



What My

Muslim

Buddhist

Jewish

New Age

Mormon

Coworkers Believe

Two days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I was asked to lead a prayer service in downtown Boston. At the time, people were still being found alive in the rubble of the twin towers, so much of the service was spent praying for rescue workers, for those they were trying to rescue, and for the family members of everyone involved in all of the attacks.

It didn't take long, though, for shock to turn to anger and for anger to turn to righteous outrage. And as any student of history knows, righteous outrage, when left untended, almost always births a backlash of bias and uninformed speculation.

Often, but not always.

Here in Boston, a group of committed lay Christians rejected knee-jerk cries for biased retaliation. Rather than lash out blindly, many sought to understand the difference between the fanatics behind the attacks and the Muslim coworkers they knew, admired and respected as everyday workplace companions. For nearly twelve weeks, using many of the apologetics websites of the various faiths, a sizable group of Boston working Christians met and explored the core beliefs of the faiths of their coworkers.

We were in for many surprises: For example, most didn't realize Muslims, Christians and Jews share many heroes of the faith; and nearly every faith holds Jesus in high regard. Or that Islam's holy writings refer respectfully to the holy writings of Jews, and in one place, even appear to suggest the Torah should be used to mediate interpretative disputes between Muslims seeking to understand the Koran. While it was these three faiths most workers wanted to learn about after the terrorist attacks of September 11, the studies were so energized we expanded to explore other faiths of our coworkers.

Eventually someone asked for a "cheat sheet"; a handbook they could refer back to for a summary of the various faiths, with a comparison to Christianity as its backbone. After more discussion, we decided on the information you find in the following pages: Who are the heroes of each faith; what does that faith teach about Jesus; about life after death; and then a summary of the core beliefs likely to affect the daily lives of the people we know who practice those faiths.

Not all faiths are represented here, but we look forward to expanding this document in the future. In addition to other faiths, we'll be examining popularized cults, as well as agnosticism, and even atheism.

In the meantime, we hope this handbook offers some small insights into the beliefs of your coworkers, too.

One last editorial note: Each religion holds distinctly divergent views on the grammatical and editorial representations of the words, descriptions and even illustrations of their faith. As Christians, we choose to honor God by using capital letters when referring to Him, and by using lower case when referring to the deities of other faiths. There is no basis for, nor truth in, the idea of one God, many names and faces, so it is impossible to suggest we're referring to the same God and Creator when talking about other faiths. While we want to be respectful of the beliefs of our coworkers, we cannot escape the exclusive claim Jesus makes that "no man comes to the Father except through Him." With eternity at stake, it is imperative that even as we seek to understand our coworkers' beliefs, we never stop praying for their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

What Do Muslims Believe?

Islam, the religion of your Muslim coworkers, did not exist until the seventh century, though adherents of Islam would not agree with that statement. Rather, they believe that Allah (*the term they use for their deity*) and Islam have always existed, and were only completed, or revealed in detail, with the life of Muhammed.

Heroes of their Faith: It is interesting to note many of the heroes of the Muslim faith are also heroes of the faiths of both Judaism and Christianity. Muslims consider their line of prophets to be a chain that begins with Adam, then follows through Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David and Jesus. The final, complete prophet in the eyes of Muslims is Muhammed.

Views on Jesus: Islam reveres Jesus as a prophet of Allah, and even acknowledges His virgin birth. However, Muslims do not believe Jesus was the Messiah, nor do they believe He is more important than Muhammed. They do not believe Jesus was divine, and they do not believe He was crucified. Instead, they teach that Allah put the face and features of Jesus on another man and that it was this man who was crucified while Allah rescued Jesus and brought Him to heaven.

Views on the Afterlife: Muslims believe in an eternal afterlife, but they believe that its' rewards and punishments are based on a human being's obedience to the tenets of Islam. There is no concept of grace in the Muslim faith.

Basic Beliefs:

There are three fundamental Islamic beliefs:

1. ***Tawhid***--This is the Muslim belief that Allah is the Creator, and nothing exists except by his action. Muslims believe there is only one god, and that he is all-powerful. They believe he has no offspring and shares his power with no other being (a specific rejection of the Trinity in Christianity.) Muslims believe the Tawhid causes them to surrender all areas of their lives to the Creator, including their work, and that there is no division between the religious and the secular. This means it is the duty of every Muslim to work to bring the place where they live under the rule of Islam.
2. ***Risalah***--This is the principle of prophethood, that Allah left instructions for mankind through the line of the prophets, the chain of prophets noted above in "heroes of their faith." Muslims believe Muhammed is the final messenger of Allah to mankind. Muslims believe the revealed books of Allah are the Torah, the Psalms of David, the Gospels of Jesus, and the Qur'an or Koran. They believe the Koran trumps all other revelations, and that understanding it is aided by the Ahadith and the Sunnah, a collection of sayings and life-stories of how Muhammed put the Koran into practice.
3. ***Akhirah***--This governs the Muslim view of eternity. Those who obey Allah are rewarded in heaven. Those who do not are sent to Hell.

There are five basic duties of a practicing Muslim:

1. ***Shahadah***. This is the public proclamation "There is no god except Allah; Muhammed is the messenger of Allah." Muslims are supposed to make this proclamation regularly.
2. ***Salah***. This is the principle of compulsory prayer. Muslims are required to pray five times each day, a requirement designed to remind them that Allah governs all of life.
3. ***Zakah***. Every Muslim is required to give 2.5% of their savings and assets annually to be used for the poor and needy as defined in the Koran and the Sunnah. This is compulsory, and is different than Islamic state taxes or charitable contributions.
4. ***Sawm***. A process of fasting.
5. ***Haji***. Every Muslim who is fiscally and physically able is expected to make a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime to the House of Allah in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

What Do Mormons Believe?

Of the faiths listed in this booklet, by far the most difficult to uncover and describe accurately is the Mormon faith. This is because there seem to be aspects of the Mormon faith that are not initially taught to all Mormons, but are instead taught only as a Mormon moves up in the church, or grows in their commitment to the church and its' teachings. No other faith we examined makes it so difficult to find a listing of their core beliefs. It took nearly three times as much effort to discover what's recorded below as it did to get the same information from other faiths.

The Mormon faith did not exist until it was founded by Joseph Smith in upstate New York in the 1820's. Smith was--according to most historical accounts--an illiterate young man of 14 when he says the angel Moroni appeared to him telling him he was to restore the Christian church to truth. Smith claimed this same angel also told him where he could discover stones buried in the ground, stones that eventually became the Book of Mormon. While the Mormon church considers itself *the* Christian denomination, it is not generally considered a Christian faith when measured by historical, orthodox Christian tenets. Most evangelical and mainline denominations also resist labeling the Mormon faith as a Christian faith, although, at least in the early stages of its' teachings, the beliefs of novice or new Mormons are often difficult to distinguish from orthodox Christian beliefs. It is in the deeper truths of the sect where Mormonism diverges from historical, orthodox Christianity.

Heroes of their Faith: The heroes of the Mormon faith include the angel Moroni, Nephi, an early North American, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and the early elders of the church. They also consider the head of the church in each era of the church's history to be significant and worthy of note.

Views on Jesus: Mormons believe god was once a human being just like us, and that he "progressed" to his present godlike state, just like other men now ruling other universes as gods have done. The Mormon church believes the god of this universe literally and physically impregnated Mary, and that Jesus is therefore God's literal son. Mormons believe Jesus appeared many times to a remnant of early Christians who migrated from Jerusalem to North America.

Views on the Afterlife: Mormons believe in heaven and hell, but they also believe that people who die have a second chance to attain heaven. Essentially, they believe that if an ancestor of someone who dies participates in a ritual ceremony here on Earth, then the person who is dead is given a second chance to choose heaven or hell. This explains why Mormons place such a premium on genealogy.

Basic Beliefs:

1. Mormons do not believe in original sin; in other words, they don't believe that humans are born sinful. They do believe humans can't save themselves, and therefore need the sacrifice of Jesus. However, they believe that only by purifying one's self and living a clean life is it possible for a person to qualify for redemption, and that once a person has qualified, the Holy Spirit moves them to accept Jesus.
2. Mormons do believe in a trinity. However, they believe both god and Jesus are flesh and blood beings.
3. Mormons believe that after the Apostles died, all of Christianity became a false religion, and the only true believers remaining existed on the North American continent. These North Americans were descendants of a remnant who they believe migrated from Jerusalem. Eventually these true believers were wiped out when their own people turned wicked, but not before burying the stones, supposedly engraved by the prophet Mormon, which Joseph Smith found and translated into the Book of Mormon.
4. Mormons include the Bible in their sacred texts, but they also include the Book of Mormon; The Pearl of Great Price which includes two "lost" books of the Bible plus a statement of faith; and The Doctrine and Covenants, which includes 138 revelations from god and two other documents.
5. Advanced Mormon teaching, generally hard to find published for general access, and likely unfamiliar to most of your Mormon co-workers, teaches that each person has the potential to become a god of their own universe, just as the god of this universe did.

6. Mormons believe god is married to “the Mother”, a being who is not the virgin Mary.

What Do New Age Practitioners Believe?

There is no such thing as a New Age denomination. New Age spirituality is a loosely connected group of people who share some common beliefs but who seldom engage in formal worship and rarely organize into large groups. It is estimated that 20% of Americans today hold to some form of New Age spirituality. It is important to note that while some of the practices of the New Age movement are similar to those of Wiccans and other Occult practitioners, the New Age movement does not worship Satan.

Heroes of their Faith: It is difficult to say that New Age adherents have any heroes of their faith, except perhaps themselves, since they teach and believe that they are god, or at least they are a part of god’s essence. New Age adherents generally admire Jesus and revere Buddha, and they also admire men and women of peace and non-violence, like Gandhi.

Views on Jesus: Most New Age adherents consider Jesus a wise man, more enlightened than themselves, but no different physically or spiritually.

Views on the Afterlife: The views on an afterlife are so varied as to defy a firm description. However, most New Age adherents believe in some form of afterlife, though generally in the form of reincarnation.

Basic Beliefs:

1. ***Monism:*** The belief that everything that breathes comes from one divine energy source, and is a part of that divine energy source, and is therefore divine itself.
2. ***Panentheism:*** The belief that everything in the universe is contained in god, and god also exists outside of the universe.
3. ***Reincarnation:*** The belief that like Hinduism's transmigration of the soul, every living creature is reborn after death and continues this cycle.
4. ***Karma:*** The belief that the good and bad deeds we do add and subtract from our accumulated record, our **karma**. At the end of our life, we are rewarded or punished according to our karma by being reincarnated into either a painful new life, or a good new life. This belief is linked to that of reincarnation and is also derived from Hinduism.*
5. ***Personal Transformation.*** The belief that a profoundly intense mystical experience will lead to the acceptance and use of New Age beliefs and practices. Guided imagery, hypnosis, meditation, and (*sometimes*) the use of hallucinogenic drugs are useful to bring about and enhance this transformation. Believers hope to develop new potentials within themselves: the ability to heal oneself and others, psychic powers, a new understanding of the workings of the universe, etc. Later, when sufficient numbers of people have achieved these powers, a major spiritual, physical, psychological and cultural planet-wide transformation is expected.*
6. Most New Age adherents believe an ***aura or energy field*** surrounds the human body and is visible to only a few enlightened souls.
7. ***Ecology*** is an important facet of New Age spirituality, since god encompasses all, especially Gaia, or Mother Earth.
8. Most New Age adherents believe ***a new world order*** will eventually emerge in which all peoples will merge into one harmonic state.

*Items four and five are taken verbatim from the website www.religioustolerance.org.

What Do My Jewish Coworkers Believe?

Unlike most faiths, Judaism does not lend itself to an easy delineation of its' major tenets. Judaism does not have a dogma, though it does place great emphasis on the Law of the Prophets.

Heroes of their Faith: The heroes of the Old Testament are the heroes of the Jewish faith as well: Adam, Noah, Jacob, Isaac, David, and the prophets whose names appear in the Law of the Prophets. In fact, a surprising number of the heroes of the Jewish faith are also heroes of the Muslim and Christian faith. Judaism also holds historical Jewish figures in high regard.

Views on Jesus: Judaism rejects Jesus as the Messiah, and does not acknowledge Him as the Son of God. While some consider Him a wise man, it is not a universally-held belief. Most faithful Jewish men and women believe a Messiah will appear, but that it was not Jesus.

Views on the Afterlife: Jews share a similar belief in the afterlife with Christians, though not all segments of Judaism accept a belief in an afterlife.

Basic Beliefs:

According to the website, www.jewfaq.org, the basic tenets of Jewish faith are described by Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, one of the greatest medieval Jewish scholars (also known as Maimonides) as follows:

1. God exists.
2. God is one and unique.
3. God is incorporeal.
4. God is eternal.
5. Prayer is to be directed to God alone and to no other.
6. The words of the prophets are true.
7. Moses' prophecies are true, and Moses was the greatest of the prophets.
8. The Written Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) and Oral Torah (teachings now contained in the Talmud and other writings) were given to Moses.
9. There will be no other Torah
10. God knows the thoughts and deeds of men
11. God will reward the good and punish the wicked
12. The Messiah will come, and Jesus is not the Messiah.
13. The dead will be resurrected.

What Do Buddhists Believe?

Buddhism is a religion founded in India and rooted in Hinduism. It was founded about 600 years B.C. by Siddhartha Guatama, a native of India of royal birth. Siddhartha tried to discover ways to alleviate suffering and in his journey rejected Hinduism and ascetism, concentrating instead on meditation. Eventually he believed he overcame suffering through meditation by reaching a state of nirvana, and then spent his life trying to share this experience with others. Because of this, he is referred to as “the enlightened one” or “Buddha.” Buddhists do not believe there is a god, and Buddha is merely considered a more enlightened “way-shower” for other human beings. Buddhists believe in a moral and ethical way of life that is centered on denial of self. Most of your coworkers who claim to be Buddhist are more likely a self-developed mix of New Age spirituality and Buddhism.

Heroes of their Faith: Siddhartha Guatama, or “the Buddha”.

Views on Jesus: Individual Buddhists may acknowledge Jesus as a wise man, but organized Buddhism would not probably have an opinion of Jesus any more than it would other humans.

Views on the Afterlife: Buddhists do not believe there is a beginning or an end to life, only a continuous circle of suffering until one reaches an enlightened state where you are above suffering.

Basic Beliefs:

Buddhists hold to two major sets of doctrines, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths are:

1. The ***First Noble Truth*** is suffering. Life is full of misery: birth, ageing, sickness and death are all suffering. Though people strive for pleasure they receive only pain: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, contact with the hated and separation from the loved. And even if they **do** achieve a little happiness they soon tire of it and again become discontent.
2. The ***Second Noble Truth*** is the cause of suffering. Desire and greed always lead to dissatisfaction. Craving and attachment for sensual pleasures, the desire to end sorrow and the ambition to go on living: all these are the causes of rebirth, which brings further suffering.
3. The ***Third Noble Truth*** is the cessation of suffering. When craving and desire are relinquished, suffering and discontent end, and in their place comes satisfaction and peace.
4. The ***Fourth Noble Truth*** is the way to cessation of suffering. The Buddha taught a Middle Way, that avoided either excessive pleasure-seeking or excessive hardships. This middle way leads to enlightenment, and is called the Noble Eightfold Path.*

The ***Eightfold Path*** begins with ***Right Understanding*** arising from the first three noble truths, seeing that all is impermanent. From this awareness comes Right Intention, aspiring to truth, beauty and goodness. This leads to good conduct, in the form of ***Right Speech, Right Action*** and ***Right Livelihood***, namely taking responsibility for one’s body, its behaviour and speech, including non-violence, acting with compassion, following a moral code, and working in a way that does not harm others. Finally come ***Right Effort, Right Mindfulness*** and ***Right Concentration***, which are developed in the heart through the regular the practice of meditation.*

*Text comes from website www.arc.org.