

Paganism

Paganism (from classical Latin *pāgānus* "rural", "rustic", later "civilian") is a term first used in the fourth century by early Christians for people in the Roman Empire who practiced polytheism^[1] or ethnic religions other than Judaism. In the time of the Roman empire, individuals fell into the pagan class either because they were increasingly rural and provincial relative to the Christian population, or because they were not *militēs Christi* (soldiers of Christ).^{[2][3]} Alternative terms in Christian texts were *hellene*, *gentile*, and *heathen*.^[1] Ritual sacrifice was an integral part of ancient Graeco-Roman religion^[4] and was regarded as an indication of whether a person was pagan or Christian.^[4] Paganism has broadly connoted the "religion of the peasantry".^{[1][5]}

During and after the Middle Ages, the term *paganism* was applied to any non-Christian religion, and the term presumed a belief in false god(s).^{[6][7]} The origin of the application of the term *pagan* to polytheism is debated.^[8] In the 19th century, paganism was adopted as a self-descriptor by members of various artistic groups inspired by the ancient world. In the 20th century, it came to be applied as a self-descriptor by practitioners of Modern Paganism, Neopagan movements and Polytheistic reconstructionists. Modern pagan traditions often incorporate beliefs or practices, such as nature worship, that are different from those in the largest world religions.^{[9][10]}

Contemporary knowledge of old pagan religions and beliefs comes from several sources, including anthropological field research records, the evidence of archaeological artifacts, and the historical accounts of ancient writers regarding cultures known to Classical antiquity. Most modern pagan religions existing today (Modern or Neopaganism^{[11][12]}) express a world view that is pantheistic, panentheistic, polytheistic or animistic, but some are monotheistic.^[13]



Romanticized depiction from 1887 showing two Roman women offering a sacrifice to the goddess Vesta

Contents

Nomenclature and etymology

Pagan

Hellene

Heathen

Definition

Perception

Ethnocentrism

History

Pre-History

Bronze Age to Early Iron Age

Classical antiquity

Late Antiquity and Christianization

Islam in Arabia

Early Modern period

Romanticism

Modern Paganism

Ethnic religions of pre-Christian Europe

See also

Notes

References

External links

Nomenclature and etymology

Pagan

It is crucial to stress right from the start that until the 20th century, people did not call themselves pagans to describe the religion they practised. The notion of paganism, as it is generally understood today, was created by the early Christian Church. It was a label that Christians applied to others, one of the antitheses that were central to the process of Christian self-definition. As such, throughout history it was generally used in a derogatory sense.

— Owen Davies, *Paganism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2011^[8]

The term *pagan* is derived from Late Latin *paganus*, revived during the Renaissance. Itself deriving from classical Latin *pagus* which originally meant 'region delimited by markers', *paganus* had also come to mean 'of or relating to the countryside', 'country dweller', 'villager'; by extension, 'rustic', 'unlearned', 'yokel', 'bumpkin'; in Roman military jargon, 'non-combatant', 'civilian', 'unskilled soldier'. It is related to *pangere* ('to fasten', 'to fix or affix') and ultimately comes from Proto-Indo-European **pag-* ('to fix' in the same sense).^[14]

The adoption of *paganus* by the Latin Christians as an all-embracing, pejorative term for polytheists represents an unforeseen and singularly long-lasting victory, within a religious group, of a word of Latin slang originally devoid of religious meaning. The evolution occurred



Reconstruction of the Parthenon, on the Acropolis of Athens, Greece

only in the Latin west, and in connection with the Latin church. Elsewhere, *Hellene* or gentile (*ethnikos*) remained the word for pagan; and *paganos* continued as a purely secular term, with overtones of the inferior and the commonplace.

— Peter Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 1999^[15]

Medieval writers often assumed that *paganus* as a religious term was a result of the conversion patterns during the Christianization of Europe, where people in towns and cities were converted more easily than those in remote regions, where old ways tended to remain. However, this idea has multiple problems. First, the word's usage as a reference to non-Christians pre-dates that period in history. Second, paganism within the Roman Empire centred on cities. The concept of an urban Christianity as opposed to a rural paganism would not have occurred to Romans during Early Christianity. Third, unlike words such as *rusticitas*, *paganus* had not yet fully acquired the meanings (of uncultured backwardness) used to explain why it would have been applied to pagans.^[16]

Paganus more likely acquired its meaning in Christian nomenclature via Roman military jargon (see above). Early Christians adopted military motifs and saw themselves as *Milites Christi* (soldiers of Christ).^{[14][16]} A good example of Christians still using *paganus* in a military context rather than religious is in Tertullian's *De Corona Militis* XI.V, where the Christian is referred to as *paganus* (civilian):^[16]

*Apud hunc [Christum] tam
miles est paganus fidelis quam
paganus est miles fidelis.*^[17]

With Him [Christ] the faithful
citizen is a soldier, just as the
faithful soldier is a citizen.^[18]

Paganus acquired its religious connotations by the mid-4th century.^[16] As early as the 5th century, *paganos* was metaphorically used to denote persons outside the bounds of the Christian community. Following the sack of Rome by the Visigoths just over fifteen years after the Christian persecution of paganism under Theodosius I,^[19] murmurs began to spread that the old gods had taken greater care of the city than the Christian God. In response, Augustine of Hippo wrote *De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos* ('The City of God against the Pagans'). In it, he contrasted the fallen "city of Man" to the "city of God" of which all Christians were ultimately citizens. Hence, the foreign invaders were "not of the city" or "rural".^{[20][21][22]}

The term pagan is not attested in the English language until the 17th century.^[23] In addition to *infidel* and *heretic*, it was used as one of several pejorative Christian counterparts to *goy* (גוי / נכרי) as used in Judaism, and to *kafir* (كافر, 'unbeliever') and *mushrik* (مشرک, 'idolater') as in Islam.^[24]

Hellene

In the Latin-speaking Western Roman Empire of the newly Christianizing Roman Empire, Koine Greek became associated with the traditional polytheistic religion of Ancient Greece, and regarded as a foreign language (*lingua peregrina*) in the west.^[25] By the latter half of the 4th century in the Greek-speaking Eastern Empire, pagans were—paradoxically—most commonly called *Hellenes* (Ἕλληνες, lit. 'Greeks'). The word almost entirely ceased being used in a cultural sense.^{[26][27]} It retained that meaning for roughly the first millennium of Christianity.

This was influenced by Christianity's early members, who were Jewish. The Jews of the time distinguished themselves from foreigners according to religion rather than ethno-cultural standards, and early Jewish Christians would have done the same. Since Hellenic culture was the dominant pagan culture in the Roman east, they referred to pagans as Hellenes. Christianity inherited Jewish terminology for non-Jews and

adapted it in order to refer to non-Christians with whom they were in contact. This usage is recorded in the New Testament. In the Pauline epistles, *Hellene* is almost always juxtaposed with *Hebrew* regardless of actual ethnicities.^[27]

The usage of *Hellene* as a religious term was initially part of an exclusively Christian nomenclature, but some Pagans began to defiantly call themselves Hellenes. Other pagans even preferred the narrow meaning of the word from a broad cultural sphere to a more specific religious grouping. However, there were many Christians and pagans alike who strongly objected to the evolution of the terminology. The influential Archbishop of Constantinople Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, took offence at imperial efforts to suppress Hellenic culture (especially concerning spoken and written Greek) and he openly criticized the emperor.^[26]

The growing religious stigmatization of Hellenism had a chilling effect on Hellenic culture by the late 4th century.^[26]

By late antiquity, however, it was possible to speak Greek as a primary language while not conceiving of oneself as a *Hellene*.^[28] The long-established use of Greek both in and around the Eastern Roman Empire as a lingua franca ironically allowed it to instead become central in enabling the spread of Christianity—as indicated for example by the use of Greek for the Epistles of Paul.^[29] In the first half of the 5th century, Greek was the standard language in which bishops communicated,^[30] and the *Acta Conciliorum* ("Acts of the Church Councils") were recorded originally in Greek and then translated into other languages.^[31]

Heathen

Heathen comes from Old English *hæðen* (not Christian or Jewish); cf. Old Norse *heiðinn*. This meaning for the term originated from Gothic *haiþno* (gentile woman) being used to translate *Hellene*^[32] in Wulfila's Bible, the first translation of the Bible into a Germanic language. This may have been influenced by the Greek and Latin terminology of the time used for pagans. If so, it may be derived from Gothic *haiþi* (dwelling on the heath). However, this is not attested. It may even be a borrowing of Greek *ἔθνος* (*ethnos*) via Armenian *hethanos*.^[33]

The term has recently been revived in the forms Heathenry and Heathenism (often but not always capitalized), as alternative names for the Germanic neopagan movement, adherents of which may self-identify as Heathens.

Definition

It is perhaps misleading even to say that there was such a religion as paganism at the beginning of [the Common Era] ... It might be less confusing to say that the pagans, before their competition with Christianity, had no religion at all in the sense in which that word is normally used today. They had no tradition of discourse about ritual or religious matters (apart from philosophical debate or antiquarian treatise), no organized system of beliefs to which they were asked to commit themselves, no authority-structure peculiar to the religious area, above all no commitment to a particular group of people or set of ideas other than their family and political context. If this is the right view of pagan life, it follows that we should look on paganism quite simply as a religion invented in the course of the second to third centuries AD, in competition and interaction with Christians, Jews and others.

— J A North 1992, 187–88, ^[34]

Defining paganism is complex and problematic. Understanding the context of its associated terminology is important.^[35] Early Christians referred to the diverse array of cults around them as a single group for reasons of convenience and rhetoric.^[36] While paganism generally implies polytheism, the primary distinction between classical pagans and Christians was not one of monotheism versus polytheism, as not all pagans were strictly polytheist. Throughout history, many of them believed in a supreme deity. However, most such pagans believed in a class of subordinate gods/daimons—see henotheism—or divine emanations.^[13] To Christians, the most important distinction was whether or not someone worshipped the one true God. Those who did not (polytheist, monotheist, or atheist) were outsiders to the Church and thus considered pagan.^[37] Similarly, classical pagans would have found it peculiar to distinguish groups by the number of deities followers venerate. They would have considered the priestly colleges (such as the College of Pontiffs or Epulones) and cult practices more meaningful distinctions.^[38]

Referring to paganism as pre-Christian indigenous religions is equally untenable. Not all historical pagan traditions were pre-Christian or indigenous to their places of worship.^[35]

Owing to the history of its nomenclature, paganism traditionally encompasses the collective pre- and non-Christian cultures in and around the classical world; including those of the Greco-Roman, Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic tribes.^[39] However, modern parlance of folklorists and contemporary pagans in particular has extended the original four millennia scope used by early Christians to include similar religious traditions stretching far into prehistory.^[40]

Perception

Paganism came to be equated by Christians with a sense of hedonism, representing those who are sensual, materialistic, self-indulgent, unconcerned with the future, and uninterested in more mainstream religions. Pagans were usually described within this worldly stereotype, especially among those drawing attention to what they perceived as the limitations of paganism.^[41] Thus G. K. Chesterton wrote: "The pagan set out, with admirable sense, to enjoy himself. By the end of his civilization he had discovered that a man cannot enjoy himself and continue to enjoy anything else."^[42] In sharp contrast, Swinburne the poet would comment on this same theme: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath; We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death."^[43]

Ethnocentrism

Recently, the ethnocentric and moral absolutist origins of the common usage of the term pagan have been acknowledged,^{[44][45]} with scholar David Petts noting how, with particular reference to Christianity, "...local religions are defined in opposition to privileged 'world religions'; they become everything that world religions are not, rather than being explored as a subject in their own right."^[46] In addition, Petts notes how various spiritual, religious, and metaphysical ideas branded as "pagan" from diverse cultures were studied in opposition to Abrahamism in early anthropology, a binary he links to ethnocentrism and colonialism.^[47]

History

Pre-History

- Prehistoric religion
 - Paleolithic religion

Bronze Age to Early Iron Age

- Religions of the ancient Near East
 - Ancient Egyptian religion
 - Ancient Semitic religion
 - Ancient Iranian religion
 - Ancient Mesopotamian religion

Classical antiquity

Ludwig Feuerbach defined the paganism of classical antiquity, which he termed *Heidentum* ('heathenry') as "the unity of religion and politics, of spirit and nature, of god and man",^[48] qualified by the observation that man in the pagan view is always defined by ethnicity, i.e. Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Norse etc., so that each pagan tradition is also a national tradition. Modern historians define paganism instead as the aggregate of cult acts, set within a civic rather than a national context, without a written creed or sense of orthodoxy.^[49]

Late Antiquity and Christianization

The developments in the religious thought of the far-flung Roman Empire during Late Antiquity need to be addressed separately, because this is the context in which Early Christianity itself developed as one of several monotheistic cults, and it was in this period that the concept of pagan developed in the first place. As Christianity emerged from Second Temple Judaism (or Hellenistic Judaism), it stood in competition with other religions advocating pagan monotheism, including the cults of Dionysus,^[50] Neoplatonism, Mithraism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism. Dionysus in particular exhibits significant parallels with Christ, so that numerous scholars have concluded that the recasting of Jesus the wandering rabbi into the image of Christ the Logos, the divine saviour, reflects the cult of Dionysus directly. They point to the symbolism of wine and the importance it held in the mythology surrounding both Dionysus and Jesus Christ.^{[51][52]} Wick argues that the use of wine symbolism in the Gospel of John, including the story of the Marriage at Cana at which Jesus turns water into wine, was intended to show Jesus as superior to Dionysus.^[53] The scene in *The Bacchae* wherein Dionysus appears before King Pentheus on charges of claiming divinity is compared to the New Testament scene of Jesus being interrogated by Pontius Pilate.^{[53][54][55]}

Islam in Arabia

Arabic paganism gradually disappeared during prophet Muhammad's era through Islamization.^{[56][57]} The sacred months of the Arab pagans were the 1st, 7th, 11th and 12th months of the Islamic calendar.^[58] After Muhammad had conquered Mecca he set out to convert the pagans.^{[59][60][61]} One of the last military campaigns that Muhammad ordered against the Arab pagans was the Demolition of Dhul Khalasa. It occurred in April and May 632 AD, in 10AH of the Islamic Calendar. Dhul Khalasa is referred to as both an idol and a temple, and it was known by some as the Ka'ba of Yemen, built and worshipped by pagan tribes.^{[62][63][64][65][66][67][68][69][70]}

Early Modern period

Interest in pagan traditions was first revived during the Renaissance, when Renaissance magic was practiced as a revival of Greco-Roman magic. In the 17th century, the description of paganism turned from a theological aspect to an ethnological one, and religions began to be understood as part of the ethnic identities of peoples, and the study of the religions of so-called primitive peoples triggered questions as to the ultimate historical origin of religion. Thus, Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc saw the pagan religions of Africa of his day as relics that were in principle capable of shedding light on the historical paganism of Classical Antiquity.^[71]

Romanticism

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

— William Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much with Us", lines 9–14

Paganism resurfaces as a topic of fascination in 18th to 19th-century Romanticism, in particular in the context of the literary Celtic and Viking revivals, which portrayed historical Celtic and Germanic polytheists as noble savages.

The 19th century also saw much scholarly interest in the reconstruction of pagan mythology from folklore or fairy tales. This was notably attempted by the Brothers Grimm, especially Jacob Grimm in his *Teutonic Mythology*, and Elias Lönnrot with the compilation of the *Kalevala*. The work of the Brothers Grimm influenced other collectors, both inspiring them to collect tales and leading them to similarly believe that the fairy tales of a country were particularly representative of it, to the neglect of cross-cultural influence. Among those influenced were the Russian Alexander Afanasyev, the Norwegians Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, and the Englishman Joseph Jacobs.^[72]

Romanticist interest in non-classical antiquity coincided with the rise of Romantic nationalism and the rise of the nation state in the context of the 1848 revolutions, leading to the creation of national epics and national myths for the various newly formed states. Pagan or folkloric topics were also common in the musical nationalism of the period.

Modern Paganism

Modern Paganism, or Neopaganism, includes reconstructed religions such as Roman Polytheistic Reconstructionism, Hellenism, Slavic Native Faith, Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism, or heathenry, as well as modern eclectic traditions such as Wicca and its many offshoots, Neo-Druidism, and Discordianism.

However, there often exists a distinction or separation between some polytheistic reconstructionists such as Hellenism and revivalist neopagans like Wiccans. The divide is over numerous issues such as the importance of accurate orthopraxy according to ancient sources available, the use and concept of magic, which calendar to use and which holidays to observe, as well as the use of the term pagan itself.^{[73][74][75]}

Many of the revivals, Wicca and Neo-Druidism in particular, have their roots in 19th century Romanticism and retain noticeable elements of occultism or Theosophy that were current then, setting them apart from historical rural (*paganus*) folk religion. Most modern pagans, however, believe in the divine character of the natural world and paganism is often described as an Earth religion.^[76]

There are a number of neopagan authors who have examined the relation of the 20th-century movements of polytheistic revival with historical polytheism on one hand and contemporary traditions of folk religion on the other. Isaac Bonewits introduced a terminology to make this distinction.^[77]

Neopaganism

The overarching contemporary pagan revival movement which focuses on nature-revering/living, pre-Christian religions and/or other nature-based spiritual paths, and frequently incorporating contemporary liberal values. This definition may include groups such as Wicca, Neo-Druidism, Heathenry, and Slavic Native Faith.

Paleopaganism

A retronym coined to contrast with Neopaganism, original polytheistic, nature-centered faiths, such as the pre-Hellenistic Greek and pre-imperial Roman religion, pre-Migration period Germanic paganism as described by Tacitus, or Celtic polytheism as described by Julius Caesar.

Mesopaganism

A group, which is, or has been, significantly influenced by monotheistic, dualistic, or nontheistic worldviews, but has been able to maintain an independence of religious practices. This group includes aboriginal Americans as well as Aboriginal Australians, Viking Age Norse paganism and New Age spirituality. Influences include: Spiritualism, and the many Afro-Diasporic faiths like Haitian Vodou, Santería and Espiritu religion. Isaac Bonewits includes British Traditional Wicca in this subdivision.

Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick in their *A History of Pagan Europe* (1995) classify pagan religions as characterized by the following traits:

- Polytheism: Pagan religions recognise a plurality of divine beings, which may or may not be considered aspects of an underlying unity (the soft and hard polytheism distinction).
- Nature-based: Some pagan religions have a concept of the divinity of nature, which they view as a manifestation of the divine, not as the fallen creation found in dualistic cosmology.
- Sacred feminine: Some pagan religions recognize the female divine principle, identified as the Goddess (as opposed to individual goddesses) beside or in place of the male divine principle as expressed in the Abrahamic God.^[78]



Some megaliths are believed to have religious significance.



Children standing with *The Lady of Cornwall* in a neopagan ceremony in England



Neopagan handfasting ceremony at Avebury (Beltane 2005)

In modern times, Heathen and Heathenry are increasingly used to refer to those branches of modern paganism inspired by the pre-Christian religions of the Germanic, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon peoples.^[79]

In Iceland, the members of *Ásatrúarfélagið* account for 0.4% of the total population,^[80] which is just over a thousand people. In Lithuania, many people practice Romuva, a revived version of the pre-Christian religion of that country. Lithuania was among the last areas of Europe to be Christianized. Odinism has been established on a formal basis in Australia since at least the 1930s.^[81]

Ethnic religions of pre-Christian Europe

- Albanian mythology
- Baltic mythology
- Basque mythology
- Celtic polytheism
- Etruscan mythology
- Finnic mythologies
- Germanic paganism
- Ancient Greek religion
- Hungarian Native Faith
- Minoan religion
- Mari Native Religion
- Mordvin Native Religion
- Norse mythology
- Religion in ancient Rome
- Sámi shamanism
- Scythian religion
- Slavic paganism

See also

- Animism
- Astrotheology
- Crypto-paganism
- Dharmic religions
- East Asian religions
- Eleusinian Mysteries
- Henotheism
- Jungian psychology
- Kemetism
- List of Pagans
- Neopagan temples in Europe
- List of Neopagan movements
- List of religions and spiritual traditions



The hammer Mjöllnir is one of the primary symbols of Germanic neopaganism.



The Tursaansydän symbol, part of the Finnish neopaganism.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism or **Mazdayasna** is an Iranian religion and one of the world's oldest continuously-practiced organized faiths, based on the teachings of the Iranian-speaking prophet Zoroaster (also known as *Zarathuštra* in Avestan or as *Zartosht* in Persian).^{[1][2]} It has a dualistic cosmology of good and evil within the framework of a monotheistic ontology and an eschatology which predicts the ultimate conquest of evil by good.^[3] Zoroastrianism exalts an uncreated and benevolent deity of wisdom known as *Ahura Mazda* (lit. 'Lord of Wisdom') as its supreme being.^[4] Historically, the unique features of Zoroastrianism, such as its monotheism,^[5] messianism, belief in free will and judgement after death, conception of heaven, hell, angels, and demons, among other concepts, may have influenced other religious and philosophical systems, including the Abrahamic religions and Gnosticism,^{[6][7][8]} Northern Buddhism,^[7] and Greek philosophy.^[9]

With possible roots dating back to the 2nd millennium BCE, Zoroastrianism enters recorded history around the middle of the 6th century BCE.^[10] It served as the state religion of the ancient Iranian empires for more than a millennium, approximately from 600 BCE to 650 CE, but declined from the 7th century CE onwards as a direct result of the Muslim conquest of Persia (633–654 CE) which led to the large-scale persecution of the Zoroastrian people.^[11] Recent estimates place the current number of Zoroastrians in the world at around 110,000–120,000^[12] at most, with the majority of this figure living in India, Iran, and North America; their number has been thought to be declining.^{[13][14]}

The most important texts of Zoroastrianism are those contained within the *Avesta*, which includes the central writings thought to be composed by Zoroaster known as the *Gathas*, as well as poems within the *Yasna* that define the teachings of Zoroaster, which serve as the basis for worship. The religious philosophy of Zoroaster divided the early Iranian gods of the Proto-Indo-Iranian tradition into emanations of the natural world as *ahuras*^[15] and *daevas*,^[16] the latter of which were not considered to be worthy of worship. Zoroaster proclaimed that Ahura Mazda was the supreme creator, the creative and sustaining force of the universe through *Asha*,^[4] and that human beings are given a choice between supporting Ahura Mazda or not, making them ultimately responsible for their choices. Though Ahura Mazda has no equal contesting force, *Angra Mainyu* (destructive spirit/mentality), whose forces are born from *Aka Manah* (evil thought), is considered to be the main adversarial force of the religion, standing against *Spenta Mainyu* (creative spirit/mentality).^[17] Middle Persian literature developed Angra Mainyu further into *Ahriman*, advancing him to be the direct adversary to Ahura Mazda.^[18]

Additionally, the life force that originates from Ahura Mazda, known as *Asha* (truth, cosmic order),^{[4][19]} stands in opposition to *Druj* (falsehood, deceit).^{[20][21]} Ahura Mazda is considered to be all-good with no evil emanating from the deity.^[4] Ahura Mazda works in *gētīg* (the visible material realm) and *mēnōg* (the invisible spiritual and mental realm)^[22] through the seven (six when excluding Spenta Mainyu) *Amesha Spentas*.^[23]

Zoroastrianism is not entirely uniform in theological and philosophical thought, especially with historical and modern influences having a significant impact on individual and local beliefs, practices, values and vocabulary, sometimes merging with tradition and in other cases displacing it.^[24] The ultimate purpose in the life of a practicing Zoroastrian is to become an *ashavan* (a master of Asha) and to bring happiness into the world, which contributes to the cosmic battle against evil. The core teachings of Zoroastrianism include:

- Following the threefold path of Asha: *Humata, Hūxta, Huvarshta* (lit. 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds').^[25]
- Practicing charity to keep one's soul aligned with Asha and thus with spreading happiness.^[26]
- The spiritual equality and duty of men and women alike.^[27]
- Being good for the sake of goodness and without the hope of reward (see *Ashem Vohu*).

Contents

Terminology

Overview

Theology

Practices

History

Classical antiquity

Late antiquity

Decline in the Middle Ages

Conversion

Survival

Modern

Relation to other religions and cultures

Indo-Iranian origins

Abrahamic religions

Manichaeism

Present-day Iran

Religious text

Avesta

Middle Persian (Pahlavi)

Zoroaster

Zoroaster in legend

Cypress of Kashmar

Fire Temple of Kashmar

Principal beliefs

Cosmology: Creation of the universe

Eschatology: Renovation and judgment

Ritual and prayer

Demographics

In South Asia

India

Pakistan

Iran, Iraq and Central Asia

Western world

See also

References

Terminology

The name *Zoroaster* (*Ζωροάστηρ*) is a Greek rendering of the Avestan name *Zarathustra*. He is known as *Zartosht* and *Zardosht* in Persian and *Zartosht* in Gujarati.^[28] The Zoroastrian name of the religion is *Mazdayasna*, which combines *Mazda-* with the Avestan word *yasna*, meaning "worship, devotion".^[4] In English, an adherent of the faith is commonly called a Zoroastrian or a Zarathustrian. An older expression still used today is *Behdin*, meaning "The best religion|*beh* < Middle Persian *weh* 'good' + *din* < Middle Persian *dēn* < Avestan *daēnā*". In the Zoroastrian liturgy, this term is used as a title for a lay individual who has been formally inducted into the religion in a *Navjote* ceremony, in contrast to the priestly titles of *osta*, *osti*, *ervad* (*hirbod*), *mobed* and *dastur*.^{[29][30][31]}

The first surviving reference to Zoroaster in English scholarship is attributed to Thomas Browne (1605–1682), who briefly refers to Zoroaster in his 1643 *Religio Medici*.^[32] The term *Mazdaism* (/ˈmæzdə.ɪzəm/) is an alternative form in English used as well for the faith, taking *Mazda-* from the name Ahura Mazda and adding the suffix *-ism* to suggest a belief system.^[33]

Overview

Theology

Zoroastrians believe that there is one universal, transcendent, all-good, and uncreated supreme creator deity, Ahura Mazda, or the "Wise Lord" (*Ahura* meaning "Lord" and *Mazda* meaning "Wisdom" in Avestan).^[34] Zoroaster keeps the two attributes separate as two different concepts in most of the Gathas yet sometimes combines them into one form. Zoroaster also claims that Ahura Mazda is omniscient but not omnipotent.^[4] In the Gathas, Ahura Mazda is noted as working through emanations known as the Amesha Spenta^[23] and with the help of "other ahuras",^[35] of which Sraosha is the only one explicitly named of the latter category.

Scholars and theologians have long debated on the nature of Zoroastrianism, with dualism, monotheism, and polytheism being the main terms applied to the religion.^{[36][35][37]} Some scholars assert that Zoroastrianism's concept of divinity covers both being and mind as immanent entities, describing Zoroastrianism as having a belief in an immanent self-creating universe with consciousness as its special attribute, thereby putting Zoroastrianism in the pantheistic fold sharing its origin with Indian Hinduism.^{[38][39]} In any case, Asha, the main spiritual force which comes from Ahura Mazda,^[19] is the cosmic order which is the antithesis of chaos, which is evident as *druj*, falsehood and disorder.^[20] The resulting cosmic conflict involves all of creation, mental/spiritual and material, including humanity at its core, which has an active role to play in the conflict.^[40]

In the Zoroastrian tradition, *druj* comes from Angra Mainyu (also referred to in later texts as "Ahriman"), the destructive spirit/mentality, while the main representative of Asha in this conflict is Spenta Mainyu, the creative spirit/mentality.^[17] Ahura Mazda is immanent in humankind and interacts with creation through emanations known as the Amesha Spenta, the bounteous/holy immortals, which are representative and guardians of different aspects of creation and the ideal personality.^[23] Ahura Mazda, through these Amesha Spenta, is assisted by a league of countless divinities called Yazatas, meaning "worthy of worship", and each is generally a hypostasis of a moral or physical aspect of creation. According to Zoroastrian cosmology, in articulating the Ahuna Vairya formula, Ahura Mazda made the ultimate triumph of good

against Angra Mainyu evident.^[41] Ahura Mazda will ultimately prevail over the evil Angra Mainyu, at which point reality will undergo a cosmic renovation called Frashokereti^[42] and limited time will end. In the final renovation, all of creation—even the souls of the dead that were initially banished to or chose to descend into "darkness"—will be reunited with Ahura Mazda in the Kshatra Vairya (meaning "best dominion"),^[43] being resurrected to immortality. In Middle Persian literature, the prominent belief was that at the end of time a savior-figure known as the Saoshyant would bring about the Frashokereti, while in the Gathic texts the term Saoshyant (meaning "one who brings benefit") referred to all believers of Mazdayasna but changed into a messianic concept in later writings.

Zoroastrian theology includes foremost the importance of following the Threefold Path of Asha revolving around Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds.^[25] There is also a heavy emphasis on spreading happiness, mostly through charity,^[26] and respecting the spiritual equality and duty of both men and women.^[27] Zoroastrianism's emphasis on the protection and veneration of nature and its elements has led some to proclaim it as the "world's first proponent of ecology."^[44] The Avesta and other texts call for the protection of water, earth, fire and air making it, in effect, an ecological religion: "It is not surprising that Mazdaism...is called the first ecological religion. The reverence for Yazatas (divine spirits) emphasizes the preservation of nature (Avesta: Yasnas 1.19, 3.4, 16.9; Yashts 6.3–4, 10.13)."^[45] However, this particular assertion is limited to natural forces held as emanations of asha by the fact that early Zoroastrians had a duty to exterminate "evil" species, a dictate no longer followed in modern Zoroastrianism.^[46]

Practices

The religion states that active and ethical participation in life through good deeds formed from good thoughts and good words is necessary to ensure happiness and to keep chaos at bay. This active participation is a central element in Zoroaster's concept of free will and Zoroastrianism as such rejects extreme forms of asceticism and monasticism but historically has allowed for moderate expressions of these concepts.^[48]

In Zoroastrian tradition, life is a temporary state in which a mortal is expected actively to participate in the continuing battle between Asha and Druj. Prior to its incarnation at the birth of the child, the *urvan* (soul) of an individual is still united with its *fravashi* (personal/higher spirit), which has existed since Ahura Mazda created the universe. Prior to the splitting off of the *urvan* the *fravashi* participates in the maintenance of creation led by Ahura Mazda. During the life of a given individual, the *fravashi* acts as a source of inspiration to perform good actions and as a spiritual protector. The *fravashis* of ancestors cultural, spiritual, and heroic, associated with illustrious bloodlines, are venerated and can be called upon to aid the living.^[49] On the fourth day after death, the *urvan* is reunited with its *fravashi*, whereupon the experiences of life in the material world are collected for use in the continuing battle for good in the spiritual world. For the most part, Zoroastrianism does not have a notion of reincarnation. Followers of Ilm-e-Kshnoom in India believe in reincarnation and practice vegetarianism, among other



An 8th century Tang dynasty Chinese clay figurine of a Sogdian man wearing a distinctive cap and face veil, possibly a camel rider or even a Zoroastrian priest engaging in a ritual at a fire temple, since face veils were used to avoid contaminating the holy fire with breath or saliva; Museum of Oriental Art (Turin), Italy.^[47]

currently non-traditional opinions,^[50] although there have been various theological statements supporting vegetarianism in Zoroastrianism's history and claims that Zoroaster was vegetarian.^[51]

In Zoroastrianism, water (*aban*) and fire (*atar*) are agents of ritual purity, and the associated purification ceremonies are considered the basis of ritual life. In Zoroastrian cosmogony, water and fire are respectively the second and last primordial elements to have been created, and scripture considers fire to have its origin in the waters (re. which conception see Apam Napat). Both water and fire are considered life-sustaining, and both water and fire are represented within the precinct of a fire temple. Zoroastrians usually pray in the presence of some form of fire (which can be considered evident in any source of light), and the culminating rite of the principal act of worship constitutes a "strengthening of the waters". Fire is considered a medium through which spiritual insight and wisdom are gained, and water is considered the source of that wisdom. Both fire and water are also hypostasized as the Yazatas Atar and Anahita, which worship hymns and litanies dedicated to them.

A corpse is considered a host for decay, i.e., of *druj*. Consequently, scripture enjoins the safe disposal of the dead in a manner such that a corpse does not pollute the good creation. These injunctions are the doctrinal basis of the fast-fading traditional practice of ritual exposure, most commonly identified with the so-called Towers of Silence for which there is no standard technical term in either scripture or tradition. Ritual exposure is currently mainly practiced by Zoroastrian communities of the Indian subcontinent, in locations where it is not illegal and diclofenac poisoning has not led to the virtual extinction of scavenger birds. Other Zoroastrian communities either cremate their dead, or bury them in graves that are cased with lime mortar, though Zoroastrians are keen to dispose of their dead in the most environmentally harmless way possible.

For a variety of social and political factors the Zoroastrians of the Indian subcontinent, namely the Parsis and Iranis have not engaged in conversion since at least the 18th Century. Zoroastrian high priests have historically opined there is no reason to not allow conversion which is also supported by the Revayats and other scripture though later priests have condemned these judgements.^{[52][35]} Within Iran, many of the beleaguered Zoroastrians have been also historically opposed or not practically concerned with the matter of conversion. Currently though, The Council of Tehran Mobeds (the highest ecclesiastical authority within Iran) endorses conversion but conversion from Islam to Zoroastrianism is illegal under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran.^{[53][35]}

History

Classical antiquity

The roots of Zoroastrianism are thought to lie in a common prehistoric Indo-Iranian religious system dating back to the early 2nd millennium BCE.^[54] The prophet Zoroaster himself, though traditionally dated to the 6th century BCE, is thought by many modern historians to have been a reformer of the polytheistic Iranian religion who lived in the 10th century BCE.^[55] Zoroastrianism as a religion was not firmly established until several centuries later. Zoroastrianism enters recorded history in the mid-5th century BCE. Herodotus' *The Histories* (completed c. 440 BCE) includes a description of Greater Iranian society with what may be recognizably Zoroastrian features, including exposure of the dead.^[56]

The Histories is a primary source of information on the early period of the Achaemenid era (648–330 BCE), in particular with respect to the role of the Magi. According to Herodotus, the Magi were the sixth tribe of the Medes (until the unification of the Persian empire under Cyrus the Great, all Iranians were referred to as "Mede" or "Mada" by the peoples of the Ancient World) and wielded considerable influence at the courts of the Median emperors.^[57]

Following the unification of the Median and Persian empires in 550 BCE, Cyrus the Great and later his son Cambyses II curtailed the powers of the Magi after they had attempted to sow dissent following their loss of influence. In 522 BCE, the Magi revolted and set up a rival claimant to the throne. The usurper, pretending to be Cyrus' younger son Smerdis, took power shortly thereafter.^[58] Owing to the despotic rule of Cambyses and his long absence in Egypt, "the whole people, Persians, Medes and all the other nations" acknowledged the usurper, especially as he granted a remission of taxes for three years.^[57]

Darius I and later Achaemenid emperors acknowledged their devotion to Ahura Mazda in inscriptions, as attested to several times in the Behistun inscription, and appear to have continued the model of coexistence with other religions. Whether Darius was a follower of the teachings of Zoroaster has not been conclusively established as there is no indication of note that worship of Ahura Mazda was exclusively a Zoroastrian practice.^[59]

According to later Zoroastrian legend (*Denkard* and the *Book of Arda Viraf*), many sacred texts were lost when Alexander the Great's troops invaded Persepolis and subsequently destroyed the royal library there. Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotheca historica*, which was completed circa 60 BCE, appears to substantiate this Zoroastrian legend.^[60] According to one archaeological examination, the ruins of the palace of Xerxes bear traces of having been burned.^[61] Whether a vast collection of (semi-)religious texts "written on parchment in gold ink", as suggested by the *Denkard*, actually existed remains a matter of speculation.^[62]

Alexander's conquests largely displaced Zoroastrianism with Hellenistic beliefs,^[55] though the religion continued to be practiced many centuries following the demise of the Achaemenids in mainland Persia and the core regions of the former Achaemenid Empire, most notably Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus. In the Cappadocian kingdom, whose territory was formerly an Achaemenid possession, Persian colonists, cut off from their co-religionists in Iran proper, continued to practice the faith [Zoroastrianism] of their forefathers; and there Strabo, observing in the first century B.C., records (XV.3.15) that these "fire kindlers" possessed many "holy places of the Persian Gods", as well as fire temples.^[63] Strabo further states that these were "noteworthy enclosures; and in their midst there is an altar, on which there is a large quantity of ashes and where the magi keep the fire ever burning."^[63] It was not until the end of the Parthian period (247 B.C.–A.D. 224) that Zoroastrianism would receive renewed interest.^[55]

Late antiquity

As late as the Parthian period, a form of Zoroastrianism was without a doubt the dominant religion in the Armenian lands.^[64] The Sassanids aggressively promoted the Zurvanite form of Zoroastrianism, often building fire temples in captured territories to promote the religion. During the period of their centuries-long suzerainty over the Caucasus, the Sassanids made attempts to promote Zoroastrianism there with considerable successes, and it was prominent in the pre-Christian Caucasus (especially modern-day Azerbaijan).



Painted clay and alabaster head of a Zoroastrian priest wearing a distinctive Bactrian-style headdress, Takhti-Sangin, Tajikistan, Greco-Bactrian kingdom, 3rd–2nd century BCE



The Tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, Iran.

Due to its ties to the Christian Roman Empire, Persia's arch-rival since Parthian times, the Sassanids were suspicious of Roman Christianity, and after the reign of Constantine the Great, sometimes persecuted it.^[65] The Sassanid authority clashed with their Armenian subjects in the Battle of Avarayr (A.D. 451), making them officially break with the Roman Church. But the Sassanids tolerated or even sometimes favored the Christianity of the Church of the East. The acceptance of Christianity in Georgia (Caucasian Iberia) saw the Zoroastrian religion there slowly but surely decline,^[66] but as late the 5th century A.D. it was still widely practised as something like a second established religion.^{[67][68]}

Decline in the Middle Ages

Most of the Sassanid Empire was overthrown by the Arabs over the course of 16 years in the 7th century. Although the administration of the state was rapidly Islamicized and subsumed under the Umayyad Caliphate, in the beginning "there was little serious pressure" exerted on newly subjected people to adopt Islam.^[69] Because of their sheer numbers, the conquered Zoroastrians had to be treated as dhimmis (despite doubts of the validity of this identification that persisted down the centuries),^[70] which made them eligible for protection. Islamic jurists took the stance that only Muslims could be perfectly moral, but "unbelievers might as well be left to their iniquities, so long as these did not vex their overlords."^[70] In the main, once the conquest was over and "local terms were agreed on", the Arab governors protected the local populations in exchange for tribute.^[70]

The Arabs adopted the Sassanid tax-system, both the land-tax levied on land owners and the poll-tax levied on individuals,^[70] called jizya, a tax levied on non-Muslims (i.e., the dhimmis). In time, this poll-tax came to be used as a means to humble the non-Muslims, and a number of laws and restrictions evolved to emphasize their inferior status. Under the early orthodox caliphs, as long as the non-Muslims paid their taxes and adhered to the dhimmi laws, administrators were enjoined to leave non-Muslims "in their religion and their land." (Caliph Abu Bakr, qtd. in Boyce 1979, p. 146).

Under Abbasid rule, Muslim Iranians (who by then were in the majority) in many instances showed severe disregard for and mistreated local Zoroastrians. For example, in the 9th century, a deeply venerated cypress tree in Khorasan (which Parthian-era legend supposed had been planted by Zoroaster himself) was felled for the construction of a palace in Baghdad, 2,000 miles (3,200 km) away. In the 10th century, on the day that a Tower of Silence had been completed at much trouble and expense, a Muslim official contrived to get up onto it, and to call the adhan (the Muslim call to prayer) from its walls. This was turned into a pretext to annex the building.^[71]

Ultimately, Muslim scholars like Al-Biruni found few records left of the belief of for instance the Khawarizmians because figures like Qutayba ibn Muslim "extinguished and ruined in every possible way all those who knew how to write and read the Khawarizmi writing, who knew the history of the country and who studied their sciences." As a result, "these things are involved in so much obscurity that it is impossible to obtain an accurate knowledge of the history of the country since the time of Islam..."^[72]

Conversion



A scene from the Hamzanama where Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib Burns Zarthust's Chest and Shatters the Urn with his Ashes

Though subject to a new leadership and harassment, the Zoroastrians were able to continue their former ways, although there was a slow but steady social and economic pressure to convert,^{[73][74]} with the nobility and city-dwellers being the first to do so, while Islam was accepted more slowly among the peasantry and landed gentry.^[75] "Power and worldly-advantage" now lay with followers of Islam, and although the "official policy was one of aloof contempt, there were individual Muslims eager to proselytize and ready to use all sorts of means to do so."^[74]

In time, a tradition evolved by which Islam was made to appear as a partly Iranian religion. One example of this was a legend that Husayn, son of the fourth caliph Ali and grandson of Islam's prophet Muhammad, had married a captive Sassanid princess named Shahrbanu. This "wholly fictitious figure"^[76] was said to have borne Husayn a son, the historical fourth Shi'a imam, who claimed that the caliphate rightly belonged to him and his descendants, and that the Umayyads had wrongfully wrested it from him. The alleged descent from the Sassanid house counterbalanced the Arab nationalism of the Umayyads, and the Iranian national association with a Zoroastrian past was disarmed. Thus, according to scholar Mary Boyce, "it was no longer the Zoroastrians alone who stood for patriotism and loyalty to the past."^[76] The "damning indictment" that becoming Muslim was Un-Iranian only remained an idiom in Zoroastrian texts.^[76]

With Iranian support, the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 750, and in the subsequent caliphate government—that nominally lasted until 1258—Muslim Iranians received marked favor in the new government, both in Iran and at the capital in Baghdad. This mitigated the antagonism between Arabs and Iranians, but sharpened the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Abbasids zealously persecuted heretics, and although this was directed mainly at Muslim sectarians, it also created a harsher climate for non-Muslims.^[77]

Survival

Despite economic and social incentives to convert, Zoroastrianism remained strong in some regions, particularly in those furthest away from the Caliphate capital at Baghdad. In Bukhara (in present-day Uzbekistan), resistance to Islam required the 9th-century Arab commander Qutaiba to convert his province four times. The first three times the citizens reverted to their old religion. Finally, the governor made their religion "difficult for them in every way", turned the local fire temple into a mosque, and encouraged the local population to attend Friday prayers by paying each attendee two dirhams.^[74] The cities where Arab governors resided were particularly vulnerable to such pressures, and in these cases the Zoroastrians were left with no choice but to either conform or migrate to regions that had a more amicable administration.^[74]



The fire temple of Baku, c. 1860

The 9th century came to define the great number of Zoroastrian texts that were composed or re-written during the 8th to 10th centuries (excluding copying and lesser amendments, which continued for some time thereafter). All of these works are in the Middle Persian dialect of that period (free of Arabic words), and written in the difficult Pahlavi script (hence the adoption of the term "Pahlavi" as the name of the variant of the language, and of the genre, of those Zoroastrian books). If read aloud, these books would still have been intelligible to the laity. Many of these texts are responses to the tribulations of the time, and all of them include exhortations to stand fast in their religious beliefs. Some, such as the "Denkard", are doctrinal defenses of the religion, while others are explanations of theological aspects (such as the Bundahishn's) or practical aspects (e.g., explanation of rituals) of it.

In Khorasan in northeastern Iran, a 10th-century Iranian nobleman brought together four Zoroastrian priests to transcribe a Sassanid-era Middle Persian work titled *Book of the Lord* (*Khwaday Namag*) from Pahlavi script into Arabic script. This transcription, which remained in Middle Persian prose (an Arabic version, by al-Muqaffa, also exists), was completed in 957 and subsequently became the basis for Firdausi's *Book of Kings*. It became enormously popular among both Zoroastrians and Muslims, and also served to propagate the Sassanid justification for overthrowing the Arsacids (i.e., that the Sassanids had restored the faith to its "orthodox" form after the Hellenistic Arsacids had allowed Zoroastrianism to become corrupt).



Fire Temple of Yazd

Among migrations were those to cities in (or on the margins of) the great salt deserts, in particular to Yazd and Kerman, which remain centers of Iranian Zoroastrianism to this day. Yazd became the seat of the Iranian high priests during Mongol Il-Khanate rule, when the "best hope for survival [for a non-Muslim] was to be inconspicuous."^[78] Crucial to the present-day survival of Zoroastrianism was a migration from the northeastern Iranian town of "Sanjan in south-western Khorasan",^[79] to Gujarat, in western India. The descendants of that group are today known as the Parsis—"as the Gujaratis, from long tradition, called anyone from Iran"^[79]—who today represent the larger of the two groups of Zoroastrians in India.^[80]



Museum of Zoroastrians in Kerman

The struggle between Zoroastrianism and Islam declined in the 10th and 11th centuries. Local Iranian dynasties, "all vigorously Muslim,"^[79] had emerged as largely independent vassals of the Caliphs. In the 16th century, in one of the early letters between Iranian Zoroastrians and their co-religionists in India, the priests of Yazd lamented that "no period [in human history], not even that of Alexander, had been more grievous or troublesome for the faithful than 'this millennium of the demon of Wrath'."^[81]



A Special Container Carrying The Holy Fire from Aden to the Lonavala Agiary, India

Modern

Zoroastrianism has survived into the modern period, particularly in India, where the Parsis are thought to have been present since about the 9th century.

Today Zoroastrianism can be divided in two main schools of thought: reformists and traditionalists. Traditionalists are mostly Parsis and accept, beside the Gathas and Avesta, also the Middle Persian literature and like the reformists mostly developed in their modern form from 19th century developments. They generally do not allow conversion to the faith and, as such, for someone to be a Zoroastrian they must be born of Zoroastrian parents. Some traditionalists recognize the children of mixed marriages as Zoroastrians, though usually only if the father is a born Zoroastrian.^[82] Reformists tend to advocate a "return" to the Gathas, the universal nature of the faith, a decrease in ritualization, and an emphasis on the faith as philosophy rather than religion. Not all Zoroastrians identify with either school and notable examples are getting traction including Neo-Zoroastrians/Revivalists, which are usually reinterpretations of Zoroastrianism appealing

towards Western concerns,^[83] and centering the idea of Zoroastrianism as a living religion and advocate the revival and maintenance of old rituals and prayers while supporting ethical and social progressive reforms. Both of these latter schools tend to center the Gathas without outright rejecting other texts except the Vendidad. The Ilm-e-Khshnoom and the Pundol Group are Zoroastrian mystical schools of thought popular among a small minority of the Parsi community inspired mostly by 19th-century theosophy and typified by a spiritual ethnocentric mentality.

From the 19th century onward, the Parsis gained a reputation for their education and widespread influence in all aspects of society. They played an instrumental role in the economic development of the region over many decades; several of the best-known business conglomerates of India are run by Parsi-Zoroastrians, including the Tata, Godrej, Wadia families, and others.

Though the Armenians share a rich history affiliated with Zoroastrianism (that eventually declined with the advent of Christianity), reports indicate that there were Zoroastrian Armenians in Armenia until the 1920s.^[84] A comparatively minor population persisted in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Persia, and a growing large expatriate community has formed in the United States mostly from India and Iran, and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

At the request of the government of Tajikistan, UNESCO declared 2003 a year to celebrate the "3000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture", with special events throughout the world. In 2011 the Tehran Mobeds Anjuman announced that for the first time in the history of modern Iran and of the modern Zoroastrian communities worldwide, women had been ordained in Iran and North America as mobedyars, meaning women assistant mobeds (Zoroastrian clergy).^{[85][86][87]} The women hold official certificates and can perform the lower-rung religious functions and can initiate people into the religion.^[88]

Relation to other religions and cultures

Indo-Iranian origins

The religion of Zoroastrianism is closest to Vedic religion to varying degrees. Some historians believe that Zoroastrianism, along with similar philosophical revolutions in South Asia were interconnected strings of reformation against a common Indo-Aryan thread. Many traits of Zoroastrianism can be traced back to the culture and beliefs of the prehistorical Indo-Iranian period, that is, to the time before the migrations that led to the Indo-Aryans and Iranics becoming distinct peoples. Zoroastrianism consequently shares elements with the historical Vedic religion that also has its origins in that era. Some examples include cognates between the



A modern Zoroastrian fire temple in Western India



Sadeh in Tehran, 2011



Map of the Achaemenid Empire in the 5th century BCE

Avestan word *Ahura* ("Ahura Mazda") and the Vedic Sanskrit word *Asura* ("demon; evil demigod"); as well as *Daeva* ("demon") and *Deva* ("god") and they both descend from a common Proto-Indo-Iranian religion.

Zoroastrianism itself inherited ideas from other belief systems and, like other "practiced" religions, accommodates some degree of syncretism,^[89] with Zoroastrianism in Sogdia, the Kushan Empire, Armenia, China, and other places incorporating local and foreign practices and deities.^[90] Zoroastrian influences on Hungarian, Slavic, Ossetian, Turkic and Mongol mythologies have also been noted, all of which bearing extensive light-dark dualisms and possible sun god theonyms related to Hvarekhsaeta.^{[91][92][93]}

Abrahamic religions

There exist many similarities between Zoroastrianism and Abrahamic religions as pointed out already by *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906).^[94] While some scholars consider that key concepts of Zoroastrian dualism (good and evil; divine twins Ahura Mazda "God" and Angra Mainyu "Satan"), image of the deity, eschatology, resurrection and final judgment, messianism, revelation of Zoroaster on a mountain with Moses on Mount Sinai, three sons of Fereyduun with three sons of Noah, heaven and hell, angelology and demonology, cosmology of six days or periods of creation, free will among others influenced Abrahamic religions, while other scholars diminish or reject such influences.^{[94][95][96][6][8]} Lester L. Grabbe in 2006 concluded that "there is general agreement that Persian religion and tradition had its influence on Judaism over the centuries" and the "question is where this influence was and which of the developments in Judaism can be ascribed to the Iranian side as opposed to the effect of the Greek or other cultures".^[8] There exist distinctions but also similarities between Zoroastrian and Jewish law regarding marriage and procreation.^[97] Mary Boyce noted that besides Abrahamic religions it also had influence to the East on Northern Buddhism.^[7]

Manichaeism

Zoroastrianism is often compared with Manichaeism. Nominally an Iranian religion, it has its origins in Middle-Eastern Gnosticism. Superficially such a comparison seems apt, as both are dualistic and Manichaeism adopted many of the Yazatas for its own pantheon. Gherardo Gnoli, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*,^[98] says that "we can assert that Manichaeism has its roots in the Iranian religious tradition and that its relationship to Mazdaism, or Zoroastrianism, is more or less like that of Christianity to Judaism".^[99]

But they are quite different.^[100] Manichaeism equated evil with matter and good with spirit, and was therefore particularly suitable as a doctrinal basis for every form of asceticism and many forms of mysticism. Zoroastrianism, on the other hand, rejects every form of asceticism, has no dualism of matter and spirit (only of good and evil), and sees the spiritual world as not very different from the natural one (the word "paradise", or *pairi.daeza*, applies equally to both.)

Manichaeism's basic doctrine was that the world and all corporeal bodies were constructed from the substance of Satan, an idea that is fundamentally at odds with the Zoroastrian notion of a world that was created by God and that is all good, and any corruption of it is an effect of the bad.

Present-day Iran

Many aspects of Zoroastrianism are present in the culture and mythologies of the peoples of Greater Iran, not least because Zoroastrianism was a dominant influence on the people of the cultural continent for a thousand years. Even after the rise of Islam and the loss of direct influence, Zoroastrianism remained part of the cultural heritage of the Iranian language-speaking world, in part as festivals and customs, but also because Ferdowsi incorporated a number of the figures and stories from the Avesta in his epic *Shāhnāme*, which is pivotal to Iranian identity. One notable example is the incorporation of the Yazata Sraosha as an angel venerated within Shia Islam in Iran.^[101]

Religious text

Avesta

The Avesta is a collection of the central religious texts of Zoroastrianism written in the old Iranian dialect of Avestan. The history of the Avesta is speculated upon in many Pahlavi texts with varying degrees of authority, with the current version of the Avesta dating at oldest from the times of the Sasanian Empire.^[102] According to Middle Persian tradition, Ahura Mazda created the twenty-one Nasks of the original Avesta which Zoroaster brought to Vishtaspa. Here, two copies were created, one which was put in the house of archives and the other put in the Imperial treasury. During Alexander's conquest of Persia, the Avesta (written on 1200 ox-hides) was burned, and the scientific sections that the Greeks could use were dispersed among themselves. However, there is no strong evidence historically towards these claims and they remain contested despite affirmations from the Zoroastrian tradition, whether it be the Denkart, Tansar-nāma, Ardāy Wirāz Nāmag, Bundahsin, Zand i Wahman Yasn or the transmitted oral tradition.^{[102][103]}

As tradition continues, under the reign of King Valax (identified with a Vologases of the Arsacid Dynasty^[104]), an attempt was made to restore what was considered the Avesta. During the Sassanid Empire, Ardashir ordered Tansar, his high priest, to finish the work that King Valax had started. Shapur I sent priests to locate the scientific text portions of the Avesta that were in the possession of the Greeks. Under Shapur II, Arderbad Mahrespandand revised the canon to ensure its orthodox character, while under Khosrow I, the Avesta was translated into Pahlavi.

The compilation of the Avesta can be authoritatively traced, however, to the Sasanian Empire, of which only fraction survive today if the Middle Persian literature is correct.^[102] The later manuscripts all date from after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the latest being from 1288, 590 years after the fall of the Sasanian Empire. The texts that remain today are the Gathas, Yasna, Visperad and the Vendidad, of which the latter's inclusion is disputed within the faith.^[105] Along with these texts is the individual, communal, and ceremonial prayer book called the Khordeh Avesta, which contains the Yashts and other important hymns, prayers, and rituals. The rest of the materials from the Avesta are called "Avestan fragments" in that they are written in Avestan, incomplete, and generally of unknown provenance.^[106]

Middle Persian (Pahlavi)

Middle Persian and Pahlavi works created in the 9th and 10th century contain many religious Zoroastrian books, as most of the writers and copyists were part of the Zoroastrian clergy. The most significant and important books of this era include the Denkard, Bundahishn, Menog-i Khrad, Selections of Zadspram, Jamasp Namag, Epistles of Manucher, Rivayats, Dadestan-i-Denig, and Arda Viraf Namag. All Middle Persian texts written on Zoroastrianism during this time period are considered secondary works on the religion, and not scripture. Nonetheless, these texts have had a strong influence on the religion.

Zoroaster

Zoroastrianism was founded by Zoroaster (or Zarathushtra) in ancient Iran. The precise date of the founding of the religion is uncertain and estimates vary wildly from 2000 BCE to "200 years before Alexander". Zoroaster was born - in either Northeast Iran or Southwest Afghanistan - into a culture with a polytheistic religion, which featured excessive animal sacrifice^[107] and the excessive ritual use of intoxicants, and his life was influenced profoundly by the attempts of his people to find peace and stability in the face of constant threats of raiding and conflict. Zoroaster's birth and early life are little documented but speculated upon heavily in later texts. What is known is recorded in the Gathas, forming the core of the Avesta, which contain hymns thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. Born into the Spitama clan, he refers to himself as a poet-priest and prophet. He had a wife, three sons, and three daughters, the numbers of which are gathered from various texts.^[108]

Zoroaster rejected many of the gods of the Bronze Age Iranians and their oppressive class structure, in which the Kavis and Karapans (princes and priests) controlled the ordinary people. He also opposed cruel animal sacrifices and the excessive use of the possibly hallucinogenic Haoma plant (conjectured to have been a species of ephedra and/or Peganum harmala), but did not condemn either practice outright, providing moderation was observed.^{[109][110]}

Zoroaster in legend

According to later Zoroastrian tradition, when Zoroaster was 30 years old, he went into the Daiti river to draw water for a Haoma ceremony; when he emerged, he received a vision of Vohu Manah. After this, Vohu Manah took him to the other six Amesha Spentas, where he received the completion of his vision.^[111] This vision radically transformed his view of the world, and he tried to teach this view to others. Zoroaster believed in one supreme creator deity and acknowledged this creator's emanations (Amesha Spenta) and other divinities which he called Ahuras (Yazata). Some of the deities of the old religion, the Daevas (Devas in Sanskrit), appeared to delight in war and strife and were condemned as evil workers of Angra Mainyu by Zoroaster.

Zoroaster's ideas were not taken up quickly; he originally only had one convert: his cousin Maidhyoimanha.^[112] The local religious authorities opposed his ideas, considering that their faith, power, and particularly their rituals were threatened by Zoroaster's teaching against the bad and overly-complicated ritualization of religious ceremonies. Many did not like Zoroaster's downgrading of the Daevas to evil ones not worthy of worship. After twelve years of little success, Zoroaster left his home.

In the country of King Vishtaspa, the king and queen heard Zoroaster debating with the religious leaders of the land and decided to accept Zoroaster's ideas as the official religion of their kingdom after having Zoroaster prove himself by healing the king's favorite horse. Zoroaster is believed to have died in his late 70s, either by murder by a Turanian or old age. Very little is known of the time between Zoroaster and the Achaemenian period, except that Zoroastrianism spread to Western Iran and other regions. By the time of the founding of the Achaemenid Empire, Zoroastrianism is believed to have been already a well-established religion.

Cypress of Kashmar

The Cypress of Kashmar is a mythical cypress tree of legendary beauty and gargantuan dimensions. It is said to have sprung from a branch brought by Zoroaster from Paradise and to have stood in today's Kashmar in northeastern Iran and to have been planted by Zoroaster in honor of the conversion of King Vishtaspa to Zoroastrianism. According to the Iranian physicist and historian Zakariya al-Qazwini King Vishtaspa had been a patron of Zoroaster who planted the tree himself. In his *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*, he further describes how the Al-Mutawakkil in 247 AH (861 AD) caused the

mighty cypress to be felled, and then transported it across Iran, to be used for beams in his new palace at Samarra. Before, he wanted the tree to be reconstructed before his eyes. This was done in spite of protests by the Iranians, who offered a very great sum of money to save the tree. Al-Mutawakkil never saw the cypress, because he was murdered by a Turkish soldier (possibly in the employ of his son) on the night when it arrived on the banks of the Tigris.^{[113][114]}

Fire Temple of Kashmar

Kashmar Fire Temple was the first Zoroastrian fire temple built by Vishtaspa at the request of Zoroaster in Kashmar. In a part of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, the story of finding Zarathustra and accepting Vishtaspa's religion is regulated that after accepting Zoroastrian religion, Vishtaspa sends priests all over the universe And Azar enters the fire temples (domes) and the first of them is Adur Burzen-Mihr who founded in Kashmar and planted a cypress tree in front of the fire temple and made it a symbol of accepting the Bahi religion And he sent priests all over the world, and commanded all the famous men and women to come to that place of worship.^[115]

According to the Paikuli inscription, during the Sasanian Empire, Kashmar was part of Greater Khorasan, and the Sasanians worked hard to revive the ancient religion. It still remains a few kilometers above the ancient city of Kashmar in the castle complex of Atashgah.^[116]



Reconstruction of the Sassanid model of Fire Temple of Kashmar is located near the historical complex of Atashgah Castle

Principal beliefs

Humata, Huxta, Huvarshta (Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds), the Threefold Path of Asha, is considered the core maxim of Zoroastrianism especially by modern practitioners. In Zoroastrianism, good transpires for those who do righteous deeds for its own sake, not for the search of reward. Those who do evil are said to be attacked and confused by the druj and are responsible for aligning themselves back to Asha by following this path.^[25]

In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda is the beginning and the end, the creator of everything that can and cannot be seen, the eternal and uncreated, the all-good and source of Asha.^[4] In the Gathas, the most sacred texts of Zoroastrianism thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself, Zoroaster acknowledged the highest devotion to Ahura Mazda, with worship and adoration also given to Ahura Mazda's manifestations (Amesha Spenta) and the other ahuras (Yazata) that support Ahura Mazda.^[117]

Daena (*din* in modern Persian and meaning "that which is seen") is representative of the sum of one's spiritual conscience and attributes, which through one's choice Asha is either strengthened or weakened in the Daena.^[118] Traditionally, the *manthras*, spiritual prayer formulas, are believed to be of immense power and the vehicles of Asha and creation used to maintain good and fight evil.^[119] *Daena* should not be confused with the fundamental principle of Asha, believed to be the cosmic order which governs and permeates all existence, and the concept of which governed the life of the ancient Indo-Iranians. For these, *asha* was the course of everything observable—



Faravahar (or Ferohar), one of the primary symbols of Zoroastrianism, believed to be the depiction of a Fravashi or the Khvarenah.

the motion of the planets and astral bodies; the progression of the seasons; and the pattern of daily nomadic herdsman life, governed by regular metronomic events such as sunrise and sunset, and was strengthened through truth-telling and following the Threefold Path.^[19]

All physical creation (*getig*) was thus determined to run according to a master plan—inherent to Ahura Mazda—and violations of the order (*druj*) were violations against creation, and thus violations against Ahura Mazda.^[22] This concept of *asha* versus the *druj* should not be confused with Western and especially Abrahamic notions of good versus evil, for although both forms of opposition express moral conflict, the *asha* versus *druj* concept is more systemic and less personal, representing, for instance, chaos (that opposes order); or "uncreation", evident as natural decay (that opposes creation); or more simply "the lie" (that opposes truth and goodness).^[19] Moreover, in the role as the one uncreated creator of all, Ahura Mazda is not the creator of *druj*, which is "nothing", anti-creation, and thus (likewise) uncreated and developed as the antithesis of existence through choice.^[20]



A Parsi Wedding, 1905

In this schema of *asha* versus *druj*, mortal beings (both humans and animals) play a critical role, for they too are created. Here, in their lives, they are active participants in the conflict, and it is their spiritual duty to defend Asha, which is under constant assault and would decay in strength without counteraction.^[19] Throughout the Gathas, Zoroaster emphasizes deeds and actions within society and accordingly extreme asceticism is frowned upon in Zoroastrianism but moderate forms are allowed within.^[48]

Central to Zoroastrianism is the emphasis on moral choice, to choose the responsibility and duty for which one is in the mortal world, or to give up this duty and so facilitate the work of *druj*.

Similarly, predestination is rejected in Zoroastrian teaching and the absolute free will of all conscious beings is core, with even divine beings having the ability to choose. Humans bear responsibility for all situations they are in, and in the way they act toward one another. Reward, punishment, happiness, and grief all depend on how individuals live their lives.^[120]

In the 19th century, through contact with Western academics and missionaries, Zoroastrianism experienced a massive theological change that still affects it today. The Rev. John Wilson led various missionary campaigns in India against the Parsi community, disparaging the Parsis for their "dualism" and "polytheism" and as having unnecessary rituals while declaring the Avesta to not be "divinely inspired". This caused mass dismay in the relatively uneducated Parsi community, which blamed its priests and led to some conversions towards Christianity.

The arrival of the German orientalist and philologist Martin Haug led to a rallied defense of the faith through Haug's reinterpretation of the Avesta through Christianized and European orientalist lens. Haug postulated that Zoroastrianism was solely monotheistic with all other divinities reduced to the status of angels while Ahura Mazda became both omnipotent and the source of evil as well as good. Haug's thinking was subsequently disseminated as a Parsi interpretation, thus corroborating Haug's theory, and the idea became so popular that it is now almost universally accepted as doctrine (though being reevaluated in modern Zoroastrianism and academia).^[35] It has been argued by Dr Almut Hintze that this designation of monotheism is not wholly perfect and that Zoroastrianism instead has its "own form of monotheism" which combines elements of dualism and polytheism.^[121] It has otherwise been opined that Zoroastrianism is totally monotheistic with only dualistic elements.^[122]

Throughout Zoroastrian history, shrines and temples have been the focus of worship and pilgrimage for adherents of the religion. Early Zoroastrians were recorded as worshiping in the 5th century BCE on mounds and hills where fires were lit below the open skies.^[123] In the wake of Achaemenid expansion,

shrines were constructed throughout the empire and particularly influenced the role of Mithra, Aredvi Sura Anahita, Verethragna and Tishtrya, alongside other traditional Yazata who all have hymns within the Avesta and also local deities and culture-heroes. Today, enclosed and covered fire temples tend to be the focus of community worship where fires of varying grades are maintained by the clergy assigned to the temples.^[124]

Cosmology: Creation of the universe

According to the Zoroastrian creation myth, Ahura Mazda existed in light and goodness above, while Angra Mainyu existed in darkness and ignorance below. They have existed independently of each other for all time, and manifest contrary substances. Ahura Mazda first manifested seven divine beings called Amesha Spentas, who support him and represent beneficent aspects of personality and creation, along with numerous Yazatas, divinities worthy of worship. Ahura Mazda then created the material and visible world itself in order to ensnare evil. Ahura Mazda created the floating, egg-shaped universe in two parts: first the spiritual (*menog*) and 3,000 years later, the physical (*getig*). Ahura Mazda then created Gayomard, the archetypal perfect man, and Gavaevodata, the primordial bovine.^[120]

While Ahura Mazda created the universe and humankind, Angra Mainyu, whose very nature is to destroy, miscreated demons, evil *daevas*, and noxious creatures (*khrafstar*) such as snakes, ants, and flies. Angra Mainyu created an opposite, evil being for each good being, except for humans, which he found he could not match. Angra Mainyu invaded the universe through the base of the sky, inflicting Gayomard and the bull with suffering and death. However, the evil forces were trapped in the universe and could not retreat. The dying primordial man and bovine emitted seeds, which were protect by Mah, the Moon. From the bull's seed grew all beneficial plants and animals of the world and from the man's seed grew a plant whose leaves became the first human couple. Humans thus struggle in a two-fold universe of the material and spiritual trapped and in long combat with evil. The evils of this physical world are not products of an inherent weakness, but are the fault of Angra Mainyu's assault on creation. This assault turned the perfectly flat, peaceful, and ever day-lit world into a mountainous, violent place that is half night.^[120]

Eschatology: Renovation and judgment

Zoroastrianism also includes beliefs about the renovation of the world (Frashokereti) and individual judgment (cf. general and particular judgment), including the resurrection of the dead, which are alluded to in the Gathas but developed in later Avestan and Middle Persian writings.

Individual judgment at death is at the Chinvat Bridge ("bridge of judgement" or "bridge of choice"), which each human must cross, facing a spiritual judgment, though modern belief is split as to whether it is representative of a mental decision during life to choose between good and evil or an afterworld location. Humans' actions under their free will through choice determine the outcome. According to tradition, the soul is judged by the Yazatas Mithra, Sraosha, and Rashnu, where depending on the verdict one is either greeted at the bridge by a beautiful, sweet-smelling maiden or by an ugly, foul-smelling old hag representing their Daena affected by their actions in life. The maiden leads the dead safely across the bridge, which widens and becomes pleasant for the righteous, towards the House of Song. The hag leads the dead down a bridge that narrows to a razor's edge and is full of stench until the departed falls off into the abyss towards the House of Lies.^{[120][125]} Those with a balance of good and evil go to Hamistagan, a purgatorial realm mentioned in the 9th century work Dadestan-i Denig.^[126]

The House of Lies is considered temporary and reformatory; punishments fit the crimes, and souls do not rest in eternal damnation. Hell contains foul smells and evil food, a smothering darkness, and souls are packed tightly together although they believe they are in total isolation.^[120]

In ancient Zoroastrian eschatology, a 3,000-year struggle between good and evil will be fought, punctuated by evil's final assault. During the final assault, the sun and moon will darken and humankind will lose its reverence for religion, family, and elders. The world will fall into winter, and Angra Mainyu's most fearsome miscreant, Azi Dahaka, will break free and terrorize the world.^[120]

According to legend, the final savior of the world, known as the Saoshyant, will be born to a virgin impregnated by the seed of Zoroaster while bathing in a lake. The Saoshyant will raise the dead—including those in all afterworlds—for final judgment, returning the wicked to hell to be purged of bodily sin. Next, all will wade through a river of molten metal in which the righteous will not burn but through which the impure will be completely purified. The forces of good will ultimately triumph over evil, rendering it forever impotent but not destroyed. The Saoshyant and Ahura Mazda will offer a bull as a final sacrifice for all time and all humans will become immortal. Mountains will again flatten and valleys will rise; the House of Song will descend to the moon, and the earth will rise to meet them both.^[120] Humanity will require two judgments because there are as many aspects to our being: spiritual (*menog*) and physical (*getig*).^[120] Thus, Zoroastrianism can be said to be a universalist religion with respect to salvation in that all souls are redeemed at the final judgement.

Ritual and prayer

The central ritual of Zoroastrianism is the Yasna, which is a recitation of the eponymous book of the Avesta and sacrificial ritual ceremony involving Haoma.^[127] Extensions to the Yasna ritual are possible through use of the Visperad and Vendidad, but such an extended ritual is rare in modern Zoroastrianism.^{[128][129]} The Yasna itself descended from Indo-Iranian sacrificial ceremonies and animal sacrifice of varying degrees are mentioned in the Avesta and are still practiced in Zoroastrianism albeit through reduced forms such as the sacrifice of fat before meals.^[109] High rituals such as the Yasna are considered to be the purview of the Mobeds with a corpus of individual and communal rituals and prayers included in the Khordeh Avesta.^{[127][130]} A Zoroastrian is welcomed into the faith through the Navjote/Sedreh Pushi ceremony, which is traditionally conducted during the later childhood or pre-teen years of the aspirant, though there is no defined age limit for the ritual.^{[119][131]} After the ceremony, Zoroastrians are encouraged to wear their sedreh (ritual shirt) and kusti (ritual girdle) daily as a spiritual reminder and for mystical protection, though reformist Zoroastrians tend to only wear them during festivals, ceremonies, and prayers.^{[132][119][131]}

The incorporation of cultural and local rituals is quite common and traditions have been passed down in historically Zoroastrian communities such as herbal healing practices, wedding ceremonies, and the like.^{[133][134][119]} Traditionally, Zoroastrian rituals have also included shamanic elements involving mystical methods such as spirit travel to the invisible realm and involving the consumption of fortified wine, Haoma, mang, and other ritual aids.^{[135][22][136][137][138]} Historically, Zoroastrians are encouraged to pray the five daily Gāhs and to maintain and celebrate the various holy festivals of the Zoroastrian calendar, which can differ from community to community.^{[139][140]} Zoroastrian prayers, called manthras, are conducted usually with hands outstretched in imitation of Zoroaster's prayer style described in the Gathas and are of a reflectionary and supplicant nature believed to be endowed with the ability to banish evil.^{[141][142][41]} Devout Zoroastrians are known to cover their heads during prayer, either with traditional topi, scarves, other headwear, or even just their hands. However, full coverage and veiling which is traditional in Islamic practice is not a part of Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian women in Iran wear their head coverings displaying hair and their faces to defy mandates by the Islamic Republic of Iran.^[143]

Demographics



The sacred Zoroastrian pilgrimage shrine of Chak Chak in Yazd, Iran.

Zoroastrian communities internationally tend to comprise mostly two main groups of people: Indian Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. According to a study in 2012 by the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, the number of Zoroastrians worldwide was estimated to be between 111,691 and 121,962. The number is imprecise because of diverging counts in Iran.^[12] As of 2018, it has been estimated that there are 100,000 to 200,000 Zoroastrians worldwide, with around 60,000 Parsis in India and 1,400 in Pakistan.^[144]

Small Zoroastrian communities may be found all over the world, with a continuing concentration in Western India, Central Iran, and Southern Pakistan. Zoroastrians of the diaspora are primarily located in the United States, Great Britain and the former British colonies, particularly Canada and Australia, and usually anywhere where there is a strong Iranian and Gujarati presence.

In South Asia

India

India is considered to be home to the single largest Zoroastrian population in the world. When the Islamic armies, under the first caliphs, invaded Persia, those locals who were unwilling to convert to Islam sought refuge, first in the mountains of Northern Iran, then the regions of Yazd and its surrounding villages. Later, in the ninth century CE, a group sought refuge in the western coastal region of India, and also scattered to other regions of the world. Following the fall of the Sassanid Empire in 651 CE, many Zoroastrians migrated. Among them were several groups who ventured to Gujarat on the western shores of the Indian subcontinent, where they finally settled. The descendants of those refugees are today known as the Parsis. The year of arrival on the subcontinent cannot be precisely established, and Parsi legend and tradition assigns various dates to the event.

In the Indian census of 2001, the Parsis numbered 69,601, representing about 0.006% of the total population of India, with a concentration in and around the city of Mumbai. Due to a low birth rate and high rate of emigration, demographic trends project that by 2020 the Parsis will number only about 23,000 or 0.002% of the total population of India. By 2008, the birth-to-death ratio was 1:5; 200 births per year to 1,000 deaths.^[147] India's 2011 Census recorded 57,264 Parsi Zoroastrians.^[148]

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the Zoroastrian population was estimated to number 1,675 people in 2012,^[12] mostly living in Sindh (especially Karachi) followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.^{[149][150]} The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) of Pakistan claimed that there were 3,650 Parsi voters during the elections in Pakistan in 2013 and 4,235 in 2018.^[151]

Historical population of Parsis in India

Year	Pop.	±% p.a.
1941	114,000	—
1971	91,266	−0.74%
1981	71,630	−2.39%
2001	69,601	−0.14%
2011	57,264	−1.93%

Sources:^{[145][146]}



Parsi Navjote ceremony (rites of admission into the Zoroastrian faith)

Iran, Iraq and Central Asia

Iran's figures of Zoroastrians have ranged widely; the last census (1974) before the revolution of 1979 revealed 21,400 Zoroastrians.^[152] Some 10,000 adherents remain in the Central Asian regions that were once considered the traditional stronghold of Zoroastrianism, i.e., Bactria (see also Balkh), which is in Northern Afghanistan; Sogdiana; Margiana; and other areas close to Zoroaster's homeland. In Iran, emigration, out-marriage and low birth rates are likewise leading to a decline in the Zoroastrian population. Zoroastrian groups in Iran say their number is approximately 60,000.^[153] According to the Iranian census data from 2011 the number of Zoroastrians in Iran was 25,271.^[154]

Communities exist in Tehran, as well as in Yazd, Kerman and Kermanshah, where many still speak an Iranian language distinct from the usual Persian. They call their language Dari (not to be confused with the Dari of Afghanistan). Their language is also called *Gavri* or *Behdini*, literally "of the Good Religion". Sometimes their language is named for the cities in which it is spoken, such as *Yazdi* or *Kermani*. Iranian Zoroastrians were historically called *Gabrs*, originally without a pejorative connotation but in the present-day derogatorily applied to all non-Muslims.

The number of Kurdish Zoroastrians, along with those of non-ethnic converts, has been estimated differently.^[155] The Zoroastrian Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq has claimed that as many as 100,000 people in Iraqi Kurdistan have converted to Zoroastrianism recently, with community leaders repeating this claim and speculating that even more Zoroastrians in the region are practicing their faith secretly.^{[156][157][158]} However, this has not been confirmed by independent sources.^[159]

The surge in Kurdish Muslims converting to Zoroastrianism is largely attributed to disillusionment with Islam after experiencing violence and oppression perpetrated by ISIS in the area.^[160]

Western world

North America is thought to be home to 18,000–25,000 Zoroastrians of both South Asian and Iranian background. A further 3,500 live in Australia (mainly in Sydney). As of 2012, the population of Zoroastrians in USA was 15,000, making it the third-largest Zoroastrian population in the world after those of India and Iran.^[161] It has been claimed that 3,000 Kurds have converted to Zoroastrianism in Sweden.^[162] In 2020, Historic England published *A Survey of Zoroastrianism Buildings in England* with the aim of providing information about buildings that Zoroastrians use in England so that HE can work with communities to enhance and protect those buildings now and in the future. The scoping survey identified four buildings in England.^[163]

See also

- Dualism in cosmology
- Iranian religions
- Mandaean cosmology
- Muslim conquest of Persia
- Persecution of Zoroastrians
- Proto-Indo-European mythology
- Zoroastrian calendar

References

Sikhism

Sikhism (/ˈsɪkɪzəm/) or **Sikhi** (Punjabi: ਸਿੱਖੀ *Sikkhī*, [ˈsɪkʰiː], from ਸਿੱਖ, *Sikh*, 'disciple', 'seeker', or 'learner')^[i] is one of the most recent religious faiths that originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, present-day Pakistan,^[ii] around the end of the 15th century CE.^{[1][2][3][4][5][6]} It is the most recently founded major organized faith, and stands at fifth-largest worldwide^[7] with about 25–30 million adherents (known as Sikhs) as of the early 21st century.^{[8][9]}

Sikhism developed from the spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the faith's first guru,^[10] and the nine Sikh gurus who succeeded him. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), named the Sikh scripture *Guru Granth Sahib* as his successor, bringing to a close the line of human gurus and establishing the scripture as the 11th and last eternally living guru, a religious spiritual/life guide for Sikhs.^{[11][12][13]} Guru Nanak taught that living an "active, creative, and practical life" of "truthfulness, fidelity, self-control and purity" is above metaphysical truth, and that the ideal man "establishes union with God, knows His Will, and carries out that Will".^[14] Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru (1606–1644), established the concept of mutual co-existence of the *miri* ('political/'temporal') and *piri* ('spiritual') realms.^[15]

The Sikh scripture opens with the *Mul Mantar* (ਮੂਲ ਮੰਤਰ), fundamental prayer about *ik onkar* (ੴ, 'One God').^{[16][17]} The core beliefs of Sikhism, articulated in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, include faith and meditation in the name of the one creator; divine unity and equality of all humankind; engaging in seva ('selfless service'); striving for justice for the benefit and prosperity of all; and honest conduct and livelihood while living a householder's life.^{[18][19][20]} Following this standard, Sikhism rejects claims that any particular religious tradition has a monopoly on Absolute Truth.^{[iii][21]}

Sikhism emphasizes *simran* (ਸਿਮਰਨ, meditation and remembrance of the teachings of Gurus),^[22] which can be expressed musically through *kirtan*, or internally through *naam japna* ('meditation on His name') as a means to feel God's presence. It teaches followers to transform the "Five Thieves" (i.e. lust, rage, greed, attachment, and ego).^[23]

The religion developed and evolved in times of religious persecution, gaining converts from both Hinduism and Islam.^[24] Mughal rulers of India tortured and executed two of the Sikh gurus—Guru Arjan (1563–1605) and Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675)—after they refused to convert to Islam.^{[25][26][27][28][29]} The persecution of Sikhs triggered the founding of the *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 as an order to protect the freedom of conscience and religion,^{[25][30]} with members expressing the qualities of a *Sant-Sipāhī* ('saint-soldier').^{[31][32]}



Symbol of Sikhism

Contents

Terminology

Philosophy and teachings

The Best Father

Worldly Illusion

Timeless Truth

Liberation

Power and Devotion (Miri and Piri)

Singing and Music

Remembrance of the Divine Name

Service and Action

Justice and Equality

Ten Gurus and Authority

Scripture

Adi Granth

Guru Granth Sahib
Compilation
Language and script
Teachings
As guru
Relation to Hinduism and Islam
Dasam Granth
Janamsakhis

Observances

Sikh festivals/events
Ceremonies and customs
Initiation and the Khalsa

History

Historical influences
Growth of Sikhism
Political advancement
Sikh confederacy and the rise of the Khalsa
Singh Sabha movement
Partition of India
Khalistan

Sikh people

Sikh sects
Sikh castes
Sikh diaspora

Prohibitions in Sikhism

See also

Notes

References

Further reading

External links

Terminology

The majority of Sikh scriptures were originally written in the alphabet of *Gurmukhī*, a script standardised by Guru Angad out of Laṅḍā scripts historically used in present-day Pakistan and North India.^{[33][34]} Adherents of Sikhism are known as *Sikhs*, meaning 'students' or 'disciples' of the Guru. The anglicised word *Sikhism* derives from the Punjabi verb *Sikhi*, which connotes the "temporal path of learning" and is rooted in the word *sikhana* ('to learn').^{[35][36]}

Philosophy and teachings

Sikhism is classified as an Indian religion along with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.^{[iv][v][38]}

The basis of Sikhism lies in the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. Sikh ethics emphasize the congruence between spiritual development and everyday moral conduct. Its founder Guru Nanak summarized this perspective as: "Truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living."^{[39]:234} Sikhism lays emphasis on *Ēk nūr te sab jag upjiā*, 'From the one light, the entire universe welled up.'

The Best Father

The Definition of Sikh:^[37]

Any human being who faithfully believes in

- i. One Immortal Being,
- ii. Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib,
- iii. The Guru Granth Sahib,
- iv. The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and
- v. the baptism bequeathed by the tenth

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion with pantheistic elements, advocating the belief in One Universal God signified by the term *Ik Onkar*.^{[40][41]} In Sikhism, the overall concept of God is *Waheguru* ('wondrous Teacher') considered to be *nirankar* ('shapeless'), *akal* ('timeless'), *karta purakh* ('the creator'), and *agam agochar* ('incomprehensible and invisible').^[42]

Guru, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion, is a Sikh.

In a literal sense, God has no gender in Sikhism, though metaphorically, God is presented as masculine and God's power as feminine. For example, God is repeatedly referred to by the name *akal purkh* ('beyond time and space') and *nirankar* ('without form') by the tenth guru Guru Gobind Singh Ji, but he also refers to God as his father, and God's creative power as his mother. Similarly, another example is that the scripture and eternal guru, the Guru Granth Sahib says that all humans are soul-brides who long to unite with their husband Lord.^[43] In addition, the gurus also wrote in the Guru Granth Sahib that there are many worlds on which the transcendental God has created life.^[44]

The Sikh scripture begins with God as *ik onkar* (ੴ), the 'formless one',^{[17][39]:227} understood in the Sikh tradition as monotheistic unity of God.^[45] *Ik onkar* (sometimes capitalized) is more loosely rendered 'the one supreme reality', 'the one creator', 'the all-pervading spirit', and other ways of expressing a diffused but unified and singular sense of God and creation.^[46]

The traditional *Mul Mantar* goes from *ik onkar* until *Nanak hosee bhee sach* Guru Nanak (the first guru of sikhs) is living forever. The existence of guru is eternal. Sach means right, true, real. It means Guru Nanak is real from ages and will remain true. The opening line of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and each subsequent *raga*, mentions *ik onkar*.^[47]

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ
ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

"There is one supreme being, the eternal reality, the creator, without fear and devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the true Guru."

*ikk ōankār sat(i)-nām(u) karatā purakh(u)
nirabha'u niravair(u) akāl(a) mūrat(i)
ajūnī saibhan gur(a) prasād(i).*

—*Guru Granth Sahib* (17th c.), p. 1

Worldly Illusion

Māyā, defined as a temporary illusion or "unreality", is one of the core deviations from the pursuit of God and salvation: where worldly attractions give only illusory temporary satisfaction and pain that distracts from the process of the devotion of God. However, Nanak emphasised *māyā* as not a reference to the unreality of the world, but of its values. In Sikhism, the influences of ego, anger, greed, attachment, and lust, known as the *pānj chor* ('five thieves'), are believed to be particularly distracting and hurtful. Sikhs believe the world is currently in a state of *kali yuga* ('age of darkness') because the world is led astray by the love of and attachment to *māyā*.^[48] The fate of people vulnerable to the five thieves, is separation from God, and the situation may be remedied only after intensive and relentless devotion.^[49]

Timeless Truth

According to Guru Nanak, the supreme purpose of human life is to reconnect with *Akal* ('The Timeless One'), however, *egotism* is the biggest barrier in making this connection. Using the Guru's teaching remembrance of *nām* (the divine Name of the Lord)^{[50][51]} leads to the end of egotism. Guru Nanak designated the word *Guru* ('teacher')^[52] to mean the voice of "the spirit": the source of knowledge and the guide to salvation.^[53] As *ik onkar* is *universally immanent*, *Guru* is indistinguishable from *Akal* and are one and the same.^[54] One connects with *Guru* only with accumulation of selfless search of truth.^[55] Ultimately the seeker realises that it is the consciousness within the body which is the seeker/follower of the Word that is the true *Guru*. The human body is just a means to achieve the reunion with Truth.^[54] Once truth starts to shine in a person's heart, the essence of current and past holy books of all religions is understood by the person.^[56]



An Akali-Nihang Sikh Warrior at [Harmandir Sahib](#), also called the [Golden Temple](#)

Liberation

Guru Nanak's teachings are founded not on a final destination of heaven or hell, but on a spiritual union with the *Akal*, which results in salvation or *jivanmukti* ('enlightenment/liberation within one's lifetime'),^[57] a concept also found in Hinduism.^[58] Guru Gobind Singh makes it clear that human birth is obtained with great fortune, therefore one needs to be able to make the most of this life.^[59]

Sikhs accept reincarnation and karma concepts found in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, but do not necessarily infer a metaphysical soteriology akin to those found in those other religions.^{[59][60][61]} However, in Sikhism, both karma and liberation "is modified by the concept of God's grace" (*nadar, mehar, kirpa, karam*, etc.).^[58] Guru Nanak states that "the body takes birth because of karma, but salvation is attained through grace."^[62] To get closer to God, Sikhs: avoid the evils of *maya*; keep the everlasting truth in mind; practice *shabad kirtan* (musical recitation of hymns); meditate on *naam*; and serve humanity. Sikhs believe that being in the company of the *satsang* (association with *sat*, 'true', people) or *sadh sangat* is one of the key ways to achieve liberation from the cycles of reincarnation.^[63]

Power and Devotion (Miri and Piri)

Miri-Piri is a doctrine that has been practiced in Sikh religion since the seventeenth century. The doctrine of the "Mir" (social and political aspects of life) and the "Pir" (guides to spiritual aspect of life) was revealed by the first Guru of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, but propounded by the sixth Guru of Sikhism, Guru Hargobind, on June 12, 1606.^{[64][65]} After the martyrdom of his father, Guru Hargobind was elevated to the Guruship and fulfilled the prophecy that was given by the primal figure of Sikh, Baba Buddha, that the guru will possess spiritual and temporal power. Guru Hargobind introduced the two swords of Miri and Piri symbolizing both worldly (social and political) and spiritual authority.^{[66][64]} The two kirpan of Miri and Piri are tied together with a khanda in center, so the combination of both is considered supreme, Where action informed or arising out of the spiritual heart completes one's purpose and meaning in the world of action: spirituality.^{[67][64]}

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and the founder of Sikhism, was a Bhakti saint.^[68] He taught that the most important form of worship is *Bhakti* (devotion to Waheguru).^[69] Guru Arjan, in the *Sukhmani Sahib*, recommended the true religion is one of loving devotion to God.^{[70][71]} The *Guru Granth Sahib* includes suggestions on how a Sikh should perform constant *Bhakti*.^{[69][72][73]} Some scholars call Sikhism a *Bhakti* sect of Indian traditions,^{[74][75]} adding that it emphasises "*nirguni Bhakti*," i.e. loving devotion to a divine without qualities or physical form.^{[75]:1–3[76][77]} While Western scholarship generally places Sikhism as arising primarily within a Hindu *Bhakti* movement milieu while recognizing some Sufi Islamic influences,^{[78][79]:3,42–3} some Indian Sikh scholars disagree and state that Sikhism transcended the environment it emerged from. The basis of the latter analysis is that *Bhakti* traditions did not clearly disassociate from Vedic texts and their cosmologies and metaphysical worldview, while the Sikh tradition clearly did disassociate from the Vedic tradition.^[80]

Some Sikh sects outside the Punjab region of India, such as those found in Maharashtra and Bihar, practice *aarti* (the ceremonial use of lamps) during *Bhakti* observances in a Sikh gurdwara.^{[81][82]} But, most Sikh gurdwaras forbid *aarti* during their *Bhakti* practices.^{[79]:201}

While emphasizing *Bhakti*, the Sikh gurus also taught that the spiritual life and secular householder life are intertwined, and not separate. This logically follows from the pantheistic nature of Sikh philosophy.^[83] In Sikh worldview, the everyday world is part of the Infinite Reality, increased spiritual awareness leads to increased and vibrant participation in the everyday world.^[84] Guru Nanak described living an "active, creative, and practical life" of "truthfulness, fidelity, self-control and purity" as being higher than the metaphysical truth.^[85]

The 6th Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind, after Guru Arjan's martyrdom, faced with oppression by the Islamic Mughal Empire, affirmed the philosophy that the political/temporal (*Miri*) and spiritual (*Piri*) realms are mutually coexistent.^{[86][87]} According to the 9th Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, the ideal Sikh should have both *Shakti* (power that resides in the temporal), and *Bhakti* (spiritual meditative qualities). This was developed into the concept of the "saint soldier" by the 10th Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh.^[87]

The concept of man as elaborated by Guru Nanak refines and negates the "monotheistic concept of self/God", and "monotheism becomes almost redundant in the movement and crossings of love."^[88] The goal of man, taught the Sikh gurus, is to end all dualities of "self and other, I and not-I", attain the "attendant balance of separation-fusion, self-other, action-inaction, attachment-detachment, in the course of daily life".^[88]

Singing and Music

Sikhs refer to the hymns of the gurus as *Gurbani* ('Guru's word'). *Shabad Kirtan* is the singing of *Gurbani*. The entire verses of *Guru Granth Sahib* are written in a form of poetry and rhyme to be recited in thirty-one Ragas of the Classical Indian Music as specified. However, the exponents of these are rarely to be found amongst the Sikhs who are conversant with all the Ragas in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. *Guru Nanak* started the *Shabad Kirtan* tradition and taught that listening to *kirtan* is a powerful way to achieve tranquility while meditating, and singing of the glories of the Supreme Timeless One (God) with devotion is the most effective way to come in communion with the Supreme Timeless One.^[89] The three morning prayers for Sikhs consist of *Japji Sahib*, *Jaap Sahib*, and *Tav-Prasad Savaiye*.^[90] Baptised Sikhs (*Amritdharis*) rise early and meditate, then recite all the Five Banis of Nitnem, before breakfast. Five Banis consists of Jap Ji Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Tav-Prasad Savaiye, Chaupai Sahib, Anand Sahib and recitation of the banis paath is followed by Ardās in which Sarbat da Bhala principle is taught by Gurus which literally means blessings for everyone, blessings to humankind in good faith without discrimination.

Remembrance of the Divine Name

A key practice by Sikhs is remembrance^[51] of the *Naam* (divine name) *Waheguru*.^[50] This contemplation is done through *Nām Japna* (repetition of the divine name) or *Naam Simran* (remembrance of the divine Name through recitation).^{[51][91]} The verbal repetition of the name of God or a sacred syllable has been an ancient established practice in religious traditions in India, however, Sikhism developed *Naam-simran* as an important *Bhakti* practice.^{[92][93][94]} *Guru Nanak's* ideal is the total exposure of one's being to the divine Name and a total conforming to *Dharma* or the "Divine Order". *Nanak* described the result of the disciplined application of *nām simraṇ* as a "growing towards and into God" through a gradual process of five stages. The last of these is *Sach Khaṇḍ* (*The Realm of Truth*) – the final union of the spirit with God.^[53]

Service and Action

The Sikh gurus taught that by constantly remembering the divine name (*naam simran*) and through selfless service (*sēvā*) the devotee overcomes egotism (*Haumai*). This, it states, is the primary root of five evil impulses and the cycle of birth and death.^{[95][96]}

Service in Sikhism takes three forms: *Tan* (physical service, i.e. labor), *Man* (mental service, such as dedicating your heart for service of others), and *Dhan* (material service, including financial support).^[97] Sikhism stresses *kirat karō*: that is "honest work". Sikh teachings also stress the concept of sharing, or *vaṇḍ chakkō*, giving to the needy for the benefit of the community.^[98]

Justice and Equality

Sikhism regards God as the true king, the king of all kings, the one who dispenses justice through the law of *karma*, a retributive model and divine grace.^{[99][31][32]}

The term for justice in the Sikh tradition is *Niāyā*^[99] It is related to the term *dharam* which in Sikhism connotes 'moral order' and righteousness (derived from but become distinct from the etymologically related Hindu concept of *dharmā*).^[99] According to the Tenth Sikh Guru, *Guru Gobind Singh*, states *Pashaura Singh* (a professor of Sikh studies), "one must first try all the peaceful means of negotiation in the pursuit of justice" and if these fail then it is legitimate to "draw the sword in defense of righteousness".^[100] Sikhism considers "an attack on *dharam* is an attack on justice, on righteousness, and on the moral order generally" and the *dharam* "must be defended at all costs".^[101] The divine name is its antidote for pain and vices. Forgiveness is taught as a virtue in Sikhism, yet it also teaches its faithful to shun those with evil intentions and to pick up the sword to fight injustice and religious persecution.^[102]

Sikhism does not differentiate religious obligations by sex. God in Sikhism has no sex, and the Sikh scripture does not discriminate against women, nor bar them from any roles.^[103] Women in Sikhism have been in positions of leadership, including leading in wars and issued orders or *hukamnamas*.^{[104][103][105]}

Ten Gurus and Authority

The term *Guru* comes from the *Sanskrit* *gurū*, meaning teacher, enlightener, guide, or mentor. The traditions and philosophy of Sikhism were established by ten Gurus from 1469 to 1708.^{[106][107]} Each Guru added to and reinforced the message taught by the previous, resulting in the creation of the Sikh religion. *Guru Nanak* was the first Guru and appointed a disciple as successor. *Guru Gobind Singh* was the final Guru in human form. Before his death, *Guru Gobind Singh* decreed in 1708, that the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* would be the final and perpetual Guru of the Sikhs.^[13]

Guru Nanak stated that his Guru is God who is the same from the beginning of time to the end of time.^[108] Nanak said to be a God's slave and servant, but maintained that he was only a guide and teacher.^{[109][110]} Nanak stated that the human Guru is mortal, who is to be respected and loved but not worshipped.^[109] When Guru, or SatGuru (The true Guru) is used in *Gurbani* it is often referring to the highest expression of truthfulness.^[111]

Guru Angad succeeded Guru Nanak. Later, an important phase in the development of Sikhism came with the third successor, Guru Amar Das. Guru Nanak's teachings emphasised the pursuit of salvation; Guru Amar Das began building a cohesive community of followers with initiatives such as sanctioning distinctive ceremonies for birth, marriage, and death. Amar Das also established the *manji* (comparable to a diocese) system of clerical supervision.^[53]

Guru Amar Das's successor and son-in-law Guru Ram Das founded the city of Amritsar, which is home of the Harimandir Sahib and regarded widely as the holiest city for all Sikhs. Guru Arjan was arrested by Mughal authorities who were suspicious and hostile to the religious community he was developing.^[112] His persecution and death inspired his successors to promote a military and political organization of Sikh communities to defend themselves against the attacks of Mughal forces.

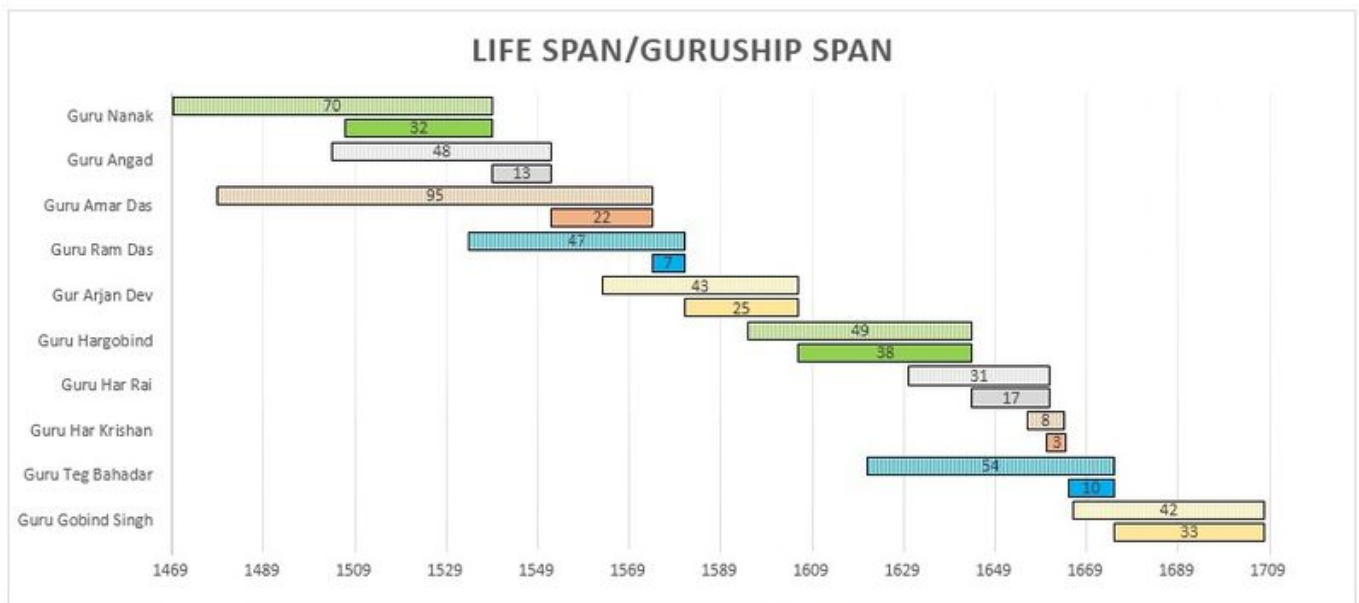
The Sikh gurus established a mechanism which allowed the Sikh religion to react as a community to changing circumstances. The sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, was responsible for the creation of the concept of Akal Takht (*throne of the timeless one*), which serves as the supreme decision-making centre of Sikhism and sits opposite the Harimandir Sahib. The Akal Takht is located in the city of Amritsar. The leader is appointed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Pabandhak Committee (SPGC). The *Sarbat Khālsā* (a representative portion of the Khalsa Panth) historically gathers at the Akal Takht on special festivals such as Vaisakhi or Hola Mohalla and when there is a need to discuss matters that affect the entire Sikh nation. A *gurmatā* (literally, 'guru's intention') is an order passed by the Sarbat Khālsā in the presence of the Gurū Granth Sāhib. A *gurmatā* may only be passed on a subject that affects the fundamental principles of Sikh religion; it is binding upon all Sikhs.^[113] The term *hukamnāmā* (literally, 'edict' or 'royal order') is often used interchangeably with the term *gurmatā*. However, a *hukamnāmā* formally refers to a hymn from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* which is given order to Sikhs.



A rare Tanjore-style painting from the late 19th century depicting the ten Sikh Gurus with Bhai Bala and Bhai Mardana



The interior of the Akal Takht



Life Span		Guruship Span	
Guru Nanak	15-Apr-1469 - 22-Sep-1539 : 70 years 05 months and 07 days	20-Aug-1507 - 22-Sep-1539 : 32 years 01 months and 02 days	
Guru Angad	31-Mar-1504 - 29-Mar-1552 : 47 years 11 months and 29 days	07-Sep-1539 - 29-Mar-1552 : 12 years 06 months and 22 days	
Guru Amar Das	05-May-1479 - 01-Sep-1574 : 95 years 03 months and 27 days	26-Mar-1552 - 01-Sep-1574 : 22 years 05 months and 06 days	
Guru Ram Das	24-Sep-1534 - 01-Sep-1581 : 46 years 11 months and 08 days	01-Sep-1574 - 01-Sep-1581 : 07 years	
Gur Arjan Dev	02-May-1563 - 16-Jun-1606 : 43 years 01 months and 14 days	01-Sep-1581 - 30-May-1606 : 24 years 08 months and 29 days	
Guru Hargobind	05-Jul-1595 - 19-Mar-1644 : 48 years 08 months and 14 days	25-May-1606 - 28-Feb-1644 : 37 years 09 months and 03 days	
Guru Har Rai	16-Jan-1630 - 06-Oct-1661 : 31 years 08 months and 20 days	03-Mar-1644 - 06-Oct-1661 : 17 years 07 months and 03 days	
Guru Har Krishan	23-Jul-1656 - 30-Mar-1664 : 07 years 08 months and 07 days	06-Oct-1661 - 30-Mar-1664 : 02 years 05 months and 24 days	
Guru Teg Bahadar	01-Apr-1621 - 24-Nov-1675 : 54 years 07 months and 23 days	20-Mar-1665 - 11-Nov-1675 : 10 years 07 months and 22 days	
Guru Gobind Singh	22-Dec-1666 - 07-Oct-1708 : 41 years 09 months and 15 days	11-Nov-1675 - 07-Oct-1708 : 32 years 10 months and 26 days	

Approximate Life Spans and Guruship Spans of the 10 Sikh Gurus

The word *guru* in Sikhism also refers to *Akal Purkh* (God), and God and *guru* can sometimes be synonymous in *Gurbani* (Sikh writings).^{[106][114]}

Scripture

There is one primary scripture for the Sikhs: the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. It is sometimes synonymously referred to as the *Ādi Granth*.^[115] Chronologically, however, the *Ādi Granth* – literally, 'First Volume' – refers to the version of the scripture created by Guru Arjan in 1604.^[116] The *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is the final expanded version of the scripture compiled by Guru Gobind Singh.^{[115][117]} While the *Guru Granth Sahib* is an unquestioned scripture in Sikhism, another important religious text, the *Dasam Granth*, does not enjoy universal consensus, but is considered a secondary scripture by many Sikhs.^[115]

Adi Granth

The *Ādi Granth* was compiled primarily by Bhai Gurdas under the supervision of Guru Arjan between the years 1603 and 1604.^[118] It is written in the Gurmukhī script, which is a descendant of the *Laṇḍā* script used in the Punjab at that time.^[119] The Gurmukhī script was standardised by Guru Angad, the second guru of the Sikhs, for use in the Sikh scriptures and is thought to have been influenced by the *Śāradā* and *Devanāgarī* scripts. An authoritative scripture was created to protect the integrity of hymns and teachings of the Sikh Gurus, and thirteen Hindu and two Muslim bhagats of the *Bhakti* movement sant tradition in medieval India.^[120] The thirteen Hindu *bhagats* whose teachings were entered into the text included Ramananda, Namdev, Pipa, Ravidas, Beni, Bhikhan, Dhanna, Jaidev, Parmanand, Sadhana, Sain, Sur, Trilochan, while the two Muslim *bhagats* were Kabir and Sufi saint Farid.^{[121][122][123][124]} However, the bhagats in context often spoke of transcending their religious labels, Kabir often attributed to being a Muslim states in the *Adi Granth*, "I am not Hindu nor Muslim."^[125] The Gurus following on this message taught that different methods of devotion are for the same infinite God.^[126]

Guru Granth Sahib

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is the holy scripture of the Sikhs, and is regarded as the living Guru.

Compilation

The Guru Granth started as a volume of Guru Nanak's poetic compositions. Prior to his death, he passed on his volume to Guru Angad (Guru 1539–1551). The final version of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* was compiled by *Guru Gobind Singh* in 1678. It consists of the original *Ādi Granth* with the addition of *Guru Tegh Bahadur's* hymns. The predominant bulk of *Guru Granth Sahib* is compositions by seven Sikh Gurus – *Guru Nanak*, *Guru Angad*, *Guru Amar Das*, *Guru Ram Das*, *Guru Arjan*, *Guru Teg Bahadur* and *Guru Gobind Singh*. It also contains the traditions and teachings of thirteen *Hindu Bhakti* movement *sants* (saints) such as *Ramananda*, *Namdev* among others, and two *Muslim saints* namely *Kabir* and the Sufi *Sheikh Farid*.^{[121][53]}

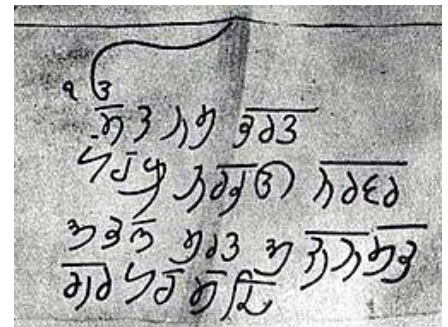


Gurū Granth Sāhib – the primary scripture of Sikhism

The text comprises 6,000 *śabads* (line compositions),^[115] which are poetically rendered and set to rhythmic ancient north Indian classical music.^[127] The bulk of the scripture is classified into sixty *rāgas*, with each Granth *rāga* subdivided according to length and author. The hymns in the scripture are arranged primarily by the *rāgas* in which they are read.^[115]

Language and script

The main language used in the scripture is known as *Sant Bhāṣā*, a language related to both *Punjabi* and *Hindi* and used extensively across medieval northern India by proponents of popular devotional religion (*bhakti*).^[128] The text is printed in *Gurumukhi* script, believed to have been developed by *Guru Angad*,^[115]. The language shares the Indo-European roots found in numerous regional languages of India.^[129]



Mul Mantra written by *Guru Har Rai*, showing the *Ik Onkar* at top.

Teachings



A group of *Sikh musicians* called *Dhadi* at the *Golden Temple* complex

The vision in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, states *Torkel Brekke*, is a society based on divine justice without oppression of any kind.^[130]

The Granth begins with the *Mūl Mantra*, an iconic verse which received *Guru Nanak* directly from *Akal Purakh* (God). The traditional *Mul Mantra* goes from *Ik Onkar* until *Nanak Hosee Bhee Sach*.

One God exists, truth by name, creative power, without fear, without enmity, timeless form, unborn, self-existent, by the *Guru's* grace.^[131]

(*Punjabi*: *ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥*,

romanized: *Ika oāṅkāra sati nāmu karatā purakhu nirabha'u niravairu akāla mūrati ajūnī saibhaṅ gura prasādi*)

As guru

The Tenth *Guru*, *Guru Gobind Singh ji*, named the Sikh scripture *Guru Granth Sahib* as his successor, terminating the line of human *Gurus* and making the scripture the literal embodiment of the eternal, impersonal *Guru*, where *Gods/Gurus* word serves as the spiritual guide for *Sikhs*.^{[11][12][13][132]}

All *Sikhs* are commanded to take the *Granth* as *Guru*

(*Punjabi*: *ਸੱਬ ਸਿੱਖਣ ਕੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨਯੋ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ* |, romanized: *Sabb sikkhaṅ kō hukam hai gurū mānyō granth*)

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed in *Sikh Gurdwara* (temple); many *Sikhs* bow or prostrate before it on entering the temple. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed every morning and put to bed at night in many *Gurdwaras*.^[133] The *Granth* is revered as eternal *gurbānī* and the spiritual authority.^[134]

The copies of the *Guru Granth Sahib* are not regarded as material objects, but as living subjects which are alive.^[135] According to *Myrvold*, the Sikh scripture is treated with respect like a living person, in a manner similar to the *Gospel* in early Christian worship. Old copies of the Sikh scripture are not thrown away, rather funerary services are performed.^[135]

In India the Guru Granth Sahib is even officially recognised by the Supreme Court of India as a judicial person which can receive donations and own land.^[135] Yet, some Sikhs also warn that, without true comprehension of the text, veneration for the text can lead to bibliolatry, with the concrete form of the teachings becoming the object of worship instead of the teachings themselves.^[135]

Relation to Hinduism and Islam

The Sikh scriptures use Hindu terminology, with references to the Vedas, and the names of gods and goddesses in Hindu bhakti movement traditions, such as Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, Parvati, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Rama, Krishna, but not to worship.^{[130][136][137]} It also refers to the spiritual concepts in Hinduism (*Ishvara*, *Bhagavan*, *Brahman*) and the concept of God in Islam (*Allah*) to assert that these are just "alternate names for the Almighty One".^[138]

While the Guru Granth Sahib acknowledges the Vedas, Puranas and Qur'an,^[139] it does not imply a syncretic bridge between Hinduism and Islam,^[140] but emphasises focusing on nitnem banis like Japu (repeating mantra of the divine Name of God – Waheguru), instead of Muslim practices such as circumcision or praying by prostrating on the ground to God, or Hindu rituals such as wearing thread.^[141]

Dasam Granth

The Dasam Granth is a scripture of Sikhs which contains texts attributed to the Guru Gobind Singh. The *Dasam Granth* is important to a great number of Sikhs, however it does not have the same authority as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Some compositions of the *Dasam Granth* like Jaap Sahib, (Amrit Savaiye), and Benti Chaupai are part of the daily prayers (Nitnem) for Sikhs.^[143] The first verse of the ardās prayer is from Chandi di Var. The *Dasam Granth* is largely versions of Hindu mythology from the Puranas, secular stories from a variety of sources called *Charitro Pakhyan* – tales to protect careless men from perils of lust.^{[144][145]}

Five versions of *Dasam Granth* exist, and the authenticity of the *Dasam Granth* has in modern times become one of the most debated topics within Sikhism. The text played a significant role in Sikh history, but in modern times parts of the text have seen antipathy and discussion among Sikhs.^[142]

Janamsakhis

The Janamsākhīs (literally *birth stories*), are writings which profess to be biographies of Guru Nanak. Although not scripture in the strictest sense, they provide a hagiographic look at Guru Nanak's life and the early start of Sikhism. There are several – often contradictory and sometimes unreliable – Janamsākhīs and they are not held in the same regard as other sources of scriptural knowledge.

Observances

Observant Sikhs adhere to long-standing practices and traditions to strengthen and express their faith. The daily recitation of the divine name of God VaheGuru and from a memory of specific passages from the Gurū Granth Sāhib, like the *Japu* (or *Japjī*, literally *chant*) hymns is recommended immediately after rising and bathing. Baptized Sikhs recite the five-morning prayers, the evening and night prayer. Family customs include both reading passages from the scripture and attending the gurdwara (also *gurdwārā*, meaning *the doorway to God*; sometimes transliterated as *Gurudwara*). There are many gurdwaras prominently constructed and maintained across India, as well as in almost every nation where Sikhs reside. Gurdwaras are open to all, regardless of religion, background, caste, or race.

Worship in a gurdwara consists chiefly of the singing of passages from the scripture. Sikhs will commonly enter the gurdwara, touch the ground before the holy scripture with their foreheads. The recitation of the eighteenth century *ardās* is also customary for attending Sikhs. The ardās recalls past sufferings and glories of the community, invoking divine grace for all humanity.^[146]



The Dasam Granth is a Sikh scripture which contains texts attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, including his autobiography Bachittar Natak. The major narrative in the text is on Chaubis Avtar (24 Avatars of Hindu god Vishnu), Rudra, Brahma, the Hindu warrior goddess Chandi and a story of Rama in Bachittar Natak.^[142]



The Darbar Sahib of a Gurdwara

The gurdwara is also the location for the historic Sikh practice of "Langar" or the community meal. All gurdwaras are open to anyone of any faith for a free meal, always vegetarian.^[147] People eat together, and the kitchen is maintained and serviced by Sikh community volunteers.^[148]

Sikh festivals/events

Guru Amar Das chose festivals for celebration by Sikhs like Vaisakhi, wherein he asked Sikhs to assemble and share the festivities as a community.^{[149][150]}

Vaisakhi is one of the most important festivals of Sikhs, while other significant festivals commemorate the birth, lives of the Gurus and Sikh martyrs. Historically, these festivals have been based on the moon calendar Bikrami calendar.^[151] In 2003, the SGPC, the Sikh organisation in charge of upkeep of the historical gurdwaras of Punjab, adopted Nanakshahi calendar.^[151] The new calendar is highly controversial among Sikhs and is not universally accepted. Sikh festivals include the following:

- Vaisakhi which includes Parades and Nagar Kirtan and occurs on 13 April or 14 April. Sikhs celebrate it because on this day, which fell on 30 March 1699, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, inaugurated the Khalsa, the 11th body of Guru Granth Sahib and leader of Sikhs until eternity.
 - Nagar Kirtan involves the processional singing of holy hymns throughout a community. While practiced at any time, it is customary in the month of Visakhi (or Vaisakhi). Traditionally, the procession is led by the saffron-robed Panj Piare (the five beloved of the Guru), who are followed by the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy Sikh scripture, which is placed on a float.



Nagar Kirtan crowd listening to Kirtan at Yuba City, California.

- Band Chor Diwas has been another important Sikh festival in its history.^[152] In recent years, instead of Diwali, the post-2003 calendar released by SGPC has named it the Bandi Chhor divas.^[153] Sikhs celebrate Guru Hargobind's release from the Gwalior Fort, with several innocent Raja kings who were also imprisoned by Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1619. This day continues to be commemorated on the same day of Hindu festival of Diwali, with lights, fireworks and festivities.
- Hola Mohalla is a tradition started by Guru Gobind Singh. It starts the day after Sikhs celebrate Holi,^[154] sometimes referred to as Hola.^[155] Guru Gobind Singh modified Holi with a three-day Hola Mohalla extension festival of martial arts. The extension started the day after the Holi festival in Anandpur Sahib, where Sikh soldiers would train in mock battles, compete in horsemanship, athletics, archery and military exercises.^{[156][157]}
- Gurpurbs are celebrations or commemorations based on the lives of the Sikh Gurus. They tend to be either birthdays or celebrations of Sikh martyrdom. All ten Gurus have Gurpurbs on the Nanakshahi calendar, but it is Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh who have a gurpurb that is widely celebrated in Gurdwaras and Sikh homes. The martyrdoms are also known as a Shaheedi Gurpurbs, which mark the martyrdom anniversary of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Ceremonies and customs

Khalsa Sikhs have also supported and helped develop major pilgrimage traditions to sacred sites such as Harmandir Sahib, Anandpur Sahib, Fatehgarh Sahib, Patna Sahib, Hazur Nanded Sahib, Hemkund Sahib and others.^[158] Sikh pilgrims and Sikhs of other sects customarily consider these as holy and a part of their Tirath.^[159] The Hola Mohalla around the festival of Holi, for example, is a ceremonial and customary gathering every year in Anandpur Sahib attracting over 100,000 Sikhs.^{[160][161]} Major Sikh temples feature a sarovar where some Sikhs take a customary dip. Some take home the sacred

water of the tank particularly for sick friends and relatives,^{[162][163]} believing that the waters of such sacred sites have restorative powers and the ability to purify one's *karma*.^{[164][vi][162]} The various Gurus of Sikhism have had different approaches to pilgrimage.^[165]

Upon a child's birth, the Guru Granth Sahib is opened at a random point and the child is named using the first letter on the top left hand corner of the left page. All boys are given the last name Singh, and all girls are given the last name Kaur (this was once a title which was conferred on an individual upon joining the Khalsa).^[166]

The Sikh marriage ritual includes the *anand kāraj* ceremony.^{[167][168]} The marriage ceremony is performed in front of the Guru Granth Sahib by a baptized Khalsa, Granthi of the Gurdwara.^{[169][170]} The tradition of circling the Guru Granth Sahib and Anand Karaj among Khalsa is practised since the fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das. Its official recognition and adoption came in 1909, during the Singh Sabha Movement.^[170]

Upon death, the body of a Sikh is usually cremated. If this is not possible, any respectful means of disposing the body may be employed. The *kīrtan sōhilā* and *ardās* prayers are performed during the funeral ceremony (known as *antim sanskā*).^[171]



Sikh wedding



Sikh funeral procession, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

Initiation and the Khalsa

Khalsa (meaning "pure and sovereign") is the collective name given by Guru Gobind Singh to those Sikhs who have been fully initiated by taking part in a ceremony called *ammrit sañcār* (nectar ceremony).^[172] During this ceremony, sweetened water is stirred with a double-edged sword while liturgical prayers are sung; it is offered to the initiating Sikh, who ritually drinks it.^[172] Many Sikhs are not formally and fully initiated, as they do not undergo this ceremony, but do adhere to some components of Sikhism and identify as Sikhs. The initiated Sikh, who is believed to be reborn, is referred to as Amritdhari or Khalsa Sikh, while those who are not initiated or baptised are referred to as Kesdhari or Sahajdhari Sikhs.^{[172][173]}

The first time that this ceremony took place was on Vaisakhi, which fell on 30 March 1699 at Anandpur Sahib in Punjab.^[172] It was on that occasion that Gobind Singh baptised the Pañj Piārē – the five beloved ones, who in turn baptised Guru Gobind Singh himself. To males who initiated, the last name Singh, meaning "lion", was given, while the last name Kaur, meaning "princess", was given to baptised Sikh females.^[172]

Baptised Sikhs wear five items, called the Five Ks (in Punjabi known as *pañj kakkē* or *pañj kakār*), at all times. The five items are: *kēs* (uncut hair), *kañghā* (small wooden comb), *kaṛā* (circular steel or iron bracelet), *kirpān* (sword/dagger), and *kacchera* (special undergarment).^[172] The Five Ks have both practical and symbolic purposes.^[174]

History

Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, was born in the village of Rāi Bhōi dī Talwandī, now called Nankana Sahib (in present-day Pakistan).^[175] His parents were Punjabi Khatri Hindus.^{[176][177]} According to the hagiography *Puratan Janamsakhi* composed more than two centuries after his death and probably based on oral tradition,^[178] Nanak as a boy was fascinated by religion and spiritual matters, spending time with wandering ascetics and holy men.^[179] His friend was Mardana, a Muslim. Together they would sing devotional songs all night in front of the public, and bathe in the river in the morning. One day, at the usual bath, Nanak went missing and his family feared he had drowned. Three days later he returned home, and declared: "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim" ("*nā kōi hindū nā kōi musulmān*"). Thereafter, Nanak started preaching his ideas that form the tenets of Sikhism. In 1526, Guru Nanak at age 50, started a small commune in Kartarpur and his disciples came to be known as *Sikhs*.^[179] Although the exact account of his itinerary is disputed, hagiographic accounts state he made five major journeys, spanning thousands of miles: the first tour being east towards Bengal and Assam; the second south towards Andhra and Tamil Nadu; the third north to Kashmir, Ladakh, and Mount Sumeru^[180] in Tibet; and the fourth to Baghdad.^[181] In his last and final tour, he returned to the banks of the Ravi River to end his days.^[182]

There are two competing theories on Guru Nanak's teachings.^[183] One, according to Cole and Sambhi, is based on hagiographical *Janamsakhis*,^[184] and states that Nanak's teachings and Sikhism were a revelation from God, and not a social protest movement nor any attempt to reconcile Hinduism and Islam in the 15th century.^[185] The other states that Nanak was a guru. According to Singha, "Sikhism does not subscribe to the theory of incarnation or the concept of prophethood. But it has a pivotal concept of Guru. He is not an incarnation of God, not even a prophet. He is an illumined soul."^[186] The second

theory continues that hagiographical *Janamsakhis* were not written by Nanak, but by later followers without regard for historical accuracy, and contain numerous legends and myths created to show respect for Nanak.^[187] The term *revelation*, clarify Cole and Sambhi, in Sikhism is not limited to the teachings of Nanak, but is extended to all Sikh gurus, as well as the words of past, present and future men and women, who possess divine knowledge intuitively through meditation. The Sikh revelations include the words of non-Sikh *bhagats*, some who lived and died before the birth of Nanak, and whose teachings are part of the Sikh scriptures.^[188] The *Adi Granth* and successive Sikh gurus repeatedly emphasised, states Mandair, that Sikhism is "not about hearing voices from God, but it is about changing the nature of the human mind, and anyone can achieve direct experience and spiritual perfection at any time".^[183]

Historical influences

The roots of the Sikh tradition are, states Louis Fenech, perhaps in the *Sant*-tradition of India whose ideology grew to become the Bhakti tradition.^[vii] Furthermore, adds Fenech:^[189]

Few Sikhs would mention these Indic texts and ideologies in the same breadth as the Sikh tradition, let alone trace elements of their tradition to this chronological and ideological point, *despite the fact* that the Indic mythology permeates the Sikh sacred canon, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and the secondary canon, the *Dasam Granth* ... and adds delicate nuance and substance to the sacred symbolic universe of the Sikhs of today and of their past ancestors.

The development of Sikhism was influenced by the *Bhakti movement*;^{[viii][vii][ix][190]} however, Sikhism was not simply an extension of the Bhakti movement.^{[80][191]} Sikhism, for instance, disagreed with some of the views of Bhakti saints Kabir and Ravidas.^{[x][191]} Sikhism developed while the region was being ruled by the *Mughal Empire*. Two of the Sikh Gurus, *Guru Arjan* and *Guru Tegh Bahadur*, refused to convert to Islam and were tortured and executed by the Mughal rulers.^{[25][192]} The Islamic era persecution of Sikhs triggered the founding of the *Khalsa*, as an order for freedom of conscience and religion.^{[25][193][30]} A Sikh is expected to embody the qualities of a "Sant-Sipāhī" – a *saint-soldier*.^{[31][32]}

Growth of Sikhism

After its inception, Sikhism grew as it gained converts among Hindus and Muslims in the Punjab region.^{[24][194][195][196]} In 1539, *Guru Nanak* chose his disciple *Lahiṇā* as a successor to the Guruship rather than either of his sons. *Lahiṇā* was named *Guru Angad* and became the second Guru of the Sikhs.^{[197][198]} Nanak conferred his choice at the town of *Kartarpur* on the banks of the river *Ravi*. *Sri Chand*, *Guru Nanak's* son was also a religious man, and continued his own commune of Sikhs. His followers came to be known as the *Udasi* Sikhs, the first parallel sect of Sikhism that formed in Sikh history.^[199] The *Udasis* believe that the Guruship should have gone to *Sri Chand*, since he was a man of pious habits in addition to being *Nanak's* son.^[199]

Guru Angad, before joining *Guru Nanak's* commune, worked as a *pujari* (priest) and religious teacher centered around Hindu goddess *Durga*.^{[198][200]} On *Nanak's* advice, *Guru Angad* moved from *Kartarpur* to *Khadur*, where his wife *Khivi* and children were living, until he was able to bridge the divide between his followers and the *Udasis*. *Guru Angad* continued the work started by *Guru Nanak* and is widely credited for standardising the *Gurmukhī* script as used in the sacred scripture of the Sikhs.^[200]

Guru Amar Das became the third Sikh Guru in 1552 at the age of 73. He adhered to the *Vaishnavism* tradition of Hinduism for much of his life, before joining the commune of *Guru Angad*.^{[201][202]} *Goindval* became an important centre for Sikhism during the Guruship of *Guru Amar Das*. He was a reformer, and discouraged veiling of women's faces (a Muslim custom) as well as *sati* (a Hindu custom).^{[203][204]} He encouraged the *Kshatriya* people to fight in order to protect people and for the sake of justice, stating this is *Dharma*.^[205] *Guru Amar Das* started the tradition of appointing *manji* (zones of religious administration with an appointed chief called *sangatias*),^[201] introduced the *dasvandh* ("the tenth" of income) system of revenue collection in the name of *Guru* and as pooled community religious resource,^[206] and the famed *langar* tradition of Sikhism where anyone, without discrimination of any kind, could get a free meal in a communal seating. The collection of revenue from Sikhs through regional appointees helped Sikhism grow.^{[201][207]}



Guru Nanak explaining Sikh teachings to *Sadhus*

Guru Amar Das named his disciple and son-in-law Jēṭhā as the next Guru, who came to be known as Guru Ram Das. The new Guru faced hostilities from the sons of Guru Amar Das and therefore shifted his official base to lands identified by Guru Amar Das as Guru-ka-Chak.^[208] He moved his commune of Sikhs there and the place then was called Ramdaspur, after him. This city grew and later became Amritsar – the holiest city of Sikhism.^[209] Guru Ram Das expanded the *manji* organization for clerical appointments in Sikh temples, and for revenue collections to theologically and economically support the Sikh movement.^[208]

In 1581, Guru Arjan – youngest son of Guru Ram Das, became the fifth Guru of the Sikhs. The choice of successor, as throughout most of the history of Sikh Guru successions, led to disputes and internal divisions among the Sikhs.^[210] The elder son of Guru Ram Das named Prithi Chand is remembered in the Sikh tradition as vehemently opposing Guru Arjan, creating a faction Sikh community which the Sikhs following Guru Arjan called as *Minas* (literally, "scoundrels").^{[211][212]}

Guru Arjan is remembered in the Sikh for many things. He built the first Harimandir Sahib (later to become the Golden Temple). He was a poet and created the first edition of Sikh sacred text known as the *Ādi Granth* (literally "the first book") and included the writings of the first five Gurus and other enlightened 13 Hindu and 2 Muslim Sufi saints. In 1606, he was tortured and killed by the Mughal emperor Jahangir,^[213] for refusing to convert to Islam.^{[214][25][215]} His martyrdom is considered a watershed event in the history of Sikhism.^{[25][216]}

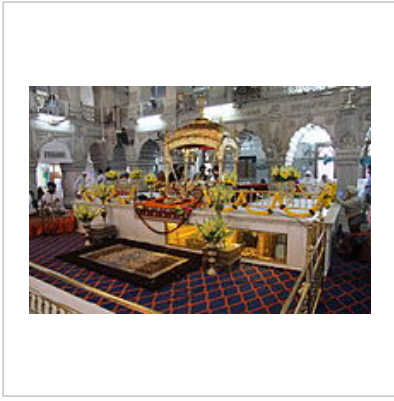
Political advancement

After the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, his son Guru Hargobind at age eleven became the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, and Sikhism dramatically evolved to become a political movement in addition to being religious.^[217] Guru Hargobind carried two swords, calling one spiritual and the other for temporal purpose (known as *mīrī* and *pīrī* in Sikhism).^[218] According to the Sikh tradition, Guru Arjan asked his son Hargobind to start a military tradition to protect the Sikh people and always keep himself surrounded by armed Sikhs. The building of an armed Sikh militia began with Guru Hargobind.^[217] Guru Hargobind was soon arrested by the Mughals and kept in jail in Gwalior. It is unclear how many years he served in prison, with different texts stating it to be between 2 and 12.^[219] He married three women, built a fort to defend Ramdaspur and created a formal court called Akal Takht, now the highest Khalsa Sikh religious authority.^[220]

In 1644, Guru Hargobind named his grandson Har Rai as the Guru. The Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan attempted political means to undermine the Sikh tradition, by dividing and influencing the succession.^[221] The Mughal ruler gave land grants to Dhir Mal, a grandson of Guru Hargobind living in Kartarpur, and attempted to encourage Sikhs to recognise Dhir Mal as the rightful successor to Guru Hargobind.^[221] Dhir Mal issued statements in favour of the Mughal state, and critical of his grandfather Guru Arjan. Guru Hargobind rejected Dhir Mal, the latter refused to give up the original version of the *Adi Granth* he had, and the Sikh community was divided.^[221]

Guru Har Rai is famed to have met Dara Shikoh during a time Dara Shikoh and his younger brother Aurangzeb were in a bitter succession fight. Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Rai, who refused to go and sent his elder son Ram Rai instead.^[222] The emperor found a verse in the Sikh scripture insulting to Muslims, and Ram Rai agreed it was a mistake then changed it. Ram Rai thus pleased Aurangzeb, but displeased Guru Har Rai who excommunicated his elder son. He nominated his younger son Guru Har Krishan to succeed him in 1661. Aurangzeb responded by granting Ram Rai a *jagir* (land grant). Ram Rai founded a town there and enjoyed Aurangzeb's patronage; the town came to be known as Dehradun, after *Dehra* referring to Ram Rai's shrine. Sikhs who followed Ram Rai came to be known as *Ramraiya* Sikhs.^{[222][223]} However, according to rough estimates, there are around 120–150 million (12–15 crore)^[224] Guru Har Krishan became the eighth Guru at the age of five, and died of smallpox before reaching the age of eight. No hymns composed by these three Gurus are included in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.^[225]

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the uncle of Guru Har Krishan, became Guru in 1665. Tegh Bahadur resisted the forced conversions of *Kashmiri Pandits*^[226] and non-Muslims^[227] to Islam, and was publicly beheaded in 1675 on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in Delhi for refusing to convert to Islam.^{[228][229]} His beheading traumatized the Sikhs. His body was cremated in Delhi, the head was carried secretly by Sikhs and cremated in Anandpur. He was succeeded by his son, Gobind Rai, who militarised his followers by creating the Khalsa in 1699, and baptising the *Pañj Pīārē*.^[230] From then on, he was known as Guru Gobind Singh, and Sikh identity was redefined into a political force resisting religious persecution.^[231]



Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib in Delhi. The long window under the marble platform is the location where Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed by the Mughals.



Artistic rendering of the execution of Bhai Mati Das by the Mughals. This image is from a Sikh Ajaibghar near the towns of Mohali and Sirhind in Punjab, India.

Sikh confederacy and the rise of the Khalsa



Sculpture at Mehdianna Sahib of the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716 by the Mughals.



Some bodyguards of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the Sikh capital, Lahore, Punjab.

Guru Gobind Singh inaugurated the Khalsa (the collective body of all initiated Sikhs) as the Sikh temporal authority in the year 1699. It created a community that combines its spiritual purpose and goals with political and military duties.^{[232][13][128]} Shortly before his death, Guru Gobind Singh proclaimed the Gurū Granth Sāhib (the Sikh Holy Scripture) to be the ultimate spiritual authority for the Sikhs.^[233]

The Sikh Khalsa's rise to power began in the 17th century during a time of growing militancy against Mughal rule. The creation of a Sikh Empire began when Guru Gobind Singh sent a Sikh general, Banda Singh Bahadur, to fight the Mughal rulers of India^[234] and those who had committed atrocities against Pir Buddhu Shah. Banda Singh advanced his army towards the main Muslim Mughal city of Sirhind and, following the instructions of the Guru, punished all the culprits. Soon after the invasion of Sirhind, while resting in his chamber after the Rehras prayer Guru Gobind Singh was stabbed by a Pathan assassin hired by Mughals. Gobind Singh killed the attacker with his sword. Though a European surgeon stitched the Guru's wound, the wound re-opened as the Guru tugged at a hard strong bow after a few days, causing profuse bleeding that led to Gobind Singh's death.

After the Guru's death, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur became the commander-in-chief of the Khalsa.^[235] He organised the civilian rebellion and abolished or halted the Zamindari system in time he was active and gave the farmers proprietorship of their own land.^[236] Banda Singh was executed by the emperor Farrukh Siyar after refusing the offer of a pardon if he

converted to Islam. The confederacy of Sikh warrior bands known as *misls* emerged, but these fought between themselves. Ranjit Singh achieved a series of military victories and created a Sikh Empire in 1799.

The Sikh empire had its capital in Lahore, spread over almost 200,000 square miles (520,000 square kilometres) comprising what is now northwestern Indian subcontinent. The Sikh Empire entered into a treaty with the colonial British powers, with each side recognizing Sutlej River as the line of control and agreeing not to invade the other side.^[237] Ranjit Singh's most lasting legacy was the restoration and expansion of the Harmandir Sahib, most revered Gurudwara of the Sikhs, with marble and gold, from which the popular name of the "Golden Temple" is derived.^[238] After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, the Sikh Empire fell into disorder. Ranjit Singh had failed to establish a lasting structure for Sikh government or stable succession, and the Sikh Empire rapidly declined after his death. Factions divided the Sikhs, and led to Anglo-Sikh wars. The British easily defeated the confused and demoralised Khalsa forces, then disbanded them into destitution.^[239] The youngest son of Ranjit Singh, named Duleep Singh, ultimately succeeded, but he was arrested and exiled after the defeat of Sikh Khalsa.^[240]

Singh Sabha movement

The Singh Sabha movement, a movement to revitalize Sikhism, also saw the resurgence of the Khalsa after their defeat in wars with the British^[241] - latterly in the Second Anglo-Sikh War - and the subsequent decline and corruption of Sikh institutions during colonial rule, and the proselytization of other faith groups in the Punjab.^{[242][243]} It was started in the 1870s, and after a period of interfactional rivalry, united under the Tat Khalsa to reinvigorate Sikh practice and institutions.^[244]

The last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire, Duleep Singh, converted to Christianity in 1853, a controversial but influential event in Sikh history. Along with his conversion, and after Sikh Empire had been dissolved and the region made a part of the colonial British Empire, proselytising activities of Christians, Brahmo Samajis, Arya Samaj, Muslim Anjuman-i-Islamia and Ahmadiyah sought to convert the Sikhs in northwestern Indian subcontinent into their respective faiths.^{[242][243]} These developments launched the Singh Sabha Movement.^{[242][243]}

The first meeting of the movement was in the Golden Temple, Amritsar in 1873, and it was largely launched by the Sanatan Sikhs, Gianis, priests, and granthis.^[245] Shortly thereafter, Nihang Sikhs began influencing the movement, followed by a sustained campaign by the Tat Khalsa, which had quickly gained dominance by the early 1880s.^{[244][246]} The movement became a struggle between Sanatan Sikhs and Tat Khalsa in defining and interpreting Sikhism.^{[247][248][249]}

Sanatan Sikhs led by Khem Singh Bedi – who claimed to be a direct descendant of Guru Nanak, Avtar Singh Vahiria and others supported a more inclusive approach which considered Sikhism as a reformed tradition of Hinduism, while Tat Khalsa campaigned for an exclusive approach to the Sikh identity, disagreeing with Sanatan Sikhs and seeking to modernize Sikhism.^{[249][246][250]} The Singh Sabha movement expanded in north and northwest Indian subcontinent, leading to more than 100 Singh Sabhas.^{[249][247]} By the early decades of the 20th century, the influence of Tat Khalsa increased in interpreting the nature of Sikhism and their control over the Sikh Gurdwaras.^{[249][247][246]} The Tat Khalsa banished Brahmanical practices including the use of the yagna fire,^{[251][252]} replaced by the Anand Karaj marriage ceremony in accordance with Sikh scripture, and the idols and the images of Sikh Gurus from the Golden Temple in 1905, traditions which had taken root during the administration of the mahants during the 1800s.^[253] They undertook a sustained campaign to standardize how Sikh Gurdwaras looked and ran, while looking to Sikh scriptures and the early Sikh tradition^[254] to purify the Sikh identity.^[255]

The spiritual successors of the Singh Sabha include the Akali movement of the 1920s, as well as the modern-day Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), a gurdwara administration body, and the Akali Dal political party.^[256]

Partition of India

Sikhs participated and contributed to the decades-long Indian independence movement from the colonial rule in the first half of the 20th century. Ultimately when the British Empire recognized independent India, the land was partitioned into Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan (East and West) in 1947. This event, states Banga, was a watershed event in Sikh history.^{[257][258]} The Sikhs had historically lived in northwestern region of Indian subcontinent on both sides of the partition line ("Radcliffe Line"). According to Banga and other scholars, the Sikhs had strongly opposed the Muslim League demands and saw it as "perpetuation of Muslim domination" and anti-Sikh policies in what just a hundred years before was a part of the Sikh Empire. As such, Sikh organizations, including the Chief Khalsa Dewan and Shiromani Akali Dal led by Master Tara Singh, condemned the Lahore Resolution and the movement to create Pakistan, viewing it as inviting possible persecution; the Sikhs largely thus strongly opposed the partition of India.^[259] During the discussions with the colonial authorities, Tara Singh emerged as an important leader who campaigned to prevent the partition of colonial India and for the recognition of Sikhs as the third community.^[257]

When partition was announced, the newly created line divided the Sikh population into two halves. Along with the Hindus, the Sikhs suffered organized violence and riots against them in West Pakistan, and Sikhs moved en masse to the Indian side leaving behind their property and the sacred places of Sikhism.^{[257][261]} This reprisals on Sikhs were not one sided, because as Sikhs entered the Indian side, the Muslims in East Punjab experienced reprisals and they moved to West Pakistan.^{[257][261]} Before the partition, Sikhs constituted about 15% of the population in West Punjab that became a part of Pakistan, the majority being Muslims (55%). The Sikhs were the economic elite and wealthiest in West Punjab, with them having the largest representation in West Punjab's aristocracy, nearly 700 Gurdwaras and 400 educational institutions that served the interests of the Sikhs.^[262] Prior to the partition, there were a series of disputes between the majority Muslims and minority Sikhs, such as on the matters of jhatka versus halal meat, the disputed ownership of Gurdwara Sahidganj in Lahore which Muslims sought as a mosque and Sikhs as a Gurdwara, and the insistence of the provincial Muslim government in switching from Indian Gurmukhi script to Arabic-Persian Nastaliq script in schools.^[257] During and after the Simla Conference in June 1945, headed by Lord Wavell, the Sikh leaders initially expressed their desire to be recognized as the third party, but ultimately relegated their demands and sought a United India where Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims would live together, under a Swiss style constitution. The Muslim League rejected this approach, demanding that entire Punjab should be granted to Pakistan.^[263] The Sikh leaders then sought the partition instead, and Congress Working Committee passed a resolution in support of partitioning Punjab and Bengal.^{[263][261]}

Between March and August 1947, a series of riots, arson, plunder of Sikh and property, assassination of Sikh leaders, and killings in Jhelum districts, Rawalpindi, Attock and other places made Tara Singh call the situation in Punjab as "civil war", while Lord Mountbatten stated "civil war preparations were going on".^[260] The riots had triggered the early waves of migration in April, with some 20,000 people leaving northwest Punjab and moving to Patiala.^{[264][258]} In Rawalpindi, 40,000 people became homeless. The Sikh leaders made desperate petitions, but all religious communities were suffering in the political turmoil. Sikhs, states Banga, were "only 4 million out of a total of 28 million in Punjab, and 6 million out of nearly 400 million in India; they did not constitute the majority, not even in a single district".^{[264][265]}

When the partition line was formally announced in August 1947, the violence was unprecedented, with Sikhs being one of the most affected religious community both in terms of deaths, as well as property loss, injury, trauma and disruption.^{[266][261]} Sikhs and Muslims were both victims and perpetrators of retaliatory violence against each other. Estimates range between 200,000 and 2 million deaths of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims.^{[266][261]} There were numerous rapes of and mass suicides by Sikh women, they being taken captives, their rescues and above all a mass exodus of Sikhs from newly created Pakistan into newly independent India. The partition created the "largest foot convoy of refugees recorded in [human] history, stretching over 100 kilometer long", states Banga, with nearly 300,000 people consisting of mostly "distracted, suffering, injured and angry Sikhs". Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan flooded into India, Muslim refugees from India flooded into Pakistan, each into their new homeland.^{[266][265]}



Sikh Light Infantry personnel march past during the Republic Day parade in New Delhi, India

Khalistan

In 1940, a few Sikhs such as the victims of Komagata Maru in Canada proposed the idea of Khalistan as a buffer state between an independent India and what would become Pakistan.^[262] These leaders, however, were largely ignored.^{[257][258]} The early 1980s witnessed some Sikh groups seeking an independent nation named Khalistan carved out from India and Pakistan. The Golden Temple and Akal Takht were occupied by various militant groups in 1982. These included the Dharam Yudh Morcha led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the Babbar Khalsa, the AISSF and the National Council of Khalistan.^[267] Between 1982 and 1983, there were Anandpur Resolution demand-related terrorist attacks against civilians in parts of India.^[268] By late 1983, the Bhindranwale led group had begun to build bunkers and observation posts in and around the Golden Temple, with militants involved in weapons training.^[267] In June 1984, the then Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi ordered Indian Army to begin Operation Blue Star against the militants.^[267] The fierce engagement took place in the precincts of Darbar Sahib and resulted in many deaths, including Bhindranwale, the destruction of the Sikh Reference Library, which was considered a national treasure that contained over a thousand rare manuscripts,^[269] and destroyed Akal Takht. Numerous soldiers, civilians and militants died in the cross fire. Within days of the Operation Blue Star, some 2,000 Sikh soldiers in India mutinied and attempted to reach Amritsar to liberate the Golden Temple.^[267] Within six months, on 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards Satwant and Beant Singh assassinated her. The assassination triggered the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.^[268]



Sikhs in London protesting against the Indian government

According to Donald Horowitz, while anti-Sikh riots led to much damage and deaths, many serious provocations by militants also failed to trigger ethnic violence in many cases throughout the 1980s. The Sikhs and their neighbors, for most part, ignored attempts to provoke riots and communal strife.^[268]

Sikh people

Estimates state that Sikhism has some 25-30 million followers worldwide.^[271] According to Pew Research, a religion demographics and research group in Washington DC, "more than nine-in-ten Sikhs are in India, but there are also sizable Sikh communities in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada."^[272] Within India, the Sikh population is found in every state and union territory, but it is predominantly found in the northwestern and northern states. Only in the state of Punjab do Sikhs constitute a majority (58% of the total, per 2011 census).^[270] The states and union territories of India where Sikhs constitute more than 1.5% of its population are Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir.^[270] Forming 4.7% of the total population, the western Canadian province of British Columbia is home to over 200,000 Sikhs and is the only province (or similar major subnational division) in the world outside India with Sikhism as the second most followed religion among the population.^{[273][274]}

Sikhs in India^[270]

State/UT	Percentage
Punjab	58%
Chandigarh	13.1%
Haryana	4.9%
Delhi	3.4%
Uttarakhand	2.3%
Jammu and Kashmir	1.9%
Rajasthan	1.3%
Himachal Pradesh	1.2%

Sikhism was founded in northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent in what is now Pakistan. Some of the Gurus were born near Lahore and in other parts of Pakistan. Prior to 1947, in British India, millions of Sikhs lived in what later became Pakistan. During the partition, Sikhs and Hindus left the newly created Muslim-majority Pakistan and mostly moved to Hindu-majority India — with some moving to Muslim-majority Afghanistan^[275] — while numerous Muslims in India moved to Pakistan.^{[276][277]} According to 2017 news reports, only about 20,000 Sikhs remain in Pakistan, and their population is dwindling (0.01% of the country's estimated 200 million population).^{[278][279]}

Sikh sects

Sikh sects are sub-traditions within Sikhism that believe in an alternate lineage of gurus, or have a different interpretation of the Sikh scriptures, or believe in following a living guru, or hold other concepts that differ from the orthodox Khalsa Sikhs.^{[280][281]} The major historic sects of Sikhism have included Udasi, Nirmala, Nanakpanthi, Khalsa, Sahajdhari, Namdhari Kuka, Nirankari, and Sarvaria.^[282]



Namdhari Sikhs, also called the *Kuka* Sikhs are a sect of Sikhism known for their crisp white dress and horizontal *pagari* (turban).^{[283][169]}

Above: Namdhari singer and musicians.

The early Sikh sects were Udasis and Minas founded by Sri Chand – the elder son of Guru Nanak, and Prithi Chand – the elder son of Guru Ram Das respectively, in parallel to the official succession of the Sikh Gurus. Later on Ramraiya sect grew in Dehradun with the patronage of Aurangzeb.^[284] Many splintered Sikh communities formed during the Mughal Empire era. Some of these sects were financially and administratively supported by the Mughal rulers in the hopes of gaining a more favorable and compliant citizenry.^{[281][284]}

After the collapse of Mughal Empire, and particularly during the rule of Ranjit Singh, Udasi Sikhs protected Sikh shrines, preserved the Sikh scripture and rebuilt those that were desecrated or destroyed during the Muslim–Sikh wars. However, Udasi Sikhs kept idols and images inside these Sikh temples.^{[199][285]} In the 19th century, Namdharis and Nirankaris sects were formed in Sikhism, seeking to reform and return to what each believed was the pure form of Sikhism.^{[249][247][248]}

All these sects differ from Khalsa orthodox Sikhs in their beliefs and practices, such as continuing to solemnize their weddings around fire and being strictly vegetarian.^{[283][169]} Many accept the concept of living Gurus such as Guru Baba Dyal Singh. The Nirankari sect, though unorthodox, was influential in shaping the views of Tat Khalsa and the contemporary-era Sikh beliefs and practices.^{[286][287]} Another significant Sikh sect of the 19th century was the Radhasoami movement in Punjab led by Baba Shiv Dyal.^[288] Other contemporary era Sikh sects include the quasi Hindu 3HO, formed in 1971, which exists outside India, particularly in North America and Europe.^{[288][289][290]}

Sikh castes

According to Surinder Jodhka, the state of Punjab with a Sikh majority has the "largest proportion of scheduled caste population in India". Although decried by Sikhism, Sikhs have practiced a caste system. The system, along with untouchability, has been more common in rural parts of Punjab. The landowning dominant Sikh castes, states Jodhka, "have not shed all their prejudices against the lower castes or dalits; while dalits would be allowed entry into the village gurdwaras they would not be permitted to cook or serve langar." The Sikh dalits of Punjab have tried to build their own gurdwara, other local level institutions and sought better material circumstances and dignity. According to Jodhka, due to economic mobility in contemporary Punjab, castes no longer mean an inherited occupation, nor are work relations tied to a single location.^[291] In 1953, the government of India acceded to the demands of the Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh, to include Sikh Dalit castes in the list of scheduled castes.^[292] In the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 20 of the 140 seats are reserved for low-caste Sikhs.^[292]



Nagar Kirtan in Bangalore

Over 60% of Sikhs belong to the Jat caste, which is an agrarian caste. Despite being very small in numbers, the mercantile Khatri and Arora castes wield considerable influence within the Sikh community. Other common Sikh castes include Sainis, Ramgarhias (artisans), Ahluwalias (formerly brewers), Rai sikh (Raa), Kambojs (rural caste), Labanas, Kumhars and the two Dalit castes, known in Sikh terminology as the Mazhabis (the Chuhras) and the Ravidasias (the Chamars).^[293]

Sikh diaspora

Sikhism is the fourth-largest amongst the medium-sized world religions, and one of the youngest.^{[294][295][296]} Worldwide, there are 30 million Sikhs, which makes up 0.4% of the world's population. Approximately 75% of Sikhs live in Punjab, where they constitute over 58% of the state's population. Large communities of Sikhs migrate to the neighboring states such as Indian State of Haryana which is home to the second largest Sikh population in India with 1.1 million Sikhs as per 2001 census, and large immigrant communities of Sikhs can be found across India. However, Sikhs only comprise about 2% of the Indian population.^[297]



Sikhs celebrating Vaisakhi in Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Sikh migration to Canada began in the 19th century and led to the creation of significant Sikh communities, predominantly in South Vancouver and Surrey, British Columbia, and Brampton, Ontario. Today temples, newspapers, radio stations, and markets cater to these large, multi-generational Indo-Canadian groups. Sikh festivals such as Vaisakhi and Bandi Chhor are celebrated in those Canadian cities by the largest groups of followers in the world outside the Punjab.

Sikhs also migrated to East Africa, West Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. These communities developed as Sikhs migrated out of Punjab to fill in gaps in imperial labour markets.^[298] In the early twentieth century a significant community began to take shape on the west coast of the United States. Smaller populations of Sikhs are found within many countries in Western Europe, Pakistan, Mauritius, Malaysia, Philippines, Fiji, Nepal, China, Afghanistan, Iran, Singapore, United States, and many other countries.

Prohibitions in Sikhism

These prohibitions are strictly followed by initiated Khalsa Sikhs who have undergone baptism. While the Sikh gurus did not enforce religion and did not believe in forcing people to follow any particular religion in general, the Sikh community does encourage all people to become better individuals by following the Guru's Way (Gur-mat), as opposed to living life without the Guru's code of disciple (Man-mat):

4 major transgressions:^[299]

- Hair removal – Hair cutting, trimming, removing, shaving, plucking, threading, dyeing, or any other alteration from any body part is strictly forbidden.^[300]
- Eating the meat of an animal slaughtered the Muslim way (Kutha meat).^[301] This is the absolute minimum required by all initiated Sikhs. Many Sikhs refrain from eating non-vegetarian food, and believe all should follow this diet. This is due to various social, cultural, political, and familial aspects. As such, there has always been major disagreement among Sikhs over the issue of eating non-vegetarian food. Sikhs following the rahit (code of conduct) of the Damdami Taksal & AKJ also subscribe to this view. The Akali Nihangs have traditionally eaten meat and are famous for performing Jhatka.^{[302][303][304][305]} Thus, there is a wide range of views that exist on the issue of a proper "Sikh diet" in the Panth. Nonetheless, all Sikhs agree with the

minimum consensus that meat slaughtered via the Muslim (Halal) or Jewish (Shechita) methods is strictly against Sikh dogma and principles.^{[306][307]} The Akal Takht represents the final authority on controversial issues concerning the Sikh Panth (community or collective). The Hukamnama (edict or clarification), issued by Akal Takht Jathedar Sadhu Singh Bhaura dated February 15, 1980, states that eating meat does not go against the code of conduct of the Sikhs. Amritdhari Sikhs can eat meat as long as it is Jhatka meat.^[308]

- **Adultery:** Cohabiting with a person other than one's spouse (sexual relations with anyone who you are not married to).^{[309][310][311][312][313][314][315]}
- **Intoxication** – A Sikh must not take hemp (cannabis), opium, liquor, tobacco, in short, any intoxicant.^[316] Consumption of tobacco and intoxicants (hemp, opium, liquor, narcotics, cocaine, etc.) is not allowed.^{[317][318]} Cannabis is generally prohibited, but ritually consumed in edible form by some Sikhs.^{[319][320]} Some Sikh groups, like the Damdami Taksal, are even opposed to drinking caffeine in Indian tea. Indian tea is almost always served in Sikh Gurudwaras around the world. Some Akali Nihang groups consume cannabis-containing shaheedi degh (ਭੰਗ), purportedly to help in meditation.^{[321][322][323]} *Sūkha parshaad* (ਸੁੱਖਾ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦ), "Dry-sweet", is the term Akali Nihangs use to refer to it. It was traditionally crushed and consumed as a liquid, especially during festivals like *Hola Mohalla*. It is never smoked, as this practice is forbidden in Sikhism.^[324] In 2001, Jathedar Santa Singh, the leader of Budha Dal, along with 20 chiefs of Nihang sects, refused to accept the ban on consumption of *shaheedi degh* by the apex Sikh clergy of Akal Takht - in order to preserve their traditional practices.^[325] According to a recent BBC article, "Traditionally they also drank shaheedi degh, an infusion of cannabis, to become closer with God".^[326] Baba Santa Singh was excommunicated and replaced with Baba Balbir Singh, who agreed to shun the consumption of *bhanga*.^[327]

Other mentioned practices to be avoided, as per the Sikh Rehat Maryada:

- Piercing of the nose or ears for wearing ornaments is forbidden for Sikh men and women.^[328]
- Female infanticide: A Sikh should not kill his daughter; nor should he maintain any relationship with a killer of daughter.^[329]
- A Sikh shall not steal, form dubious associations or engage in gambling.^[330]
- It is not proper for a Sikh woman to wear veil or keep her face hidden by veil or cover.^[331]
- Sikhs cannot wear any token of any other faith. Sikhs must not have their head bare or wear caps. They also cannot wear any ornaments piercing through any part of the body.^[332]
- Hereditary priest – Sikhism does not have priests, as they were abolished by Guru Gobind Singh (the 10th Guru of Sikhism).^[333] The only position he left was a Granthi to look after the Guru Granth Sahib; any Sikh is free to become Granthi or read from the Guru Granth Sahib.^[333]

See also

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- [Bebe Nanaki](#)
 - [Mai Bhago](#)
 - [Five Virtues](#)
 - [Hari Singh Nalwa](#)
 - [Indian religions](#)
 - [Turban training centre](#)
 - [Women in the Guru Granth Sahib](#)

Notes

- i. *Sikhism* (commonly known as *Sikhī*) originated from the word *Sikh*, which comes from the Sanskrit root *śiṣya* meaning "disciple", or *śikṣa* meaning "instruction". Singh, Khushwant. 2006. *The Illustrated History of the Sikhs*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-567747-8. p. 15. Kosh, Gur Shabad Ratnakar Mahan. https://web.archive.org/web/20050318143533/http://www.ik13.com/online_library.htm
- ii. "Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikh originated in India." Moreno, Luis; Colino, César (2010). *Diversity and Unity in Federal Countries* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=N5lpveRnSxEC&pg=PA207>). McGill Queen University Press. p. 207. ISBN 978-0-7735-9087-8.
- iii. "Sikhism rejects the view that any particular religious tradition has a monopoly regarding Absolute Truth. Sikhism rejects the practice of converting people to other religious traditions." Kalsi, Sewa Singh (2008). *Sikhism*. London: Kuperard. p. 24. ISBN 978-1-85733-436-4.
- iv. "As an Indian religion, Sikhism affirms transmigration, the continued rebirth after death". Brekke, Torkel (2014). Reichberg, G. M.; Syse, H. (eds.). *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=t3CFAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA672>). Cambridge University Press. p. 672. ISBN 978-1-139-95204-0 – via Google Books.
- v. "Sikhism, Indian religion founded in the Punjab in the late 15th century." (McLeod 2019/1998).

Taoism

Taoism (/ˈtaʊɪzəm/, /ˈdaʊɪzəm/) or **Daoism** (/ˈdaʊɪzəm/) refers to either a school of philosophical thought (道家; *daojia*) or to a religion (道教; *daojiao*); both share ideas and concepts of Chinese origin and emphasize living in harmony with the *Tao* (Chinese: 道; pinyin: *Dào*; lit. 'Way', 'Thoroughfare' or *Dao*). The *Tao Te Ching*, a book containing teachings attributed to Lao Tzu (老子), together with the later writings of Zhuangzi, are both widely considered the keystone works of Taoism.

In Taoism, the *Tao* is the source of everything and the ultimate principle underlying reality.^{[2][3]} Taoism teaches about the various disciplines for achieving perfection through self-cultivation. This can be done through the use of Taoist techniques and by becoming one with the unplanned rhythms of the all, called "the way" or "Tao".^{[2][4]} Taoist ethics vary depending on the particular school, but in general tend to emphasize *wu wei* (action without intention), naturalness, simplicity, spontaneity and the Three Treasures: 慈, compassion, 儉, frugality and 不敢爲天下先, humility.

The roots of Taoism go back at least to the 4th century BCE. Early Taoism drew its cosmological notions from the School of YinYang (Naturalists) and was deeply influenced by one of the oldest texts of Chinese culture, the *I Ching*, which expounds a philosophical system about how to keep human behavior in accordance with the alternating cycles of nature. The Legalist Shen Buhai (c. 400 – c. 337 BCE) may also have been a major influence, expounding a realpolitik of *wu wei*, or qualified inaction.^[5]

Taoism has had a profound influence on Chinese culture in the course of the centuries and Taoists (道士; *dàoshi*, "masters of the Tao"), a title traditionally attributed only to the clergy and not to their lay followers, usually take care to note the distinction between their ritual tradition and the practices of Chinese folk religion and non-Taoist vernacular ritual orders, which are often mistakenly identified as pertaining to Taoism. Chinese alchemy (especially neidan), Chinese astrology, Chan (Zen) Buddhism, several martial arts including kung fu, traditional Chinese medicine, feng shui and many styles of qigong have been intertwined with Taoism throughout history.

Today, the Taoist religion is one of the five religious doctrines officially recognized by the People's Republic of China (PRC), including in its special administrative regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macau.^[6] It is also a major religion in Taiwan^[7] and has

Taoism

Tao, a Chinese word signifying way, path, route, road or, sometimes more loosely, doctrine.

Chinese	道教
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Hanyu Pinyin	Dàojiào ^[1]
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Literal meaning	"Way Tradition"
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a significant number of adherents in a number of other societies throughout East and Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.

Contents

Definition

Spelling and pronunciation

Categorization

The terms "Taoist" and "Taoism" as a liturgical framework

History

Doctrines

Ethics

Tao and Te

Wu-wei

Ziran

Three Treasures

Cosmology

Theology

Texts

Tao Te Ching

Zhuangzi

I Ching

The Taoist Canon

Other texts

Symbols and images

Practices

Rituals

Physical cultivation

Society

Adherents

Art and poetry

Political aspects

Relations with other religions and philosophies

See also

References

Citations

General sources

Further reading

External links

Transcriptions

Standard Mandarin

Hanyu Pinyin Dàojiào^[1]

Bopomofo ㄉㄠˋ ㄓㄠˋ

Gwoyeu Romatzyh Dawjiaw

Wade–Giles Tao⁴-chiao⁴

Yale Romanization Dàujyàu

IPA [tâʊ.tɕjâʊ]

Wu

Romanization Doh^ㄌ goh^ㄆ

Yue: Cantonese

Yale Romanization Douhgaau

Jyutping Dou6gaau3

IPA [tòu.kāːu]

Southern Min

Hokkien POJ Tō-kàu

Tâi-lô Tō-kàu

Middle Chinese

Middle Chinese dâw kâew

Old Chinese

Baxter–Sagart *[kə.l]ʰuʔ
(2014) s.kʰraw-s

Definition

Spelling and pronunciation

Since the introduction of the Pinyin system for romanizing Mandarin Chinese, there have been those who have felt that "Taoism" would be more appropriately spelled as "Daoism". The Mandarin Chinese pronunciation for the word 道 (way, path) is spelled as *tao*⁴ in the older Wade–Giles romanization system (from which the spelling 'Taoism' is derived), while it is spelled as *dào* in the newer Pinyin romanization system (from which the spelling "Daoism" is derived). Both the Wade–Giles *tao*⁴ and the Pinyin *dào* are intended to be pronounced identically in Mandarin Chinese (like the unspirated 't' in 'stop'), but despite this fact, "Taoism" and "Daoism" can be pronounced differently in English vernacular.^[8]



Birth places of notable Chinese philosophers from Hundred Schools of Thought in Zhou Dynasty. Philosophers of Taoism are marked by triangles in dark green.

Categorization

The word *Taoism* is used to translate different Chinese terms which refer to two semantically distinct fields:^[9]

1. Taoist religion (道教; *Dàojiào*; lit. "teachings of the Tao"), or the "liturgical" aspect^[10] – A family of organized religious movements sharing concepts or terminology from "Taoist philosophy";^[11] the first of these is recognized as the Celestial Masters school.
2. Taoist philosophy (道家; *Dàojiā*; lit. "school or family of the Tao") or "Taology" (道學; *dào xué*; lit. "learning of the Tao"), or the mystical aspect^[10] – The philosophical doctrines based on the texts of the *Yi Jing*, the *Tao Te Ching* (道德經; *dàodéjīng*) and the *Zhuangzi* (莊子; *zhuāngzi*). The earliest recorded uses of the term Tao to refer to a philosophy or a school of thought are found in the works of classical historians during Han Dynasty.^{[12][13]} These works include The Commentary of Zhuo (左传; *zuǒ zhuàn*) by Zuo Qiuming (左丘明) and in the Records of the Grand Historian (史記; *Shǐjì*) by Sima Tan. This usage of the term to narrowly denote a school of thought precedes the emergence of the Celestial Masters and associated later religions. It is unlikely that Zhuangzi was familiar with the text of the *Tao Te Ching*,^{[14][15]} and Zhuangzi himself may have died before the term was in use.^[15]

In ancient China, the use of the term Taoist to narrowly describe a school of thought, rather than a set of religious teachings, has been recorded as early as 100 BCE ^{[16][17]} and such usage precedes the emergence of the earliest Taoist religious sects such as the Celestial Masters by at least 300 years.

The distinction between Taoist philosophy (道家) and religion (道教) has been maintained by modern pioneers of Chinese philosophy Feng Youlan (馮友蘭; 1895-1990) and Wing-tsit Chan (陳榮捷; 1901–1994). The distinction as advocated by outstanding philosophers such as Feng and Chan, however, is rejected by the majority of Western and Japanese scholars.^[18] It is contested by hermeneutic (interpretive) difficulties in the categorization of the different Taoist schools, sects and movements.^[19]

Taoism does not fall under an umbrella or a definition of a single organized religion like the Abrahamic traditions; nor can it be studied as a mere variant of Chinese folk religion, as although the two share some similar concepts, much of Chinese folk religion is separate from the tenets and core teachings of Taoism.^[20] The sinologists Isabelle Robinet and Livia Kohn agree that "Taoism has never been a unified religion, and has constantly consisted of a combination of teachings based on a variety of original revelations."^[21]

The philosopher Chung-ying Cheng views Taoism as a religion that has been embedded into Chinese history and tradition. "Whether Confucianism, Taoism, or later Chinese Buddhism, they all fall into this pattern of thinking and organizing and in this sense remain religious, even though individually and intellectually they also assume forms of philosophy and practical wisdom."^[22] Chung-ying Cheng also noted that the Taoist view of heaven flows mainly from "observation and meditation, [though] the teaching of the way (*Tao*) can also include the way of heaven independently of human nature".^[22] In Chinese history, the three religions of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism stand on their own independent views, and yet are "involved in a process of attempting to find harmonization and convergence among themselves, so that we can speak of a 'unity of three religious teachings' (三教合一; *Sānjiào Héyī*).^[22]

The terms "Taoist" and "Taoism" as a liturgical framework

Traditionally, the Chinese language does not have terms defining lay people adhering to the doctrines or the practices of Taoism, who fall instead within the field of folk religion. Taoist, in Western sinology, is traditionally used to translate *daoshi* (道士, "master of the Tao"), thus strictly defining the priests of Taoism, ordained clergymen of a Taoist institution who "represent Taoist culture on a professional basis", are experts of Taoist liturgy, and therefore can employ this knowledge and ritual skills for the benefit of a community.^[23]

This role of Taoist priests reflects the definition of Taoism as a "liturgical framework for the development of local cults", in other words a scheme or structure for Chinese religion, proposed first by the scholar and Taoist initiate Kristofer Schipper in *The Taoist Body* (1986).^[24] *Daoshi* are comparable to the non-Taoist *fashi* (法師, "ritual masters") of vernacular traditions (the so-called "Faism") within Chinese religion.^[24]

The term *dàojiàotú* (道教徒; 'follower of Taoism'), with the meaning of "Taoist" as "lay member or believer of Taoism", is a modern invention that goes back to the introduction of the Western category of "organized religion" in China in the 20th century, but it has no significance for most of Chinese society in which Taoism continues to be an "order" of the larger body of Chinese religion.

History

Lao Tzu is traditionally regarded as one of the founders of Taoism and is closely associated in this context with original or primordial Taoism.^[25] Whether he actually existed is disputed;^{[26][27]} however, the work attributed to him—the *Tao Te Ching*—is dated to the late 4th century BCE.^[28]

Taoism draws its cosmological foundations from the School of Naturalists (in the form of its main elements—yin and yang and the Five Phases), which developed during the Warring States period (4th to 3rd centuries BCE).^[29]

Robinet identifies four components in the emergence of Taoism:

1. Philosophical Taoism, i.e. the *Tao Te Ching* and Zhuangzi
2. techniques for achieving ecstasy
3. practices for achieving longevity or immortality

4. exorcism^[26]

Some elements of Taoism may be traced to prehistoric folk religions in China that later coalesced into a Taoist tradition.^[30] In particular, many Taoist practices drew from the Warring-States-era phenomena of the wu (connected to the shamanic culture of northern China) and the fangshi (which probably derived from the "archivist-soothsayers of antiquity, one of whom supposedly was Lao Tzu himself"), even though later Taoists insisted that this was not the case.^[31] Both terms were used to designate individuals dedicated to "... magic, medicine, divination,... methods of longevity and to ecstatic wanderings" as well as exorcism; in the case of the wu, shamans or sorcerers is often used as a translation.^[31] The fangshi were philosophically close to the School of Naturalists, and relied much on astrological and calendrical speculations in their divinatory activities.^[32]



Lao Tzu Riding an Ox
(1368–1644) by Zhang Lu



Wudangshan, one of the Taoist sacred places.

The first organized form of religious Taoism, the Way of the Celestial Masters's school (later known as Zhengyi school), developed from the Five Pecks of Rice movement at the end of the 2nd century CE; the latter had been founded by Zhang Taoling, who said that Lao Tzu appeared to him in the year 142.^[33] The Way of the Celestial Masters school was officially recognized by ruler Cao Cao in 215, legitimizing Cao Cao's rise to power in return.^[34] Lao Tzu received imperial recognition as a divinity in the mid-2nd century BCE.^[35]

By the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the various sources of Taoism had coalesced into a coherent tradition of religious organizations and orders of ritualists in the state of Shu (modern Sichuan). In earlier ancient China, Taoists were thought of as hermits or recluses who did not participate in political life. Zhuangzi was the best known of these, and it is significant that he lived in the south, where he was part of local Chinese shamanic traditions.^[36]

Female shamans played an important role in this tradition, which was particularly strong in the southern state of Chu. Early Taoist movements developed their own institution in contrast to shamanism but absorbed basic shamanic elements. Shamans revealed basic texts of Taoism from early times down to at least the 20th century.^[37] Institutional orders of Taoism evolved in various strains that in more recent times are conventionally grouped into two main branches: Quanzhen Taoism and Zhengyi Taoism.^[38] After Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi, the literature of Taoism grew steadily and was compiled in form of a canon—the Tao Tsang—which was published at the behest of the emperor. Throughout Chinese history, Taoism was nominated several times as a state religion. After the 17th century, it fell from favor.

Taoism, in form of the Shangqing school, gained official status in China again during the Tang dynasty (618–907), whose emperors claimed Lao Tzu as their relative.^[39] The Shangqing movement had developed much earlier, in the 4th century, on the basis of a series of revelations by gods and spirits to a certain Yang Xi in the years between 364 and 370.^[40]

Between 397 and 402, Ge Chaofu compiled a series of scriptures which later served as the foundation of the Lingbao school,^[41] which unfolded its greatest influence during the Song dynasty (960–1279).^[42] Several Song emperors, most notably Huizong, were active in promoting Taoism, collecting Taoist texts and publishing editions of the Taotsang.^[43]



A part of a Taoist manuscript, ink on silk, 2nd century BCE, Han Dynasty, unearthed from Mawangdui tomb 3rd.

In the 12th century, the Quanzhen School was founded in Shandong. It flourished during the 13th and 14th centuries and during the Yuan dynasty became the largest and most important Taoist school in Northern China. The school's most revered master, Qiu Chuji, met with Genghis Khan in 1222 and was successful in influencing the Khan towards exerting more restraint during his brutal conquests. By the Khan's decree, the school also was exempt from taxation.^[44]



Qiu Chuji (1503) by Guo Xu

Aspects of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism were consciously synthesized in the Neo-Confucian school, which eventually became Imperial orthodoxy for state bureaucratic purposes under the Ming (1368–1644).^[45]

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), however, due to discouragements of the government, many people favored Confucian and Buddhist classics over Taoist works.

During the 18th century, the imperial library was constituted, but excluded virtually all Taoist books.^[46] By the beginning of the 20th century, Taoism went through many catastrophic events. (As a result, only one complete copy of the Tao Tsang still remained, at the White Cloud Monastery in

Beijing).^[47]

Today, Taoism is one of five official recognized religions in the People's Republic of China. The government regulates its activities through the Chinese Taoist Association.^[48] However, Taoism is practiced without government involvement in Taiwan, where it claims millions of adherents.

World Heritage Sites Mount Qingcheng and Mount Longhu are thought to be among the birthplaces of Taoism.

Doctrines

Ethics

Taoism tends to emphasize various themes of the *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*, such as naturalness, spontaneity, simplicity, detachment from desires, and most important of all, wu wei.^[49] The concepts of those keystone texts cannot be equated with Taoism as a whole.^[50]

Tao and Te

Tao (道; dào) literally means "way", but can also be interpreted as road, channel, path, doctrine, or line.^[51] In Taoism, it is "the One, which is natural, spontaneous, eternal, nameless, and indescribable. It is at once the beginning of all things and the way in which all things pursue their course."^[52] It has variously been



Xiangguting Temple, a *Taoguan* in Weihai, Shandong, China

denoted as the "flow of the universe",^[53] a "conceptually necessary ontological ground",^[54] or a demonstration of nature.^[55] The Tao also is something that individuals can find immanent in themselves.^[56]

The active expression of Tao is called *Te* (德; *dé*; also spelled—and pronounced—*Teh*, or even *De*; often translated with Virtue or Power),^[57] in a sense that *Te* results from an individual living and cultivating the Tao.^[58]

Wu-wei

The polysemous term *wu-wei* or *wuwei* (無爲; *wúwéi*) constitutes the leading ethical concept in Taoism.^[59] *Wei* refers to any intentional or deliberated action, while *wu* carries the meaning of "there is no ..." or "lacking, without". Common translations are nonaction, effortless action, or action without intent.^[59] The meaning is sometimes emphasized by using the paradoxical expression "wei wu wei": action without action.^[60]

In ancient Taoist texts, *wu-wei* is associated with water through its yielding nature.^[61] Taoist philosophy, in accordance with the *I Ching*, proposes that the universe works harmoniously according to its own ways. When someone exerts their will against the world in a manner that is out of rhythm with the cycles of change, they may disrupt that harmony and unintended consequences may more likely result rather than the willed outcome. Taoism does not identify one's will as the root problem. Rather, it asserts that one must place their will in harmony with the natural universe.^[62] Thus, a potentially harmful interference may be avoided, and in this way, goals can be achieved effortlessly.^{[63][64]} "By *wu-wei*, the sage seeks to come into harmony with the great Tao, which itself accomplishes by nonaction."^[59]

Ziran

Ziran (自然; *zìrán*; *tzu-jan*; lit. "self-so", "self-organization"^[65]) is regarded as a central value in Taoism.^[66] It describes the "primordial state" of all things^[67] as well as a basic character of the Tao,^[68] and is usually associated with spontaneity and creativity.^[69] To attain naturalness, one has to identify with the Tao;^[68] this involves freeing oneself from selfishness and desire, and appreciating simplicity.^[66]

An often cited metaphor for naturalness is *pu* (樸; *pǔ*, *pú*; *p'u*; lit. "uncut wood"), the "uncarved block", which represents the "original nature... prior to the imprint of culture" of an individual.^[70] It is usually referred to as a state one returns to.^[71]

Three Treasures

The Taoist *Three Treasures* or *Three Jewels* (三寶; *sānbǎo*) comprise the basic virtues of *ci* (慈; *cí*, usually translated as *compassion*), *jian* (儉; *jiǎn*, usually translated as *moderation*), and *bùgǎn wéi tiānxià xiān* (不敢爲天下先; *bùgǎn wéi tiānxià xiān*, literally "not daring to act as first under the heavens", but usually translated as *humility*).

As the practical, political side of Taoist philosophy, Arthur Waley translated them as "abstention from aggressive war and capital punishment", "absolute simplicity of living", and "refusal to assert active authority".^[72]

The Three Treasures can also refer to jing, qi and shen (精氣神; *jīng-qì-shén*; jing is usually translated as *essence*, qi as *life force*, and shen as *spirit*). These terms are elements of the traditional Chinese concept of the human body, which shares its cosmological foundation—Yinyangism or the Naturalists—with Taoism. Within this framework, they play an important role in neidan ("Taoist Inner Alchemy").^[73]

Cosmology

Taoist cosmology is cyclic—the universe is seen as being in a constant process of re-creating itself.^[74] Evolution and 'extremes meet' are main characters.^[65] Taoist cosmology shares similar views with the School of Naturalists (Yinyang)^[29] which was headed by Zou Yan (305–240 BCE). The school's tenets harmonized the concepts of the Wu Xing (Five Elements) and yin and yang. In this spirit, the universe is seen as being in a constant process of re-creating itself, as everything that exists is a mere aspect of qi, which "condensed, becomes life; diluted, it is indefinite potential".^[74] Qi is in a perpetual transformation between its condensed and diluted state.^[75] These two different states of qi, on the other hand, are embodiments of the abstract entities of yin and yang,^[75] two complementary extremes that constantly play against and with each other and one cannot exist without the other.^[76]

Human beings are seen as a microcosm of the universe,^[20] and for example comprise the Wu Xing in form of the zang-fu organs.^[77] As a consequence, it is believed that a deeper understanding of the universe can be achieved by understanding oneself.^[78]

Theology

Taoist theology can be defined as apophatic, given its philosophical emphasis on the formlessness and unknowable nature of the Tao, and the primacy of the "Way" rather than anthropomorphic concepts of God. This is one of the core beliefs that nearly all the sects share.^[34]

Taoist orders usually present the Three Pure Ones at the top of the pantheon of deities, visualizing the hierarchy emanating from the Tao. Lao Tzu is considered the incarnation of one of the Three Purities and worshiped as the ancestor of the philosophical doctrine.^{[25][79]}

Different branches of Taoism often have differing pantheons of lesser deities, where these deities reflect different notions of cosmology.^[80] Lesser deities also may be promoted or demoted for their activity.^[81] Some varieties of popular Chinese religion incorporate the Jade Emperor, derived from the main of the Three Purities, as a representation of the most high God.

Persons from the history of Taoism, and people who are considered to have become immortals (xian), are venerated as well by both clergy and laypeople.

Despite these hierarchies of deities, traditional conceptions of Tao should not be confused with the Western theism. Being one with the Tao does not necessarily indicate a union with an eternal spirit in, for example, the Hindu sense.^{[55][62]}

Texts

Tao Te Ching

The *Tao Te Ching* or *Daodejing* is widely considered the most influential Taoist text.^[82] According to legend, it was written by Lao Tzu,^[83] and often the book is simply referred to as the *Lao Tzu*. Authorship, precise date of origin, and even unity of the text are still subject of debate,^[84] and will probably never be known with certainty.^[85] The earliest texts of the *Tao Te Ching* that have been excavated (written on bamboo tablets) date back to the late 4th century BCE.^[86] Throughout the history of religious Taoism, the *Tao Te Ching* has been used as a ritual text.^[87]



1770 Wang Bi edition of the *Tao Te Ching*

The famous opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching* are:

道可道非常道 (pinyin: dào kě dào fēi cháng dào)

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao

名可名非常名 (pinyin: míng kě míng fēi cháng míng)

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.^[88]

There is significant, at times acrimonious, debate regarding which English translation of the *Tao Te Ching* is preferable, and which particular translation methodology is best.^[89] The *Tao Te Ching* is not thematically ordered. The main themes of the text are repeatedly expressed using variant formulations, often with only a slight difference.^[90]

The leading themes revolve around the nature of Tao and how to attain it. Tao is said to be ineffable and accomplishes great things through small means.^[91] Ancient commentaries on the *Tao Te Ching* are important texts in their own right. Perhaps the oldest one, the *Heshang Gong* commentary, was most likely written in the 2nd century CE.^[92] Other important commentaries include the one from Wang Bi and the Xiang'er.^[93]

Zhuangzi

The *Zhuangzi* or *Chuang Tzu* (莊子), named after its traditional author Zhuangzi, is a composite of writings from various sources, and is generally considered the most important of all Taoist writings.^[94] The commentator Guo Xiang (c. CE 300) helped establish the text as an important source for Taoist thought. The traditional view is that Zhuangzi himself wrote the first seven chapters (the "inner chapters") and his students and related thinkers were responsible for the other parts (the outer and miscellaneous chapters). The work uses anecdotes, parables and dialogues to express one of its main themes, that is aligning oneself to the laws of the natural world and "the way" of the elements.^{[95][96]}

I Ching

The *I Ching* or *Yijing* was originally a divination system that had its origins around 1150 BCE.^[97] Although it predates the first mentions of Tao as an organized system of philosophy and religious practice, this text later became of philosophical importance to Taoism and Confucianism.

The *I Ching* itself, shorn of its commentaries, consists of 64 combinations of 8 trigrams (called "hexagrams"), traditionally chosen by throwing coins or yarrow sticks, to give the diviner some idea of the situation at hand and, through reading of the "changing lines", some idea of what is developing.^[98]

The 64 original notations of the hexagrams in the *I Ching* can also be read as a meditation on how change occurs, so it assists Taoists with managing yin and yang cycles as Laozi advocated in the *Tao Te Ching* (the oldest known version of this text was dated to 400 BCE). More recently as recorded in the 18th century, the Taoist master Liu Yiming continued to advocate this usage.^[99]



The eight trigrams of the *I Ching*, known as bagua

The Taoist Canon

The Taoist Canon (道藏, *Treasury of Tao*) is also referred to as the *Taotsang*. It was originally compiled during the Jin, Tang, and Song dynasties. The extant version was published during the Ming Dynasty.^[100]

The Ming *Taotsang* includes almost 1500 texts.^[101] Following the example of the Buddhist Tripitaka, it is divided into three *dong* (洞, "caves", "grottoes"). They are arranged from "highest" to "lowest":^[102]

1. The Zhen ("real" or "truth" 眞) grotto. Includes the Shangqing texts.
2. The Xuan ("mystery" 玄) grotto. Includes the Lingbao scriptures.
3. The Shen ("divine" 神) grotto. Includes texts predating the Maoshan (茅山) revelations.

Taoist generally do not consult published versions of the *Taotsang*, but individually choose, or inherit, texts included in the *Taotsang*. These texts have been passed down for generations from teacher to student.^[103]

The Shangqing School has a tradition of approaching Taoism through scriptural study. It is believed that by reciting certain texts often enough one will be rewarded with immortality.^[104]

Other texts

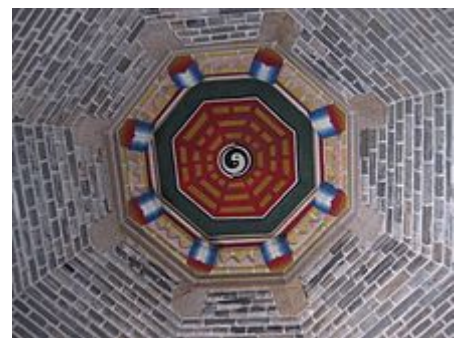
While the *Tao Te Ching* is most famous, there are many other important texts in traditional Taoism. Taishang Ganying Pian ("Treatise of the Exalted One on Response and Retribution") discusses sin and ethics, and has become a popular morality tract in the last few centuries.^[105] It asserts that those in harmony with Tao will live long and fruitful lives. The wicked, and their descendants, will suffer and have shortened lives.^[91]

Symbols and images



Basic depiction of the taijitu symbol without trigrams

The taijitu (太極圖; *tàijítú*; commonly known as the "yin and yang symbol" or simply the "yin yang") and the Ba-gua 八卦 ("Eight Trigrams") have importance in Taoist symbolism.^[106] In this cosmology, the universe creates itself out of a primary chaos of material energy, organized into the cycles of Yin and Yang and formed into objects and lives. Yin is the receptive and Yang is the active principle, seen in all forms of



A spider web ceiling depicting a taijitu surrounded by the Bagua.

change and difference such as the annual season cycles, the natural landscape, the formation of both men and women as characters, and sociopolitical history.^[107] While almost all Taoist organizations make use of it, its principles have influenced Confucian, Neo-Confucian or pan-Chinese theory. One can see this symbol as a decorative element on Taoist organization flags and logos, temple floors, or stitched into clerical robes. According to Song dynasty sources, it originated around the 10th century CE.^[108] Previously, a tiger and a dragon had symbolized yin and yang.^[108]

Taoist temples may fly square or triangular flags. They typically feature mystical writing or diagrams and are intended to fulfill various functions including providing guidance for the spirits of the dead, bringing good fortune, increasing life span, etc.^[109] Other flags and banners may be those of the gods or immortals themselves.^[110]

A zigzag with seven stars is sometimes displayed, representing the Big Dipper (or the Bushel, the Chinese equivalent). In the Shang Dynasty of the 2nd millennium BCE, Chinese thought regarded the Big Dipper as a deity, while during the Han Dynasty, it was considered a *qi* path of the circumpolar god, *Taiyi*.^[111]

Taoist temples in southern China and Taiwan may often be identified by their roofs, which feature dragons and phoenixes made from multicolored ceramic tiles. They also stand for the harmony of yin and yang (with the phoenix representing yin). A related symbol is the flaming pearl, which may be seen on such roofs between two dragons, as well as on the hairpin of a Celestial Master.^[112] In general though, Chinese Taoist architecture lacks universal features that distinguish it from other structures.^[113]

Practices

Rituals

In ancient times, before the Taoism religion was founded, food would sometimes be set out as a sacrifice to the spirits of the deceased or the gods. This could include slaughtered animals, such as pigs and ducks, or fruit. The Taoist Celestial Master Zhang Daoling rejected food and animal sacrifices to the Gods. He tore apart temples, which demanded animal sacrifice and drove away its priests. This rejection of sacrifices has continued into the modern day, as Taoism Temples are not allowed to use animal sacrifices (with the exception of folk temples or local tradition.)^[114] Another form of sacrifice involves the burning of joss paper, or hell money, on the assumption that images thus consumed by the fire will reappear—not as a mere image, but as the actual item—in the spirit world, making them available for revered ancestors and departed loved ones. The joss paper is mostly used when memorializing ancestors, such as done during the Qingming festival.



A hall of worship of the Erwang Temple, a Taoist temple in Dujiangyan, Sichuan. There are elements of the jingxiang religious practice (incense and candle offerings).

Also on particular holidays, street parades take place. These are lively affairs that involve firecrackers and flower-covered floats broadcasting traditional music. They also variously include lion dances and dragon dances; human-occupied puppets (often of the "Seventh Lord" and "Eighth Lord"), Kungfu-practicing and palanquins carrying god-images. The various participants are not considered performers, but rather possessed by the gods and spirits in question.^[115]

Fortune-telling—including astrology, I Ching, and other forms of divination—has long been considered a traditional Taoist pursuit. Mediumship is also widely encountered in some sects. There is an academic and social distinction between martial forms of mediumship (such as *tongji*) and the spirit-writing that is typically practiced through *planchette writing*.^[116]

Physical cultivation



Chinese woodblock illustration of a *waidan* alchemical refining furnace, 1856 *Illustrated Manual of External Medicine* (外科圖說)

A recurrent and important element of Taoism are rituals, exercises and substances aiming at aligning oneself spiritually with cosmic forces, at undertaking ecstatic spiritual journeys, or at improving physical health and thereby extending one's life, ideally to the point of immortality.^[117] Enlightened and immortal beings are referred to as *xian*.

A characteristic method aiming for longevity is *Taoist alchemy*. Already in very early Taoist scriptures—like the *Taiping Jing* and the *Baopuzi*—alchemical formulas for achieving immortality were outlined.^[118]

A number of martial arts traditions, particularly the ones falling under the category of *Neijia* (like *T'ai Chi Ch'uan*, *Pa Kwa Chang* and *Xing Yi Quan*) embody Taoist principles to a significant extent, and some practitioners consider their art a means of practicing Taoism.^[119]

Society

Adherents

The number of Taoists is difficult to estimate, due to a variety of factors including defining Taoism. According to a survey of religion in China in the year 2010, the number of people practicing some form of *Chinese folk religion* is near to 950 million (70% of the Chinese).^[120] Among these, 173 million (13%) claim an affiliation with Taoist practices.^[120] Furthermore, 12 million people claim to be "Taoists", a term traditionally used exclusively for initiates, priests and experts of Taoist rituals and methods.^[120]



The *White Cloud Temple* in Beijing

Most Chinese people and many others have been influenced in some way by Taoist traditions. Since the creation of the People's Republic of China, the government has encouraged a revival of Taoist traditions in codified settings. In 1956, the *Chinese Taoist Association* was formed to administer the activities of all registered Taoist orders, and received official approval in 1957. It was disbanded during the *Cultural Revolution* under *Mao Zedong*, but was reestablished in 1980. The headquarters of the association are at the *Baiyunguan*, or *White Cloud Temple of Beijing*, belonging to the *Longmen* branch of *Quanzhen* Taoism.^[121] Since 1980, many Taoist monasteries and temples have been reopened or rebuilt, both belonging to the *Zhengyi* or *Quanzhen* schools, and clergy *ordination* has been resumed.

Taoist literature and art has influenced the cultures of *Korea*, *Japan*, and *Vietnam*. Organized Taoism seems not to have attracted a large non-Chinese following until modern times. In *Taiwan*, 7.5 million people (33% of the population) identify themselves as Taoists.^[122] Data collected in 2010 for religious demographics of

Hong Kong^[123] and Singapore^[124] show that, respectively, 14% and 11% of the people of these cities identify as Taoists.

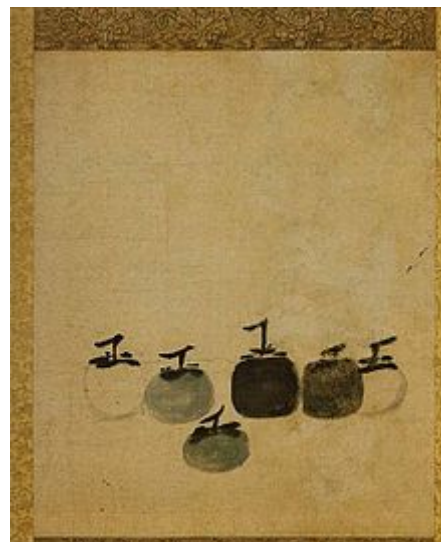
Followers of Taoism are also present in Chinese émigré communities outside Asia. In addition, it has attracted followers with no Chinese heritage. For example, in Brazil there are Taoist temples in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro which are affiliated with the Taoist Society of China. Membership of these temples is entirely of non-Chinese ancestry.^[125]

Art and poetry

Throughout Chinese history, there have been many examples of art being influenced by Taoist thought. Notable painters influenced by Taoism include Wu Wei, Huang Gongwang, Mi Fu, Muqi Fachang, Shitao, Ni Zan, Tang Mi, and Wang Zengzu.^[126] Taoist arts represents the diverse regions, dialects, and time spans that are commonly associated with Taoism. Ancient Taoist art was commissioned by the aristocracy; however, scholars masters and adepts also directly engaged in the art themselves.^[127]

Political aspects

Taoism never had a unified political theory. While Huang-Lao's positions justified a strong emperor as the legitimate ruler,^[128] the "primitivists" (like in the chapters 8-11 of the Zhuangzi) argued strongly for a radical anarchism. A more moderate position is presented in the Inner Chapters of the Zhuangzi in which the political life is presented with disdain and some kind of pluralism or perspectivism is preferred.^[129] The syncretist position in texts like the Huainanzi and some Outer Chapters of the Zhuangzi blended some Taoist positions with Confucian ones.^[130]



Six Persimmons, a Taoist-influenced 13th-century Chinese painting by the monk, Mu Qi.

Relations with other religions and philosophies

Many scholars believe Taoism arose as a countermovement to Confucianism.^[131] The philosophical terms *Tao* and *De* are indeed shared by both Taoism and Confucianism.^[132] Zhuangzi explicitly criticized Confucian and Mohist tenets in his work. In general, Taoism rejects the Confucian emphasis on rituals, hierarchical social order, and conventional morality, and favors "naturalness", spontaneity, and individualism instead.^[133]

The entry of Buddhism into China was marked by significant interaction and syncretism with Taoism.^[134] Originally seen as a kind of "foreign Taoism", Buddhism's scriptures were translated into Chinese using the Taoist vocabulary.^[135] Representatives of early Chinese Buddhism, like Sengzhao and Tao Sheng, knew and were deeply influenced by the Taoist keystone texts.^[136]

Taoism especially shaped the development of Chan (Zen) Buddhism,^[137] introducing elements like the concept of *naturalness*, distrust of scripture and text, and emphasis on embracing "this life" and living in the "every-moment".^[138]

On the other hand, Taoism also incorporated Buddhist elements during the Tang dynasty. Examples of such influence include monasteries, vegetarianism, prohibition of alcohol, the doctrine of emptiness, and collecting scripture in tripartite organization in certain sects.

Ideological and political rivals for centuries, Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism deeply influenced one another.^[139] For example, Wang Bi, one of the most influential philosophical commentators on Lao Tzu (and the *I Ching*), was a Confucian.^[140] The three rivals also share some similar values, with all three embracing a humanist philosophy emphasizing moral behavior and human perfection. In time, most Chinese people identified to some extent with all three traditions simultaneously.^[141] This became institutionalized when aspects of the three schools were synthesized in the Neo-Confucian school.^[142]

Some authors have undertaken comparative studies of Taoism and Christianity. This has been of interest for students of the history of religion such as J. J. M. de Groot,^[143] among others. A comparison of the teachings of Lao Tzu and Jesus of Nazareth has been made by several authors, such as Martin Aronson,^[144] and Toropov & Hansen (2002), who believe that there are parallels that should not be ignored.^[145] In the opinion of J. Isamu Yamamoto, the main difference is that Christianity preaches a personal God while Taoism does not.^[146] Yet, a number of authors, including Lin Yutang,^[147] have argued that some moral and ethical tenets of the religions are similar.^{[148][149]} In neighboring Vietnam, Taoist values have been shown to adapt to social norms and formed emerging sociocultural beliefs together with Confucianism.^[150]



Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism Are One, a painting in the *litang* style portraying three men laughing by a river stream, 12th century, Song dynasty. The Hanging Monastery, a monastery with the combination of three philosophies: Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

See also

- Bagua
- Baopuzi
- Chinese culture
- Chinese ritual mastery traditions
- Dragon Gate Taoism
- Five precepts (Taoism)
- Hong Kong Taoist Association
- Lingbao School
- Neidan

Bahá'í Faith

The **Bahá'í Faith** is a relatively new religion^[a] teaching the essential worth of all religions and the unity of all people.^[b] Established by Bahá'u'lláh in the 19th century, it initially developed in Iran and parts of the Middle East, where it has faced ongoing persecution since its inception.^[13] The religion is estimated to have 5-8 million adherents, known as Bahá'ís, spread throughout most of the world's countries and territories.^[c]

The religion has three central figures: the Báb (1819–1850), considered a herald who taught that God would soon send a prophet in the same way as Jesus or Muhammad, and who was executed by Iranian authorities in 1850; Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), who claimed to be that prophet in 1863 and faced exile and imprisonment for most of his life; and his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), who was released from confinement in 1908 and made teaching trips to Europe and the United States. After 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death in 1921, leadership of the religion fell to his grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957). Bahá'ís annually elect local, regional, and national Spiritual Assemblies that govern the religion's affairs. Every five years the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies elect the Universal House of Justice, the nine-member supreme governing institution of the worldwide Bahá'í community that is located in Haifa, Israel, near the Shrine of the Báb.



Seat of the Universal House of Justice, governing body of the Bahá'ís, in Haifa, Israel

According to the Bahá'í teachings, religion is revealed in an orderly and progressive way by a single God through Manifestations of God, who are the founders of major world religions throughout history; Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad are noted as the most recent of these before the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís regard the major religions as fundamentally unified in purpose, though varied in social practices and interpretations. The Bahá'í Faith stresses the unity of all people, explicitly rejecting racism and nationalism. At the heart of Bahá'í teachings is the goal of a unified world order that ensures the prosperity of all nations, races, creeds, and classes.^{[14][15]}

Letters written by Bahá'u'lláh to various people, including some heads of state, have been collected and assembled into a canon of Bahá'í scripture. This includes works by his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Báb, who is regarded as Bahá'u'lláh's forerunner. Prominent among Bahá'í literature are the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *Some Answered Questions*, and *The Dawn-Breakers*.

Contents

Etymology

Beliefs

God

Religion

Human beings

[Social principles](#)

[Covenant](#)

[Shoghi Effendi's summary](#)

[Canonical texts](#)

[History](#)

[Báb](#)

[Bahá'u'lláh](#)

['Abdu'l-Bahá](#)

[Shoghi Effendi](#)

[Universal House of Justice](#)

[Demographics](#)

[Social practices](#)

[Exhortations](#)

[Prohibitions](#)

[Marriage](#)

[Work](#)

[Places of worship](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Symbols](#)

[Socio-economic development](#)

[United Nations](#)

[Persecution](#)

[Iran](#)

[Egypt](#)

[See also](#)

[Notes](#)

[Citations](#)

[References](#)

[Books](#)

[Encyclopedias](#)

[Journals](#)

[News media](#)

[Other](#)

[Further reading](#)

[External links](#)

Etymology

The word **Bahá'í** (بهائى) is used either as an adjective to refer to the Bahá'í Faith or as a term for a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The proper name of the religion is the **Bahá'í Faith**, not *Bahá'í* or *Baha'ism* (the latter is regarded as derogatory by the Bahá'ís).^{[16][17]} It is derived from the [Arabic](#) **Bahá'** (بهاء), a name Bahá'u'lláh chose for himself, meaning 'glory' or 'splendor'. In English, the word is commonly pronounced **ba-HIGH** (/bəˈhaɪ/), but the more accurate rendering of the Arabic is **bah-HA-ee** (/bəˈhɑːʔiː/).

The accent marks above the letters, representing long vowels, derive from a system of transliterating Arabic and Persian script that was adopted by Bahá'ís in 1923, and which has been used in almost all Bahá'í publications since.^[16] Bahá'ís prefer the orthographies *Bahá'í*, *the Báb*, *Bahá'u'lláh*, and *'Abdu'l-Bahá*. "Bahai", "Bahais", "Baha'i", "the Bab", "Bahauallah" and "Baha'ullah" are often used when accent marks are unavailable.

The term **Baha'ism** (or *Bahaism*) was once common among academics,^{[18][19][20][21]} for example as a variant of "Bahai Faith" by the US Library of Congress,^[22] but it is now less common.^{[23][16]}

Beliefs

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh form the foundation of Bahá'í belief.^[24] Three principles are central to these teachings: the unity of God, the unity of religion, and the unity of humanity.^[25] Baha'is believe that God periodically reveals his will through divine messengers, whose purpose is to transform the character of humankind and to develop, within those who respond, moral and spiritual qualities. Religion is thus seen as orderly, unified, and progressive from age to age.^[26]



Bahá'í House of Worship in Ingleside, Sydney, Australia

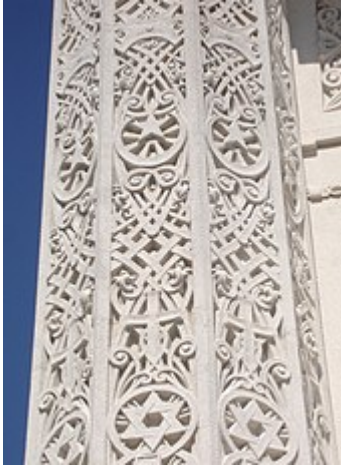
God

The Bahá'í writings describe a single, personal, inaccessible, omniscient, omnipresent, imperishable, and almighty God who is the creator of all things in the universe.^[27] The existence of God and the universe is thought to be eternal, without a beginning or end.^[28] Though inaccessible directly, God is nevertheless seen as conscious of creation, with a will and purpose expressed through messengers called Manifestations of God.^[29]

Bahá'í teachings state that God is too great for humans to fully comprehend, or to create a complete and accurate image of by themselves. Therefore, human understanding of God is achieved through his revelations via his Manifestations.^{[30][31]} In the Bahá'í Faith, God is often referred to by titles and attributes (for example, the All-Powerful, or the All-Loving), and there is a substantial emphasis on monotheism. Bahá'í teachings state that the attributes applied to God are used to translate Godliness into human terms and to help people concentrate on their own attributes in worshipping God to develop their potentialities on their spiritual path.^{[30][31]} According to the Bahá'í teachings the human purpose is to learn to know and love God through such methods as prayer, reflection, and being of service to others.^[30]

Religion

Bahá'í notions of progressive religious revelation result in their accepting the validity of the well known religions of the world, whose founders and central figures are seen as Manifestations of God.^[32] Religious history is interpreted as a series of dispensations, where each *manifestation* brings a somewhat broader and more advanced revelation that is rendered as a text of scripture and passed on through history with greater or lesser reliability but at least true in substance,^[33] suited for the time and place in which it was expressed.^[28] Specific religious social teachings (for example, the direction of prayer, or dietary restrictions) may be revoked by a subsequent manifestation so that a more appropriate requirement for the time and place may be established. Conversely, certain general principles (for example, neighbourliness, or



Symbols of many religions on a pillar of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.

charity) are seen to be universal and consistent. In Bahá'í belief, this process of progressive revelation will not end; it is, however, believed to be cyclical. Bahá'ís do not expect a new manifestation of God to appear within 1000 years of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.^[34]

Bahá'í beliefs are sometimes described as syncretic combinations of earlier religious beliefs.^[35] Bahá'ís, however, assert that their religion is a distinct tradition with its own scriptures, teachings, laws, and history.^{[28][36]} The religion was initially seen as a sect of Islam because of its belief in the prophethood of Muhammad and in the authenticity and veracity of the Qur'an.^[37] Most religious specialists now see it as an independent religion, with its religious background in Shi'a Islam being seen as analogous to the Jewish context in which Christianity was established.^[38] Muslim institutions and clergy, both Sunni and Shi'a, consider formerly-Muslim Bahá'ís to be deserters or apostates from Islam, which has led to Bahá'ís being persecuted.^{[39][40]} Bahá'ís describe their faith as an independent world religion, differing from the other traditions in its relative age and in the appropriateness of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the modern context.^[41]

Bahá'u'lláh is believed to have fulfilled the messianic expectations of these precursor faiths.^[42]

Human beings

The Bahá'í writings state that human beings have a "rational soul", and that this provides the species with a unique capacity to recognize God's status and humanity's relationship with its creator. Every human is seen to have a duty to recognize God through his Messengers, and to conform to their teachings.^[43] Through recognition and obedience, service to humanity and regular prayer and spiritual practice, the Bahá'í writings state that the soul becomes closer to God, the spiritual ideal in Bahá'í belief. According to Bahá'í belief when a human dies the soul is permanently separated from the body and carries on in the next world where it is judged based on the person's actions in the physical world. Heaven and Hell are taught to be spiritual states of nearness or distance from God that describe relationships in this world and the next, and not physical places of reward and punishment achieved after death.^[44]



The ringstone symbol, representing humanity's connection to God.

The Bahá'í writings emphasize the essential equality of human beings, and the abolition of prejudice. Humanity is seen as essentially one, though highly varied; its diversity of race and culture are seen as worthy of appreciation and acceptance. Doctrines of racism, nationalism, caste, social class, and gender-based hierarchy are seen as artificial impediments to unity.^[25] The Bahá'í teachings state that the unification of humanity is the paramount issue in the religious and political conditions of the present world.^[28]

Social principles

The following principles are frequently listed as a quick summary of the Bahá'í teachings. They are derived from transcripts of speeches given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his tour of Europe and North America in 1912.^{[45][46]} The list is not authoritative and a variety of such lists circulate.^{[36][47]}

- Unity of God

- Unity of religion
- Unity of humanity
- Equality between women and men
- Elimination of all forms of prejudice
- World peace and a new world order
- Harmony of religion and science
- Independent investigation of truth
- Universal compulsory education
- Universal auxiliary language
- Obedience to government and non-involvement in partisan politics^[d]
- Elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty
- Prohibition of slavery

Bahá'u'lláh writes that all people "have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization", based on the development of virtues,^[48] but warns that "if carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation".^{[49][50]}

With specific regard to the pursuit of world peace, Bahá'u'lláh prescribed a world-embracing collective security arrangement for the establishment of a temporary era of peace referred to in the Baha'i teachings as the Lesser Peace. For the establishment of a lasting peace (The Most Great Peace) and the purging of the "overwhelming Corruptions" it is necessary that all the people of the world universally unite under a universal Faith.^[51]

Covenant

The Bahá'í teachings speak of a "Greater Covenant",^[52] being universal and endless, and a "Lesser Covenant", being unique to each religious dispensation. The Greater Covenant is viewed as a more enduring agreement between God and humanity, where a Manifestation of God is expected to come to humanity about every thousand years, at times of turmoil and uncertainty.

The Lesser Covenant is viewed as an agreement between a Messenger of God and his followers, and includes social practices and the continuation of authority in the religion. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá established rules and institutions for an authoritative line of succession of leadership, in order to maintain unity and prevent schism.^{[53][54][55]} The Universal House of Justice is the final authority to resolve any disagreements among Bahá'ís, and within this framework no individual follower may propose 'inspired' or 'authoritative' interpretations of scripture.^[53] The dozen or so attempts at schism^[55] have all either become extinct or remained extremely small, numbering a few hundred collectively.^{[56][57]} The followers of such divisions are regarded as Covenant-breakers and shunned.^{[58][59]}

Shoghi Effendi's summary

Shoghi Effendi, the head of the religion from 1921 to 1957, wrote the following summary of what he considered to be the distinguishing principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, which, he said, together with the laws and ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas constitute the bedrock of the Bahá'í Faith:

The independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition; the oneness of the entire human race, the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the Faith; the basic unity of all religions; the condemnation of all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or

national; the harmony which must exist between religion and science; the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar; the introduction of compulsory education; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the institution of a world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations; the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of worship; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind—these stand out as the essential elements [which Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed].^[60]

Canonical texts

The *canonical texts* of the Bahá'í Faith are the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, and the authenticated talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are considered as divine revelation, the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the writings of Shoghi Effendi as authoritative interpretation, and those of the Universal House of Justice as authoritative legislation and elucidation. Some measure of divine guidance is assumed for all of these texts.^[61]

Some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important writings include the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ("Most Holy Book"), which defines many laws and practices for individuals and society,^[62] the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* ("Book of Certitude"), which became the foundation of much of Bahá'í belief,^[63] and *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, which includes further doctrinal foundations. Although the Bahá'í teachings have a strong emphasis on social and ethical issues, a number of foundational texts have been described as mystical.^[28] These include the *Seven Valleys* and the *Four Valleys*.^[64] *The Seven Valleys* was written to a follower of Sufism, in the style of 'Attar, the Persian Muslim poet,^[65] and sets forth the stages of the soul's journey towards God. It was first translated into English in 1906, becoming one of the earliest available books of Bahá'u'lláh to the West. *The Hidden Words* is another book written by Bahá'u'lláh during the same period, containing 153 short passages in which Bahá'u'lláh claims to have taken the basic essence of certain spiritual truths and written them in brief form.^[66]

History

The Bahá'í Faith traces its beginnings to the religion of the Báb and the Shaykhi movement that immediately preceded it. The Báb was a merchant who began preaching in 1844 that he was the bearer of a new revelation from God, but was rejected by the generality of Islamic clergy in Iran, ending in his public execution for the crime of heresy.^[67] The Báb taught that God would soon send a new messenger, and Bahá'ís consider Bahá'u'lláh to be that person.^[68] Although they are distinct movements, the Báb is so interwoven into Bahá'í theology and history that Bahá'ís celebrate his birth, death, and declaration as holy days, consider him one of their three central figures (along with Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá), and a historical account of the Bábí movement (*The Dawn-Breakers*) is considered one of three books that every Bahá'í should "master" and read "over and over again".^[69]

The Bahá'í community was mostly confined to the Iranian and Ottoman empires until after the death of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, at which time he had followers in 13 countries of Asia and Africa.^[70] Under the leadership of his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the

Bahá'í timeline

1817	Bahá'u'lláh was born in Tehran, Iran
1819	The Báb was born in Shiraz, Iran
1844	The Báb declares his mission in Shiraz, Iran
1850	The Báb is publicly executed in Tabriz, Iran
1852	Thousands of

religion gained a footing in Europe and America, and was consolidated in Iran, where it still suffers intense persecution.^[13] 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death in 1921 marks the end of what Bahá'ís call the "heroic age" of the religion.^[71]

Báb



Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel

On the evening of 22 May 1844, Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad of Shiraz gained his first convert and took on the title of "the Báb" (الباب "Gate"), referring to his later claim to the status of Mahdi of Shi'a Islam.^[13] His followers were therefore known as Bábís. As the Báb's teachings spread, which the Islamic clergy saw as blasphemous, his followers came under increased persecution and torture.^[28] The conflicts escalated in several places to military sieges by the Shah's army. The Báb himself was imprisoned and eventually executed in 1850.^[72]

Bahá'ís see the Báb as the forerunner of the Bahá'í faith, because the Báb's writings introduced the concept of "He whom God shall make manifest", a messianic figure whose coming, according to

Bahá'ís, was announced in the scriptures of all of the world's great religions, and whom Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, claimed to be.^[28] The Báb's tomb, located in Haifa, Israel, is an important place of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís. The remains of the Báb were brought secretly from Iran to the Holy Land and eventually interred in the tomb built for them in a spot specifically designated by Bahá'u'lláh.^[73] The main written works translated into English of the Báb's are collected in *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* out of the estimated 135 works.^[74]

Bahá'u'lláh

Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Núrí was one of the early followers of the Báb, and later took the title of Bahá'u'lláh. Bábís faced a period of persecution that peaked in 1852–53 after a few individual Bábís made a failed attempt to assassinate the Shah. Although they acted alone, the government responded with collective punishment, killing many Bábís. Bahá'u'lláh was put in prison.

Shortly thereafter he was expelled from Iran and traveled to Baghdad, in the Ottoman Empire.^[25] In Baghdad, his leadership revived the persecuted followers of the Báb in Iran, so Iranian authorities requested his removal, which instigated a summons to Constantinople (now Istanbul) from the Ottoman Sultan. In 1863, at the time of his removal from Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh first announced his claim of prophethood to his family and followers, which he said came to him years earlier while in a dungeon of Tehran.^[25] From the time of the initial exile from Iran, tensions grew between him and Subh-i-Azal, the appointed leader of the Bábís, who did not recognize Bahá'u'lláh's claim. Throughout the rest of his life Bahá'u'lláh gained the allegiance of most of the Bábís, who came to be known as Bahá'ís.

Bábís are executed
Bahá'u'lláh is imprisoned and forced into exile

1863 Bahá'u'lláh first announces his claim to divine revelation in Baghdad, Iraq.
He is forced to leave Baghdad for Istanbul, then Adrianople

1868 Bahá'u'lláh is forced into harsher confinement in 'Akká, in Palestine

1892 Bahá'u'lláh dies near 'Akká
His Will appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as successor

1908 'Abdu'l-Bahá is released from prison

1921 'Abdu'l-Bahá dies in Haifa
His Will appointed Shoghi Effendi as Guardian

1957 Shoghi Effendi dies in England

1963 The Universal House of Justice is first elected

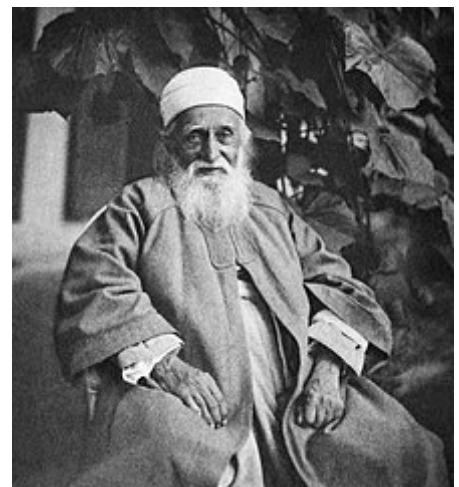
He spent less than four months in Constantinople. After receiving chastising letters from Bahá'u'lláh, Ottoman authorities turned against him and put him under house arrest in Adrianople (now Edirne), where he remained for four years, until a royal decree of 1868 banished all Bábís to either Cyprus or 'Akká.

It was in or near the Ottoman penal colony of 'Akká, in present-day Israel, that Bahá'u'lláh spent the remainder of his life. After initially strict and harsh confinement, he was allowed to live in a home near 'Akká, while still officially a prisoner of that city.^[75] He died there in 1892. Bahá'ís regard his resting place at Bahjí as the Qiblih to which they turn in prayer each day.^[76]

He produced over 18,000 works in his lifetime, in both Arabic and Persian, of which only 8% have been translated into English.^[77] During the period in Adrianople, he began declaring his mission as a Messenger of God in letters to the world's religious and secular rulers, including Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, and Queen Victoria.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

'Abbás Effendi was Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, known by the title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Bahá). His father left a will that appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the leader of the Bahá'í community, and designated him as the "Centre of the Covenant", "Head of the Faith", and the sole authoritative interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings.^{[73][78]} 'Abdu'l-Bahá had shared his father's long exile and imprisonment, which continued until 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own release as a result of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Following his release he led a life of travelling, speaking, teaching, and maintaining correspondence with communities of believers and individuals, expounding the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.^[25]



'Abdu'l-Bahá

There are over 27,000 extant documents by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, mostly letters, of which only a fraction have been translated into English.^[74] Among the more well known are *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, the *Tablet to Auguste-Henri Forel*, and *Some Answered Questions*. Additionally notes taken of a number of his talks were published in various volumes like *Paris Talks* during his journeys to the West.

Shoghi Effendi

Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* are foundational documents of the Bahá'í administrative order. Bahá'u'lláh established the elected Universal House of Justice, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá established the appointed hereditary Guardianship and clarified the relationship between the two institutions.^{[73][79]} In his Will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi, his eldest grandson, as the first Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi served for 36 years as the head of the religion until his death.^[80]

Throughout his lifetime, Shoghi Effendi translated Bahá'í texts; developed global plans for the expansion of the Bahá'í community; developed the Bahá'í World Centre; carried on a voluminous correspondence with communities and individuals around the world; and built the administrative structure of the religion, preparing the community for the election of the Universal House of Justice.^[25] He unexpectedly died after a brief illness on 4 November 1957, in London, England, under conditions that did not allow for a successor to be appointed.^{[81][82][83]}

In 1937, Shoghi Effendi launched a seven-year plan for the Bahá'ís of North America, followed by another in 1946.^[84] In 1953, he launched the first international plan, the Ten Year World Crusade. This plan included extremely ambitious goals for the expansion of Bahá'í communities and institutions, the translation of Bahá'í texts into several new languages, and the sending of Bahá'í pioneers into previously unreached nations.^[85] He announced in letters during the Ten Year Crusade that it would be followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, which was elected in 1963 at the culmination of the Crusade. The House of Justice then launched a nine-year plan in 1964, and a series of subsequent multi-year plans of varying length and goals followed, guiding the direction of the international Bahá'í community.^[86]

Universal House of Justice

Since 1963, the Universal House of Justice has been the elected head of the Bahá'í Faith. The general functions of this body are defined through the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and clarified in the writings of Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. These functions include teaching and education, implementing Bahá'í laws, addressing social issues, and caring for the weak and the poor.^[88]

The House of Justice directs the work of the Bahá'í community through a series of multi-year international plans that began with a nine-year plan in 1964.^[89] In the current plan, the House of Justice encourages the Bahá'ís around the world to focus on capacity building through children's classes, junior youth groups, devotional gatherings, and study circles.^{[90][91]} Additional lines of action include social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society.^{[92][93]} The years from 2001 until 2021 represent four successive five-year plans, culminating in the centennial anniversary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.^[94] Annually, on 21 April, the Universal House of Justice sends a 'Ridván' message to the worldwide Bahá'í community,^[95] that updates Bahá'ís on current developments and provides further guidance for the year to come.^[e]

At local, regional, and national levels, Bahá'ís elect members to nine-person Spiritual Assemblies, which run the affairs of the religion. There are also appointed individuals working at various levels, including locally and internationally, which perform the function of propagating the teachings and protecting the community. The latter do not serve as clergy, which the Bahá'í Faith does not have.^{[28][96]} The Universal House of Justice remains the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, and its 9 members are elected every five years by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies.^[97] Any male Bahá'í, 21 years or older, is eligible to be elected to the Universal House of Justice; all other positions are open to male and female Bahá'ís.^[98]

Malietoa Tanumafili II of Samoa was the first serving head of state to embrace the Bahá'í Faith.^[99]

Demographics

The Bahá'í Faith is a medium-sized religion.^[100] A Bahá'í-published document reported 4.74 million Bahá'ís in 1986 growing at an annual rate of 4.4%.^[101] Bahá'í sources since 1991 usually estimate the worldwide Bahá'í population to be above 5 million.^[102] The *World Christian Encyclopedia* estimated 7.1 million Bahá'ís in the world in 2000, representing 218 countries,^[103] and 7.3 million in 2010^[104] with the same source. The figure of 5 million Bahá'ís in the early 1990s is a result of rapid growth since the early 1950s, when rough estimates suggest there were only around 200,000 Bahá'ís.^[105]



The Bahá'í House of Worship, Wilmette, Illinois, is the oldest surviving Bahá'í House of Worship in the world.^[87]

According to two researchers in 2013: "The Baha'i Faith is the only religion to have grown faster in every United Nations region over the past 100 years than the general population; Baha'i was thus the fastest-growing religion between 1910 and 2010, growing at least twice as fast as the population of almost every UN region."^[106] The Bahá'í Faith was ranked by *Foreign Policy* magazine as the world's second fastest growing religion by percentage (1.7%) in 2007.^[107] It was listed in *The Britannica Book of the Year* (1992–present) as the second most widespread of the world's independent religions in terms of the number of countries represented. According to *Britannica*, the Bahá'í Faith (as of 2010) is established in 221 countries and territories and has an estimated seven million adherents worldwide.^[108] Additionally, Bahá'ís have self-organized in most of the nations of the world.



The Lotus Temple, a Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India. It attracts an average of 4 million visitors a year.

The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2004 included the following on the regional distribution of the world's Bahá'ís:

The majority of Bahá'ís live in Asia (3.6 million), Africa (1.8 million), and Latin America (900,000). According to some estimates, the largest Bahá'í community in the world is in India, with 2.2 million Bahá'ís, next is Iran, with 350,000, the US, with 150,000, and Brazil, with 60,000. Aside from these countries, numbers vary greatly. Currently, no country has a Bahá'í majority.^[109]

The world's largest Bahá'í population lives in India, which in 2010 was home to an estimated 1,897,651 Bahá'ís.^[104] Also according to the Association of Religion Data Archives, the Bahá'í Faith is the largest numerical religious minority in Iran,^{[110][111]} Panama^[112] and Belize,^[113] the second largest international religion in Bolivia,^[114] Zambia,^[115] and Papua New Guinea,^[116] and the third largest international religion in Chad^[117] and Kenya.^[118]

Social practices

Exhortations

The following are a few examples from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on personal conduct that are required or encouraged of his followers:

- Bahá'ís over the age of 15 should individually recite an obligatory prayer each day, using fixed words and form.
- In addition to the daily obligatory prayer, Bahá'ís should offer daily devotional prayer and should meditate and study sacred scripture.
- Adult Bahá'ís should observe a Nineteen-Day Fast each year during daylight hours in March, with certain exemptions.
- There are specific requirements for Bahá'í burial that include a specified prayer to be read at the interment. Embalming or cremating the body is strongly discouraged.

- Bahá'ís should make a 19% voluntary payment on any wealth in excess of what is necessary to live comfortably, after the remittance of any outstanding debt. The payments go to the Universal House of Justice.

Prohibitions

The following are a few examples from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on personal conduct that is prohibited or discouraged.

- Backbiting and gossip are prohibited and denounced.
- Drinking or selling alcohol is forbidden.
- Sexual intercourse is only permitted between a husband and wife, and thus premarital, extramarital, or homosexual intercourse are forbidden. (See also Homosexuality and the Bahá'í Faith)
- Participation in partisan politics is forbidden.
- Begging as a profession is forbidden.



Bahá'í gardens in Haifa, Israel

The observance of personal laws, such as prayer or fasting, is the sole responsibility of the individual.^[119] There are, however, occasions when a Bahá'í might be administratively expelled from the community for a public disregard of the laws, or gross immorality. Such expulsions are administered by the National Spiritual Assembly and do not involve shunning.^[120]

While some of the laws from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applicable at the present time, others are dependent upon the existence of a predominantly Bahá'í society, such as the punishments for arson or murder. The laws, when not in direct conflict with the civil laws of the country of residence, are binding on every Bahá'í.^[121]

Marriage

The purpose of marriage in the Bahá'í faith is mainly to foster spiritual harmony, fellowship and unity between a man and a woman and to provide a stable and loving environment for the rearing of children.^[122] The Bahá'í teachings on marriage call it a *fortress for well-being and salvation* and place marriage and the family as the foundation of the structure of human society.^[123] Bahá'u'lláh highly praised marriage, discouraged divorce, and required chastity outside of marriage; Bahá'u'lláh taught that a husband and wife should strive to improve the spiritual life of each other.^[124] Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá'í scripture.^[123]

Bahá'ís intending to marry are asked to obtain a thorough understanding of the other's character before deciding to marry.^[123] Although parents should not choose partners for their children, once two individuals decide to marry, they must receive the consent of all living biological parents, whether they are Bahá'í or not. The Bahá'í marriage ceremony is simple; the only compulsory part of the wedding is the reading of the wedding vows prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh which both the groom and the bride read, in the presence of two witnesses.^[123] The vows are "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."^[123]

Work

Bahá'u'lláh prohibited a mendicant and ascetic lifestyle.^[125] Monasticism is forbidden, and Bahá'ís are taught to practice spirituality while engaging in useful work.^[28] The importance of self-exertion and service to humanity in one's spiritual life is emphasised further in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, where he states that work done in the spirit of service to humanity enjoys a rank equal to that of prayer and worship in the sight of God.^[28]

Places of worship

Most Bahá'í meetings occur in individuals' homes, local Bahá'í centers, or rented facilities. Worldwide, as of 2018, ten Bahá'í Houses of Worship, including eight Mother Temples and two local Houses of Worship have been built^[126] and a further five are planned for construction. Two of these houses of worship are national while the other three are going to be local temples.^[126] Bahá'í writings refer to an institution called a "Mashriqu'l-Adhkár" (Dawning-place of the Mention of God), which is to form the center of a complex of institutions including a hospital, university, and so on.^[127] The first ever Bahá'í temple was built from 1902 to 1907 in 'Ishqábád, Turkmenistan, and regarding the attempt at building a complex of satellite institutions it was the most complete ever built, but it was confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1938 and later demolished.^[128] The oldest extant Bahá'í temple is the one near Chicago, Illinois, dedicated in 1953.



Bahá'í House of Worship,
Langenhain, Germany

Calendar

The Bahá'í calendar is based upon the calendar established by the Báb. The year consists of 19 months, each having 19 days, with four or five intercalary days, to make a full solar year.^[25] The Bahá'í New Year corresponds to the traditional Iranian New Year, called Naw Rúz, and occurs on the vernal equinox, near 21 March, at the end of the month of fasting. Bahá'í communities gather at the beginning of each month at a meeting called a Feast for worship, consultation and socializing.^[28]

Each of the 19 months is given a name which is an attribute of God; some examples include Bahá' (Splendour), 'Ilm (Knowledge), and Jamál (Beauty).^[129] The Bahá'í week is familiar in that it consists of seven days, with each day of the week also named after an attribute of God. Bahá'ís observe 11 Holy Days throughout the year, with work suspended on 9 of these. These days commemorate important anniversaries in the history of the religion.^[130]

Symbols

The symbols of the religion are derived from the Arabic word Bahá' (بهاء, "splendor" or "glory"), with a numerical value of 9, which is why the most common symbol is the nine-pointed star.^[131] The ringstone symbol and calligraphy of the Greatest Name are also often encountered. The former consists of two five-pointed stars interspersed with a stylized Bahá' whose shape is meant to recall the three onenesses,^[132] while the latter is a calligraphic rendering of the phrase Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá (يا بهاء الأبهى "O Glory of the Most Glorious!").

The five-pointed star is the official symbol of the Bahá'í Faith,^{[133][134]} known as the *Haykal* ("temple"). It was initiated and established by the Báb and various works were written in calligraphy shaped into a five-pointed star.^[135]

Socio-economic development

Since its inception the Bahá'í Faith has had involvement in socio-economic development beginning by giving greater freedom to women,^[137] promulgating the promotion of female education as a priority concern,^[138] and that involvement was given practical expression by creating schools, agricultural co-ops, and clinics.^[137]

The religion entered a new phase of activity when a message of the Universal House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 was released. Bahá'ís were urged to seek out ways, compatible with the Bahá'í teachings, in which they could become involved in the social and economic development of the communities in which they lived. Worldwide in 1979 there were 129 officially recognized Bahá'í socio-economic development projects. By 1987, the number of officially recognized development projects had increased to 1482.^[86]

Current initiatives of social action include activities in areas like health, sanitation, education, gender equality, arts and media, agriculture, and the environment.^[139] Educational projects include schools, which range from village tutorial schools to large secondary schools, and some universities.^[140] By 2017, the Bahá'í Office of Social and Economic Development estimated that there were 40,000 small-scale projects, 1,400 sustained projects, and 135 Bahá'í-inspired organizations.^[139]

United Nations

Bahá'u'lláh wrote of the need for world government in this age of humanity's collective life. Because of this emphasis the international Bahá'í community has chosen to support efforts of improving international relations through organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, with some reservations about the present structure and constitution of the UN.^[140] The Bahá'í International Community is an agency under the direction of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, and has consultative status with the following organizations:^{[141][142]}

- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
- United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- World Health Organization (WHO)

The Bahá'í International Community has offices at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and representations to United Nations regional commissions and other offices in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Nairobi, Rome, Santiago, and Vienna.^[142] In recent years, an Office of the Environment and an Office for the Advancement of Women were established as part of its United Nations Office. The Bahá'í Faith has



The calligraphy of the Greatest Name



Students of *School for Girls*, Tehran, 13 August 1933. This photograph may be of the students of *Tarbiyat School for Girls* which was established by the Bahá'í Community of Tehran in 1911; the school was closed by government decree in 1934.^[136]

also undertaken joint development programs with various other United Nations agencies. In the 2000 Millennium Forum of the United Nations a Bahá'í was invited as one of the only non-governmental speakers during the summit.^[143]

Persecution

Bahá'ís continue to be persecuted in some majority-Islamic countries, whose leaders do not recognize the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion, but rather as apostasy from Islam. The most severe persecutions have occurred in Iran, where more than 200 Bahá'ís were executed between 1978 and 1998.^[111] The rights of Bahá'ís have been restricted to greater or lesser extents in numerous other countries, including Egypt, Afghanistan,^[144] Indonesia,^[145] Iraq,^[146] Morocco,^[147] Yemen,^[148] and several countries in sub-Saharan Africa.^[86]



The Bahá'í cemetery in Yazd after its desecration by the Iranian government

Iran

The marginalization of the Iranian Bahá'ís by current governments is rooted in historical efforts by Muslim clergy to persecute the religious minority.^[149] When the Báb started attracting a large following, the clergy hoped to stop the movement from spreading by stating that its followers were enemies of God. These clerical directives led to mob attacks and public executions.^[13] Starting in the twentieth century, in addition to repression aimed at individual Bahá'ís, centrally directed campaigns that targeted the entire Bahá'í community and its institutions were initiated.^[150] In one case in Yazd in 1903 more than 100 Bahá'ís were killed.^[151] Bahá'í schools, such as the Tarbiyat boys' and girls' schools in Tehran, were closed in the 1930s and 1940s, Bahá'í marriages were not recognized and Bahá'í texts were censored.^{[150][152]}

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to divert attention from economic difficulties in Iran and from a growing nationalist movement, a campaign of persecution against the Bahá'ís was instituted.^[f] An approved and coordinated anti-Bahá'í campaign (to incite public passion against the Bahá'ís) started in 1955 and it included the spreading of anti-Bahá'í propaganda on national radio stations and in official newspapers.^[150] During that campaign, initiated by Mulla Muhammad Taghi Falsafi, the Bahá'í center in Tehran was demolished at the orders of Tehran military governor, General Teymur Bakhtiar.^[153] In the late 1970s the Shah's regime consistently lost legitimacy due to criticism that it was pro-Western. As the anti-Shah movement gained ground and support, revolutionary propaganda was spread which alleged that some of the Shah's advisors were Bahá'ís.^[154] Bahá'ís were portrayed as economic threats, and as supporters of Israel and the West, and societal hostility against the Bahá'ís increased.^{[150][155]}

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 Iranian Bahá'ís have regularly had their homes ransacked or have been banned from attending university or from holding government jobs, and several hundred have received prison sentences for their religious beliefs, most recently for participating in study circles.^[111] Bahá'í cemeteries have been desecrated and property has been seized and occasionally demolished, including the House of Mírzá Buzurg, Bahá'u'lláh's father.^[13] The House of the Báb in Shiraz, one of three sites to which Bahá'ís perform pilgrimage, has been destroyed twice.^{[13][156][157]} In May 2018, the Iranian authorities expelled a young woman student from university of Isfahan because she was Bahá'í.^[158] In March 2018, two more Bahá'í students were expelled from universities in the cities of Zanjan and Gilan because of their religion.

According to a US panel, attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran increased under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency.^{[159][160]} The United Nations Commission on Human Rights revealed an October 2005 confidential letter from Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Iran ordering its members to identify Bahá'ís and to monitor their activities. Due to these actions, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights stated on 20 March 2006, that she "also expresses concern that the information gained as a result of such monitoring will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of, and discrimination against, members of the Bahá'í faith, in violation of international standards. The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is, in fact, deteriorating."^[161]

On 14 May 2008, members of an informal body known as the "Friends" that oversaw the needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran were arrested and taken to Evin prison.^{[159][162]} The Friends court case has been postponed several times, but was finally underway on 12 January 2010.^[163] Other observers were not allowed in the court. Even the defence lawyers, who for two years have had minimal access to the defendants, had difficulty entering the courtroom. The chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said that it seems that the government has already predetermined the outcome of the case and is violating international human rights law.^[163] Further sessions were held on 7 February 2010,^[164] 12 April 2010^[165] and 12 June 2010.^[166] On 11 August 2010 it became known that the court sentence was 20 years imprisonment for each of the seven prisoners^[167] which was later reduced to ten years.^[168] After the sentence, they were transferred to Gohardasht prison.^[169] In March 2011 the sentences were reinstated to the original 20 years.^[170] On 3 January 2010, Iranian authorities detained ten more members of the Baha'i minority, reportedly including Leva Khanjani, granddaughter of Jamaloddin Khanjani, one of seven Baha'i leaders jailed since 2008 and in February, they arrested his son, Niki Khanjani.^[171]

The Iranian government claims that the Bahá'í Faith is not a religion, but is instead a political organization, and hence refuses to recognize it as a minority religion.^[172] However, the government has never produced convincing evidence supporting its characterization of the Bahá'í community.^[173] The Iranian government also accuses the Bahá'í Faith of being associated with Zionism.^[174] These accusations against the Bahá'ís have no basis in historical fact,^{[175][155][176]} and the accusations are used by the Iranian government to use the Bahá'ís as "scapegoats".^[177] In fact it was the Iranian leader Naser al-Din Shah Qajar who banished Bahá'u'lláh from Iran to the Ottoman Empire and Bahá'u'lláh was later exiled by the Ottoman Sultan, at the behest of the Iranian Shah, to territories further away from Iran and finally to Acre in Syria, which only a century later was incorporated into the state of Israel.^[178]

In 2019, the Iranian government made it impossible for the Bahá'ís to legally register with the Iranian state. National identity card applications in Iran (<https://www.dw.com/en/iran-id-card-rule-highlights-plaint-of-bahai/a-52149974>) no longer include the "other religions" option effectively making the Bahá'í Faith unrecognized by the state.

Egypt

During the 1920s, Egypt's religious Tribunal recognized the Baha'i Faith as a new, independent religion, totally separate from Islam, due to the nature of the 'laws, principles and beliefs' of the Baha'is. At the same time the Tribunal condemned "in most unequivocal and emphatic language the followers of Baha'u'llah as the believers in heresy, offensive and injurious to Islam, and wholly incompatible with the accepted doctrines and practice of its orthodox adherents."^[179]

Bahá'í institutions and community activities have been illegal under Egyptian law since 1960. All Bahá'í community properties, including Bahá'í centers, libraries, and cemeteries, have been confiscated by the government and fatwas have been issued charging Bahá'ís with apostasy.^[180]

The Egyptian identification card controversy began in the 1990s when the government modernized the electronic processing of identity documents, which introduced a de facto requirement that documents must list the person's religion as Muslim, Christian, or Jewish (the only three religions officially recognized by the government). Consequently, Bahá'ís were unable to obtain government identification documents (such as national identification cards, birth certificates, death certificates, marriage or divorce certificates, or passports) necessary to exercise their rights in their country unless they lied about their religion, which conflicts with Bahá'í religious principle. Without documents, they could not be employed, educated, treated in hospitals, travel outside of the country, or vote, among other hardships.^[181] Following a protracted legal process culminating in a court ruling favorable to the Bahá'ís, the interior minister of Egypt released a decree on 14 April 2009, amending the law to allow Egyptians who are not Muslim, Christian, or Jewish to obtain identification documents that list a dash in place of one of the three recognized religions.^[182] The first identification cards were issued to two Bahá'ís under the new decree on 8 August 2009.^[183]

See also

- Bahá'í Faith in fiction
- Criticism of the Bahá'í Faith
- List of Bahá'ís
- List of former Bahá'ís
- Bahá'í Faith by country
- Terraces (Bahá'í), the Hanging Gardens of Haifa

Notes

- a. The Bahá'í Faith is described in reliable sources as a 'religion', 'sect',^[1] 'relatively new religion',^[2] 'world religion',^[3] 'major world religion',^[4] 'megareligion',^[5] 'independent world religion',^[6] 'new religious movement',^[7] 'alternative religion',^[8] and other attempts to convey that it is new (relative to well-established faiths), not mainstream, and with no racial or national focus.
- b. Sources summarize the Bahá'í Faith as teaching, "the essential worth of all religions, the unity of all peoples, and the equality of the sexes",^[9] "the essential unity of all religions and the unity of humanity",^[10] "the spiritual unity of mankind and advocates peace and universal education",^[11] "the unity of all peoples under God",^[4] or "religious unity... the Oneness of Humanity... the equality of all human beings regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or social class".^[12]
- c. See Bahá'í Faith by country#Number of Bahá'ís worldwide for details estimates.
- d. Obedience to government is not applicable when submission to law amounts to a denial of Faith. See for example: Political Non-involvement and Obedience to Government – A compilation of some of the Messages of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice (<http://www.bahaistudies.net/nonpolitical.html>) (compiled by Dr. Peter J. Khan)
- e. All Ridván messages can be found at Bahai.org (<http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages>) and Bahaiprayers.net/Ridvan (<http://bahaiprayers.net/Ridvan>) (multi-lingual).
- f. In line with this is the thinking that the government encouraged the campaign to distract attention from more serious problems, including acute economic difficulties. Beyond this lay the difficulty which the regime faced in harnessing the nationalist movement that had supported Musaddiq.(Akhavi 1980, pp. 76–78)