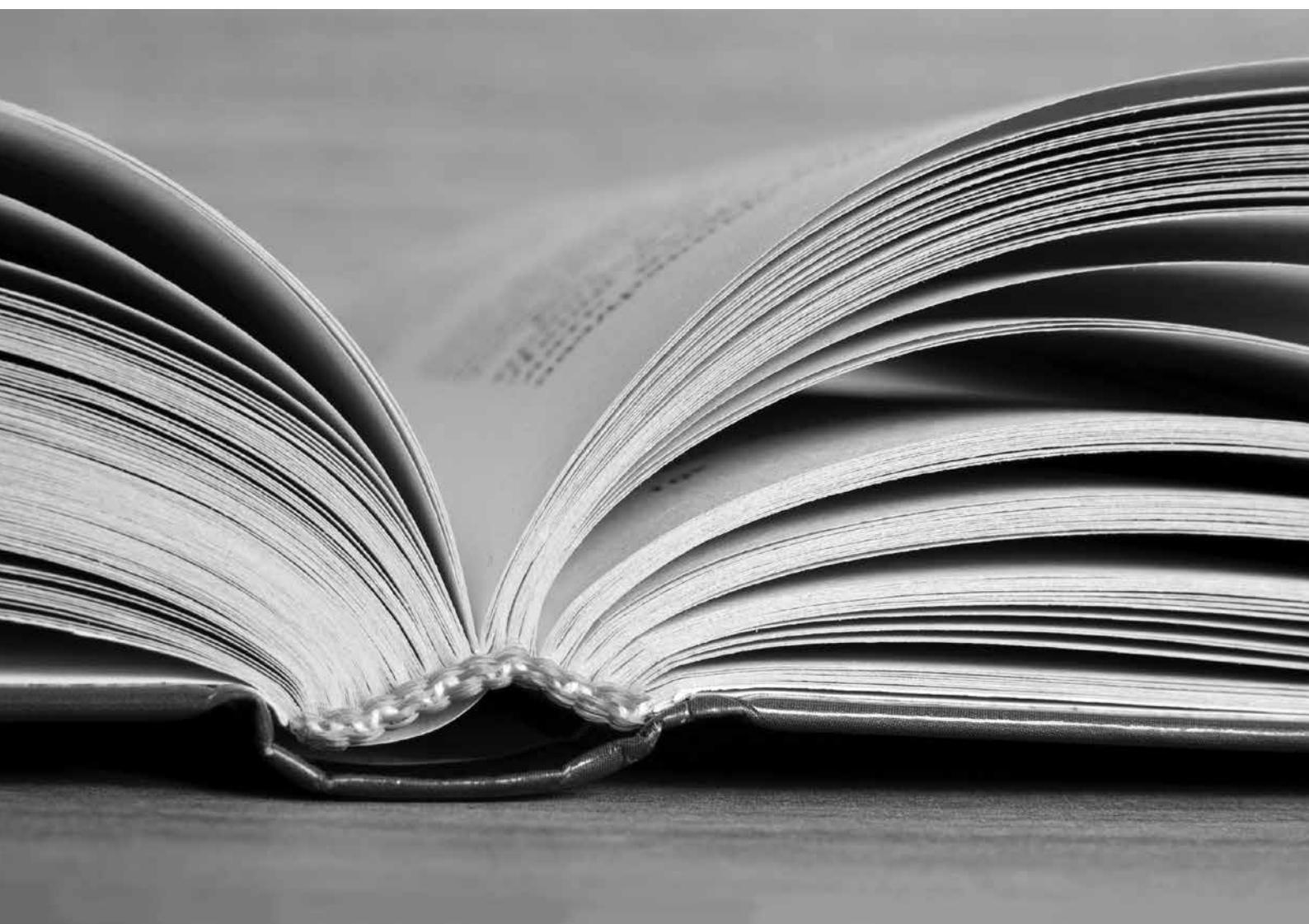
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