

RELIGIOUS LITERACY

GUIDE TO EVERYDAY ENCOUNTERS

Religious literacy : guide to everyday encounters

© 2024 The National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland – CORE forum

Layout: Eeva Lamminen

ISBN 978-952-65396-0-7 (paperback)

ISBN 978-952-65396-1-4 (PDF)



The objective of the National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland – CORE Forum is to cherish social peace. We promote interfaith dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. Freedom of religion or belief and equality are essential values of the Forum.

Religions are united by common basic values of peace, understanding, and responsibility. These also serve as guidelines for the CORE Forum activities. The CORE Forum is a member of the global Religions for Peace network, and our work is thereby linked to the global movement for promotion of dialogue between religions.

The Forum cooperates with the authorities, acts as an expert in issues related to religions, and participates in societal debate. Moreover, in all its activities the Forum promotes the visible role of religion as part of everyday life, as well as the visibility of representatives of religions as active agents in society.

AUTHORS:

Pia Jardi is, among other things, the chairperson of CORE Forum 2021-2023, general secretary of the Finnish Muslim Forum and vice president of Amal, a women's organization within the social branch. Jardi works as a social instructor, and she has also been active in party politics.

Gopinath das, aka **Timo Ilves**, is an active member of the Hare Krishna movement. Within the movement, he is responsible for the rites of passage and for musical arrangements. He is an educated professional musician, and he has a B.Sc. degree in computer science. In India he has studied Vedic scriptures and the religious culture of India.

Melody Karvonen is an active member of the Bahá'í Community. She has had a long career as a Consultant and Trainer for Cross-Cultural Understanding. She has also worked as a construction drafter, as a trainer at the police department, and as an immigrant counselor.

Irma Rinne is the chairperson of the Buddhist Union of Finland and an active member of the Buddhist Dharma Center. She has a Licentiate of Philosophy degree, and until her retirement she worked as amanuensis of musicology at the University of Helsinki.

Mirja Tapola is a primary school teacher for children with special needs and vice-principal in an elementary school in Espoo. She has also taught religion to children, youth and adults in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She is also a certified professional supervisor and a member of STOrY.

Osmo Vartiainen is Director of Education in the Catholic Church in Finland. He is involved in versatile cooperation, both in Finland and internationally, in the fields of worldview, education, and culture.

Religious working group of the Jewish congregation in Helsinki, among others **Simon Livson**.

The CORE Forum staff: **Katri Kuusikallio** (Executive Director), **Miina Noroila** (Communications Officer) ja **Anne Heinola** (University Trainee).

CONTENTS

Introduction – Why do we need religious literacy?	6
1. General principles for encounters between religions, cultures, and opinions: You are always meeting a human being	8
Tips for taking into account religions in various situations	10
2. Common features of religions	12
3. Presentation of religions	14
Bahá'í Faith	14
Buddhism	16
Islam.....	18
Judaism.....	20
The Hare Krishna movement	22
Christianity	24
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	26
4. Sustainable development – religions and nature	28



INTRODUCTION – WHY DO WE NEED RELIGIOUS LITERACY?

Religious literacy is the ability to understand different religions and look beneath their surface. For a sufficient religious literacy you need the necessary basic information on several religious traditions. Another prerequisite is the ability to meet others with respect. We live in a pluralistic society. Freedom of religion and conscience is guaranteed by the Constitution of Finland. A Religious Freedom Act has been in force since 1923. Even long before that, for several centuries, there have been various religious groups in Finland. It is good to remember that all the religions discussed in this

guide have come to Finland from elsewhere, including the dominant religion, Lutheran Christianity.

The different value systems, customs and cultures of religions can be seen as enrichment. To identify and accept them is essential for social peace and sustainable development. For many of us, religion is a resource, a source of inspiration, and a natural part of everyday life. Practitioners of different religions have a lot in common with each other and also with those who do not identify with any religion.



However, there are often prejudices associated with religions. In discussions about religions today, we often speak about polarization, that is, exaggeration and confrontation. Due to religious literacy we can see other religions as important social actors alongside others.

This guide offers instructions for encounters between religions as well as basic information about seven religions that are active in Finland: The Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, the Hare Krishna movement as a representative of Hinduism, Christianity, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of course, there are other religious movements in Finland, and this guide does not take a position on their importance. We have chosen to present world religions with which the CORE Forum has strong connections. The general principles for dealing with religions are also useful when other religions or minorities are met.

This guide has been compiled in cooperation with representatives of the religions mentioned above. The reader should remember that religious communities are not homogeneous. Brief presentations of religions do not bring out their internal diversity. The concept of religion can be understood in different ways within a single religious tradition, and there are also several general definitions of religion.

A religiously literate person understands that many factors can influence one's perceptions, choices, and actions. Religion is one factor among others. Every person, regardless on religion or belief, should always be faced as an individual.

The guide consists of four chapters. The first one deals with dialogue and general principles for encounters between religions or worldviews. The second chapter takes up features that are common for religions, dealing with religions and religious cultures in general. The third chapter presents main features of the seven selected religious communities, such as they are seen within those religions. Finally, the fourth chapter discusses how a religion can contribute to sustainable development or the well-being of human beings and nature.

This guide was made with funding from the Finnish Heritage Agency, and it implements the principles of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Helsinki, May 2022 *the National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland – the CORE Forum*

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN RELIGIONS, CULTURES, AND OPINIONS: YOU ARE ALWAYS MEETING A HUMAN BEING

Dialogue, or a constructive discussion, requires a respectful approach, equal participation, building up trust and relationships, and honest interaction.

In dialogue it is important that you also can involve the quiet ones who are not usually heard. It is best to choose a topic that is important for people. You should make sure that the tone is respectful and that people listen to

each other. Dialogue is also a useful approach in everyday encounters between people.

Facing differences, whether they are about religion, cultural background, or opinions, can seem challenging in the beginning. In dialogue, an open and positive attitude is emphasized. The following four principles can help to make the interaction pleasant and fruitful:



1) We are all human: Let's remember what we have in common

You should meet a person as a person, not just as a member of a group. After all, the things we have in common are more than those that separate us. Religions, cultures, and social structures are comprised of human beings. On an everyday level we are doing rather similar things, and our basic security consists of the same factors. Religions, too, have a lot in common.

3) Getting others genuinely involved: Openness and acceptance

Give others space and opportunity to participate. Everyone is allowed to have an opinion, and one should feel safe to express one's opinion. Do not judge, accept that we may have different opinions. Cooperation or interaction should not aim at changing the opinions, beliefs, and views of the other one. The idea is not to dispute but to meet each other in a dialogue. There is no need to hide one's own identity. On the contrary, when you mirror your own identity in the other one, you may gain a deeper self-understanding.

2) Learning and cooperation as our goal: Let's ask and listen, not just assume

Get rid of your prejudices and assumptions. Don't hesitate to ask, do not assume. Listen and sincerely try to understand the other person's perspective. By your conduct you show respect and appreciation. Respect what is important and sacred for the other one. Be empathetic and open to learning new things. The pursuit of learning does not mean that you just concentrate on knowledge about religions.

4) Consider your own position and that of the other one

Be aware of your own position and that of the one you are speaking with, both in that situation and in general, in society and the world. Do you belong to the majority or the minority, do you have other special positions? What about the person you meet? Think about how this could be taken into account in the interaction so that also those in a minority position are genuinely heard and understood.

TIPS FOR TAKING INTO ACCOUNT RELIGIONS IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS

How do you act when you in your everyday life encounter religious issues that you are not familiar with? Good advice for most everyday situations is: Ask, listen, discuss, and respect.

At work

At your work you may encounter situations when you especially need knowledge about religions. Not everyone wants to share their convictions with colleagues, and they have the right to be silent. If an employee tells about one's own religion, the employer can show open attitude by asking how this can be taken into account. A person who is practicing a religion can usually show it. According to the Act on the Freedom of Religion, an employee has

for example the right to show religious beliefs by clothing.

It is good to be aware of the sacred days of various religions. If an employee follows religious customs in vacation applications, worktime arrangements, and other similar situations, such wishes should be listened to. Allowing the daily practice of religion is also polite. For example, it is considerate to reserve for Muslims a quiet place for daily prayers. Prayer times are negotiable.

In CORE Forum's Multifaith Calendar you can familiarize yourself with the most important feasts of different religions: uskot.fi/en/multifaith-calendar/. The calendar is available in Finnish, Swedish, English, Arabic, and



Russian. In Finland, the calendar holidays are based on the holy days of Lutheran Christianity, and they can be important for Christians.

At home and at celebrations

When you invite a person belonging to a different religion to your home, it is good to be aware of the diets included in the religion. The Hare Krishna devotees and Buddhists are usually vegetarians, Jews follow the Kosher diet, and Muslims the Halal diet.

As for drinks, for example the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and The Hare Krishna devotees can be expected not to drink coffee or drinks made from the tea plant. Practitioners of many religions abstain from alcohol or other intoxicants. These generally include, for example, the Bahá'ís, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Buddhists, The Hare Krishna devotees, and Muslims.

Fasting periods, for example in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, can impose restrictions on food and drink culture during the events of the annual religious cycles. For example, dur-

ing the Islamic fasting month Ramadan, Muslims eat after sunset only. For health reasons it is possible to abstain from fasting. Ramadan ends with the great 'Id al-Fitr celebration.

Visit to a holy site

Many religions welcome outsiders to their ceremonies and places of worship. You might also be invited to celebrations like weddings, funerals, or child-naming ceremonies. Such an invitation is an honor. In such a situation it is polite to follow the customs and regulations of the religion, and it is a good idea to ask in advance what to do.

Many religions emphasize, e.g. decent, clean, and covering clothing (Muslims, The Hare Krishna devotees, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Christians depending on denomination, cultural background, and occasion). There are also other customs: for example, when entering a temple, center, or mosque, one may be expected to take off one's shoes, or to salute the altar and its sacred objects by bowing (Buddhists, Muslims, members of the Hare Krishna movement.)



2. COMMON FEATURES OF RELIGIONS

Religions are different, but they also have many similarities. For example, representatives of the religions presented in this guide found the following features that many religions share:

These things perceived as common can be both personal and publicly visible in society. There are religions that precisely define the culture associated with them, and religions that include many kinds of cultural interpretations. Religions create their own culture but they also can be modified in various ways, influenced by the surrounding culture and era. The influence of religions on world politics has recently increased. Religions have been used to justify both violent nationalist pursuits and efforts to promote peace and mutual care. It is important to remember that violence and subjugating others do not belong to the basic essence of religions. In Finland, practitioners of religions have the opportunity to develop a religious culture that promotes social peace and sustainable development.

**Sense of
community**

**Quest for silence
and serenity,
spiritual exercises**

**Idea of divine
power**

**Experience of
sacredness**

**Prayer
and praise**

**Upbringing
and education
processes,
individual self-
development**

**Ethical
consideration and
caring for others**

**Rituals,
celebrations, and
traditions**

**Shared texts,
history, and
traditions,
e.g. Judaism,
Christianity and
Islam**

Foundation and way to Finland

- Founder Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892).
- Succession order clearly defined, which prevented sectarian division.
- To Finland in the 1930s.

Figures and denominations

- The community grows rapidly, figures change all the time.
- Bahá'í Faith has taken root in almost 200 countries and geographical regions.
- National assemblies in almost 190 countries and geographical regions.
- No sectarian denominations.

Activities

- The Bahá'í community established its administration in Finland in 1950.
- The national Bahá'í centre in Käpylä Helsinki, the North Calotte Bahá'í centre in Inari.
- Active within the UN and in close co-operation with international organizations.

3. PRESENTATION OF RELIGIONS

This part offers brief presentations of the religions included in this guide. The numbers of members are based on statistical data from 2020 or estimates given by the member communities.



BAHÁ'Í FAITH

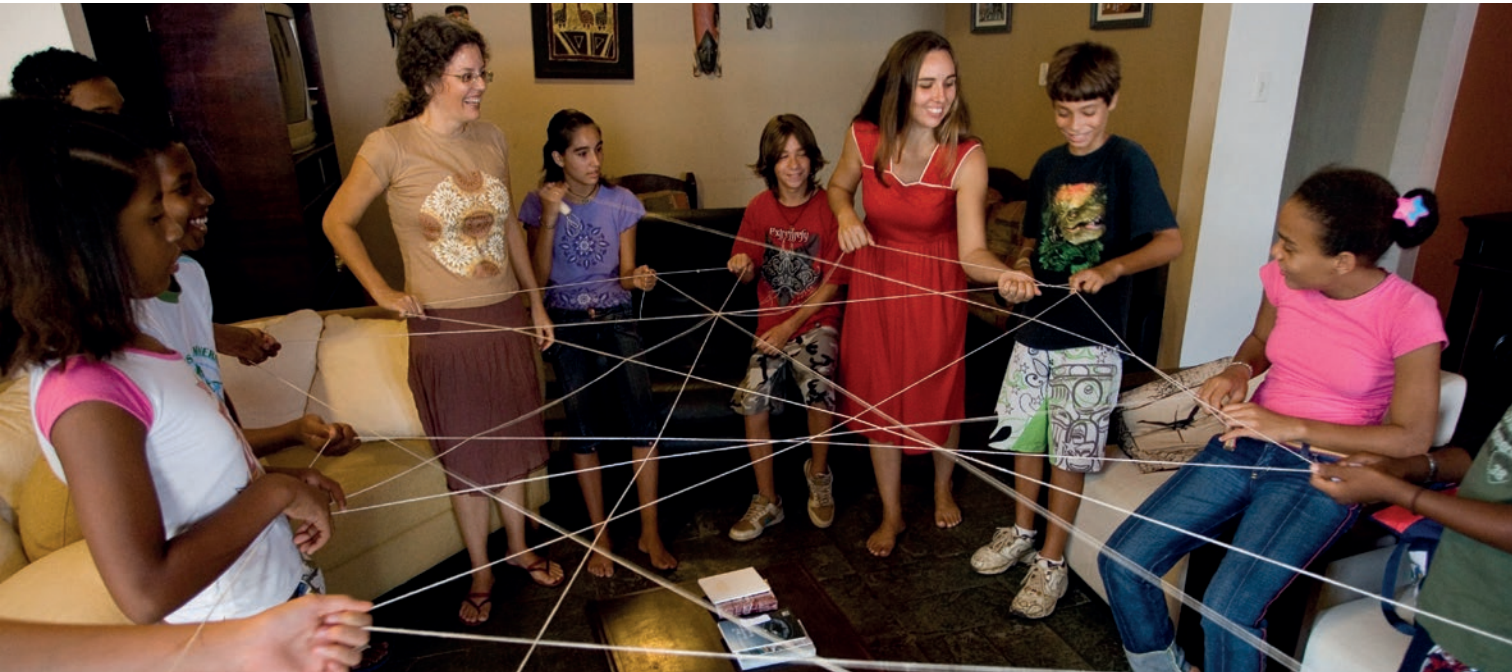
Perhaps one of the best known quotations by Bahá'u'lláh expresses the core idea of the Faith: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” In Bahá'í theology, religion is seen as a unified educating and civilizing process intended by God for humankind. Every divine teacher who has contributed to the education of humankind – the founding figures of world religions – has through his unique and essential contribution taken the process further towards the next stage, towards a state in which all of humankind is unified in a harmonious society, whose homeland is the whole planet, and where the principle of “Unity in Diversity” becomes reality.” According to the Bahá'í view, we now live

on the threshold of that turning point, that era of great transition and upheavals preceding the stage of maturity.

At the base of all this is the perception of reality as a coherent whole that includes both material and spiritual attributes, both concrete and abstract dimensions (e.g. concrete natural phenomena in the universe and, on the other hand, abstract laws of nature). God is not a force operating within the universe but rather the original source, above and beyond everything. The task of religions, and especially of the divine teachers, is to convey God's will and guidance to humanity, so that both individuals and society gradually reach the potential of their existence. This pattern

of thinking also reconciles the roles of religion and science as two different but complementary sources of knowledge – channels that ultimately help humanity to know the will and works of their Creator.

Bahá'ís participate gladly in various kinds of shared events. Indeed, Bahá'í teachings actually encourage Bahá'ís to joyfully accept invitations to visits, and Bahá'u'lláh exhorts his followers to associate *“with faces joyous and beaming with light ... with your neighbour”* and *“in a spirit of utmost kindness and love”*, and to *“consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendship and fellowship”* Bahá'ís also organize a wide variety of activities and events that are open to everyone.



BUDDHISM



The essence of Buddhism are the Three Jewels: Buddha (the Enlightened One), Dharma (Teaching), and Sangha (Spiritual Community). There is no divine Creator, i.e. God, in Buddhism. However, in the parallel worlds in addition to humans and animals there are spiritual beings – such as heavenly beings, local spirits, and hellish beings – living in the karmic cycle of rebirths.

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha. He taught how to free oneself from suffering through an eightfold path of eight practices: 1) right view, 2) right thought, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) right mindfulness, and 8) right concentration. The path can be summed up in three points: ethics, meditation, and wisdom. Ethics will aim at goodness, meditation at tranquility, and wisdom at a deep understanding of the world and the human mind.

Buddhism is not just a religion but a lifestyle as well. It is a spiritual path, not a centrally steered religion. Its core message declares that human beings can improve themselves.

Each one of us can get in touch with the ultimate, luminous nature of the mind devoid of selfish thoughts and harmful emotions. Through practice we can understand the true essence of all phenomena. When we free ourselves from confusion, anger, and clinging, we can finally reach the peace of nirvana. Everyone without exception can become enlightened, in other words, become a Buddha.

The concept of karma emphasizes one's own responsibility: Thought, speech and action will leave a mark that will affect the future and the future incarnations. However, karma does not mean a fixed fate. Our own actions and attitudes can change it. Compassionate action for others and practicing Dharma are means of purifying one's karma.



Foundation and way to Finland

- The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama who lived in Northern India 500 BCE.
- The Pali-language Tipitaka is the basis of present-day Theravada Buddhism.
- Tripitaka in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan is the basis of both Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.
- Found its way to the West and to Finland at the end of the 19th century along with new spiritual trends.

Figures and denominations

- Globally 500 million. In Finland 15 000 - 20 000 of which registered members in religious communities only 1826 (in 2020).

- Many immigrants from Asia: especially Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Divided into several denominations and traditions.

Activities

- Finland's first association founded in 1947, Friends of Buddhism (now Bodhidharma).
- FWBO (Friends of Western Buddhist Order) Finnish community 1973 (now Triratna), many more since the 1980s. Today there are more than 40 groups representing different movements.
- The Finnish Buddhist Union in 2009 as a Buddhist cooperative organisation.
- Buddhist temples/centres in and around larger cities.



Photographer: Mikko Koponen

ISLAM

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on belief in one God (Allah in Arabic). Those who believe in the teachings of Islam are called Muslims. The Arabic word Islam means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is one who submits to God. According to Islam, the holy book, The Qur'an, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century in the Arabian Peninsula. According to Islam, the Prophet Muhammad is the seal of prophets whose mission was to spread the message of Islam.



The most important Islamic guidelines are based on the holy book, the Qur'an, and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, the Hadith. The central teachings of Islam are summarized in the five basic pillars: 1) The profession of faith – uttering that "there is no other God but Allah and that Muhammad is his Prophet". By uttering the profession of faith one declares oneself to be a Muslim. 2) The five daily prayers – a Muslim should pray five times a day during prescribed times, facing

the holy Kaaba which is located in the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. 3) An alms tax – charity is essential in Islam, and a Muslim must pay alms tax annually within the limits of one's own wealth. Islam is a religion of communality, peace, and good sharing. 4) Fasting – the month of Ramadan is a month of fasting for Muslims. Islam makes use of a lunar calendar instead of the Gregorian solar calendar, which means that the timing of Ramadan changes every year. 5) Pilgrimage – a Muslim should aim to perform the pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca at least once in their lifetime.

Islam is an internally diverse religion. Islam includes the principle of covering clothing, which is interpreted in different ways depending on denomination, community, and individual. The weekly holiday for Muslims is Friday, when Muslims around the world gather for the Friday prayer (salat al-Juma) in mosques or other gathering places. Friday prayer takes place in the afternoon. The prayer is preceded by a sermon (khutba) which is delivered by the leader of the prayer, the imam.



Figures and denominations

- Globally 1.9 billion. In Finland approx. 110 000 - 120 000 Muslims of which 19 347 registered (in 2020).
- Two main denominations: Sunnis and Shias.
- Sunnis are the majority, both in Finland and globally.

Foundation and way to Finland

- The revelations of God through prophets, especially the life and revelations of the last prophet Muhammad, to whom the Qur'an was revealed and whose Sunnah (tradition) has been compiled.
- Tatar Muslims immigrated to Finland from Russia in the 19th century.

- Immigration from Muslim countries since the 1990s.
- Finnish converts.

Activities

- First Islamic association in Finland registered in 1915.
- One purpose-built mosque in Finland, in Järvenpää.
- Large numbers of prayer rooms around the country.
- Over 60 Islamic communities in Finland and altogether around 130 other registered communities such as kindergartens and cultural associations.

Figures and denominations

- Globally about 14 million. In Finland about 2000 of which 1200 congregation members.
- Main denominations: Orthodox Judaism (further divided into various groups of ultra-orthodoxy and normative orthodoxy, such as Hasidism and Modern Orthodoxy), Conservative Judaism, Reconstructionism, and Reform Judaism (further divided, e.g. reconstructionism).

Foundation and way to Finland

- The holy scripture Tanach, includes the Torah, i.e. the five books of Moses, Nevi'im or the Prophets, and Ketuvim or the Writings.
- In the 1830s the Jewish soldiers of the Tsar's army received the permission to settle in Finland.
- For a long time there were restrictions like temporary residence permits and professional restrictions.
- Civil Rights since 1918.

Activities

- Communities in Helsinki and Turku.
- National Representation: the Central Council of Jewish Communities in Finland.
- Jewish community school and kindergarten in Helsinki.

JUDAISM

The basic idea of Jewish religious life is monotheism, i.e. belief in one G-d (editor's note: this is how a devout Jew writes the word God). The idea is based on the revelations, considered divine and given at different times to the Jewish people. The idea is expressed clearly in the Ten Commandments – a basic pillar of the ethics and moral of Judaism and the Western civilization. The first commandment is this: *"I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Mitzrayim, the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods beside me."* (Mitzrayim = Egypt.)

The second commandment continues by further emphasizing the importance of monotheism: *"You shall not make for yourself a statue or any other image of God."* Jews believe that they are the chosen people of G-d to whom the Torah (the five books of Moses) were given. However, this does not mean privileges but rather responsibility and obligation to follow the laws of the Torah and serve as an example. According to the Jewish faith, the Torah contains the promise of a land of their own for the Jews, *Eretz Israel*.



A characteristic feature of Judaism is the manifestation of faith more in lifestyle and actions than in theology proper. Holidays are celebrated in the family circle around a festive meal, discussing the background of the holiday and how it is still significant in our days. The traditional Jewish holidays have their roots already in the days of the Jewish Bible, but some of them are of more recent origin. In composing their festive meals, the Finnish

Jews follow the so called Ostjuden tradition which is of East European origin.

Religion alone does not guarantee salvation. The most important thing is a righteous and good life. An essential idea of Judaism concerning the importance of respecting other people is expressed in the instruction given by the respected Jewish spiritual leader Rabbi Hillel: *"Do not do unto others what you would not have done to yourself"*.



THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT



The Hare Krishna movement represents a monotheistic version of Hinduism even though Hinduism is generally understood as a polytheistic religion due to its colorful godly hierarchy based on the Vedic scriptures.

The Vedic tradition includes six schools of which the Hare Krishna movement represents Vedanta or the conclusion of the Vedas. According to the conclusion of the Vedas, the purpose of human beings is to revive their lost relationship with God, follow His instructions, and learn to love Him. This includes the understanding of the spiritual origin of living beings and the reality of afterlife which is determined by how one has lived one's life in this material world. If one still has personal material desires, one must undergo another birth in the material world according to one's karma. If the desires of a human being are the same as God's desires, he or she goes to the spiritual world. Thus one's cycle of births and deaths, i.e. reincarnation, comes to an end.

The purpose of the bhakti yoga method practiced by the Hare Krishna devotees is to

achieve pure and unconditional love for the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna.

Bhakti yoga means connecting with God through the method of loving devotional service. The most important part of this method is chanting the holy names of God, in the form of the Hare Krishna mantra: *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*. This mantra, or prayer, is recited both silently alone and loudly in a group according to the call-and-response principle.

A member of the Hare Krishna movement may aspire for initiation from a spiritual master. At initiation, one promises to follow the following regulative principles: 1) no meat eating, including fish and eggs, 2) no gambling, 3) no intoxicants, and 4) no illicit sex. In addition, the initiation candidate promises to repeat the Hare Krishna mantra 16×108 (=1728) times every day, with prayer beads. Moreover, following the annual holidays and fasting days is recommended. The purpose of following these principles is to help the person to get rid of the material-body-based conception of life. Following all the rules and regulations and studying the scriptures culminates in the principle: Always remember Krishna and never forget Krishna.

Figures and denominations

- Globally about 1 million, in Finland about 100.
- A movement within Hinduism. There are many different traditions in Hinduism. Hindus worship mainly *Vishnu*, *Shiva* and *Durga*.
- Unifying features of Hinduism are the Vedic scriptures as well as the conceptions of the Law of Karma and Reincarnation.
- The Hare Krishna movement belongs to the *Gaudia Vaishnava* or *Vishnu* worship tradition based in West Bengal.

Foundation and way to Finland

- A leading figure was Sri Krishna Chaitanya. He is recognized as the last incarnation of Krishna (1486-1534).
- The teachings of the Hare Krishna movement are mainly based on the Vedas, such

as Bhagavad-Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam and Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita.

- Started in 1966 in New York City by *A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada*.
- The Hare Krishna movement in Finland was established in 1984 with the name 'Krishna-liike ISKCON Suomessa'.

Activities

- Registered as an official religious community under the name ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness).
- Krishna movement ISKCON in Finland: Temple in Malmi.
- School visits are made possible and occasional tours are done around Finland to make Krishna Consciousness known.



CHRISTIANITY

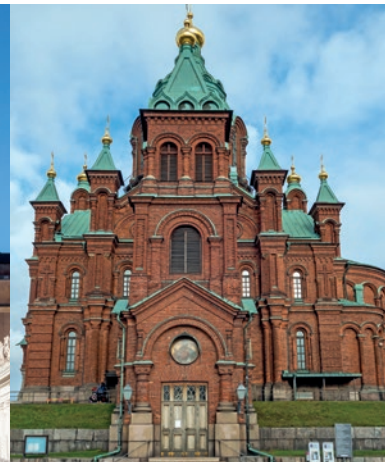


On core issues, Christian churches stick to the common doctrine based on the common creeds in which the most central articles of faith are defined. The holy scriptures of Christianity consist of a collection of writings (the Bible) that are partly shared with Judaism (the Old Testament). The writings essential to Christianity (New Testament) about Jesus as the Messiah (i.e. Christ) separate Christianity from Judaism.

Christian *monotheism* is based on the concept of God, by whom the entire universe, or *Creation*, has been created, who is the living and immanent personal Almighty, and whose creation still continues with all living things, e.g. in the form of every human being that is born. God is one but also a *trinity* of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Accord-

ing to Christianity, historical Jesus is the Son of God ("the Son", the second person of the triune God) who was born as a man due to the influence of the Holy Spirit and who redeemed the whole Creation from sin and death. As a consequence of this, every human being has an opportunity to live forever in *Heaven*, that is, in the presence of God. According to Christianity, God is Love, Truth, Justice, and Mercy.

The Christian holy day is Sunday. The liturgical traditions and practices of worship may significantly differ from each other, culturally, even within denominations, e.g. concerning modest dress or participation in the central event of the service, the Communion. The meaning of Communion as the culmination of the service is the congregation's communal participation and joy in receiving God's work of salvation. The event can be serious, devout,



and solemn, or even joyful. A church event may also have a special theme, secular or spiritual.

Figures and denominations

- Globally more than 2.4 billion, in Finland 3.86 million.
- Numerous denominations. Of those active in Finland, the oldest are the Catholic Church (globally largest, 1.4 billion, in Finland about 17 000 registered members) and the Orthodox Church (globally about 260-300 million, in Finland over 100 000, of which 60 000 registered).
- The Catholic church is still growing both globally and in Finland. The number of registered members of the Orthodox Church in Finland has remained relatively steady but there are even tens of thousands of Orthodox amongst recent immigrants.
- In Finland, most Christians (about 3.7 million) belong to the Lutheran Church, a branch of Protestantism established in the 16th century.
- Other Protestant, Lutheran and Free Christian communities, with a total of more than 100,000 members and approx. 600 congregations.
- The Lutheran and Orthodox churches have a special status in Finland.

Foundation and way to Finland

- Born in Roman Judea about 2000 years ago among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth (Pentecost).
- Historically based on God's revelation of himself, as conveyed by Judaism. The central event is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ: his death and resurrection on Easter, according to the scriptures.
- In the area of present-day Finland more than 1000 years ago, officially 1156 (Catholic Church in western and southern Finland; Orthodox Christianity in the east).
- In the 16th century, Protestant Reformation in Northern Europe resulted in Lutheran Christianity taking over in the Kingdom of Sweden (including modern-day Finland).

Activities

- Different churches have their own representative offices, congregations, and activities.
- The Finnish Ecumenical Council functions as a cooperation body between churches and Christian communities.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe in Jesus Christ and regard him as the central and most important figure of their religion, and his teachings as the foundation of everything. The atoning work of Jesus plays a central role. They also believe in God the Father and the Holy Spirit, although they, unlike other Christians, regard them as three separate persons. The Bible plays an important role, together with other scriptures, such as the Book of Mormon.



At the center of the church's theology is Jesus Christ and his role as a part of God's plan. Human beings are God's spirit children who lived with God before coming to the earth. Freedom to choose is an eternal principle. God chose a Savior, Jesus, whose mission was to atone for everyone's wrong choices and sins and make eternal life possible for everyone who wants it. God and Jesus decide, according to a person's desires and actions, what kind of place the person will move to after this life and the resurrection.

The temples of the church are places in which church members can make covenants with God and be sealed with their spouses or families so that the family relationship continues into eternity. In temples it is also possible to perform important ordinance services for those ancestors who have died without hearing about these matters. These ordinances on behalf of ancestors do not mean that they are made members of the church, but that in the afterlife they have the opportunity to receive the ordinance if they so wish.

Church services take place on Sundays and usually include prayers, singing, speeches given by members, and a sacrament similar to communion. Water and bread are used in this sacrament. Everyone is welcomed to church services and other religious events as well as more informal events. Often the members are also willing and eager to participate in the events of the religions of their friends together with them. Church members also like to talk about their own religion and learn about other religions.

Figures and denominations

- Globally 16.5. million, in Finland about 5000 of which 3200 registered.
- Present in more than 160 countries.
- Smaller factions split off during the early years of the church.

Foundation and way to Finland

- Founded by Joseph Smith in the USA in 1830 after a vision of God and Jesus.
- To Finland in the late 1860s, through Finns baptized in Sweden and later through missionaries.

Activities

- 1.7.1948 officially recognized and registered by the Finnish state.
- About 30 congregations all around Finland.
- The temple in Karakallio, Espoo, was completed in 2006.



4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – RELIGIONS AND NATURE

Religions, worldviews, and traditions are of great importance for the well-being of both humans and nature. Sustainable development requires that we think about the long-term and far-reaching consequences of our actions, considering future generations, nature, and everyone's well-being. Respect for nature and the environment is a factor that unites all religions.

Global warming and the loss of biodiversity have made considerations of our relationship

with nature into a central theme, also within religions. Moreover, in order to behave in a way that facilitates sustainable development, individuals and society must reject greed and self-centered materialism. Religions teach this, too.

How do practitioners of religions see the role of people and religions in sustainable development? What practical solutions can religions offer? This is what some representatives of religions say to us:



“The **Bahá'í** view of creation is a coherent whole: the universe and nature are a consistent consequence of the laws of nature through which the potential of existence is manifested as gradual evolution. Since nature and the universe are the ‘artwork’ of their Creator, they are also fundamentally sacred. Humankind’s spiritual, social and physical environment are all interconnected. The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith call for respect for nature, good treatment of animals, and for practicing moderation in the use of natural resources.” Melody Karvonen

”In **Buddhist** philosophy, a human being is a part of the world where everything affects everything. We depend on each other in many ways; that’s why the well-being of everyone must be our goal. Moreover, the world is constantly changing, nothing is permanent. Human action affect the process of change in the world. The effects of good and bad actions are visible throughout the world.” Irma Rinne

“According to **Islam**, it is forbidden to waste. Accordingly, natural resources of any kind must not be wasted. Planting a tree is regarded as an ongoing act of charity, a desirable action for which the planter is rewarded as long as the tree benefits any created being. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had declared a 30-km area around the city of Medina as a protected area and prohibited the cutting of trees within its boundaries.” Pia Jardi



Photographer: Jonathan Pettersson

"Krishna has given people livelihood and riches in a natural and clean way. Technological development means using nature in a way that is unfavorable to nature, and maintaining it entails a great responsibility for the damage caused to nature. Therefore, technology must be used primarily for actions that promote Krishna consciousness. Technology, and the raw materials it makes use of, belong to God." Timo Ilves

"Christian churches respect nature as a part of God's creation. The most significant religious statement in modern times regarding the relationship between society and nature is Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*. According to Pope Francis, humans have a responsibility for the state of Creation. The sin of greed and selfishness, as well as a relativistic worldview, lead to destructive exploitation of natural resources and to inequality between societies." Osmo Vartiainen

"Already since the beginning of the 1980's The World Council of Churches, an ecumenical movement whose goal is Christian unity, has promoted integrity of the Creation as part of its core operations integrating it with the demand for global justice. In 1989, the Orthodox Church designated the first of September as Creation Day and later other churches joined in. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew received the additional title "The Green Patri-

arch" when, in 1997, he, as the first religious leader, spoke about ecological sin." Heikki Huttunen

"At our **Jewish** congregation center we strive to consume as little energy as possible, and we are now examining the possibility to use geothermal heat. In our school, children and youth are guided to understand the crucial importance of environmental protection for the future of both humankind and our planet." Simon Livson

"Also as organization, **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** works with respect for nature. For example, when buildings are constructed around the world, the church tries to act according to the "Green Initiative". Some new buildings have, for example, green roofs, and in many places, measures have been taken to reduce energy consumption, e.g. in heating, air conditioning, and lighting." Mirja Tapola

Representatives of religions can be asked to participate in events and activities that promote sustainable development. Many communities have developed their own concrete models for implementing their environmental responsibility in their communities. An example is the environmental diploma of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. According to the manual of this diploma, the goal is to achieve carbon neutrality.



Photographer: Ifrah Akter

SOURCES

Francis. 2015. *Laudato si'*. Vatican City: Vatican Press. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Kirkkohallitus. 2021. *Kirkon ympäristödiplomin käsikirja*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja Kirkko ja toiminta 116. <https://julkaisut.evl.fi/catalog/Tutkimukset%20ja%20julkaisut/r/4290>

Konttori, J. & Pauha, T. 2020. Finland. In: Radius, E., Muessig, S., Akgönül, S., Alibasic, A., Nielsen, J.S. and Scharbrodt, O. (eds.). *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*. Leiden: Brill.

Puro, U. & Matikainen, J. 2000. *Dialogi: yhdessä ajattelemisen taito*. Helsinki: TSL.

Tilastokeskus. 2020. "Väestö 31.12. muuttujina Uskontokunta, Vuosi ja Tiedot. PxWeb". 2020. https://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/fi/StatFin/StatFin_vrm_vaerak/statfin_vaerak_pxt_11rx.px/table/tableViewLayout1/.

What is religious literacy? Why is religious literacy needed in our increasingly diverse society?

Religious Literacy - A guide to everyday encounters offers instructions for encounters between religions as well as basic information about seven religions that are active in Finland: The Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, the Hare Krishna movement as a representative of Hinduism, Christianity, and The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.

The guide can be used in the workplace, offices, companies and in private use.

ISBN 978-952-65396-0-7 (paperback)

ISBN 978-952-65396-1-4 (PDF)



 <https://uskot.fi>

 [USKOT-foorumi](https://www.facebook.com/USKOT-foorumi)

 [@uskot_foorumi](https://www.instagram.com/@uskot_foorumi)

 [@USKOT_foorumi](https://www.twitter.com/@USKOT_foorumi)