

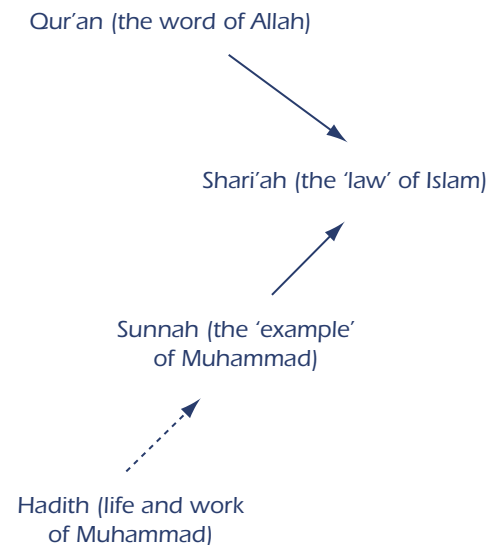
The Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad in Arabic, and is still written in that language. This means that it cannot be changed or misinterpreted.



Young Muslims learning Arabic to read the Qur'an

What is the Hadith?

This contains various accounts about the life and activities of Muhammad that passed among Muslims after his death. The most reliable accounts became known as **Sunnah** (custom), the example set by Muhammad's own life which all Muslims should follow. There are several Hadith collections and they elaborate on the rules given in the Qur'an on all aspects of life.



Worship in Islam

How do Muslims worship?

Muslims may pray alone or with other Muslims. However, even when they pray alone in their home or workplace they are aware of the whole community of Muslims praying together. All Muslims will be facing Makkah and all will be performing the same actions and words. At the end of the prayer session, each worshipper will turn to the right and the left to acknowledge their fellow worshippers.



What is the mosque?



A masjid

The Muslim place of public worship is the **masjid** (mosque). Masjids can vary greatly in shape and size, from magnificent structures on a grand scale to the plainest, most basic of buildings. However, they share a number of fundamental features. These include an enclosed hall, where Muslim's kneel, sit or prostrate themselves before Allah to perform their prayer; an opening or niche (**mihrab**) in an interior wall that indicates the direction of

What holy places are special for Hindus?

For Hindus, making a pilgrimage to a holy site, of which there are many in India, is regarded as an important way of showing devotion to God and is thought to bring great blessings to those who make such a journey in the right spirit.

Holy places for Hindus are usually located on the banks of rivers, coasts, seashores and mountains. Because water is essential for life, Hindus believe that it comes from God and is a part of God. This is one of the reasons why rivers are often places of pilgrimage in India, in particular the River Ganges at Varanasi (Benares). Bathing is also important in Hinduism because it is believed that the worshipper must be in a state of cleanliness to appear before God to worship.



Pilgrims bathing in the River Ganges at Varanasi

While most Hindus hold that pilgrimage is a great honour, some question its worth, arguing that true pilgrimage is the inner journey of the soul.



Suchinderam temple and tank for ritual bathing in Tamil Nadu



The Hindu Way of Life

How are class divisions viewed within Hinduism?

Traditionally, Indian society has been divided into four main religious groups (**varnas**):

- The priests (**Brahmins**), teachers and spiritual leaders.
- The nobles and warriors (**Kshatriyas**) who maintain law and good government.
- The merchants and peasants (**Vaishyas**) who are responsible for trade and commerce, agriculture and industry.
- The labourers (**Sudras**) who are craftsmen and manual workers.

What is the caste system?

As Indian communities grew and developed, the four main varnas became divided into a number of sub-classes (**jatis**) or caste groups. Caste is a social group into which a Hindu is born depending on the occupation or background of their parents. There are numerous castes, each with its own laws of purity, eating, marriage and social mixing. Caste defines a person's religious and social duties and responsibilities. Marriage and other social contacts have been traditionally kept within the same caste.

The three highest castes wear a sacred thread as a sign that they are twice born (see page 73, The student stage). A person remains within the caste into which they were born, but after they die they can be reborn into a higher or lower caste, or even as an animal, depending on whether or not they have lived a good life. Although the caste system ensured that all necessary tasks in society were performed, some aspects of it have been banned by the Indian government in recent times. This was because it did not allow people equality of opportunity and wasted much talent. Nevertheless, it is still very influential in villages, but less so in large towns and cities.



Sikh Way of Life

What is the Sikh way of life?

Nanak taught that the path to God was made possible by:

- worshipping and repeating the divine name of God
- keeping the company of the **Sat Sangat** (True Believers)
- living in the community of the Khalsa and caring for the needy by sharing the fruits of hard work
- performing **sewa**
- success in business or hard work (karo).



Sikhs would also say that the wearing of the five Ks is important.

Why are all Sikh men called Singh?

The name '**Singh**' means lion. It describes how members of the Khalsa should act. They should be both gentle and fearsome when faced with persecution or any other wrong. In this way Sikhs have gained great respect throughout the world. This name was given to Sikh men at the first **Vaisakhi** in 1699 CE by Guru Gobind Singh.

Why are all Sikh women called Kaur?

Guru Gobind Singh said that all Sikh women should adopt the name '**Kaur**', which means princess. It means that Sikh women should behave and be treated like princesses. This gave equal rights to women at a time when they had few rights. Many Sikh women have fought alongside men against persecution.



Sikh Worship

How do Sikhs worship?

The emphasis in Sikhism is on an individual's freedom from samsara and his or her own need to achieve enlightenment in order for this to happen. Worship in Sikhism is, therefore, a very personal thing except in major shrines of international importance. In order to worship, Sikhs:

- visit Gurdwaras (the Gateway or Doorway to the Guru – the name for the Sikh place of worship)
- offer fruit and flowers or money at the palki – the daily resting place of the Guru Granth Sahib
- the Guru Granth Sahib should be shown respect by the waving of the **chauri**
- listen to the Gurbani (the teachings of the Gurus) in the company of the Sat Sangat
- repeat and meditate on the name of God
- share sacred food – **karah parshad**
- share a communal meal in the **Langar** – communal kitchen and dining room.



While praying (Nam Japa) Sikhs will recite the **Japji** and other prayers at the appropriate time of the day. The **Rahit Maryada**, the Sikh code of discipline, also requires them to read sections of the Guru Granth Sahib in a specially laid out sequence. Sikhs may also use a set of 108 beads called a Mala. The phrase 'Waha Guru' – God is great – is chanted 108 times.