
Instant Expert: **World Religions**



INSTANT
EXPERT

WORLD

RELIGIONS

→ Joanne O'Brien and
Sandra Palmer



Text copyright © 2013 Joanne O'Brien and Sandra Palmer
This edition copyright © 2013 Lion Hudson

The right of Joanne O'Brien and Sandra Palmer to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Lion Books
an imprint of

Lion Hudson plc

Wilkinson House, Jordan Hill Road,
Oxford OX2 8DR, England
www.lionhudson.com/lion

ISBN 978 0 7459 5576 6
e-ISBN 978 0 7459 5784 5

First edition 2013

Acknowledgments

Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton, a member of the Hodder Headline Group. All rights reserved. "NIV" is a trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

The Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer as they appear in *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (Church House Publishing, 2000) are copyright © The English Language Liturgical Consultation and are reproduced by permission of the publisher.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in the UK, February 2013, LH26

Contents

INTRODUCTION 6

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH 7

BUDDHISM 10

CHRISTIANITY 27

DAOISM 46

HINDUISM 49

ISLAM 67

JAINISM 83

JUDAISM 87

SHINTO 101

SIKHISM 104

ZOROASTRIANISM 109

Introduction

Over two-thirds of the world's peoples profess allegiance to a religion. This book is a snapshot of the beliefs and practices of eleven religions, although we recognize that for some adherents religion is a cultural identity rather than a way of life. As there are too many religions in the world to accommodate them all in a small book, we have chosen those with wide historical and religious significance, rather than using the number of followers as our sole criteria for inclusion.

In order to give a glimpse of the breadth and complexity of religions in a book of this length, we have chosen to write about some in greater depth than others. This decision does not reflect the impact or importance of the religions that we have written about more briefly.

Different religions have different ways of calculating and dating the year of an event. The designations BC ("before Christ") and AD (*Anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord") reflect a Christian perspective, and we have decided to continue with these abbreviations, as they are widely used, rather than using BCE ("Before the Common Era") and CE ("Common Era").

The Bahá'í Faith

Followers of the Bahá'í Faith, known as Bahá'ís, believe that God has been revealed at different times through different prophets. Each revelation was relevant to its particular place and time. For this present age God sent the prophet Mirza Husayn-'Ali Nuri, born in 1817, now known by his religious title of Bahá'u'lláh – "the Glory of God". As the world changes and progresses, Bahá'ís believe that all people should be united, not divided by nation, race, and religion.

There are around 5 million Bahá'ís in communities spread throughout the world. They are governed through local and national elected bodies called Spiritual Assemblies. They also have a world-governing council that is based at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. This is called the Universal House of Justice.

Beginnings

The Bahá'í Faith began in the middle of the nineteenth century in Iran (Persia) with the visionary dreams and subsequent teachings of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad Shirazi. He was born in 1819 into a Shia Muslim family.

As a young man Siyyid ‘Ali-Muhammad felt that the spirit of God had entered and inspired him and in 1844 announced that he was a “Báb” or “gate”. In Shia tradition this is a way in which God communicates with humanity. His teachings attracted a wide circle of followers, but his religious claims also brought strong opposition. He was executed by firing squad in 1850. Before his death, he declared that a new prophet would arise – Bahá’ís believe that Bahá’u’lláh is this new prophet.

Bahá’u’lláh followed the teachings of the Báb, which led to his imprisonment in 1852. He had a series of mystical visions in prison that revealed his divine mission. In 1863 Bahá’u’lláh finally declared to his close followers that he was the promised one – the new prophet. He was exiled to the city of Acre in present-day Israel where he continued to write and teach. Bahá’u’lláh died in 1892 and appointed his son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as his successor.

Scriptures

The writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are believed to be divinely revealed. These form the scriptures along with the writings and transcribed talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Many Bahá’ís also read the scriptures of other faiths for religious enlightenment, but they are not binding on Bahá’í belief and practice.

Unity of all people

“The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.”

Bahá’u’lláh

Because of their belief in the unity of all people, Bahá’ís campaign to promote equality and economic justice. They also work towards providing equal access to education, regardless of class and race. Bahá’ís are often involved in grassroots initiatives in their home towns and villages as this is an expression of faith in action.

Bahá’í prayer and worship

Bahá’ís meet informally at devotional meetings and study circles. These are an opportunity to pray, share spiritual experiences, and develop friendships in the local community.

The Bahá’í community has also built seven Houses of Worship, at least one on each continent. Although they have distinctive designs, they also have the unifying feature of nine sides and a central dome. The newest House of Worship, completed in 1986 in New Delhi, is the shape of a lotus flower. These places of worship are open to people of all religions, and there are no clergy or set rituals.