



Reference Calendar of Religious Observances

APPENDIX

Description of religions

All religious descriptions provided by Religious Tolerance; <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

Judaism: Judaism is an Abrahamic religion -- a faith which recognizes Abraham as a Patriarch. Others include Christianity Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Circa 2000 BCE, the G-d of the ancient Israelites established a divine covenant with Abraham, making him the patriarch of many nations. The term Abrahamic Religions is derived from his name. These are the three or four major religions which trace their roots back to Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Baha'i Faith. The Baha'i faith is often not included among the Abramic religions. Also, smaller non-Jewish groups such as Falashas, Karaits, Mandaeanism, Rastafarians, Samaritans, etc. trace their spiritual roots back to Abraham.

Islam: Islam is the second most popular religion in the world. There were about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world in 2010, according to Pew Research. Muslims constituted about 23% of all people on Earth. The religion is currently in a period of rapid growth, and is expected to reach 2.8 billion by 2050, when the number of Muslims will probably approximately equal the number of Christians in the world. 1

Estimates of the number of Muslim adults in the U.S. have ranged from about 1 to 7 million. The former estimate is based on public opinion polls and assume that almost all adults who consider themselves Muslims are willing to respond openly to public opinion pollsters. Because of the widespread islamophobia in the country, this value is probably an underestimate. The latter estimate comes from Muslim groups in the U.S. who assume that all immigrants to the U.S. from Muslim countries were Muslims and have remained so to the present time. It is probably an overestimate.

Christianity: There are many definitions for this term. Many people regard "Christianity" and their own denomination's name to be synonyms. That is, their faith group is viewed as teaching the only truly legitimate Christian faith. Their group, alone, has the "fullness of truth" while all other groups are in error. In contrast, others view "Christianity" as including the full range of faith groups from the most conservative fundamentalist to the most progressive Christian denomination.

"We accept as Christian any individual or group who devoutly, thoughtfully, seriously, and prayerfully regards themselves to be Christian. That is, they honestly believe that they follow Yeshua of Nazareth's (a.k.a. Jesus Christ's) teachings as they understand them to be. "

Other individuals and groups have much narrower definitions of the term. They often believe that their faith group is the "true" Christian religion, and that all others are in error. That is certainly their right, but it does cause a great deal of confusion, frustration, anger, and conflict.

Roman Catholic: We [use the term Roman Catholic] to avoid confusion. Most Christian faith groups acknowledge the Nicene Creed and thus regard themselves as "Catholic," at least as far as being part of the "catholic and apostolic church." Within any one given faith group, the meaning of the term "Catholic" is relatively clear. But our site deals with all Christian denominations and all other religions. To assure clarity and to avoid ambiguity, we use the term "Roman Catholic" when referring to the church headed by the pope in Rome. We use similar terms (e.g. Evangelical Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, Old Catholic) when referring to some other faith groups.

Buddhism: Buddhism is often listed as the fourth largest religion in the world. It is exceeded in numbers only by Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Estimates of the precise number of Buddhists in the world vary between 350 and 1,500 million, making Buddhism the second, third or fourth largest world religion.

Buddhism was founded in Northern India by Siddhartha Gautama in the sixth century BCE. However, Buddhists believe that there were countless Buddhas -- humans who have achieved enlightenment -- before him and that there will be many more after him. When Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment, he assumed the title Lord Buddha (one who has awakened)

Hindu: Hinduism differs from Christianity and other monotheistic religions in that it does not have:

a single founder, a specific theological system, a single concept of deity, a single holy text, a single system of morality, a central religious authority, the concept of a prophet.

Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organized religion. It consists of "thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in India since 1500 BCE." 1 Because of the wide variety of Hindu traditions, freedom of belief and practice have traditionally been notable features of Hinduism.

Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic religions. They recognize a single deity, and view other Gods and Goddesses as manifestations or aspects of that supreme God or Goddess. Henotheistic and polytheistic religions have traditionally been among the world's most religiously tolerant faiths. As a result, India has traditionally been one of the most religiously tolerant in the world.

Sikh: Sikhism was founded by Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, (1469-1538). At Sultanpur, he received a vision to preach the way to enlightenment and God. He taught a strict monotheism, the brotherhood of humanity. He rejected idol worship, and the oppressive Hindu concept of caste.

The name of the religion means learner. It is often mispronounced 'seek' It should be pronounced 'se-ikh', with the final 'kh' sound like the 'kh' in Mikhail Gorbachev.

Wicca: Wicca is the largest of the Neopagan religions in the U.S. and other Western countries. Wiccans have great reverence for the Earth and for their Goddess and her consort, the horned God. Their main rule of behavior is the Wiccan Rede which forbids them from harming people, including themselves, except in some cases of self-defense.

Many, perhaps most, are solitary practitioners. Others form small groups of believers, called covens, groves, etc. Because of centuries of religious propaganda and misinformation, many conservative Christians, and others, associate Wiccans with Satanists even though the two belief systems are as different as Christianity and Atheism. Wicca is a very different religion from Christianity.

Jehovah's Witness: "The worldwide [Jehovah's Witnesses] organization is directed by an unpaid governing body serving at the international offices in Brooklyn, New York. It uses the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania....to publish literature, supervise global evangelizing, and organize conventions and schools for the ministry of Jehovah's Witnesses." 1

This essay is one of many dozens of essays on Christian denominations. It is published by the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance which is not related to either the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society or the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Bahá'í: The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's main religions. It was founded in Iran during the mid 19th century by Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad (1819-1850 CE). He assumed the title Bab ("the Gate") and prophesized the future arrival of "One greater than Himself."

The asymmetrical five pointed star...is the official symbol of the Bahá'í Faith; it was taken from an unidentified tablet in the Bab's handwriting. The nine-pointed star symbol is an alternate and commonly used symbol.

One of the Bab's followers, Mirza Husayn-'Ali-i-Nuri (1817-1892), announced that he was the Manifestation predicted by the Bab. He assumed the title Baha'u'llah ("glory of God"). His teachings on world peace, democracy, civil rights, equal rights for women, the acceptance of scientific discoveries, etc. were decades ahead of his time.

Bahá'ís believe in a single God who has repeatedly sent prophets into the world through whom he has revealed the "Word of God." Prophets include Adam, Krishna, Buddha, Yeshua of Nazareth (Jesus), Mohammed, The Bab and Baha'u'llah.

The Bahá'í faith is still looked upon by many Muslims as a breakaway sect of Islam. Bahá'ís are very heavily persecuted in some countries, particularly Iran.