

Special Books

Buddhism The scriptures of the Buddhists are called The Pali Canon.

After the death of The Buddha two major schools of Buddhism grew, the Theravada, meaning the way of the elders, and the Mahayana, meaning the great vehicle. Traditionally it is believed that the Holy books of the Theravada are the oldest and closest to the actual words of the Buddha, the Pali canon is written in the Pali language which was in use at the time of Buddha. The language of the Mahayana school of Buddhism is Sanskrit.

The Holy writing is also called the Tripitaka, or three baskets, as it was written on palm leaves bound with string between boards. These are then kept in baskets hence the name. The Pali canon evolved over several centuries, firstly being passed orally but was finally written in 45 volumes in the 1st century.

The first basket is the discipline basket or Vinaya Pitaka. This details the rules of the Sangha and regulations regarding possessions.

The second basket is the instruction basket or Sutta Pitaka. Sutta means thread and this basket contains information about the life of the Buddha and his teachings and sermons. His teaching is known as the Dhamma, the ultimate truth and the Dhammapada is found here.

The third basket is the higher teaching basket or Abhidhamma Pitaka. This contains a layer of explanation which is more profound than his former teaching and tradition says this was the teaching he preached in heaven to the gods.

There are also other commentaries and discussions that Buddha had with monks and followers. The writings are studied by the monks and are recited at festivals and other special occasions. Parts of them are honoured in shrines and written on prayer flags and wheels.

Christianity

The Bible (see also further ideas for using Bible stories) The Bible is made up of several different books within the one book. There are two parts, the Old Testament, which has 39 books, and the New Testament, which has 27 books.

The first five books of the Old Testament, also called The Hebrew Bible, are the same books as the Jewish Tenakh. The books of the Old Testament cover the story of creation, God's laws, the history of the Jews, songs, poetry and sayings and prophecies of the coming of the Messiah. The New Testament books are about the life and teaching of Jesus. The first four books are also called the Gospels; they are four accounts of the actual life of Jesus. Next come the Acts of the Apostles, which chronicle the spread of Christianity and the missionary work of St Peter and St Paul.

There are books of letters written by St Paul and other missionaries, who encouraged new Christians to stick to their beliefs and finally prophecies about the final days. The Bible is read from during worship and can be found in the home of many Christians who read it to themselves. It is treated with respect but is not seen as the actual word of God.

Children can make a 'bookcase' of the individual book titles, one shelf for each testament, to encourage understanding of the Bible as a book of books.

Hinduism There are many different sacred books in the Hindu faith; all are written in Sanskrit, meaning perfect, which is regarded as a Holy language. The scriptures fall into two main

categories, the Shrutis, meaning that which is heard or perceived, and the Smritis, meaning that which is remembered.

The Shrutis These are considered as revelations of God. They contain the oldest religious scriptures, the Vedas, meaning knowledge. The four Vedas are: Rig Veda, hymns in praise of God Sama Veda, hymns Yajur Veda, verses of the priests Atharvaveda, how to live life and how to perform rituals. The Upanishads are also part of the Shrutis and are collections of philosophical discussions on the Vedas.

The Smritis These are explanations of the Shrutis and contain two epic poems. One is the Ramayana, which tells of the life of Rama and includes the story of Rama and Sita and Diwali. The other is the Mahabharata, which is the story of two ruling families and is over 100,000 verse long. The teaching of these two epics is about courage, loyalty, faithfulness and truth.

A small section of the Mahabharata is called the Bhagavad Gita, the song of the Lord, which is a dialogue between Krishna and Prince Arjuna and explains many spiritual ideas. Most Hindu families will have a copy of this writing in their homes. Passages from the Bhagavad Gita are read during the Puja ceremony at the home shrine and in the Mandir.

Islam

The Qur'an is the Holy book of Islam. The name means recitation, it was revealed to Mohammad by the Angel Jibrail over a period of 23 years of his life and is considered to be the exact words of God.

It was written down as a volume after the prophet's death, it is always written in Arabic as this was the language it was revealed in. Although it has been translated for the understanding of non-Arab-speaking people it is not considered correct in translations. There are 114 verses or surahs and all but one begin 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'. It contains directions for living the Muslim life, ethics, philosophy and poetry. A Muslim who learns it all by heart is called Hafiz. The law of the land must not go against what is written in the Qur'an.

Before reading the Qur'an Muslims perform a ritual washing called wudu. The book is kept on a Qur'an stand made of wood and is never left open when not being read. It is not openly displayed in the Mosque. Muslims will have a copy in the home, and it is always wrapped in a clean cloth and kept on a high shelf with nothing above it.

The Hadith is also a greatly respected book of the Muslims, it is not the direct word of God but is the teaching of the Prophet Mohammad. It contains the rules of life, or Sunnah, divided into Sahih, sound, Hasan, good, Da'if, weak. It also contains the sayings, actions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad

Judaism

The most important Holy writings are called the Tenakh, this name is made up of, Te – Torah, The five books of Moses, Na - Nevi'im the writings of the prophets, Kh - Ketuvim Psalms, Proverbs and Job. The word Torah means teaching, instruction, and law and is most important. It contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is the word of God and treated with honour and respect.

The message given to Moses and the rules for living are within the Torah. There are 613 mitzvot, laws, 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. The Torah is written in Hebrew on a parchment scroll by a scribe, or Sofer, and wound round two wooden rollers. It must not have

any mistakes and when read a Yad or pointer is used as the scroll must not be touched. In the synagogue it is the most sacred object and is dressed in special cloth and kept in a cupboard called the Holy Ark.

The Sefer Torah is read at the synagogue during worship, the annual cycle of reading is celebrated at Simchat Torah when the last part of Deuteronomy is read, and the first part of Genesis is started again. It is also studied in the home.

The most important part of the Torah is the Shema, from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, a statement of the faith of the Jews. It is put in a tefillin, a box, which is strapped to the forearm and forehead during prayer by some Jews. The Shema is also found in the Mezuzah, a special container found on the doorposts of Jewish homes. The Talmud, or oral law, is made up of the Mishnah, the first writing of the oral law and the Gemara, which is a commentary on the Mishnah.

Sikhism

Guru Granth Sahib, which literally means 'teacher book Sir', is the Holy book of the Sikh faith. There were ten living Gurus beginning with Guru Nanak and ending in 1708 with the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Before he died, he decreed that there would be no more living Gurus but that the book of 5,894 hymns with teachings by the Gurus, and also some Hindus and Muslims, would be the final Guru and should be treated as a symbolic representation of all the Gurus.

It is written in Gurmukhi, which in Punjabi means 'from the Gurus mouth'. Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, collected the works together into a book called the Adi Granth, which is kept in the Golden temple at Amritsar, a Holy site of pilgrimage. Guru Gobind Singh added the works of subsequent Gurus, although not his own which can be found in the Dasam Granth.

Later the books were standardised at 1430 pages so that every volume is identical. It is rare to find a copy in the home of a Sikh, as it must be treated with great respect and given a room of its own. Many families have a small book of sayings called a gutka for the home; this is kept wrapped in cloth on a shelf. In the Gurdwara the Holy Granth has a special room for the night and when it is moved five members of the Khalsa accompany it. Worshippers always bow when they approach the Holy Granth. It is placed on a stool, Manji, on a raised platform, Tahk.

A canopy called a palki covers it and a lovely cloth, called a Rumalla which are covered in Sikh symbols, covers the Manji and the book when it is not being read. Offerings of food and money are placed in front and at intervals it is fanned with a chauri, a hair fan. At festival times there is a continuous reading of the whole Granth, which is called an Akhand Path.