

Contents

Introduction	page	2
Diagram	page	4
Buddhism: the Temple	page	5
Christianity: the Church	page	9
Hinduism: the Mandir	page	13
Islam: the Mosque	page	15
Judaism: the Synagogue	page	17
Sikhism: the Gurdwara	page	19
Appendix 1 Barnet Syllabus	page	21
Appendix 2 Enfield Syllabus	page	26

These resources used as a framework material previously produced by Barnet & Enfield, thanks to Hackney/Enfield SACRE group 2009 & members of Barnet & Enfield SACRE's. We would value any feedback or ideas.

Introduction

Barnet and Enfield are fortunate to have many different religious communities represented in their localities, making it possible for children and young people to visit a wide variety of places of worship and to experience for themselves the beliefs, traditions and customs of those faith groups.

The agreed syllabus for both authorities has, as a key element, the study of places of worship. This provides a great opportunity for children and young people to explore the area in which they study and develop an understanding of the faiths that form their communities.

The aim of this guide is to help teachers and faith leaders make the visits as educationally valuable as possible. Careful preparation is a key aspect of success and to support visits these two packs have been prepared.

The teachers' pack has generic introductory material on visits to Churches, Gurdwaras, Mandirs, Mosques, Synagogues and Temples covering all the faiths in both the Barnet and Enfield's Agreed syllabuses.

These are arranged within a common framework and include:

- ✓ an introduction
- ✓ etiquette
- ✓ key features of the building
- ✓ background information

It is hoped that over time, all places of worship will provide their own material that is specific to their particular place of worship and that these will be available on the SACRE websites of both authorities. A framework will be provided as a suggestion for faith groups to follow if they choose. A number of places of worship have already successfully completed material of this nature and have agreed to share it with other groups.

The faith leaders pack contains information to support them in leading an informative, successful, interactive and exciting session for visiting primary schools, including resource ideas and activities. The pack includes information about what children will have already learned before the visit and outlines objectives and pupil outcomes for all units taught.

Within all religions there is often diversity in the ways worship is organised and practiced. This needs to be taken into consideration when talking about individual

places of worship. For example worship in a Society of Friends Meeting House will be a very different experience from a Greek Orthodox service but both express Christian beliefs and practices. The same is true for all the other major religions, so it is never accurate to say that all Christians, Jews or Muslims worship in one set way. However, all religions do share many commonalities in the ways that they meet together to worship.

One of the aims of these guidelines is to address some of the issues and concerns that have been highlighted by faith groups, parents and teachers. One concern voiced by parents is that they are unhappy about their children going on a visit to a place of worship in case their child, as part of the visit is involved in any form of worship. Visits to places of worship are part of an educational entitlement and **at no time** will any of the pupils, teachers, parents or other staff **ever** be involved in worship (unless perhaps they are a member of the faith group that is being visited). The aim of the visit is to be an observer and see how a particular faith group worships, **not to participate or join** in worship.

The religious safety of all children needs to be safeguarded on all visits.

Pupils' learning in RE should include the entitlement to visit places of worship.

The aims of visits is to:

- ✓ develop an understanding of the faiths that are part of our society; not to convert pupils to particular point of view.
- ✓ develop an understanding of the local community of which they are a part
- ✓ to support community cohesion
- ✓ challenge prejudice based on ignorance and misunderstandings.

It is not always possible to visit all the different places of worship described in the guide, either because of time, cost or location so we are hoping to develop local resources that can be used in schools.

An up to date list of Barnet and Enfield places of worship can be accessed on their websites.

Notes for teachers

A preliminary visit needs to be made. This will allow you to:

- ✓ conduct a risk assessment
- ✓ discuss the aims of the visit and where it fits into the syllabus
- ✓ discuss the time frame and follow up work

Buddhism: the Temple

Etiquette

Shoes are removed before entering the temple or shrine room.

Behaviour

- Quiet & respectful behaviour is expected at all times
- No food or drink should be brought into the shrine room
- All mobile phones should be switched off

Aim of the Visit

No worship will take place during the visit. The children & young people are coming to observe a place of worship. It is important to encourage pupils to go beyond the 'naming of parts' & to explore the religious significance & symbolism of what they may see, hear & perhaps even smell.

Key Features

Gotama Buddha's advice on worship was to understand the **Dhamma** & live accordingly. So at its heart worship is a personal matter. However, over the years many Buddhists have felt that some visible external activity was helpful to reinforce their commitment to the **Dharma**. They have developed activities & ceremonies to pay respect & honour to a teacher & teaching in a way that reminds them of the Buddha, affirms their commitment to the **Dhamma** & contributes to their progress on the path of a Buddhist pilgrim. Worship is an integral part of Buddhist practices in all schools & traditions. However, there is diversity in the form that worship takes in the various traditions.

The Triple Gem consisting of the **Buddha**, the **Dhamma** & the **Sangha** are the foundation of Buddhism & worship is focussed directly or indirectly on these. The word Buddha in this context means more than the reference to one historical Buddha in that it includes all the Universal Buddha's of the past & future who have attained self- enlightenment. The Dhamma (Dharma) is the teaching of the Buddha. Sangha means community.

General Formalities of Worship

All traditions use a shrine as a focal point of worship & meditation. Some shrines are very simple & may consist of a Buddha's image, while other may be more elaborate. There may be a special shrine room or a shrine may be set up at one end of a hall or room. The shrine consists of platforms of different levels on which articles used for worship are placed. The Buddha image is kept at the highest level. At the lower levels are flowers, oil lamps or candles, incense holders & any other offerings. Wall hangings, pictures, images & other artefacts may also be used in worship.

Some Buddhists worship at home once or twice a day. In temples & monasteries there is generally worship three times a day in the morning, at the time of the mid-day meal & in the evening or before an evening meal if there is one. Worship in an integral part of celebrations of all kinds including special days, alms giving, memorial services, blessing services & special events. Often called worship by body, speech & mind, it is a combination of physical, vocal & mental activity. In Asian countries temple premises usually include a residence for the **Sangha**, a shrine room, a **dagoba**, a **Bodhi** tree & a hall for talks, discussions & **Dhamma** classes.

Physical activity is the first element. Worship is usually at the shrine facing a Buddha image that is always kept in a prominent position. This helps the devotee to concentrate on the activity at hand. First there is the offering of flowers, lights & incense. Sometimes food, water & soft drinks are offered to the Buddha image. The devotee pays homage by kneeling & then bowing with the hands placed palms together in front of him. Sometimes the worshippers lower their forehead to touch the ground & sometimes they do this three times in honour of the Triple Gem. Generally the devotee is seated on a cushion placed on the floor or on a low chair.

In countries such as Sri Lanka there is a **Bodhi tree** in the temple premises.

Devotees place flowers & light lamps on a table in front of the tree, pour water on its roots & worship there.

A number of Buddhist do service at the temple by cleaning, sweeping, gardening, polishing brass, arranging flowers, cooking & washing. In Thailand circumambulation of the dagoba or shrine is part of the activity.

Vocal activity is the second element. The devotee or group of devotees recite the text of the worship from memory or read from a book or worship sheet. If a monk or nun conducts the worship, the devotees follow in reciting the words of the text often phrase by phrase. In some traditions the whole group chant the text together. Sometimes the devotees read or chant Buddhist text seated facing the Buddha or the Bodhi tree & some listen or simply sit & watch.

The **mental element** is the third & most important part of the worship. It involves focussing the mind on the activity & appreciating that one is involved in an important element of Buddhist practice. The words are recited with concentration, understanding & reflection on their meaning. The devotee concentrates on the whole of the worship, reflects on the Triple Gem, tries to understand how worship contributes to his or her progress as a Buddhist pilgrim & begins to think less of self. Buddhist see worship as an uplifting experience away from the daily routine of life. It is seen as generating energy to cope with daily tasks & provides a focus for life.

Worship develops the five spiritual mental factors namely: faith; energy; mindfulness; concentration & wisdom.

Artefacts & Symbols

Images of the Buddha At the beginning Buddha was represented by a symbol such as a flower, tree, wheel or stupa (dagoba). The first images of the Buddha date from the first century BCE. The images were made from plaster, wood, metal or similar substances. Those that are situated outside are generally carved from rock. The images often reflect the traditions, period of history of the country in which they were made, they are treated with great reverence by believers & it is considered disrespectful to sit with one's feet pointing towards the image. Buddha is understood to have 32 special marks & images often reflect many of these. The long ear lobes signify spiritual wealth, the extension on the top of the head indicates that the Buddha has attained higher levels of consciousness. The round mark on the forehead called the Dharma eye indicates that he was aware of things unknown to ordinary people. The hair is generally curly signifying holiness. The Buddha may be shown sitting, standing, walking or reclining. He is often shown in the lotus position with legs crossed & each foot resting on the upper part of the other leg. The body is kept stable & balanced. This is the traditional meditation position.

There are a number of hand positions called **mudras** these all have a different significance:

- When the ends of the fingers of the right hand are touching the ground this signifies that the Buddha is calling the world to witness his achievement & take notice of his teachings
- When the palm of the right hand is facing the front that signifies fearlessness
- The thumb & the first finger of both hands forming circles is in reference to the first teachings
- The right hand facing the front at face level with the thumb & forefinger forming a circle with the three other fingers straightened symbolises great compassion
- An open palm placed on the lap in front of the seated Buddha image is the classic meditation position

Images of the Buddha reclining on his right hand side usually show him at the end of his life before passing away. In the Himalayan tradition the seated Buddha is often shown holding a small metal object called a vajra in his hand. The word vajra has two meanings - something hard & unbreakable like a diamond & something sudden &

powerful like a thunderbolt. It symbolises all that is unbreakable & powerful about the Buddhist path.

The Alms Bowl The monks & nuns (the ordained Sangha) do no paid work & their food needs are provided by the community. The alms bowl is where donations are offered. It is not a begging bowl as the **Sanghas** do not ever beg for food but collect their alms food according to the established practice which provides an opportunity for the lay people to show their generosity & gain merit by providing food.

Bowls & dishes for Offerings In India seven things are traditionally offered to an honoured guest. Following this tradition seven bowls are placed every morning as symbolic offerings to the Buddha. These are: water for washing the hands; water for washing the face; flowers; incense; drinking water; perfume & food. A candle or other form of light is lit. The offerings are often symbolic with water in each of the bowls.

Flags Sometimes flags are used to decorate shrines & temples. In Himalayan Buddhism the prayer flags have auspicious mantras & prayers printed on them wishing happiness & blessing to all living beings. The movement of the flags in the wind is believed to generate & carry these good wishes to all. The Buddhist flag signifies the unity of Buddhism & is used in many countries. The six colours symbolise the colours of the rays that came from the Buddha's body. Blue symbolises universal compassion, yellow the middle way, red blessings, white purity & liberation, orange wisdom & the sixth colour is a mixture of all the others. Prayer Wheels are also used in a similar manner.

Flowers Light & Incense. In most traditions offerings are made of flowers, lights & incense. Flowers indicate the impermanence of life & lights & incense symbolise the **Dhamma** that lights the world.

Gongs Bells & singing Bowls These are used in some traditions & have a different significance depending on the occasion. They are sometimes used to attract the attention of the believer or maybe used to accompany chanting.

Mandalas These are specially designed patterns made up of circles, squares, & triangles. They can also show pictures of the Buddha. In the traditions in which they are found they can also be used for meditation.

Prayer Beads A string of beads (usually 108) is used in worship & meditation.

The Wheel This is one of the oldest Buddhist symbols & represents Buddha's first teaching known as the 'Turning of the Wheel of Truth'. It is shown with eight spokes that symbolise the Noble Eight-fold Path.

The Wheel of Life is a circular picture divided into several sections. It shows the Buddhist view of life in this & other worlds & how human beings are part of this cycle.

Christianity: the Church

Within the various Christian denominations there is great deal of difference in the particular emphasis on ritual, traditions & customs. The beliefs of the particular religious community will be reflected in the way the building is used & worship organised & all buildings have their own individual characteristics & histories. In this publication we are beginning by looking at a general introduction to Christian places of worship. Over time we will be adding particular local examples from Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican & Free Church traditions.

Preparation

Visits need to be organised with the priest/vicar/minister/pastor or representative of the church well in advance.

Etiquette

Dress

Christian lay men & boys do not usually wear hats or caps in church. In a very few churches women & girls wear hats or scarves.

Conduct

Quiet respectful behaviour is required at all times & especially if a service is being held at the time or if people are praying. All mobile phones should be switched off before entering the building. Permission to take photographs should also be obtained before the visit & it is inadvisable to take photographs of anyone without asking their permission. Some churches regard parts of the building, for example the sanctuary as sacred & only clergy may enter.

Aim of the Visit

No worship will take place during the visit. The children & young people are coming to observe a place of worship. It is important to encourage pupils to go beyond the 'naming of parts' & to explore the religious significance & symbolism of what they may see, hear & perhaps even smell.

Variety within Christianity - the denominations

The word 'church' has a variety of meanings. It can be the building where people meet but it also refers to the body or communion of believers. There are three main Christian groupings: Catholic, Orthodox & Protestant/Reform, with diversity of beliefs & practices. The greatest variety is found within the Protestant or 'Reformed' family which includes: the Baptists, Brethren, Congregationalists, Methodists, Pentecostals,

Quakers, Salvation Army, United Reformed Church, & the 'new' churches (the Church of England is regarded by Anglicans as both Catholic & Reformed).

Church buildings

In the Roman Catholic & Church of England many churches are built in the shape of a cross (cruciform) with the font at the entrance & the holy table for communion or Eucharist at the far end, using the symbolism of the Christian journey of life. Many recently built churches have the font near the holy table or in the centre of the church with seating in a semi-circle. In the Orthodox tradition they are often rectangular symbolising Noah's Ark as a place of salvation.

Key Features

The **holy table (known in some traditions as the 'altar')** is where the communion bread & wine are shared. On or above the holy table will be a **cross** that symbolises the risen Christ, and /or a **crucifix** representing the crucified Christ. Prominent in the front of the building is the **pulpit** where the sermon or teaching is given, & there may be a separate **lectern** where the **Bible** is read aloud to the congregation. The positions of these features can reveal the relative significance placed within the tradition on the Scriptures as the Word of God, and the Sacrament of communion. So, for Roman Catholics and Orthodox, the sacrament of the Eucharist is fundamental and effective, whereas for Reformed churches the transforming power of God revealed through the Bible is prime. A prominent pipe organ in Wesleyan & Presbyterian churches along with a pulpit symbolises the importance of hymn singing.

Other features and symbols

As mentioned above, there is great variety between and even within Christian denominations. Colourful **stained glass** windows bring light into the building & often tell the story of the Bible & the lives of the saints. These were early visual aids prior to mass literacy, and may also commemorate former benefactors of the congregation. **Bells** may be rung to call people to worship & there may be an **organ** or other musical instruments for accompanying & leading music in worship.

Candles may be used in a number of ways through the church, for example an Advent ring reminds Christians of the belief that Jesus is the light of the world; the Paschal candle is a reminder of the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus at Easter. Votive candles may be lit to offer up prayers for people who are ill or in memory of someone who has died. **Statues & images** & the 'stations of the cross' may be regarded with greater reverence than just the event or person they portray. For example, on entering an Orthodox church, visitors will immediately notice icons with candles burning in front of them & on the iconostasis or screen in front of the

sanctuary. These icons, are often thought to represent the entire community of faith assembled in worship with the local congregation & act as an offering of prayer & for some believers icons reveal the incarnation of the Word of God. In some churches there will be **written symbols** such as ICTHUS ('fish') an acrostic for 'Jesus Christ, of God the Son, Saviour', or the Greek letters alpha and omega (first and last). In Reformed Churches, the shape, furniture & decorations are generally not regarded as aids to worship and so the buildings are often simple, offering as few distractions as possible from the aim of worshipping God. The pulpit often has a more prominent place because of the importance of preaching & hearing God's word. A plain cross will often be displayed signifying the risen Christ & a table for the Lord's Supper.

Common practices and beliefs

A fundamental Christian belief is that God is Trinity – 'Tri-unity' – ie. three persons in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christians believe that God the Father sent Jesus his Son to die on the cross so that sinful people could be reconciled with God. Christians know God in this life through the work of the Holy Spirit, and will be perfected by him so that after death they can live with God forever.

Almost all Christians baptise people to initiate members, and almost all Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper ('eucharist', 'communion', 'mass'), because these are the two 'sacraments' directly commanded by Jesus. But there are differences between Christian denominations in the way they do both these things. For example, many churches baptise babies but in traditions such as the Baptists, Pentecostals & other churches baptism is reserved for those who make a personal commitment of faith. In these churches where 'believers' baptism' takes place there will often be a baptistery, a large bath-like structure where an adult can be totally immersed in water. It may be open to view or if space is limited opened up only for baptisms. The exception is The Society of Friends (Quakers) & The Salvation Army who see the spiritual experience of God as paramount & not dependent on any ceremony. They therefore do not baptise or observe the Lord's Supper. Music plays an important part in most Christian traditions with hymns & instruments used to glorify God.

All Christian Churches are involved in putting the teaching of Jesus on loving & caring for others into action. These might be through national charities such as Christian Aid, CAFOD or TEAR Fund or local projects or individual action.

Jesus also told his followers to go into the world to make disciples, so Christianity is a missionary religion. This means that some believers go abroad to spread the faith, but local churches also regard it as part of their function.

Churches are not only used on Sundays - most have services & activities every day of the week & Christians believe that it is the people & what they do together in the name of Jesus Christ that make a Christian community. The 'Church' is therefore much more than a building; it is the community of people who have accepted the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, and in response try to live their lives according to the teaching of Jesus.

Hinduism: the Mandir

A Hindu place of worship is called a mandir or temple. It is a place of where a number of activities take place it is one of learning, prayer, values, culture, community & peace.

Etiquette

Shoes are removed in the outer hall

In some places women may be required to cover their heads before entering the prayer hall & dress with modesty.

They may also wash their hands in order to show cleanliness & purity of purpose.

Visitors will be expected to sit on the floor with their legs crossed so that their feet do not point towards the deity

There are no especially reserved seats or places & everyone sits on the carpet.

Women generally sit separately from men but this is a social rather than a religious custom. Visitors may be invited to share the **parshad** & should accept or decline respectfully, with two hands cupped to receive or two hands closed together in the gesture of prayer to decline. If the visit coincides with the ceremony of **arti**, pupils should be made aware that this is an act of worship & that they are expected to observe with respect not to participate.

Behaviour

- Quiet & respectful behaviour is expected especially if people are praying or a service is taking place
- No food or drink should be brought into the building
- Cigarettes & alcohol are prohibited on the premises
- All mobile phones should be switched off
- Encouragement is given to explore & discover the building

Key Features

The Mandir in Neasden is a very beautiful example, it took many years to plan & build. The stone was excavated in India, carved & bought to England in 26,300 pieces & like a jigsaw fitted together on the site. The domes & pinnacles encourage worshippers to think of higher things. The dome symbolises creation, the pinnacles excellence, the Kalash eternity & the moat purity. However, whether a mandir is purpose built or a converted building the devotion of the worshippers makes the building itself an offering.

Hindus believe in one God, **Brahman** (the Great Soul, Great Spirit). People cannot see Brahman who is above & beyond everything yet also within everyone & in all nature. Hindus believe that God has many ways of acting & of being known & returns

to earth in different forms & under different names or **avatars**. In the temples there are many statues & pictures, which represent different aspects of Brahman in a number of forms. Shiva (the Destroyer) & Vishnu (The Preserver) & their avatars are the most frequently found representations found in the mandir & the home. However Hindus honour & respect all such representations & often use these statues & pictures as a focus for their devotion. Hindus will choose one representation for special devotion. This choice will be made according to tradition, the area of India where the person comes from or has developed a connection. Within a family members may show devotion to the same representation or individuals may choose their own. There is no set day or time for worship within Hinduism. Hindus usually worship daily at home, reserving visit to a mandir for special occasions. Each home will have a special place where **puja**, the daily act of worship takes place. Puja is designed to establish a personal relationship between the devotee & God. Puja also takes place daily in the mandir & the in front of the deities are placed offering such as water, milk, rice, nuts & sweets in thanks to God. There are flowers often in garlands, incense & a canopy or covering as a mark of respect. Everyday the priests will bathe & clothe the statues & anoint them with perfume. One of the sacred symbols is Om & you might observe worshippers using a mala (a string of 108 beads) as a meditation tool or practicing yoga.

The mandir is often the centre for community life & of transmitting culture & values. It is often used for language classes, dance & music lessons, the study of Hinduism.& a place to meet & share meals.

Islam: the Mosque

Preparation

Times for visits can be arranged with the individual mosque.

Introduction

The Mosque is of central importance to the Muslim community it is much more than a place for worship & prayer. It is also for education & learning, a meeting place, a place for exchanging ideas & council, a place where the poor, the needy can seek advice. It was traditionally a place where travellers could seek refuge. However, few mosques in the UK have this facility & there are issues of security. Anyone seeking these services will be directed to the appropriate authorities provided by the state and local authority. Mosques are the centre of community life & celebrations: prayers are held five times a day; children attend Qur'an classes and learn Arabic; there are often funeral facilities & a hall for weddings.

Etiquette

Clothing

All visitors should dress modestly and seek what is required before visiting as it will depend upon who is visiting & when. Shoes are removed before entering the prayer halls of the mosque. In preparation it might be worth mentioning to the children that clean feet & socks are a good idea, as they will be walking on carpets on which people will be praying.

Seating:

- On the carpeted floor
- During prayer times visitors should sit discreetly at the back of the room & women usually sit behind the men or are up in the mezzanine gallery.
- At other times it is possible to sit in front of the Mihrab.
- It is considered to be disrespectful to have feet pointing towards the Mihrab (which shows the direction to Makkah) & so it is best to sit with feet tucked to the side.
- Sometimes Visitors are also asked not to turn their backs to the mihrab .

Behaviour

- Quiet & respectful behaviour is expected especially if people are praying or a service is taking place
- No food or drink should be brought into the building
- All mobile phones should be switched off

- Encouragement is given to explore & discover the building when permission is granted.
- Do not draw pictures of Muhammad, but the names in Arabic and calligraphy patterns can be copied
- Permission to take photographs may be allowed for an educational purpose.

Greeting

- The Muslim greeting is '*As Salaam U Alaikum*' or peace be with you and the reply is '*Wa Alaikum As Salaam*' also to you. It is not customary for men and women to shake hands.

Main Features & description

The main features of the mosque will be the **minaret** this is a tower from where in Muslim countries a **mu'adhin** calls the faithful to prayer five times a day. Many mosques in the UK have applied for licences to make the call to prayer during the day. The call to prayer is called the **adhan** and the Arabic words are the same as those used by **Bilal** when he called Muslims to prayer in the first mosque in **Madinah**. So the adhan is both a summons & a declaration of faith.

Inside the prayer room there is no furniture but space to pray, read the Qur'an and listen to speakers. Decorations are geometric patterns or Arabic calligraphy, there is no representative art.

A niche in one wall, the **mihrab** indicates the **qiblah** or direction of Makkah. All Muslims face this direction when they pray, standing side by side as a community, united by their beliefs and equal in the sight of Allah. In bowing they prostrate themselves before Allah & show their belief that Allah is greater than anyone or anything & that they are ready to live according to his will.

The **minbar** is next to the mihrab and this is where the Imam give the Khutbah (a religious talk) on Fridays & special occasions.

There are often clocks on one of the walls and a chart to show the correct time for prayers each day. Attar (perfume) is sometimes used to sweeten the air.

Before Muslims pray or read the Qur'an they have to prepare themselves both physically & spiritually. They do this by performing wudu, which is a ritual of washing and purification. The **Qur'an** is treated with great respect, it will not left on the floor, left open or other books placed on top of it. Muslims need to be in a state of purity to read from it.

A **Zakah** box reminds Muslims of their duty to give money for the poor & needy. This is one of the five pillars of the faith.

Judaism: the Synagogue

Preparation

Times for visits can be arranged with the individual synagogue but the following times are best avoided:

- Friday afternoons in winter (the Sabbath begins at sunset & this can be quite early especially in the winter months)
- Jewish Festivals & Holy days these can be checked with the SHAP or the Barnet/ Enfield calendar

Etiquette

Clothing

Jewish men & boys always cover their heads in the synagogue as a sign of humility & respect towards G-d. It is usual for men & boys to cover their heads as a sign of courtesy. Married women also cover their heads in Orthodox synagogues.

Seating

In Orthodox synagogues men & women sit separately in Progressive/ Liberal & Reform synagogues women & men sit together during services.

Behaviour

- Quiet & respectful behaviour is expected especially if people are praying or a service is taking place
- No food or drink should be brought into the building
- All mobile phones should be switched off
- Encouragement is given to explore & discover the building

Main Features & description

The word 'synagogue' comes from the Greek & means 'meeting, coming together' a translation of the Hebrew *Bet Hakneset*. It is often referred to as a 'Shul' a Yiddish word meaning school. The synagogue has three main functions as a meeting place for:

- Prayer, usually three times a day
- Learning, for people of ages – hence school
- For social purposes of all kinds

Architecturally there are few rules about the building of a synagogue & throughout history they have reflected the style & traditions of the time & the place where they

have been built. However, they may often be identified externally by a **menorah** (the seven branched candelabrum) or by the **magen David** (shield or 'star' of David). In all synagogues there is an **Ark** (meaning cupboard or chest) where the sacred **Scrolls of the Law** are stored these contain the **Five Books of Moses** (Pentateuch). Above the Ark is the **Ner Tamid** a perpetual light that is a reminder of the ever presence of G-d. In many synagogues the Ten Commandments are symbolised by two tablets above the Ark with five lines of Hebrew writing on each of them. Wherever possible, the Ark faces towards the east, which is the direction of Israel. Many synagogues have a **bimah** from which the service is conducted where the **Scrolls of the Law** are read. Traditionally the bimah faces the Ark. It is considered a great honour to be called upon to read the Torah & occasions when people are called upon may include: a person who has **yahrzeit** (commemorating the death of a father or mother); a person who has lost a near relative & has completed the period of mourning; a bridegroom on the Sabbath before his wedding; a boy who is Bar Mitzvah & his father & a man whose wife has given birth to a child. In Reform & Liberal congregations, women are called to read as well. The **siddur** is the prayer book & contains many prayers that have been collected together over many years. By using it Jews reaffirm their common identity. In Orthodox synagogues there is often a gallery where women sit, as men & women sit separately, this is not the case in Reform & Liberal traditions. Traditionally there are three daily services: **Ma'ariv** (evening or dusk), **Shahrit** (morning, dawn) and **Minha** (afternoon). The dawn & dusk services include a recitation of the **Shema**, a Jewish affirmation of belief in one G-d. The Sabbath is observed each week & begins at sunset on a Friday night & ends at nightfall on a Saturday night (about 25 hours).

Sikhism: the Gurdwara

The Gurdwara is a special place where the Sikh community worship, a home for the Sikh holy book & a centre for community life. The word gurdwara literally means 'the doorway to the Guru'. **The Guru Granth Sahib**, the most holy of the Sikh scriptures is kept in the gurdwara and Sikhs regard it as the source of all spiritual authority both in their religious & secular lives. Gurdwaras are generally open to all worshippers & everyone can enter & pray.

Etiquette

Worshippers & visitors remove their shoes & cover their heads before entering the prayer hall & dress with modesty. They may also wash their hands in order to show cleanliness & purity of purpose. There are no especially reserved seats or places & everyone sits on the carpet. Women generally sit separately from men but this is a social rather than a religious custom & women participate fully in the services. A small bow in front of the Guru Granth Sahib would be seen as a gesture of respect. Visitors may be invited to share the **karah parshad** & should accept or decline respectfully, with two hands cupped to receive or two hands closed together in the gesture of prayer to decline. Visitors may also be invited into the **Langar** to share food again they should accept or decline the hospitality respectfully. These issues will need to be considered before the visit.

Behaviour

- Quiet & respectful behaviour is expected especially if people are praying or a service is taking place
- No food or drink should be brought into the building
- Cigarettes & alcohol are prohibited on the premises
- Sit with legs crossed or feet behind so that feet are not pointing towards the Guru Granth Sahib & avoid turning one's back on the Guru.
- All mobile phones should be switched off
- Encouragement is given to explore & discover the building

Key Features

As the meaning implies the focal point of the gurdwara is the place where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept. These scriptures are the source of all authority for Sikhs so they are treated with great care & respect. The scriptures were collected together by the **5th Guru Arjan Dev**. He combined all the teachings of the first 4 Gurus & added his own teachings. Also included were writings of Hinduism & Islam that were believed to be in accord with the Guru's teachings. **Guru Gobind Singh** also added teachings of his predecessors. The scripture consist of a very large collection of

teachings that are in a poetic form & are sung as hymns known as **shabads**. There are thirty one sections or ragas. They are not arranged by subject, author or chronologically but are in musical measure. The singing is meant to concentrate the mind on God. They are written in **Gurmukhi** meaning from the Guru's mouth. All the printed copies are the same as the original which is kept at **Kartapur** in the **Punjab**. They are all 1430 pages long & when quotations are used they are referred to by page & line. Each section begins with the **Moor Mantar Guru Nanak's** understanding of God: *'There is one God whose name is eternal truth; Creator of all things and the all pervading spirit. Without fear; without hate; timeless & formless; Beyond birth & death; self enlightenment; By the grace of God made known.'* The Guru Granth Sahib is not worshipped but it is considered by Sikhs to be the diving word so it is treated with the same respect as would be shown to a living Guru. This affects how it is handled & daily routines. When it is not in use it is covered by a cloth, once it is opened the **Granthi** (the person who reads the Guru Granth Sahib & officiates at ceremonies) he holds a **chauri**, a fan made from yak's hair & it is waved over the scriptures as a symbols of their authority & regal status. At the end of each day the Guru Granth Sahib is taken from its dais and carried on the head to signify that it is above all. It is respectfully laid to rest on a canopied bed. Both men & women can read from the scriptures if they can read the Gurmukhi script. Generally on one side of the Guru Granth Sahib, musicians play the harmonium & the table. Music is important in Sikh worship as a way of praising God & meditating. The congregation join in **Kirtan**, devotional singing of the prayers & compositions of the scriptures. Music helps the worshippers to remember the words of god & to take the meaning into their hearts. Worshippers may be heard to chant Wahe-Guru (Wonderful Lord) a Sikh name for God.

At the end of the worship individual & congregational **Karah Parshad**, a sanctified food made from flour, ghee (clarified butter), sugar & water is distributed. This act is of great significance as it symbolises the equality of all people in the sight of God & affirms the importance of **sangat**, the Sikh community of believers.

The **Langar** (the Guru's kitchen) is another distinctive feature of the Gurdwara, Guru Nanak introduced it so that everyone could sit down & eat together as equals.

Members of the community take turns to donate, prepare & serve the food. All the food is vegetarian so that any one who comes may share the hospitality.

In some Gurdwaras pictures of the Gurus & of the **Harmandar Sahib** (God's house or the Golden Temple) in Amritsar may be displayed in the Langar rather than the prayer hall as some Sikhs believe that they might distract the congregation from worship.

Appendix 1 5 pages landscape

