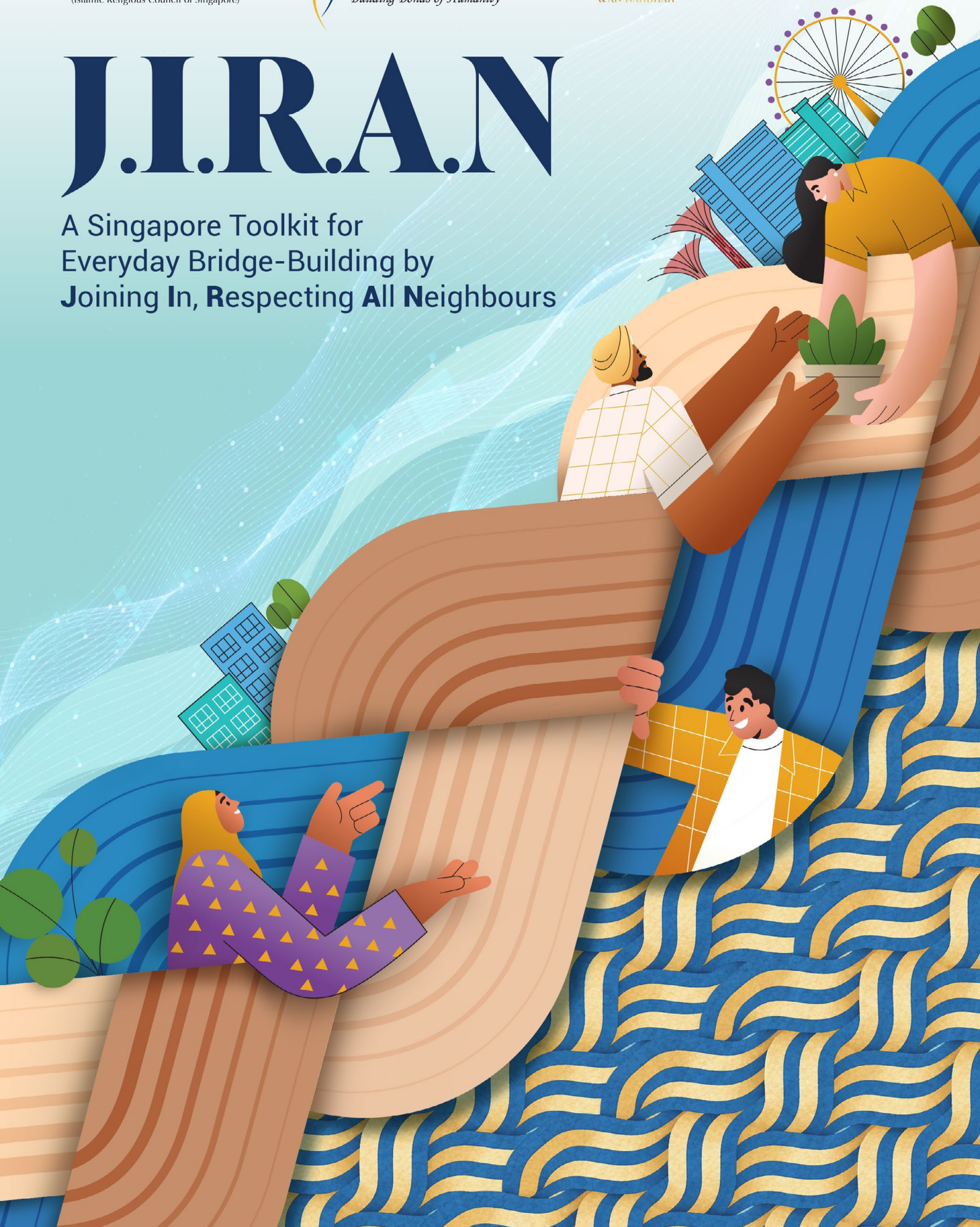
Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura
(Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)

HARMONY CENTRE @AN-NAHDHAH
Building Bonds of Humanity

20TH ANNIVERSARY
HARMONY CENTRE & AN-NAHDHAH

J.I.R.A.N

A Singapore Toolkit for Everyday Bridge-Building by **J**oining **I**n, **R**especting **A**ll **N**eighbours



Why J.I.R.A.N?

After twenty years of building bridges and contributing to the interfaith landscape in Singapore, Harmony Centre met with hundreds of Singaporeans from all walks of life to understand what they need to improve their understanding of the faiths of other citizens. The JIRAN (Joining In, Respecting All Neighbours) Toolkit is the Singaporean Muslim Community's contribution to the continuing work of strengthening relationships and improving religious literacy across our communities. JIRAN brings together lessons from two decades of interfaith engagement and translates them into simple, bite-sized practical approaches that individuals and communities can use in everyday life.

Grounded in Singapore's diverse religious landscape, the Toolkit reflects the commitment of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) to nurturing a gracious Muslim community that radiates blessings to all. It recognises that meaningful interfaith engagement does not require communities to set aside their beliefs or become more alike. Rather, it equips people to engage difference with knowledge, dignity, curiosity, responsibility and care.

Harmony Centre, MUIS' interfaith and social cohesion arm, developed the MOSAIC Framework from its accumulated experience in building relationships across religious diversity. Together with religious-literacy resources, practical guidance, reflection questions, case examples and facilitation tools, the framework forms the practical core of JIRAN. It helps readers better understand the communities around them, create meaningful encounters, deepen relationships, nurture trust, work towards shared purposes, and sustain these relationships over time.

The Toolkit is intended for faith and community leaders, religious teachers, educators, young adults, volunteers, practitioners, public officers and anyone seeking to build stronger relationships across differences in belief.

JIRAN does not present Singapore's experience as a formula to be reproduced elsewhere, although Harmony Centre has also learnt a lot from its engagement with global experts and practitioners. Contexts, histories and communities differ. Instead, it offers lessons, principles, questions and practices that can be thoughtfully adapted to different settings.

Ultimately, JIRAN is an invitation to be curious about the faith of your friend, co-worker or neighbour, and perhaps honour the needs of their faith as much as they honour yours.

Harmony begins with how we choose to live well with our neighbours.

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Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore
Hindu Advisory Board Singapore
Singapore Jain Religious Society
Jewish Welfare Board Singapore
Sikh Advisory Board Singapore
Taoist Federation Singapore
Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Singapore

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Published by Harmony Centre Singapore

Typeset and design by Oxygen Studio Designs Ptd Ltd

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Title: JIRAN Toolkit

This document is intended as a living document and may be amended or updated at any time without prior notice to reflect evolving needs and circumstances. For any feedback on the toolkit, please email to harmony@muis.gov.sg.

Produced in Singapore.

J.I.R.A.N

A Singapore Toolkit for Everyday Bridge-Building by
Joining **I**n, **R**especting **A**ll **N**eighbours

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Message of Gratitude from the Singapore Muslim Community

Kadir Maideen
Chief Executive
MUIS

Twenty years is a significant milestone for Harmony Centre. It is an occasion to remember what has been built, to recognise those who made that work possible and, equally, to consider what must now be carried forward. The JIRAN Toolkit emerges from that spirit of reflection and renewal.

Since Harmony Centre was established in 2006, Singapore's interfaith landscape has continued to evolve. New generations have come of age, new questions have emerged, and developments beyond our shores increasingly shape conversations within our society. Through these changes, one lesson has remained constant: religious harmony is not sustained by institutions alone. It depends upon relationships - patiently built, continually renewed and strong enough to carry communities through both ordinary times and difficult ones.

Harmony Centre's journey has therefore never been its own alone.

On behalf of MUIS, I wish to place on record our deep appreciation for the contributions of the past and present leadership of Harmony Centre — primarily Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, Captain Haniff Abdul Razak, Ustaz Mohd Ali Atan, Ustaz Muhammad Fazalee Jaafar, Ustazah Liyana Rosli Asmara, and Ustaz Muhammad Nasir Johari — whose stewardship has shaped the Centre through different phases of its journey. Each generation has responded to the needs of its time - establishing foundations, strengthening relationships with religious communities, expanding networks and programmes, and guiding the Centre as Singapore's interfaith landscape has grown more complex. The work we inherit today rests upon these successive layers of leadership, judgement and care.

Our gratitude extends equally to the staff of Harmony Centre, past and present, who have translated this vision into the everyday work of relationship-building. Much of interfaith work takes place away from public view: through careful preparation, research, conversations with partners, programme development, difficult discussions, follow-ups and the patient maintenance of relationships over time. Their professionalism, commitment and willingness to learn have given substance to the Centre's mission.

We also offer our heartfelt appreciation to Harmony Centre's docent volunteers, who have been an integral part of its story. For many visitors, our docents are among the first people through whom they encounter Harmony Centre and learn about Islam and the Singapore Muslim community. Through countless learning journeys and conversations, they have generously given their time to welcome others, respond to questions with sensitivity and create spaces where curiosity can grow into understanding. Their contribution embodies something fundamental to JIRAN itself: harmony is ultimately carried by people willing to meet others with knowledge, patience, generosity and respect.

We are deeply appreciative of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, as well as our partners across the wider public service, for their longstanding support of religious harmony and social cohesion. Singapore's experience reminds us that cohesion is strengthened when public institutions and communities understand their respective responsibilities and work together with trust and a shared sense of purpose.

Our particular gratitude goes to the many religious organisations, faith leaders, community representatives and interfaith practitioners who have journeyed alongside Harmony Centre. Trust between communities is built through far more than formal meetings. It grows through conversations, visits, shared meals, learning journeys, community projects, moments of celebration, honest questions and, importantly, a willingness to remain in relationship even when perspectives differ.

Meaningful interfaith engagement requires more than speaking about one another. It requires the humility to listen to how communities understand themselves, the care to represent their beliefs and practices responsibly, and the maturity to recognise the diversity that exists within every religious tradition. This principle has guided the development of JIRAN.

We are therefore especially grateful to the religious communities, subject-matter contributors and reviewers who have shared their knowledge, perspectives and careful scrutiny of this Toolkit. We also thank the writers, researchers, editors, facilitators, programme partners, colleagues and contributors who have helped transform two decades of experience into a resource that can be carried forward and used by others.

JIRAN comes at a time when Singapore's religious harmony cannot be regarded as a finished achievement. Every generation inherits both the benefits of what previous generations have built and the responsibility to renew them. Laws, policies and institutions provide essential safeguards, but the resilience of our shared society also depends on how we treat one another in everyday life: how we respond to difference, correct assumptions, listen to one another and sustain relationships when circumstances place them under strain.

To everyone who has contributed to Harmony Centre's first twenty years, and to all who will carry this work into its next chapter, we offer our sincere appreciation. May JIRAN contribute meaningfully to a harmonious society, continually shaped by the relationships we choose to build and the kind of neighbours we choose to become.

Mufti's Foreword



Strengthening Social Cohesion Through Neighbourliness

Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir
Mufti of Singapore

Religious harmony and social cohesion in Singapore are not a result of twenty years of labour since the founding of institutions such as the Harmony Centre. It is a continuous endeavour, shaped by generations before us who laid the foundations of trust, mutual respect and shared responsibility between Singaporeans. As the Harmony Centre marks this milestone, we are called not only to honour and protect what we have inherited, but to also consider what must continue to be nurtured so that harmony remains meaningful and strengthened for generations to come.

At its heart, harmony is a spiritual question. Religion speaks to our deepest convictions about God, human purpose and moral responsibility. Yet faith is never lived in isolation. It finds expression in the ways we relate to others — in our families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities, and in the ways we encounter those whose beliefs and practices differ from our own.

Our relationships with others are, in this sense, part of our moral and spiritual formation. This carries particular

significance in Singapore, where people of different religions encounter one another in the daily rhythms of life very regularly — as neighbours, colleagues, classmates, friends and fellow citizens. Yet proximity alone does not guarantee understanding. We may share the same spaces yet still remain distant from one another.

Religious harmony therefore requires something more intentional: that we steer coexistence towards a genuine curiosity to understand, and a sincere desire to respect and trust. This is the cornerstone of a united and resilient society driven by a strong sense of togetherness and shared responsibility.

Our religious communities have demonstrated the value of such relationships. Bonds cultivated in ordinary times have allowed religious leaders and organisations to stand alongside one another when society has faced periods of uncertainty, tension and crisis. These relationships have fostered a spirit of camaraderie — an assurance that, even when our traditions and convictions differ, we do not face difficult moments as strangers to one another. We have learnt to reach out, reassure, listen, and stand together in solidarity for the wellbeing of all.

Such trust cannot be manufactured only when a crisis arrives. We need to build this reservoir of respect and trust over time, and continue to nourish it with kindness, charity and compassion. These foundations are necessary to help us understand and approach the issue of differences.

The task is not to do the impossible and try to eliminate difference, but to develop the moral clarity in embracing this as a fact and engaging with others with charity in our words and actions. We should be able to hold our convictions firmly without allowing conviction to become arrogance; to disagree without contempt; and to remain faithful to our own traditions while recognising the dignity of those who understand the world differently. Difference need not lead to distance, just as disagreement should not lead to estrangement.

This is where the idea of the neighbour becomes especially meaningful. A neighbour is not an abstract category, but someone whose life intersects with ours in impactful ways — with whom we share spaces, happiness, responsibilities, pain and aspirations. Religious traditions have long recognised that proximity to others is crucial for how successful and happy we can be. It is about our common well-being, and therefore brings with it moral responsibilities.

Within the Islamic tradition, neighbourliness carries a particularly important ethical weight, calling us towards care, fairness, generosity and attentiveness to the wellbeing of others. For Muslims, the Quran reminds us to look after our neighbours, both near and far (Quran 4:36). To my mind, this has a significant meaning today — where our well-being is strongly interconnected, not just with those immediately around us, but those far away. To be a good neighbour is therefore more than an act of social courtesy. It is an expression of responsibility entrusted to us, and of a disposition of mercy and care that reaches beyond the self.

This becomes even more important in a world where global conflicts, identity-based tensions and technological changes are rapidly shaping our perceptions and driving our emotions. At such moments, the resilience of our society depends not only upon what we know about one another, but upon whether sufficient trust has already been built between us.

Laws, institutions and public norms provide essential safeguards for our religiously diverse society. But legislation cannot manufacture friendship, policy cannot substitute for trust, and institutions cannot replace the everyday relationships through which people learn to regard one another with dignity. **Harmony must therefore be safeguarded structurally, cultivated relationally and nourished spiritually. It must grow organically. It must be part of our identity.** This is the spirit in which **JIRAN** is offered.

Jiran, meaning neighbour in Malay, brings the work of interfaith relations into everyday life. It reminds us that harmony is shaped through ordinary choices: the assumptions we are prepared to question, the hospitality we extend, the conversations we initiate, the differences we learn to navigate and the relationships we choose to sustain.

Faith should ultimately move us beyond ourselves. It should inspire concern for human dignity, care for the vulnerable, justice, responsibility and the flourishing of society. In working alongside others towards these purposes, we do not surrender what makes our traditions distinctive. Rather, we allow the ethical resources of our faith to contribute to the common good.

As Harmony Centre marks its twentieth anniversary, this milestone does not mark the end of a journey, but rekindles our passion to keep the rays of harmony shining even brighter. Each generation inherits relationships patiently built by those before it, but each generation also carries the responsibility of renewing them amid new circumstances and challenges, and shaping the future.

I hope that **JIRAN** will help us undertake this responsibility with wisdom, confidence and care. May it remind us that the work of harmony begins within the human person — in the formation of character, the disciplining of the self, and the desire to encounter another person with dignity. From there, it reaches outward: to our neighbours, our communities and the society we build together.






RMONY CENTRE
@ AN-NAHDHAH

Charter on Neighbourliness

A shared civic commitment to live well with one another as neighbours

PREAMBLE

In a diverse and multi-religious society, harmony, cohesion and achieving the common good are our greatest strengths. Our pioneering figures in interreligious harmony and social cohesion have charted this path with perseverance and steadfastness and left us with an oasis of calm and stability we are all proud to call home.

As today's leaders and fellow citizens, our commitment is to strengthen these values that contribute to a more cohesive and harmonious society. We want to build a stronger society where the resilience, charity and unity of its people will help it navigate great challenges ahead. We begin by exemplifying these values to those closest to us – our neighbours.

We are neighbours.
- We share one home and a common future.
- We belong together, as one society.

We uphold the dignity of our common humanity.
- Our neighbours' well-being is one with ours.
- Their right to be honoured and respected is the same as ours.

We respect our differences.
- We embrace our diversity as a source of our collective strength and an invitation to learn about one another.
- We listen with respect and empathy, even when we disagree.
- We choose words and actions that heal differences and strengthen harmony, not those that cause hatred or deepen division.

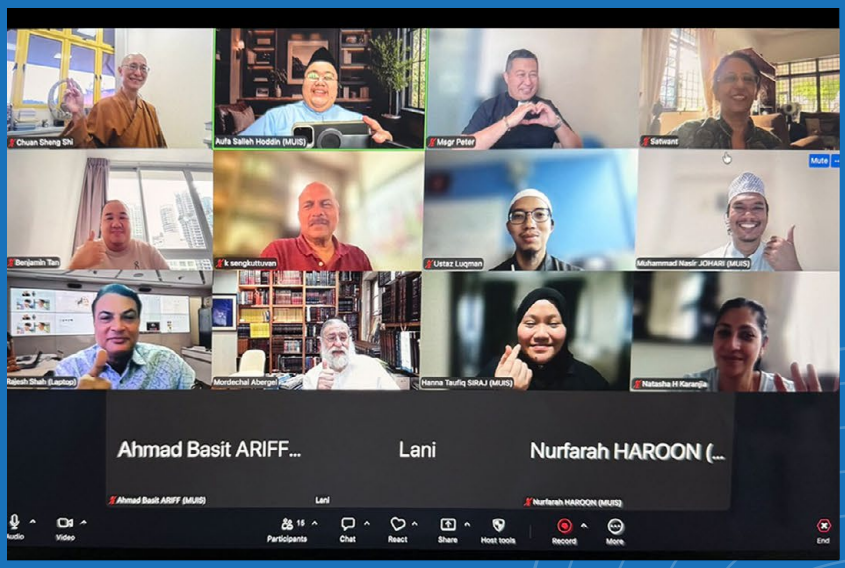
We care for one another.
- We share in our neighbour's joys and we feel their pain.
- We respond with compassion when our neighbour is hurting or in need.

We are committed to living in harmony.
- We strive to create the best model of harmony and cohesion for future generations.
- In times of hardship and challenge, we support one another and take shared responsibility for our common good.

When neighbourliness thrives, our society flourishes and our unity prevails.

When we start as good and gracious neighbours, we end up with a cohesive, united and resilient Singapore.

Affirmed by the leaders of Singapore's ten faith communities on this 14th day of October 2026.


Chuan Sheng Shi
Aufa Saliah Hoddin (MUIS)
Msgr Peter
Satwant
Benjamin Tan
k sengkuttuvan
Ustaz Luqman
Muhammad Nasir JOHARI (MUIS)
Rajesh Shah (Laptop)
Mordechai Aberger
Hanna Taufiq SIRAJ (MUIS)
Natasha H Karanjia
Ahmad Basit ARIFF...
Lani
Nurfarah HAROON (...
Ahmad Basit ARIFF (MUIS)
Lani
Nurfarah HAROON (MUIS)
Participants
Chat
React
Share
Host tools
Record
More
End







Reflection



Message of Hope for a Shared Future

Ustaz Muhammad Nasir Johari
Head, Harmony Centre & Assistant Director, Community and Interfaith Engagement, MUIS

Singapore's interfaith landscape operates within an increasingly complex and unpredictable global environment. The convergence of globalisation, technological disruption, identity politics, and religious extremism creates a volatile context where traditional approaches to interfaith work require fundamental rethinking. The rise of artificial intelligence and social media has simultaneously facilitated interfaith communication and amplified divisive narratives, creating a crisis of religious experience, legitimacy, and authority.

The unpredictability of global and local trends demands continual vigilance and adaptability. As a small and vulnerable nation, Singapore is particularly susceptible to global developments, making strategic foresight essential for sustaining interfaith relations and social cohesion.

The Harmony Centre (HA), established by MUIS in 2006, has engaged more than 78,000 in promoting interfaith understanding. However, after 20 years of operations, three strategic imperatives necessitated a futures-oriented review:

- Significant changes in the interfaith landscape — The emergence of new actors, platforms, and approaches has transformed the operating environment, with many players offering similar programmes.

- Increasingly challenging and complex issues — Intersectional issues affecting social cohesion require more sophisticated responses beyond traditional discourse on race and religion.

- Need for higher impact work — Greater impact requires focus on strategic initiatives rather than purely operational activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated several trends, particularly how technology bridges human connections and provides different ways of learning about religion. Rising demand amongst youth to create their own sacred spaces and redefine faith, spirituality, and identity signals fundamental shifts in how future generations will engage with religion.

To remain relevant, the Centre required a strategic approach that could anticipate future scenarios and position itself accordingly. HA 3.0 needed to carve a new niche within the dynamic interfaith sector by employing futures thinking to guide its strategic evolution.

Envisioning The Future through Futures Thinking (2023-2025)

The Centre conducted a comprehensive public engagement exercise to map futures of the social cohesion landscape, identify foresights and future trends affecting interfaith initiatives, and determine how developing trends should guide strategic planning for the next five to seven years. 680 participants were engaged across diverse profiles: general public, youths, educators, grassroots leaders, appointed and anointed leaders, and public officers.

To advance strategic co-creation, HA formed an Interfaith Futures Thinking Working Group comprising 17 members from government agencies and private sectors with expertise in interfaith work, futures thinking, and strategic planning. They were selected based on their competencies, capabilities, and experience in futures-related and interfaith projects. From the above, was birthed the idea for JIRAN.

JIRAN (Joining In, Respecting All Neighbours) is a practical toolkit for every Singaporean to access to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and practices of our neighbours, friends and colleagues.

It was one of the top ideas generated from HA's public engagement with Singaporeans from all walks of life and is HA's gift to Singapore as part of Harmony Centre's 20th Anniversary. It is downloadable for free on HA's page on the MUIS website. We welcome you to use it and also give us feedback on ways we can further improve it. We would love to hear from you.

Continuing this legacy means carrying its purpose into the circumstances of a new generation. We honour the bricks laid upon by those before us when we nurture the relationships they established, reach people we have yet to engage and prepare others to take this responsibility forward. It also requires the humility to recognise that approaches which served us well in one period may need to develop as society changes.

Singapore's religious diversity is part of the life we share every day. We encounter it in our neighbourhoods, places of worship, schools, workplaces and friendships. Within this diversity lies an opportunity for each of us to contribute to a more gracious and caring society. Our faith provides a strong foundation for this contribution: care for our neighbours, respect for human dignity and responsibility towards the common good.

My hope for our next chapter is that more people will recognise Singapore's harmony as a shared responsibility they can help fulfil. To those who have sustained this work, thank you. To those considering how to begin, there is a place for you in this journey.

Together, may we carry this legacy forward with care, prepare for the future with wisdom and leave the next generation both stronger relationships and the confidence to build their own.

Introduction

Multicultural Societies Must be Actively Woven



Quote by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Cohesive societies can only be sustained, and their diversity remain a strength, if people have shared hopes and a shared purpose; if their lives are interwoven, starting from how kids grow up together; if they develop respect for each other – not merely the respect for differences, but respect for the contributions that they each bring to the table.

(Yet) shared values and a belief in a common future do not come naturally. And there are always countervailing sentiments below the surface. Multicultural societies must therefore be actively woven.

Traditionally, in many societies, that meant weaving the patchwork quilt. You know what quilts are – different patches, each with its own design, and attractive when they're stitched together. But in times of stress, at times of economic insecurity, at times when polarising forces are growing, the stitching weakens, and the quilt gradually falls apart. So we need to weave a different fabric of society, weave threads of different colours, even different textures, into a single tapestry. That creates a larger motif of a nation, with many strands and many histories, but at one with itself.

That's the fabric of society that we have to weave. It requires, above all, creating opportunities for interaction, the interweaving of lives."

Extract from 'More Than A Quilt: Sustaining Multicultural Cohesion' - Speech by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the International Conference on Cohesive Societies 2025 on 24 June 2025

From Living Alongside One Another to Living Well Together

Religious diversity is part of everyday life. We live in the same neighbourhoods, attend the same schools, work in the same organisations, use the same public spaces and unite in the same nation. Places of worship are seen within short distances of one another. Religious soundscapes permeate the shared air we breathe. Different religious festivals mark our shared calendar. Besides exchanging gifts and well wishes, we take religious dietary requirements into account when sharing meals in communal spaces. This proximity is one of the defining features of Singapore's social fabric. But proximity should not be mistaken for understanding. People can live alongside one another for years while knowing surprisingly little about each other. We may recognise another community's festivals without understanding what they mean. We may know the name of a religion without knowing anyone who practises it. We may participate in interfaith events and still carry assumptions that have never been examined.

This is why religious harmony requires intentional work, together.

Singapore has invested concerted effort over generations to safeguard a common space where different religious communities live and flourish. Laws, institutions, community organisations and interfaith platforms all have important roles to sustain common spaces. Yet the strength of our plural society cannot rely on hardware alone. It also depends upon the quality of relations between its people and communities.

This relational dimension is the heart of **JIRAN**.

Our neighbours are not just interfaith partners, dialogue participants or representatives of religious organisations. A neighbour is simply someone with whom we share a part of our daily life. This simplicity matters.

Interfaith relations are sometimes imagined as the work of specialists: religious leaders sitting together at formal dialogues, organisations exchanging visits, or representatives appearing together at significant national occasions. These efforts are important. But the foundations of harmony go further. They are also built at dining tables, along common corridors, in classrooms, workplaces, community spaces and conversations among friends. Interfaith engagement is more than downloading information about religions, it has to lead to the outcome of everyone living well together.

The deeper question is: **what do our encounters make possible?**

This question is increasingly important. Religious life is changing.

Younger generations are encountering faith, identity and authority differently.

Digital platforms allow religious ideas to travel across borders almost instantly, but misinformation and inflammatory narratives can travel just as quickly. Global conflicts can affect relationships between communities thousands of kilometres away.





Individuals increasingly inhabit multiple identities at once, while familiar assumptions about religion, belonging and community continue to evolve.

The future of religious harmony will therefore require more than simply continuing what has worked in the past. Communities will need to adapt without losing relationships and principles that have enabled trust. At the same time, adaptation does and should not mean erasing religious differences.

A healthy plural society does not require less commitment by people to their traditions to relate well to others. These differences deserve to be understood accurately rather than softened into an 'artificial sameness'. Interfaith maturity lies not in pretending that essential differences do not exist, but in learning how to carry them well.

It means developing the confidence to be grounded in one's own identity while remaining genuinely interested in another. It means being able to ask difficult questions respectfully, to recognise when we do not know enough, to correct our assumptions and, where necessary, to disagree without diminishing the dignity of the person before us.

This is neighbourliness in a deeper sense: **not the absence of difference, but the ability to remain meaningfully connected across it**. Neighbourliness also directs us towards the **common good**.

This toolkit draws on lessons accumulated through Harmony Centre's first twenty years of interfaith engagement and places them alongside the experiences, practices and questions that continue to shape Singapore's religious landscape. The lessons and resources in these pages are therefore intended to be **adapted rather than mechanically replicated** — a principle embedded in JIRAN's approach to practice.

JIRAN is concerned with what happens in the next 20 or more years. Amid the complexities of collective religious harmony lies the simplicity **of caring for and learning to live well together with our neighbour**.












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Pusat Harmoni







How to Use the Jiran Toolkit

Being a Good Neighbour



How can you use the JIRAN toolkit in everyday settings?

Start where you are. Find small ways to live well with the people around you. For everyone, of all faiths or none, of all backgrounds and cultures.

1 Dietary Needs

Read the dietary guide, then check individual needs. Practices and preferences may differ.

> "I'd love to bring you some food. Is there anything I should take note of?"



2 Attire

Explore the attire section. If asking someone about their clothing, first check that they are comfortable sharing.

> "Let's learn what different forms of religious clothing mean."



3 Sacred Scriptures

Learn about its significance. Ask permission before touching or photographing it, and follow your host's guidance.



> "Could you tell us about this sacred text?"

4 Festivals

Read about the occasion. Clarify what the invitation involves and respect each person's religious boundaries.



> "Thank you for inviting me. Could you tell me what to expect?"

5 Places of Worship & Etiquette

Check guidance on dress, footwear and photography. Follow the host's instructions and ask when unsure.

> "Before we enter, is there anything we should take note of?"



6 Social Mixing

Ask about preferences for seating, activities and physical contact. Make arrangements that help everyone feel comfortable, without making assumptions.



7 Handshakes & Greetings

Warm greetings can take different forms. Respect each person's comfort with physical contact.



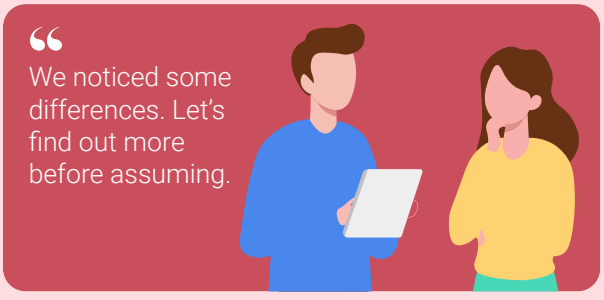
8 Religious Authority

Read about religious leadership and forms of address. Ask politely when unsure.



9 Denominations

Explore diversity within faiths. Traditions and practices vary within each faith. No one person represents everyone.



10 Funerals

Read the funeral guidance. Check with the family about visiting and offer help without expecting an immediate response.



START WITH ONE SITUATION

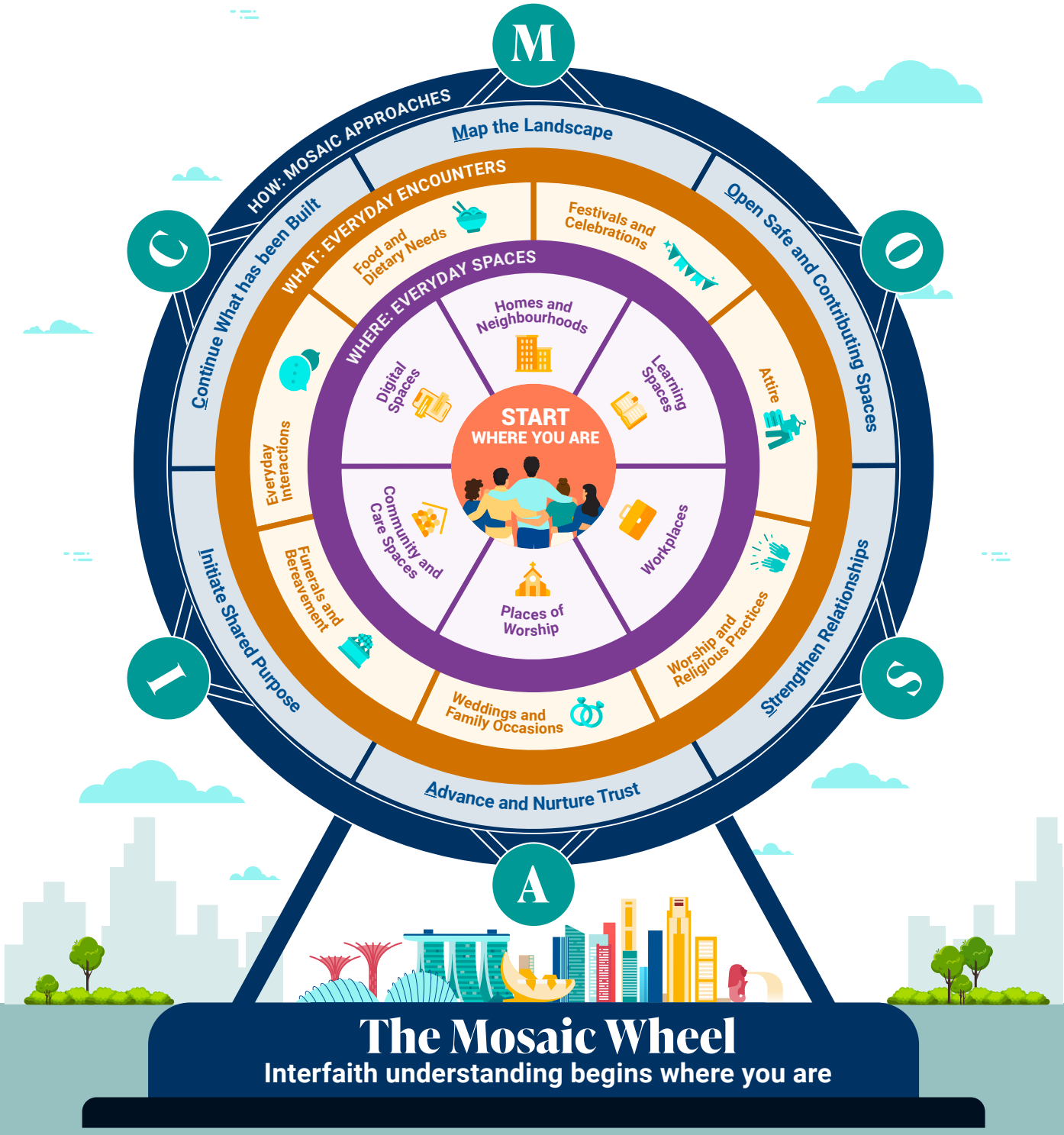
Learn with curiosity. Ask with respect. Act with care.

Practices differ. No one speaks for an entire faith.

The MOSAIC Wheel grew out of Harmony Centre's experience of bringing people of different faiths together over the past 20 years. Through visits, conversations and activities, we learnt that getting to know one another takes time. We also identified principles that can guide us in interacting respectfully with others.

A mosaic is a picture made from different pieces. Each piece keeps its own shape and colour, yet together they form a picture. Our communities are like that too. We can keep our own beliefs and ways of life while being good neighbours.

The wheel brings these lessons into everyday life - at home, in school, at work and around our neighbourhoods. It helps us ask: "*What can I do to live well together?*" and "*What are common values that can help me be a better neighbour or friend?*"



1 Start with Your Everyday Space

Where am I engaging?

- Homes & Neighbourhoods
- Workplaces
- Community & Care Spaces
- Learning Spaces
- Places of Worship
- Digital Spaces

2 Notice the Encounter

What needs understanding or care?

- Food & Dietary Needs
- Worships & Religious Practices
- Funerals & Bereavement
- Attire
- Festivals & Celebrations
- Weddings & Family Occasions
- Everyday Interactions

3 Draw on MOSAIC

Choose and combine the principles that can help guide your action.

M — Map the Landscape
Ask. Listen. Check assumptions.

O — Open Safe and Contributing Spaces
Welcome questions and contributions.

S — Strengthen Relationships
Follow up and reconnect.

A — Advance and Nurture Trust
Keep commitments. Make room for honesty.

I — Initiate Shared Purpose
Do something meaningful together.

C — Continue What Has Been Built
Sustain, renew and repair.

No fixed sequence. Some principles are more relevant in some issues than others. Revisit as needed.

4 Make a Small, Thoughtful Action

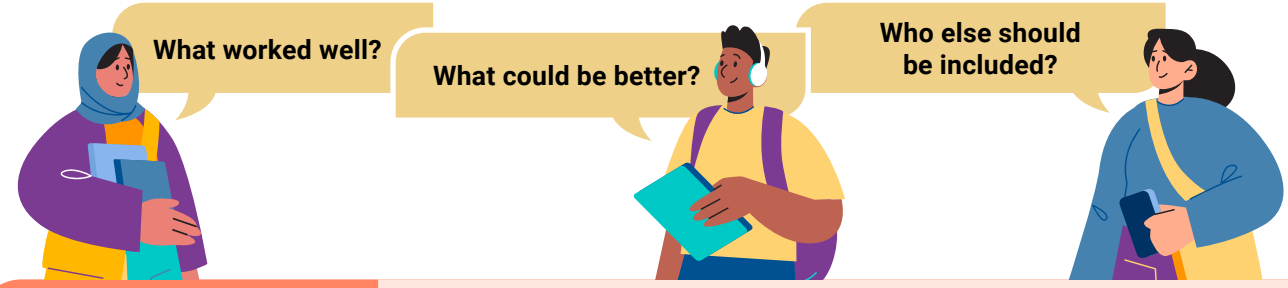
- **Neighbours** Ask before sharing food.
- **Colleagues** Check dietary needs.
- **Students** Plan an inclusive gathering.
- **Community groups** Invite missing voices.

Ask the person. Seek reliable guidance when needed.

5 Reflect, Reconnect & Adapt

Did people feel heard and included? What needs to change?

Adjust your approach



GOOD NEIGHBOURS IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

A shared community, built through everyday care

- People feel included
- Relationships continue
- Trust grows
- Differences are respected

For everyone, including people with no religious affiliation.

PART ONE

Faith, Diversity and Shared Spaces

Starting Point: Shared Common Spaces & Multi-Racial Nation

Quote from PM Lawrence Wong

> Here in Singapore, we want to treat everyone equally without prejudice or discrimination. We want to build a multi-racial nation where every community, majority and minority, can integrate fully, yet have maximum space to maintain their identities and practise their faiths, customs, and way of life."

Religious diversity is not simply a feature of Singapore's population. It is part of how we live. People with different beliefs share neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, friendships and public spaces. We encounter one another regularly, sometimes without thinking much about the religious or philosophical differences between us.

This familiarity is valuable. But living alongside one another is only the beginning. A cohesive society also needs people who can understand difference, respect dignity, build relationships and contribute towards a shared life.

Why Harmony Requires Intentional Choices

Harmony can sometimes appear effortless when a society is peaceful. People go about their daily lives. Religious festivals are celebrated. Places of worship operate freely. Communities meet one another without major difficulty. It can be tempting to assume that good relations will simply continue.

History and experience tell us otherwise.

Relationships change. New generations may not inherit the same friendships or memories as those before them. Misunderstandings can emerge. Global conflicts can shape local emotions. Digital platforms can spread misinformation quickly. Social and political developments may place religious identities under new pressures.

Harmony therefore cannot depend only on the absence of conflict. It needs to be continually built, strengthened and renewed. The relational layer is especially important.

Trust built during peaceful times becomes valuable during challenging circumstances. A religious leader who already knows another leader can make a call when tensions arise. Organisations that have worked together before can respond more quickly during a crisis. Neighbours who know one another are less likely to rely solely on stereotypes or rumours.

This is why harmony is not only something to be protected. It must also be practised. It is practised when we remain curious about people who are different from us, when assumptions are corrected, when disagreement is handled without hostility, and when relationships are strong enough to survive difficult moments.



Faith and Human Interconnectedness

Faith remains an important source of identity, meaning and moral guidance for many people. It shapes how individuals understand life, responsibility, family, community, suffering, hope and the good they wish to pursue. In a plural society, religion therefore cannot be understood only as something private. The values people carry from their religious traditions often influence how they participate in the wider society.

This can be a positive social resource. Faith can inspire compassion, service, generosity, responsibility and concern for those who are vulnerable. It can encourage people to look beyond themselves and contribute to the wellbeing of others. MUIS' social impact thinking similarly emphasises that religion should not be concerned only with personal salvation, but should inspire care for others, human dignity, flourishing and the common good.

At the same time, plurality means that no single religious tradition defines the entire public space. People will hold different convictions about God, truth, morality and the purpose of human life. Some may not identify with a religion at all. Living well together therefore requires communities to be confident in their own beliefs while recognising that others have the same right to hold convictions of their own.

Diversity, Human Dignity and Belonging

Living with diversity does not require us to pretend that our differences are small. Religions might offer different accounts of God or the Divine, revelation, salvation, human destiny and moral life. Within religions, there are very real differences of interpretation, culture, practice and observance.

Respecting other faith groups therefore does not require or mean agreeing with everything they believe nor does it mean compromising their core beliefs nor does genuine dialogue require people to dilute their convictions and flatten differences. What matters is the dignity we accord one another despite those differences.

Human dignity is universal: **people are worthy of dignity not because they share our religion, ethnicity or worldview, but because they are human.**

Recognising, honouring and upholding another's dignity makes us more careful about stereotypes. It asks us to listen before assuming that we already understand another person's beliefs. It allows us to disagree while still recognising the person before us as worthy of respect.

A person should not have to become less Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, Jain, Taoist, Bahá'í, Zoroastrian or less committed to another conviction in order to belong to the society they share with others.

Plural societies are strongest when people can be **rooted without being isolated and different without being excluded**. The image of the mosaic is useful here. Its pieces remain distinct. Their differences are visible. Yet each belongs within a larger picture. Belonging, therefore, does not require sameness. It requires sufficient dignity, trust and common responsibility for people to say, despite their differences: **We share this society, and its future concerns all of us.**

Singapore: Building Common Space

Singapore's diversity is not a backdrop — it is the texture of daily life. Neighbours greet one another across faiths. Children share classrooms with peers whose families observe different traditions. Colleagues mark one another's festivals and fast days. In February 2026, the Pew Research Center[1] ranked Singapore as the world's most religiously diverse country among 201 nations and territories studied. Singapore's own Census of Population 2020[2] fills in the detail: among residents aged 15 and above, Buddhists make up 31.1%, Christians 18.9%, Muslims 15.6%, Taoists 8.8%, Hindus 5.0%, and those with other religions 0.6%. One in five residents — 20.0%, up from 17.0% in 2010 - reported no religious affiliation. These numbers describe a society where no single tradition sets the terms for everyone else, and where the question of how to live well together is genuinely open.

That question deserves honest attention. The IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony study[3], published in 2025, found that 65.4% of respondents rated Singapore's racial and religious harmony as high or very high in 2024, a meaningful rise from 57.1% in 2018. Yet the picture is not uniform. Younger respondents were less likely to give those ratings than older ones, and racial minorities were more likely to describe harmony as moderate rather than strong. These findings are worth sitting with. They suggest that harmony, however real, is not equally felt — and that listening carefully to different experiences of belonging is not a courtesy but a necessity. For interfaith engagement, the work is to turn everyday proximity into something more: genuine understanding, friendship, and a sense of shared stake in the society we are building together.

Singapore's religious harmony, therefore, did not emerge by accident, nor does it sustain itself without effort. It has been shaped across generations through public policy, education, community leadership, and the quieter work of everyday encounter. Laws have provided important safeguards — protecting religious practice while setting limits on speech and conduct that could inflame division. Institutions have created structures that bring people together: public housing estates, national schools, workplaces, and community spaces where different backgrounds meet as a matter of course rather than special occasion. Education has sought to cultivate an understanding of Singapore's multicultural character, and community platforms have given relationships room to grow.

Beneath these formal arrangements lies something less visible but equally important: the relationships that religious leaders and communities have built with one another over the years. Visits, dialogues, shared celebrations, joint community initiatives, and the solidarity shown during difficult moments — these have created a human fabric that holds when it is tested. Laws can set boundaries; they cannot, on their own, create trust. That is the work of people.

Our Islamic tradition teaches that being a good neighbour is inseparable from living one's faith. The Prophet Muhammad said: "None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" (Sahih Muslim). This is an invitation to extend to others the same care and consideration we hope to receive — including, and perhaps especially, to neighbours of different faiths and none. It begins with listening, and with recognising that what is meaningful to us may land differently for those around us.

This is not merely abstract. Keeping the amplified call to prayer at a considerate volume allows religious expression and neighbourly care to go hand in hand. The same spirit can guide how communities manage incense smoke and other practices in shared spaces. Good neighbourliness is a mutual endeavour: making room for religious practice while taking seriously the needs of those affected by it. When concerns are raised openly and adjustments made thoughtfully, something important happens — not just a practical compromise, but a signal that every community's beliefs, needs, and wellbeing are taken seriously. That is what a common space, at its best, feels like.

[1] *Pew Research Center, "Religious Diversity Around the World," 12 February 2026, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2026/02/12/religious-diversity-around-the-world/.*

[2] *Singapore Department of Statistics, Census of Population 2020: Statistical Release 1—Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion, 2021, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/files/b80ab730-e972-42cf-979b-f16546c0b515.pdf.*

[3] *Mathew Mathews et al., Results from the IPS–OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony 2024, IPS Working Paper No. 59, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore, 2025, https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/ips-working-paper-no-59_results-from-the-ips-onepeoplesg-indicators-of-racial-and-religious-harmony-2024.pdf.*

The Singapore Muslim Community's Contribution to Social Cohesion

The Singapore Muslim community has been part of this shared endeavour across generations.

One notable pioneer was Maulana Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddique, a Muslim scholar and missionary who founded Jamiyah Singapore in 1932 and became an early advocate for stronger relations among Singapore's religious communities. In 1949, he brought together representatives of different faiths and proposed the formation of a permanent inter-religious body dedicated to fostering peace, mutual understanding and respect. This contributed to the establishment of the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), which has since become an enduring part of Singapore's interfaith landscape. His example reminds us that constructive engagement with religious difference is not new to the Singapore Muslim experience. It forms part of a longer tradition of Muslim leadership that understood religious conviction as compatible with friendship across faiths and responsibility for the wellbeing of the wider society. In short, contribution towards religious harmony and social cohesion then begins with a simple proposition: being faithfully Muslim and contributing fully to a religiously diverse Singapore are not competing responsibilities.

In Singapore, that has taken institutional form in many ways. Mosques, religious teachers, community organisations and volunteers have contributed to the wider social fabric beyond just their immediate religious community. Harmony Centre, established by MUIS in 2006, became a dedicated platform for helping others understand Islam while strengthening interfaith relationships and religious literacy. In fact, the Centre continues to honour its predecessors' legacy through the Abdul Aleem Siddique Memorial Lecture, among its longstanding interfaith initiatives.

But the Muslim contribution to harmony should not be understood only through programmes or institutions. It is also expressed through everyday conduct: being a considerate neighbour, a trustworthy colleague, a responsible citizen and a person who treats others with dignity even when convictions differ. We believe that every single person can contribute confidently to a society in which different communities can flourish together.

















PART TWO

The Picture So Far: 20 Years of Harmony Centre

Quote from Ustaz Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir, Mufti of Singapore

> As faith communities, we truly cherish harmony, respect and compassionate living. Every positive step we make puts us ahead, but every conflict or crisis extends our journey and destination further."

Excerpt from Mufti's speech at Harmony Centre's Virtual Hari Raya 2020.

Harmony Centre: 2006-2026

Twenty years of learning, relationships and shared contribution

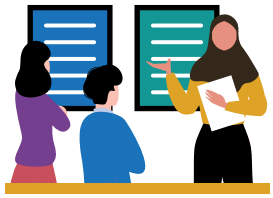
2006 – 2009



From Explaining Faith to Building Trust

- Established by MUIS on 7 October 2006.
- Served as a space to learn about Islam and meet Muslims.
- Responded to questions and concerns in the post-9/11 context — Addressing misconceptions through open conversations.

2010 – 2013



From Explaining Faith to Encountering Diverse Faiths

- 2011 – delivered more customised learning journeys to deepen understanding through dialogue.
- Introduced refreshed gallery content that promotes positive interfaith relations as ideas not external to Islam, but could be understood through Islamic texts, history and ethical teachings.

2014 – 2017



From Encounters to the Positive Role of Faith

- From gallery to grassroots – Centre initiatives such as the **Building Bridges Series** and the **Abdul Aleem Siddique Memorial Lectures** provided spaces for deeper reflection and exchange.
- Expanded efforts towards interfaith capability building through training and local and overseas exposure — Harmony Centre equipped Muslim religious teachers, practitioners and institutions with the knowledge and confidence to engage religious diversity and contribute to Singapore's interfaith efforts.
- Extending interfaith work towards digital engagement — changing ways for younger generations to encounter religion and religious difference.

2018 – 2026



From Partnerships to Impact

Expansion of role within Singapore's wider social-cohesion ecosystem – through partnerships with schools, public agencies, religious organisations, universities and seminaries.

The Centre's contribution increasingly extended into significant national and international platforms.

Key highlights:

Represented Singapore at the Parliament of World Religions 2023, sharing Singapore's approach to inclusivity and social cohesion with an international audience.

The **Faith in the Heartlands (F.A.I.T.H.)** practitioners were equipped with baseline religious literacy and practical knowledge for engaging Singapore's diverse faith communities.

Exhibition on "during Pope Francis' visit to Singapore in 2024, and HarmonyFest! 2025.

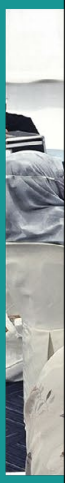
Through engaging the Interfaith Futures Workgroup and the public, Harmony Centre explored possible futures and co-creating solutions for faith communities to navigate emerging challenges and opportunities together.






Cheng Ho






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Building Bonds of Humanity






FOR THE
COMMUNITY

PART THREE

Shaping Our Singapore Together

Quote from Ustaz Dr Mohamad Fatris Bakaram, former Mufti of Singapore (2011 - 2020)

> Religions are like houses, where their respective occupants choose which to reside in, taking shelter from the heat of the sun, from the wetness of rain and from other elements of the weather, but… there are windows for us to look at occupants of the other neighbouring houses, there are doors for us to walk through in order to reach to our neighbour, we have common grounds, gardens and backyards for us to interact and share as residents of this big and spacious neighbourhood."

Source of Strength in a Challenging World, 2011

What is Interfaith Dialogue?

Singapore is home to people of different religions and belief systems. According to an article written in the book on Religious Diversity in Singapore, the term interfaith is defined **as a community which is fostered by understanding amongst different religions through the common social purposes of cohesion** (Phua, Hui, and Yap, 2008). To achieve this common goal of social cohesion and instil harmony, religious leaders launched interfaith initiatives between religions and faith groups in Singapore. These initiatives aim to promote understanding, minimise tensions and sensitivities when differences are intensified in the community for a more socially productive society.

Interfaith dialogue sessions provide a safe space for conversations about religions and beliefs. **In these sessions, many misconceptions about religions can be clarified. When citizens are able to understand one another's religious differences, cooperation and tolerance can be better instilled in the community.** As a result, dialogue outcomes are often integrated into the management of interfaith efforts and initiatives. As these programmes require the skills, religious literacy and sensitivity, handling the community differences on the ground will be more effective due to the dialogue sessions held.

Interfaith values can help us navigate our relationships and activities in the community. The figure above has at its centre the phrase 'Learning to live well together' which forms a central aim of interfaith engagement.[4] This is an invitation to actively learn about how an individual or specific community should live in a modern society while also emphasising that this learning cannot be done in isolation; we learn how to live with others by being with others.



[4] *Tom Wilsom and Riaz Ravat, Learning to Live Well Together: Case Studies in Interfaith Diversity, London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Press, 2017.*

The four values are: Encounter, Understand, Trust and Co-operate (Wilson and Ravat, 2017):



Encounter

Exchanges are facilitated between different groups and individuals. The aim of an encounter is to stimulate learning and reflection and create opportunities for understanding. You learn about other religious viewpoints and also get a clearer sense of your own religious views.



Understand

Any encounter must lead to understanding of the sincerely and deeply held beliefs and practices of others. There are many resources online about other religions, but religion is not only taught; it is also lived.



Trust

Sometimes engagement should start with establishing trust. Any event organised must be open to the possibility that trust may be lacking and acknowledge everyone's feelings without judgement. For example, when visiting a temple, some people may feel comfortable observing, while others may choose to participate in worship. Explaining that participation is optional and that everyone can make their own choices is crucial for establishing and maintaining trust. It is crucial to work hard at keeping lines of communication open and active, especially when establishing ongoing working relationships with a particular faith community.



Co-operate

Interfaith cooperation is harnessed at all levels i.e. national, district and constituency levels. Cooperation is built in many forms such as co-organising social cohesion initiatives and collective advocacy. Community engagement can include activities such as supporting families in need and organising interfaith arts and sports programmes. These engagements are useful in providing an opportunity for people who would not normally meet to co-create programmes to do so in a relatively relaxed and informal environment, so that understanding and trust could develop.

Interfaith Scene in Singapore

In Singapore, multiple agencies are involved in the interfaith scene. From government, non-government and independent bodies, several kinds of interfaith organisations were established in efforts to ensure social cohesion is regulated. These organisations cater to different groups in the society. These include active youth groups and wings, academic discourse of theological discussions, and faith and community leaders.

Exploring the Concept and Significance of Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation

Begin with an Open Heart

Initiating interfaith conversations is a delicate process that **begins with an open heart** and a **willingness to listen**. It often commences with a genuine curiosity about others' beliefs, grounded in respect and a desire to learn. Simple questions, prompted by a genuine interest in understanding, can spark meaningful conversations that bridge the gap between different faiths.

Balanced and Emotionally Safe Spaces

Mediating and moderating interfaith discussions requires **a balanced approach, ensuring a safe space** for open dialogue while respectfully navigating potentially sensitive topics. **Encouraging active listening, acknowledging diverse perspectives, and maintaining a non-judgemental stance** are crucial in fostering an atmosphere conducive to healthy conversations.

Steer towards Common Ground

Moderators help participants explore sensitive topics respectfully, recognise common ground and understand differences without allowing discussion to become hostile. Through skilled mediation, these dialogues can evolve into transformative experiences, fostering mutual respect and appreciation.

The key lies in fostering an environment where all participants feel valued and respected, and where the emphasis remains on shared humanity rather than divisive beliefs. This way, **interfaith conversations become catalysts for building bridges, promoting harmony, and celebrating the diversity that enriches our shared existence**.

In the heart of Singapore's cultural tapestry, the experiences of interfaith engagement illuminate the beautiful nuances of various religions, underscoring the shared human essence that unites us all.



PART FOUR

Understanding The Pieces: Inter-Religious Literacy

Quote from Ustaz Muhammad Nasir Johari

> We may pray in different languages — Arabic, Malay, Latin, Hindi, Sanskrit and even English. We may worship on different days — Fridays, Saturdays or even Sundays. Ultimately, it is our shared humanity that will unite us all."

Bridges of Faith Interfaith Raya Gathering, 2026

Singapore is home to so many religions, each with its own rich way of seeing the world. Let's get to know ten faiths represented in Singapore – their core beliefs, places of worship and how to carry yourself in them, sacred scriptures, denominations, dietary practices, festivals, rituals, and the people who lead and represent each faith community. As this toolkit grows, hopefully it will include more faith groups.

In our "rojak" society, diversity is something to celebrate – but not understanding one another can sometimes lead to awkward or sensitive situations. The good news? These moments are almost always navigable. One thing to keep in mind as we go: people within the same faith can hold different views and follow different practices, so stay curious rather than assuming.

You'll also find practical guidance woven throughout – how to behave at a place of worship you've never visited before, what to bring (or not bring) to a festive gathering, how to cater for friends with different dietary needs, what to wear, how to address a religious leader, and even how to offer condolences at a funeral from a tradition different from your own. These are the everyday moments where understanding really counts.

The goal isn't to make you an expert. It's to give you enough familiarity to engage with confidence - not the "kiasu" kind that freezes you into silence for fear of getting it wrong, but the kind that comes from genuinely wanting to understand.

A few things to note before we begin.

The information here is broad and based on the Singapore context. Within every faith, there is variety - different denominations, different levels of observance, and individuals at different points in their own religious journey. Approach what you read as a starting point, not a definitive rulebook.

What You Need To Know Beforehand



Religious Denominations

You would probably ask: are there different denominations within each faith? More often than not, yes. And it's a worthwhile question to sit with, because understanding that denominations exist is just as important as knowing what they are.

Denominations typically arise from differences in interpretation of sacred texts, theological emphasis, historical circumstances, or the way a faith community organises itself and its practices. They are not necessarily divisions or disagreements - in many cases, they reflect the natural diversity of thought and tradition that develops within any living faith over centuries. Two people who identify with the same religion may worship differently, observe different practices, or hold different views on matters of doctrine, and both may do so with deep sincerity and conviction.



Sacred Scriptures

Sacred scriptures hold an important place in many faith traditions, carrying core teachings, values, and wisdom. From the Bible in Christianity to the Tao Te Ching in Taoism and the Guru Granth Sahib Ji in Sikhism, these texts offer a window into what each tradition holds most dear. If you ever have the opportunity to handle or read a sacred scripture as a non-adherent, approach it with an open mind and clean hands, and take care not to damage or treat it carelessly. The physical text itself may be treated with the same reverence as its contents.



Social Mixing

Social interactions in mixed-faith settings are part and parcel of life in Singapore. Being considerate, open-minded, and respectful of others' beliefs and customs goes a long way — and it doesn't have to be complicated. A little awareness and a willingness to ask (kindly) when unsure can make all the difference.

When inviting someone from a different faith to observe or participate in a religious event, it's perfectly fine to extend the invitation — just do so without pressure, and make sure your guest knows what to expect. Sharing some basic information beforehand helps them feel prepared and comfortable rather than caught off guard.

For longer gatherings of three to four hours or more, small gestures of thoughtfulness matter. You might set aside a quiet space for a Muslim guest to perform their prayers, or ensure there's Kosher food available if you've invited Jewish friends. These aren't grand gestures — they're simply the kind of consideration that makes people feel genuinely welcome.



Dietary Needs

Being mindful of dietary needs is one of the most practical ways to show respect for different faiths. When in doubt, check directly with your guests or with the establishment you're ordering from. In Singapore, Halal and Kosher options are available at a growing number of eateries and caterers. And just to put it out there - eating Halal or Kosher food does not make you a Muslim or a Jew!



Funerals

Attending a funeral from a tradition different from your own can feel daunting, but showing up with sincerity matters more than getting every detail right. If you're unsure about the customs or rituals involved, reach out to the family, a religious institution, a community centre, or a local religious leader for guidance beforehand. When you're there, express your condolences with warmth, follow the family's lead, and offer your support quietly and without assumption. Empathy, more than anything else, is what people remember.



Festivities

Religious festivities are some of the most joyful opportunities for cross-cultural connection — but they can also raise questions. Can I join in? What should I observe? How do I greet someone? What's an appropriate gift?

As a general guide: non-adherents are often welcome to take part in the cultural and community aspects of a celebration, though certain religious ceremonies or rituals may be reserved for adherents. Respect the customs of the occasion, and when in doubt, observe before participating. Learning a simple greeting in the spirit of the festival - even just a few words — is always appreciated. If you're bringing a gift, choose something that fits the occasion and steers clear of anything that might conflict with the faith's practices.



Religious Authority

Every faith has its own way of organising religious leadership — some have formal clergy systems, others do not. Knowing who holds a position of religious authority, and how to address them respectfully, is a small but meaningful sign of regard.



Attire

Ever noticed that some members of a faith wear distinctive clothing, while others from the same tradition seem to dress quite differently? Religious attire can carry deep meaning — signalling devotion, identity, or a particular role within the community. But not everyone within a faith dresses the same way, and that's worth understanding too.

Most faiths encourage modest dress in line with cultural and social norms, though individual practice varies widely. People are on their own journeys, and the way someone dresses — or doesn't dress — according to their faith is personal. Whatever your own views, the right response is always compassion and understanding.



But what if I want to wear an attire from a faith that is not my own?

This depends on the context and the specific attire in question, so it's worth thinking carefully before doing so.

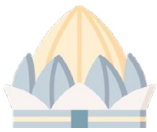
For Christianity, it would be disrespectful to wear attire reserved for the clergy or for Religious Sisters and Brothers. Even the faithful themselves do not wear such garments in ordinary circumstances — the exception might be a skit or theatrical context, and even then, it warrants sensitivity.

For Buddhism, wearing monastic robes or other sacred attire without being part of the ordained community is similarly disrespectful. These garments represent a profound spiritual commitment — a way of life, not a costume. Wearing them casually risks trivialising the values and discipline they embody.

As a general rule of thumb across faiths: if a particular garment is tied to religious ordination, clergy status, or sacred ritual, it is best left to those for whom it carries that meaning. Wearing traditional festive dress or modest cultural clothing as a guest at a religious event, on the other hand, is often welcomed and even appreciated — it shows that you've made an effort. When in doubt, ask your host. Most people are happy to guide you, and the fact that you asked will itself be taken as a sign of respect.

Now, let us dive in to each of the 10 diverse faiths in Singapore!

Bahá'í



Core Belief

A Bahá'í is a follower of Bahá'u'lláh (the "Glory of God") Who is the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. His coming was heralded by the Báb (1819–1850), whose title means "the Gate" and who prepared humanity for Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in a line of Manifestations of God that stretches beyond recorded time, including Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and the Báb. The essential message is that of unity. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings talk about the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humankind. The Bahá'í Faith teaches that humanity has always been guided by one heavenly Source; all the world's religions have been progressive stages in the revelation of God's will and purpose for humanity, and that humanity is but one human family.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Bahá'í Houses of Worship, also known as Mashriqu'l-Adhkár ("The Dawning Place of the Mention of God"), are a physical expression of the inseparability of service and worship, which is at the heart of the pattern of Bahá'í community life. While the House of Worship forms the focal point of worship for every person, regardless of faith and background, in a geographical area, its purpose is not solely to provide a place for prayer.

Eventually, it is also to support the progress of the community and to afford shelter, relief and assistance to those in need. In this connection, through the provision of education, healthcare and other services, subsidiary branches — such as a hospital, school, university, dispensary, and hospice — would gradually be added to a House of Worship. There are eight continental Bahá'í Houses of Worship, and several Houses of Worship at the national and local level around the world. More are to be constructed once the pattern of community life of worship and service becomes apparent in a locality.

Bahá'ís start to plant the seeds from which Houses of Worship eventually emerge, with simple efforts to open personal and collective devotional spaces or meetings for prayer in their localities. Bahá'ís believe that the core of religious faith is "to know and worship" God. Prayers and the Holy Writings kindle the love of God in our hearts. Having the habit of praying and reading the writings daily in the morning and evening and reflecting or meditating on the meaning of the words helps us to understand our life's purpose and inspires us into action of service towards others. Acts of service then become integrated into an evolving pattern of activity and more sustained efforts to infuse aspects of community life with a devotional spirit become possible. The Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, has revealed hundreds of prayers and Writings. Bahá'ís are required to recite in private one of the three specifically revealed Obligatory Prayers once a day. As prayer is the essential conversation of the soul with God, direct and without intermediation, there are no sermons, rituals, or clergy. As a community, Bahá'ís gather every 19 days during the Nineteen Day Feast, consisting of devotional, consultative, and social elements. It serves as a bedrock of the community, to strengthen ties of friendship and a consultation space for the community on how to uplift society.

Where can I find a Bahá'í Temple in Singapore?

There is yet to be a Bahá'í House of Worship in Singapore. Service and worship are inseparable and are at the heart of Bahá'í community life. Bahá'ís host devotional gatherings in their homes with friends, neighbours, and families of diverse backgrounds to come together in prayer, commune with our Creator, and awaken our spiritual consciousness. Together with acts of service, these gatherings shape a pattern of community life infused with a spirit of unified purpose, aimed at our spiritual, intellectual, and material development.

If I am invited to the Bahá'í Centre, what are some rules that I must observe?
The Bahá'í Centre serves as an administrative centre. When visiting the Bahá'í Centre, visitors should dress modestly and be respectful.

When is the best time for me to visit the Bahá'í Centre?
The Centre is open Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. You may wish to contact the Centre via the website (https://bahai.org.sg/) or call 6222 6200 to schedule your visits.

Dietary Practice

Bahá'ís are forbidden to take alcohol and drugs that are hallucinogenic, or any substances that are detrimental to one's health, unless prescribed by a medical doctor. Choice of dietary preferences is to be aligned with scientific knowledge on how wellness can be sustained.

Marriage

Bahá'u'lláh revealed observances and laws regarding marriage, as a grace and beneficence unto men and women, and to set the world in order. The law of marriage is a binding covenant and serves as a fortress of well-being and salvation. Bahá'í weddings are generally simple affairs with no fixed ritual. The Local Spiritual Assembly, which is the Bahá'í governing council in the area where a couple resides, will administer the marriage by ensuring that Bahá'í marriage laws are adhered to. It is obligatory to obtain the consent of both parties' living parents and on the wedding day to have the recitation, by the bride and the groom, of the marriage vow, "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." The Local Assembly will also approve witnesses to the reciting of the marriage vow. Other prayers, readings and music may be arranged as requested by the couple. Cultural practices of the couple may be observed. In Singapore, the wedding usually takes place in the presence of a Bahá'í solemniser appointed by the Registrar of Marriage (ROM) who will work with the Local Assembly to assist the couple to fulfil the legal and Bahá'í requirements for marriage.

Funeral

Death is regarded not as an end but as the beginning of a new stage of the soul's eternal journey back to God. Following a Bahá'í's passing, the body is to be washed and wrapped in a shroud of cotton or silk, and is not to be embalmed. Bahá'ís are buried and not cremated, and the body is not moved more than an hour's journey from the location of death. The sooner the burial takes place, "the more fitting and acceptable will it be"[5]. Bahá'ís believe that when a person dies, the body returns to the world of dust, while the soul continues to progress in an eternal journey through the spiritual worlds of God towards perfection and nearness towards God. Singapore has a designated Bahá'í cemetery in the Choa Chu Kang Cemetery Complex.

Who can you approach?
The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í's of Singapore and/or the respective five Local Spiritual Assemblies.

[5] *https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/kitab-i-aqdas/15#992073174*

Festivals

https://www.bahai.org/action/devotional-life/calendar

The Bahá'í calendar is a solar calendar consisting of 19 months of 19 days each, with four or five intercalary days inserted before the final month to align the calendar with the solar year. Bahá'í Holy Days commemorate events associated with the birth, declaration, and passing of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. The Holy Days of the Bahá'í Faith were gazetted in 1972 and Bahá'ís are encouraged to abstain from work or school. It is common for neighbours, families, and friends to come together to commemorate and celebrate the Bahá'í Holy Days. The following are the three greatest Holy Days of the Bahá'í calendar:

Festival	Significance
Festival of Ridván	Bahá'ís celebrate the period in 1863 when their Prophet-Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, resided in the Najíbíyyih Garden in Baghdad and declared His Mission as the Messenger of God, the Promised One of God, foretold in the religions of the past. Known as the King of Festivals, this 12-day festival from the end of April to the beginning of May is considered the most holy festival of the Bahá'í Faith. It is also the time of the year where Bahá'í worldwide elect their local and national governing councils that guide the affairs of the Bahá'í community.
Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh	The birthday of Bahá'u'lláh is observed in October or November, depending on the occurrence of the eighth new moon after Naw-Rúz. Mirza Husayn-'Alí — known as Bahá'u'lláh — was the great Divine Educator heralded by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a peaceful and united global civilization, which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured 40 years of imprisonment, torture, and exile.
Naw-Rúz	Naw-Rúz is the first day of the Bahá'í calendar. It coincides with the spring equinox in the Northern Hemisphere; the day when the sun passes into the constellation of Aries. It marks the end of the fasting month (19 days). Naw-Rúz is designated as the "Day of God". Celebrations take different forms throughout the world; typically including prayers, music, dancing, and feasting.

What you need to know!
Bahá'ís welcome everyone as part of the community and to its celebrations.

Religious Denominations

The distinctive unity of the Bahá'í Faith is safeguarded through the 'Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh'. In His will, a written and irrefutable text, Bahá'u'lláh gave explicit instructions and named His successor.

This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice.

The global Bahá'í community is now governed by the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh ordained the creation of this institution in His book of laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant

Sacred Scriptures

Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. He authored thousands of verses, letters and books. In His Writings, He outlined a framework — social principles, spiritual truths and laws — for the development of a global civilization which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. Millions of people have been learning to apply His teachings to their individual and collective lives for the betterment of the world.

Readers are advised to have general respect when handling these scriptures.

Official site for Bahá'í Writings: **https://www.bahai.org/library/**

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes. Revelation of God is meant to be knowledge for humanity and not just for adherents.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Handshaking and social interactions are typically acceptable without gender-based restrictions, within the bounds of modesty and respect.

Religious Authority

Roles

No clergy system. Governed by an elected and appointed administrative system ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Individual members of the governing councils do not have individual power or authority. Authority rests solely with the Assembly as a collective body.

What are some of the key institutions of the Bahá'í Faith?
The Universal House of Justice, National Spiritual Assembly, Local Spiritual Assembly and The Continental Board of Counsellors.

Attire

No specific religious attire for both men and women.

Buddhism

Core Belief

Buddhism's core beliefs revolve around the Triple Gem: the Buddha (the Enlightened One), the Dharma (his teachings), and the Sangha (the community of monastics) — which form the cornerstone of faith and refuge for Buddhists. The Four Noble Truths address the reality of suffering, its origins, its cessation, and the path to freedom. The Noble Eightfold Path offers a practical guide for ethical living, meditation, and wisdom, leading to enlightenment. The Ten Paramitas (Perfections), including generosity, morality, forbearance, diligence, concentration, wisdom, skilful means, aspiration, spiritual power and knowledge, are virtues cultivated over lifetimes to achieve Buddhahood. Buddhists do not acknowledge or believe in a creator god or deity. Buddhists focus on achieving enlightenment by focusing on the state of inner peace and wisdom. It can be summarised into the practice of Sila or morality, Samadhi or meditative concentration, and Panna or wisdom.

Triple Gem:

1 The Buddha

Revered not just as a person but as the embodiment of enlightenment. His life and teachings offer a model for spiritual awakening. Followers see him as the one who discovered the path to freedom from suffering.

2 The Dharma

Refers to the Buddha's teachings and the universal truth about reality. It encompasses such teachings as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self, and dependent origination.

3 The Sangha

The monastic community comprises ordained monks and nuns. It represents the support system that helps individuals on their path to enlightenment through collective practice and preservation of the Dharma. The Sangha is essential to maintaining the teachings and providing guidance.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Buddhists worship in a temple or monastery and in their daily lives. When visiting a temple, dress modestly by covering the shoulders and knees, remove shoes before entering prayer halls, and maintain a quiet, respectful demeanour. When sitting down, do not point the feet toward a Buddha image, altar or monastic.

Where can I find a Buddhist temple in Singapore?

In Singapore, there are many Buddhist temples such as the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple Singapore, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery and Wat Ananda Metyarama Temple, among many.

What must I observe when visiting a Buddhist temple?

It is customary to dress modestly, covering shoulders and knees. You would need to remove your shoes before entering certain areas, especially shrines, and show deep respect toward Buddha statues and monastics. Silence and respectful behaviour are expected during prayers and ceremonies. Avoid pointing your feet toward the altar or Buddha images, and when offering something to a Sangha, use both hands as a sign of respect.

When is the best time to visit the Buddhist temple?

Mornings are often the best time to visit Buddhist temples, as many ceremonies and prayer sessions occur early in the day. However, checking the temple's specific visiting hours and scheduled events is important to ensure an appropriate and respectful visit. Each temple may have different timings and practices.

Dietary Practice

Buddhist dietary practices are guided by principles of non-harm, mindfulness and moderation. The Mahayana tradition requires monastics and encourages lay followers to be vegetarian and not take eggs and alliums such as garlic, onions, leeks, shallots, and spring onions. In the Theravada and Vajrayana traditions, monastics may consume meat if the animal was not killed specifically for them. To maintain clarity of mind, Buddhism requires monastics and encourages lay followers to avoid intoxicants.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Vesak Day	Vesak commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and *Parinirvana* (passing) of the Buddha. In Singapore, it is celebrated on the 15th day of the 4th lunar month, which is usually the full moon day of May.
Kathina or Robe Offering Ceremony	The *Kathina* ceremony is a Theravada Buddhist tradition where lay followers offer new robes and necessities to monks who have just completed a three-month rainy season retreat (*Vassa*). The ceremony usually takes place in October or November.
Guanyin / Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's holy days	*Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, commonly known as *Guanyin Pusa*, embodies great compassion and is commemorated on three significant days: *Guanyin Pusa's* Birthday (19th day of the 2nd lunar month), Enlightenment Day (19th day of the 6th lunar month), and Renunciation Day (19th day of the 9th lunar month). Each marks key moments in the *Bodhisattva's inspiring spiritual journey*.
Ullambana ceremony	The *Ullambana* ceremony, celebrated on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month, is a time when Buddhists make offerings, chant sutras, and perform rituals to help relieve departed sentient beings' suffering and generate merit for them. Buddhists also reflect on gratitude and filial piety towards their parents and put it into action. The *Ullambana* is based on the story of Maudgalyayana (Mogallana), a disciple of the Buddha, who sought to free his deceased mother from suffering in the lower realms.

What you need to know!

Festivities often welcome non-Buddhists. Offering incense, flowers, or donations to the monastery might be appropriate. Common greetings might include "Happy Vesak", "Namo Buddhaya", "Amituofo", "May you be well and be happy", etc.

Marriage

Buddhism views marriage as a social contract and encourages married couples to uphold the Five Precepts, particularly the third precept, which prohibits sexual misconduct and promotes faithfulness and respect within the relationship. While there is no traditional wedding ceremony in the Buddhist tradition, couples often visit a temple to receive prayers, chants, and blessings from monastics for a harmonious life. Buddhist marriage emphasises an ethical, loving, compassionate, and wise partnership.

Funeral

When a Buddhist dies, the body is ritually washed, dressed, and positioned respectfully. During the wake, the Sangha may chant sutras and other sacred scriptures, reflecting on the Buddha's teachings and the impermanence of life. Cremation is commonly practised, with the ashes placed in urns in temples or other designated places. The chanting of sutras is believed to generate merit for the deceased, helping them in their journey in the afterlife and rebirth. It also allows the family members to reflect on the teachings of the Buddha, to repent, recollect, and make aspirations. Funeral customs can vary significantly across Buddhist cultures.

Who can you approach?
Buddhist temples or monasteries in Singapore.

Religious Denominations

Singapore hosts various Buddhist traditions and lineages, mainly Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

There are many Buddhist scriptures, and they are called "buddhavacana" which means "word of the Buddha".

These scriptures contain the teachings of the Buddha, also known as the "three pitakas (collections/baskets)" or Tripitaka. They consist of the Sutras (discourses), Vinaya (discipline) and Abhidharma (higher doctrines).

Readers are advised to have general respect when handling these scriptures.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes. There are English translated versions available online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Handshaking is generally acceptable in modern settings, but in traditional or monastic contexts, physical contact, especially between genders, is often avoided to respect celibacy vows. When interacting with monastics, a respectful bow or folded palms may be preferred over a handshake.

Religious Authority

Roles

In Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, there are clergy systems in place – Bhikkhus for monks and Bhikkunis for nuns.

What are their salutations?
We may refer to Sangha as Venerable, Shifu or Bhante.

Attire

Monks and Nuns may wear robes that vary in style and colour based on the particular Buddhist tradition. The robes symbolise simplicity, renunciation, and monastic discipline.

Christianity



Core Belief

Christianity is based on the life of Jesus, which is recorded in a collection of books known as the New Testament which forms part of the Bible. Christians do not merely see him as a miracle-worker, preacher and prophet, but the Son of God sent to reveal the identity of God as Father of all creation. Even though there are many Christian denominations, each practising their faith in their own way, Christians fundamentally believe that: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Christians can gather in many different places to worship God. However, they have a building specially dedicated for the purpose of worship which is called a church. A smaller church is sometimes called a chapel. The church in which a bishop's chair or cathedra is located is called a cathedral. Sunday is the day of worship for most Christians. The form of worship varies according to which Christian tradition is followed. Catholic worship centres around the celebration of the Holy Mass or Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion in other Christian churches. This service commemorates the Last Supper Jesus Christ had with his disciples the evening before he died. A typical worship includes the singing of hymns or religious songs, readings from the Bible, intercessory prayers and preaching. Christians generally have their regular Sunday Worship services at different times on Sunday, while Catholic Christians begin their Holy Masses on Saturday evening with the last ones ending on Sunday evening.

Where can I find a church in Singapore?

There are many churches located throughout Singapore and information can be found online via their websites. Some famous churches include the Armenian Apostolic Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, St Andrew's Cathedral, New Creation Church, and Church of St. Alphonsus, popularly known as Novena Church, among others.

What must I observe when visiting a church?

Wearing modestly is always advised, although the level of formality may vary across the different Christian denominations. One can always show respect by maintaining a quiet and reverent demeanour, especially during church services or prayers. Do note that some churches may have specific protocols and processes for their religious ceremonies and activities.

When is the best time to visit a church?

Sunday mornings are generally the primary time of worship for Christians although there may be services or events that will be conducted during the week. Checking the visiting hours and events that each church might conduct is always encouraged to ensure an appropriate visit.

Dietary Practice

Catholic Christians are encouraged to abstain from eating meat (excluding fish and seafood) on Fridays. Most churches of other Christian denominations do not have dietary laws, but some do not consume alcohol. Christians also refrain from eating food that has been prayed over or offered to deities.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Christmas	Traditionally, Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. Today, non-Christians also celebrate Christmas by exchanging gifts and well wishes.
Easter Sunday	Christians believe that Jesus died on Good Friday for the salvation of the world. This day commemorates his suffering, crucifixion, and death. On Easter Sunday, Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They rejoice in his victory over death and proclaim his promise of eternal life after death.

What you need to know!
Many celebrations are open to all. Bringing flowers, donating to charity, or offering to volunteer might be appreciated. Greetings like “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Easter” are suitable.

Marriage

At the marriage ceremony, there is reading from scripture, the singing of hymns, a homily or exhortation, and prayers. Catholics have the nuptial Mass. It is traditional in many churches for the father of the bride to enter the church with his daughter in a procession with her bridesmaids. At the altar, the bride is handed over to the bridegroom and the ritual of marriage begins. At the high point of the ceremony, the couple exchange promises and give their consent to each other in marriage. Catholics consider that it is this mutual consent that makes the marriage valid. The married couple is presented to the congregation at the end, and they will go outside to the accompaniment of appropriate music. Guests of the bride normally sit at the left side of the sanctuary as you enter, while guests of the bridegroom are seated on the right.

Funeral

Wake services are usually held at the home or at the funeral parlour. At the funeral service before cremation or burial, prayers are said, hymns sung, and a sermon preached on the brevity of life and faith in the resurrection of the body on the last day. Friends or family members may give eulogies. It is appropriate to visit and offer one’s condolences. Flowers may be sent to the funeral parlour or to the home of the bereaved. Christians believe in the immortality of the soul and life after death, so excessive grief would not be appropriate.

Who can you approach?
Local churches or Christian community centres, such as St Andrew’s Cathedral and the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd.

Religious Denominations

There are multiple denominations within the Christian community in Singapore. These include the Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians and Protestants (such as the Baptists, Methodists and Lutherans).

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

Christians believe in the Bible as their holy scripture. You can find the Old Testament and the New Testament inside the Bible.

The Bible contains historical accounts, theological doctrines and teachings, prophecies, and ethical guidelines.

Readers are advised to have general respect when handling these scriptures.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes. There are many e-Bibles that can be found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Handshaking is commonly accepted across genders.

Religious Authority

Roles

Christian clergy are generally ordained, and they may include: bishops, priests, pastors, deacons and ministers, depending on the Christian tradition.

Catholics, for instance, would have various ecclesiastical titles within the Church hierarchy, such as the Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Bishop among others.

What are their salutations?
Depending on the titles, ranks, and roles, members of the clergy may be addressed in different ways, according to their ranks and roles.

E.g. His Holiness, His Eminence, His Grace, Monsignor, Reverend, Pastor, Father, or Chaplain.

Attire

Clergy members might wear distinct attire based on their denomination.
E.g. robes, vestments for priests and pastors

Catholic Sisters or Brothers may also wear unique religious habits.
E.g. Canossian Sisters or La Salle Brothers

Hinduism



Core Belief

Hinduism subscribes to a henotheistic belief system. Hindus believe in Brahman as the one true God who is formless, limitless, all-inclusive, and eternal. The deities that Hindus worship are believed to be the different manifestations of Brahman. The Trinity, which are the main deities that have gained prominence in the Hindu Pantheon are Brahma the creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the absorber. Other deities in the Pantheon also have significant followers among the Hindus.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Hindus worship and pray to the deities in the temple. When visitors enter the temple premises, they should remember to remove their footwear. Visitors must also refrain from smoking or disturbing devotees during prayer sessions. As a sign of respect to the sanctity of the deities, visitors must not touch images that are being displayed in the temple.

Where can I find a Hindu Temple in Singapore?

There are currently about 24 consecrated Hindu temples in Singapore. Some of them are gazetted as national monuments with a rich heritage e.g. the Sri Mariamman Temple, the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple and the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple.

What must I observe when visiting a Hindu Temple?

It is customary to dress modestly and respectfully. No footwear is allowed in temple premises. Non-Hindus are most welcome to observe the rituals and expected to be non-intrusive at all times.

When is the best time to visit a Hindu Temple?

The daily rituals take place from 6am to 12nn and 6pm to 9pm. During these periods, it would be possible to catch a glimpse of an ongoing puja (prayer) in the temple. On some special days, one can witness elaborate proceedings with traditional music being played. These are the days the temple will be filled with many devotees.

Dietary Practice

The majority of Hindus are vegetarians while some are non-vegetarian but avoid pork and beef consumption.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Deepavali or Diwali	Hindus celebrate Deepavali or Diwali, also known as the Festival of Lights. This festival usually falls in the month of October or November. The significance of the celebration is to mark and symbolise light that overcomes darkness. In Singapore, we are able to see oil lamps being lit in the homes of Hindus.
Thaipusam	Thaipusam is a day of thanksgiving for Lord Murugan for fulfilling the prayers of devotees. During this festival, the devotees will carry milk pots on their heads and carry kavadis on their body. They are then required to go through a foot procession from Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple to Sri Thendayuthapani Temple. Kavadi is a garlanded wooden arch carried by devotees. They will pierce their tongues and skin with skewers. Metal kavadis that are heavier are decorated with peacock feathers which include flowers, palm leaves, and spears which will then be pierced into their skin. Those involved in Thaipusam event will fast and consume a vegetarian meal for a period of one to forty-five days before the procession. Typically, this festival will fall on January or February.

What you need to know!
Non-Hindus might participate in certain celebrations. Offerings of flowers, fruits, or sweets at temples can be suitable. Common greetings could include "Happy Deepavali" or "Happy Onam" or "Happy Holi".

Marriage

In Hinduism, marriage is a sacred ritual. The ceremony begins with a prayer to Lord Ganesha while the priest sings hymns from the Rig Veda and Yajur Veda. A father will then give his daughter's hand in marriage to the bridegroom. When the groom takes the hand of the bride, it signifies his acceptance of her. Holy fire is then lit, and the marriage ceremony is intricately related to fire god Agni. While the ceremony is conducted, they will also make offerings. As a symbol of marriage, the groom will tie a chain or yellow string with a golden pendant known as thali or **mangalsutra** around the bride's neck. When invited to a Hindu wedding, guests are expected to observe the ceremony and wish the couple a happy and long wedded life together.

Funeral

Once a Hindu is deceased, the body will be placed at home until it is taken to be cremated. For Hindu children, the body will be buried. After the body is cremated, the ashes are then immersed in a river or the sea. Hindus believe in the death of the body, but the immortality of the soul. The soul is then believed to reincarnate for many lifetimes after, and once it has realised the true nature of reality, the soul will be reunited with Brahman, the one and all-encompassing supreme soul.

Who can you approach?
Hindu temples or organisations in Singapore, for instance, the Sri Mariamman Temple or the Hindu Endowments Board.

Religious Denominations

The Hindu community in Singapore, whilst practicing diverse traditions, rituals and customs, does not have clearly defined denominations locally.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

Hindus believe in many sacred scriptures. These include: Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, among others.

They cover a wide range of topics from rituals and philosophy to stories of gods and practical wisdoms.

Readers are advised to have general respect and handle these scriptures with reverence.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Many Hindu texts are open to all for reading with limited English translated versions found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

The appropriateness of handshaking or physical contact might vary. Some may prefer not to have physical contact with the opposite gender due to religious or cultural reasons.

Religious Authority

Roles

Hinduism does not have a central religious authority. Leaders can be a Guru, Swami, Pandit, among others, who guide their followers in spiritual practices and rituals.

1. Swami — a Master of Spiritual Sense; an ascetic who renounced his /her birthname upon initiation to the monastic order.

2. Guru — Spiritual Teacher.

3. Pandit — A man of Knowledge of the Hindu law, ritual and literature.

What are their salutations?
Depending on their role, we may refer them as Swami, Guru, or Pandit.

Attire

Religious attire can differ based on regional practices. Some might wear Saree or Dhoti during religious worship. The Tilak or Bindi (markings on the forehead) might also be worn for cultural or religious reasons.

Islam



Core Belief

Islam is a monotheistic religion, and Muslims believe that there is no God but *Allah*; which means The God in Arabic, and that Prophet Muhammad is His Final Messenger. Islam is also one of the three main Abrahamic religions (alongside Christianity and Judaism), and it dates back to the 7th century. Muslims live by the Holy Quran; the divine words of *Allah* encapsulated in a book, as well as the Sunnah; the exemplary lifestyle, teachings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (through whom *Allah* taught the Quran to humankind). Both the Quran and Sunnah have been rigorously preserved through oral and written transmission since the 7th century.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Masjid means a place of prostration in Arabic, and it is more commonly referred to as mosques in English. *Masjids* are places for Muslims to gather and worship *Allah*. Islam is an aniconic religion, this means that the *Masjid* has no idols, nor images and no visual representations of *Allah* nor of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This is because Muslims believe that any man-made depiction would do a profound injustice to their incomparable, transcendent beauty, reducing the infinite Creator and His sublime Messenger to the limitations of finite human imagination. This deliberate absence protects the purity of absolute monotheism Muslims are obligated to observe.

Muslims pray five times a day and this practice is called *salah*, the first *Salah* means connection and prayer. *Salah* is a conversation between the creation and the Creator — *Allah*, where the creations acknowledge God's oneness, glorifiy His majesty as He deserves, and invokes Him in humble supplication for every need of this life and the Hereafter, and where *Allah* answers Him in His divine ways. *Salah* serves as the bookends of a Muslim's daily life, beginning with the dawn prayer and concluding with the final prayer of the night. Every Friday, Muslim men are required to pray the jum'ah (congregational) prayers, serving as a vital spiritual and social anchor for the community. Linguistically derived from the Arabic word for "gathering", jum'ah brings believers together to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in complete equality, dismantling social and economic barriers while reinforcing communal brotherhood. *Masjids* in Singapore conduct the weekly jum'ah prayers, which begin with a khutbah (sermon) aimed at addressing the collective spiritual and emotional needs of the community. This sermon serves as a weekly spiritual reset for Muslims amidst the distractions and hustle of daily life, reminding them to realign their lives with the words of *Allah* and His Messenger.

Where can I find a mosque in Singapore?

In Singapore, there are 71 mosques in total. Almost in every neighbourhood, one mosque is designated to accommodate congregants for daily, friday, and festive prayers.

What must I observe when visiting a mosque?

When entering the masjid, everyone must remove their shoes. Both men and women should be dressed modestly and decently. Some masjid do provide cloaks and temporary scarves for guests to wear when entering its premises. Visitors must also be respectful of the prayer halls and spaces, by not walking in front of congregants when they are praying. Standing alongside the hall would be recommended to avoid disrupting prayer practices.

When is the best time to visit the mosque?

It is best to ensure that visits are scheduled by taking prayer times into consideration. Muslims pray five times a day, and mosques hold these sessions daily. The timings of these prayers can be found on the official MUIS website, and some mosques also display the prayer timings at the mosque entrance. In any situation of doubt, do approach mosque staff to enquire and for their advice.

Dietary Practice

Food that Muslims consume must be prepared in accordance with *Halal* laws, which govern not only the ingredients used but also the manner of preparation. This includes ensuring that utensils and surfaces have not come into direct contact with *haram* (forbidden) substances, and that meat is slaughtered according to Islamic rites.

To simplify, the key categories of *haram* food and substances can be remembered using the acronym ABCDIS:

- A: Amphibians
- B: Blood, or birds of prey
- C: Carnivorous animals
- D: Dead animals (carrion), or animals not slaughtered according to Islamic rites
- I: Intoxicants, or food immolated unto idols
- S: Swine

It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list, and *halal* requirements extend beyond ingredients alone to encompass handling, preparation, and storage practices as well.

In Singapore, MUIS is the sole authority empowered to issue *halal* certificates. For ease of reference, look out for the MUIS *Halal* certification mark when sourcing *halal*-certified food options locally.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Hari Raya Puasa or Hari Raya *Aidilfitri*	Hari Raya *Aidilfitri* is celebrated as a joyous thanksgiving to commemorate the completion of *Ramadan*; the sacred month of fasting where Muslims abstain from food, drink, and sensual pleasures from dawn to dusk. Fasting is a divine obligation designed to cultivate *taqwa* (God-consciousness), teaching the soul self-restraint, discipline, and patience. Beyond individual spiritual growth, the physical experience of hunger fosters profound empathy for the less fortunate, inspiring greater charity and reminding believers to be deeply grateful for the countless blessings *Allah* has bestowed upon them. Thus, entering *Aidilfitri* is not just a cultural festivity, but a celebration of spiritual victory.
Hari Raya Haji or Hari Raya *Aidiladha*	Hari Raya *Aidiladha* represents a celebration of *Sunnatullah* — divinely ordained patterns and moral laws through which *Allah* governs the universe, and part of it includes immensely rewarding unwavering faith, servitude, and obedience. This is beautifully mirrored in the story of Prophets Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael), which forms the spiritual foundation of Hari Raya *Aidiladha*. When Prophet Ibrahim was commanded by *Allah* to sacrifice his beloved son Ismail whom he had waited for through decades of longing, neither father nor son wavered. Their absolute submission was born of a profound conviction: they understood that while human perspective is severely limited, *Allah* is All-Knowing and operates within a perfect, universal grand scheme. They knew that the Creator of all would never decree harm for His devoted servants. By immediately obeying, they observed a cornerstone of *Sunnatullah*: that the true sacrifice, obedience, and submission to Allah is not met with loss, but with divine mercy, elevated honour, and eternal reward. It is this very cornerstone that is commemorated during Hari Raya *Aidiladha*.

Festival	Significance
New Year or *Muharram*, or the Day of *Asyura*	*Muharram* means "forbidden" or "sacred" in Arabic. In the Islamic calendar, *Muharram* is the first month of the year and one of the four sacred months ordained by *Allah*. Falling within this month is the day of *Asyura*; meaning "ten" - designating specifically the tenth day of *Muharram*. While both major sects of Islam -Sunnis and Shi'is recognise the profound significance of this day, they commemorate it through markedly different historical focal points and religious observances: Sunnis observe *Asyura* primarily as a day of expressing gratitude, observing worship, and engaging in deep reflection on divine salvation. The day commemorates *Allah's* miraculous deliverance of Prophet Musa (Moses) and the Children of Israel from the tyranny of the Pharaoh by parting the Red Sea. In expression of gratitude, Sunnis observe a voluntary fast on the 10th of *Muharram*, traditionally coupled with the 9th (and sometimes the 11th) to maintain distinctiveness in practice. While Sunnis deeply revere the household of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and acknowledge the tragedy of Karbala with profound sorrow, they do not observe ritual mourning or public lamentation on this day. For Shi'i Muslims, *Asyura* is a solemn day of collective mourning and remembrance. It marks the tragic martyrdom of Husayn — the beloved grandson of Prophet Muhammad- along with his family and companions at the Battle of Karbala. Shi'is commemorate the day through solemn gatherings, elegiac poetry, sermons recounting the events of Karbala, and processionals expressing awe, respect, reverence, and solidarity with Husayn's stand against injustice and tyranny.

What you need to know!

Some celebrations may be more closed to non-Muslims, while others, like community events during *Ramadan*, might be open. Offering dates or fruits and greeting with "Ramadan Mubarak" during the fasting month or "Eid Mubarak" during Hari Raya *Aidilfitri* and *Aidiladha* might be appropriate. As for the arrival of *Muharram*, you may opt to say "Happy Hijri New Year".

Marriage

Marriage ceremonies in Islam and as practiced in Singapore is divided into two parts. First part is the solemnisation of the couple which is called the *Nikah* session. The *Nikah* session is done by the *Kadi* appointed by Registry of Muslim Marriages (ROMM). During this session, the *Kadi* will give a short sermon and advice based on Islamic teachings and moral values. The couple will then be solemnised upon both their agreement by the *Kadi*, alongside two witnesses and the bride's representative or the *Wali*. Once the *Nikah* is done, the second part of the marriage ceremony takes place, and it is called the *Walimah*. Usually for the *Nikah* session, it is attended only by immediate family members and close friends of the bride and groom. *Walimah* is the ceremony for extended family members, neighbours, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and others that are invited to celebrate the couple. The newly wed will be seated on the dais as guests enjoy the food and meet with one another.

Funeral

When a Muslim dies, the body will be cleansed, dressed in a white cloth, and buried as soon as possible. The burial takes place at the Muslim cemetery, and a short sermon or *talqin* is given to those around. Islam prohibits for bodies of the deceased to be cremated and autopsied (unless unavoidable and necessary). Death in Islam means that the body is separated from its soul (*ruh*). Muslims believe in the hereafter and that life on earth is just a phase before the Day of Judgement.

Who can you approach?
Masjids or The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS)

Religious Denominations

In Islam, schools of Islamic theology and jurisprudence are divided into several groups. The two more prominent groups in Singapore are the *Sunni* and the *Shi'i*. Among the *Sunni*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanafi* schools of thought are predominantly practiced amongst the Malay and Indian Muslims respectively.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

The Muslims refer to the Holy Quran as the primary source of religious, moral, and spiritual guidance to live their daily lives.

The Holy Quran consists of 114 chapters, with stories from the past, the rules and codes of Islamic rituals, and the moral values *Allah* has taught humankind.

Readers are kindly advised to handle these scriptures with respect, observing the same standards of cleanliness and care practiced by Muslims. This means ensuring one's hands are washed and clean, and that the reading surface is clean as well. Out of respect for the sacred text, avoid resting the book on the floor, and keep it elevated on a clean table or stand with nothing stacked on top of it.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes, with many original and translated e-versions can be found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

In Islamic tradition, cross-gender physical boundaries are observed out of profound respect for personal and interpersonal modesty. The dignified course is to maintain effortless composure: meet the encounter with upright poise, and should a handclasp be declined, pivot seamlessly to an elegant, non-contact acknowledgment, bearing in mind that the declining of a handshake conveys no disrespect or discourtesy, but rather one's steadfastness and fidelity to religious tradition.

Religious Authority

Roles

Mufti: Mufti guides the Singapore Muslim community's religious direction through the issuance of *fatwas*; an authoritative religious ruling on a matter of Islamic jurisprudence.

Imam: Imams are primarily the leaders of congregational prayers in a mosque. More generally, it is a term denoting a religious leader who serves as a religious guide who helps the community members navigate their religious life.

In Singapore, Islamic religious teachers are termed as asatizah. A male asatizah would be called an Ustaz, while a female asatizah would be called an Ustazah.

What are their salutations?
Mufti, Imam, Ustaz, Ustazah.

Attire

Muslim men may wear traditional attire like the thawb. Muslim women may wear the abaya, hijab, or niqab, depending on cultural and religious practices, as well as personal preferences.

Jainism



Core Belief

Jains believe that nature is alive and every being has a soul or jiva. In the beginning, all jivas were free and not trapped by particles of matter also known as pudgala. But over time, the soul is trapped and reborn endlessly. The only way to break this cycle is by liberating the souls from the bonds and reaching the stage of Jinas. In Jainism, there are 24 teachers known as Jinas or 'Victors' and Tirthankaras or 'Ford Makers'. These weaknesses and reached the highest teachers are believed to have conquered their weaknesses and reached the highest Ahimsa basic principles that Jainism advocates for

1. Non-violence or **Ahimsa**
2. Truth or **Asteya/ Achaurya Satya Brahmacharya**
3. Non-stealing or **Asteya/Achaurya Brahmacharya**
4. Non attachment or **Aparigraha**

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

The **Sthanaks** or **Derasars** are where Jains go to worship. They congregate for prayers and religious discourses. Before worshipping, Jains must be in a pure state called **shudh**. They will take a bath, wear clean clothes, and rinse their mouth with water before entering the Sthanaks or Derasars. No footwear, food, and drinks are allowed in the prayer halls. Smoking, alcohol consumption, and non-vegetarian food (including root vegetables) are prohibited within Sthanaks and Derasars premises.

Where can I find a Jain Sthanak in Singapore?

There is a Jain Sthanak in Singapore – The Singapore Jain Religious Society (SJRS) Sthanak, at 18 Jalan Yasin, Singapore 417991.

What must I observe when visiting a Jain Sthanak?

It is customary to dress modestly and respectfully. Visitors are required to remove their shoes when entering the SJRS Sthanak. It is also encouraged to maintain a reverent demeanour especially during times of rituals or prayers. You can find more of the guidelines provided at the SJRS website https://www.sjrs.org.sg/.

When is the best time to visit a Jain Sthanak?

At the SJRS Sthanak, special prayers called Puja are allowed in the mornings, while Darshan are conducted both during the mornings and evenings. Do check with the SJRS Sthanak beforehand for you to plan your visits accordingly.

Dietary Practice

Jains are strict vegetarians. They also avoid consuming roots of plants, alcohol, and drugs. Cigarettes are also forbidden. Seek vegetarian restaurants or Jain-specific eateries[6].

[6] *You can find the list of Jain-friendly eateries and establishments at https://www.sjrs.org.sg/*

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Mahavir Jayanto	The festival of *Mahavir Jayanto* marks the birth of Lord Mahavir which is the 24th *Tirthankar* of the current time cycle. On this day, religious programmes such as songs, dances and dramas are held. It falls on the 13th day of the 6th month *Chaitra* of the Jain calendar, which usually takes place in March or April.
Ayambil Oli	*Ayambil Oli* is a religious period in the 6th and 12th month of the Jain Calendar, where abstinence and simplicity in food consumption is observed. Volunteers prepare lunch for all who wish to observe all nine days. Devotees take one meal a day at noon, refraining from consuming oil, dairy products, vegetable spices, and drinks (except boiled water) for up to nine days during this festival.
Paryushan	This festival is the most religious eight days of the year in the Jain calendar. It is a period of fasting, abstinence and introspection. During this period, which is usually around September or October, Jain principles are reviewed, and prayers are recited to seek forgiveness from all living beings. Leading speakers and saints are invited to give daily discourses during this period. Devotees can choose to fast in whichever way and for however long they wish to.
Savantasari	On the *Savantasari* (8th day), Jains take part in a detailed, three-hour ceremony of spiritual review and forgiveness from other living beings. The fast is broken jointly on *Samu-Parna*, which is held the day after *Paryushan* ends. Diwali for Jains marks the day when Lord Mahavir attained complete liberation, and the day after Diwali is the New Year or Bestu-Varas. Jains gather on this day for prayers and to celebrate the start of the New Year.

What you need to know!
Some celebrations might be open, and offering donations or participating in community service might be appreciated. Greetings such as "Happy Mahavir Jayanti" might be suitable.

Marriage

Jains follow wedding rituals that are similar to the Indian traditions and culture. Families and friends gather for a traditional marriage ceremony and celebrate the joyous occasion. More recently, civil marriages are also accepted in Jainism.

Funeral

Jains bodies that are deceased will be cremated as soon as possible. Before cremation, the body is washed, dressed in clean clothes, and covered in a white cloth. Prior to cremation, families and friends will gather at the home of the deceased. Hymns and prayers are offered for the departed. Within 2-3 days of the cremation, a prayer session will usually be held at the home of the deceased or at the Sthanaks and Derasars.

Who can you approach?
The Singapore Jain Religious Society.

Religious Denominations

There are several different Jain sects in Singapore broadly categorised as Sthanakvasi, Deravasi, Terapanthi and Digambar. While the universal Jain beliefs are common across the various sects, some differences are present in the manner of prayers and interpretations of the religious texts.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

The sacred book for Jains is known as the Agams — A compilation of sacred books written 150-200 years after the nirvana of Lord Mahavir.

The Agams cover various topics such as spiritual conduct, philosophy, ethics and rituals.

Readers are advised to have general respect when handling these scriptures.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes, with e-versions can be found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Social interaction might vary. Some adherents may prefer not to have physical contact due to religious reasons.

Religious Authority

Roles

No religious clergy within Jainism. However, they do have priests who only assist in rituals and do not hold special status within the faith.

What are their salutations?
No specific salutations.

Attire

Jains might wear unstitched cloth pieces over their mouth and nose to prevent accidental harming of small organisms.

Judaism



Core Belief

Judaism emphasises on being a practical religion. The Jewish religious experience is recorded in a series of sacred books, which are more in the nature of a living text than a finished literary product. First among them is the Hebrew bible with the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) as the main reference. Over subsequent centuries, a large body of Rabbinic tradition or The *Talmud* is now also a reference of commentaries and codes for Jews. As the prophets of Israel insisted that only he who showed justice, love and mercy was truly acquainted with God, and the Pentateuch demands the "doing of all the words of this law" rather than the focusing on "secret things which are the Lord's", right actions are promoted over contemplation. This has been the central theme of Judaism. Judaism is also split into a variety of groups, ranging from strict orthodoxy which guards tradition to radical reform.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Jews worship in the synagogue. In the synagogue, three daily prayers are conducted. Morning prayer, afternoon prayer, and evening prayer are timings that coincide with the sacrifice timings offered in the ancient temple. During morning services, the phylacteries or *tefillin* and a prayer shawl (*tallit*) are worn. Jews also observe their Sabbath which begins at sunset on Friday and lasts until Saturday night. During the Sabbath, Jews are supposed to abstain from a number of forbidden labours and devote their time to prayers and studying the Torah. When entering a synagogue, all males, both visitors and devotees, must wear the skull caps or *kippah*. If they do not have one, they must at least cover their heads. For women, they are expected to dress modestly. Usually, they will not offer a handshake to the rabbi.

Where can I find a Synagogue in Singapore?

There are two synagogues in Singapore – the Mahgain Aboth Synagogue and the Chesed-El Synagogue.

What must I observe when visiting a Synagogue?

It is advisable to dress conservatively and modestly. In Orthodox Jewish settings, there may be separation between males and females during religious services. Be aware of these practices and follow any guidelines regarding gender separation. It is also important to note that we should maintain quiet and reverent demeanour during prayers or services and not disrupt the congregations.

When is the best time to visit a Synagogue?

You may visit the synagogues during their religious services or educational programmes. Do plan ahead by contacting the synagogue for visiting hours.

Dietary Practice

Jews are commanded to adhere to the Kosher dietary laws, both organic and processed foods must be labeled with a Kosher supervision seal or logo (*hechsher*), which guarantees that the kosher production protocols were properly applied. Kosher involves avoiding certain foods like pork or shellfish and separating dairy and meat. Kosher-supervised restaurants, like Awafi Restaurant Singapore, are suitable for your Jewish friends.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Rosh Hashanah or New Year	*Rosh Hashanah* or New Year is the celebration of the birthday of the human race. It is also believed as a day of judgement for all mankind.
Yom Kippur	Ten days of *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* is then celebrated as the Day of Atonement. *Sukkot*, the Feast of the Tabernacles, follows five days after *Yom Kippur*, which culminates with *Simchat Torah*, the completion of the yearly cycle of the reading of the Torah.
Historical moments of celebrations	Jews celebrate multiple festivals to commemorate victories and historical moments in Jewish history. 1) *Hanukkah* celebrates the victory over Syrian Greek oppression, 2) *Purim* celebrates the victory over *Haman* and deliverance from extermination, 3) *The Passover* is the seven- or eight-day celebration of freedom from enslavement in Egypt, and 4) *Shavuot* commemorates the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

What you need to know!
Participation might vary; being respectful is key. Gifts might include kosher sweets or wine. Greetings such as "Happy Hanukkah" or "Shanah Tovah" for the Jewish New Year might be appropriate.

Marriage

Jewish weddings are held under the *Chupah* canopy which is held by four poles. This canopy symbolises a Jewish home as the couple stands under it. The marriage ceremony includes the *Erussin* and the reading of the *Ketubah*, the marriage contract. This contract is for the husband to feed, clothe, and care for his wife. A ring will then be placed on the bride's finger. The rabbi will then recite the seven blessings.

Funeral

When a Jew is deceased, the body will be ritually washed and wrapped in a plain linen shroud. At the funeral, there is never an open casket. The *Tallit* is worn and buried with the body. During the memorial service at the gravesite, the rabbi delivers an eulogy, family members or friends can also choose to deliver eulogies. The rabbi also recites prayers at the service and leads the family in the mourner's kaddish. Visitors of the grave usually leave a small stone at the headstone as a mark of respect to the deceased.

Who can you approach?
Local synagogues or Jewish organisations, for example, Maghain Aboth Synagogue or Jewish Welfare Board Singapore.

Religious Denominations

The Jewish community in Singapore mainly follows the Sephardic Orthodox and welcomes all denominations of Jews.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

Jews' primary scripture is The Tanakh and consists of the Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

The Tanakh includes laws, history, prophecy, and poetry.

Readers are advised to have general respect when handling these scriptures.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes, with many e-versions can be found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Handshaking is typically acceptable but be mindful of individual preferences, especially in more traditional or Orthodox settings.

Religious Authority

Roles

Jews would be led by a Rabbi during religious congregation. Rabbis would also interpret religious texts and offer guidance on Jewish law and tradition.

What are their salutations?
Rabbi.

Attire

Some Jewish men wear the *Kippah* (skull cap) as a sign of reverence. They might also wear a *Tallit* (prayer shawl) during prayers. You might find Orthodox Jewish women wearing modest attire and covering their hair with headscarves.

Sikhism



Core Belief

Sikhs believe in one God and the teachings of the 'Ten Gurus' which are enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak in 1469, and the word Sikh means a learner or a disciple.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

The place of worship for Sikhs is called a *gurdwara*. In the Gurdwara, there are sacred writings of the Sikh religion, in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* which is also called The Guru. This is compiled by the Sikh Gurus themselves. Apart from scriptures, there are no idols or pictures, even of Sikh gurus that are allowed for worship. Sikhs can pray anytime, and there are prayers dedicated for the morning, preferably before sunrise, in the evening before sunset, and before retiring to bed at night. They may perform prayers in the Gurdwara or at home. When in the Gurdwara, men and women bow in front of the guru Granth Sahib Ji and sit on the carpeted prayer hall. It is mandatory for anyone visiting a Gurdwara to remove his/her footwear at the dedicated area and cover his/her head with a scarf/handkerchief or 'patka'.



Where can I find a Gurdwara in Singapore?

Singapore hosts 7 Sikh temples, Gurdwaras, for the Sikh community. The Central Sikh Temple at Towner Road is a prominent Gurdwara where local communities can visit and convene for communal activities with facilities such as dining halls and a meeting room.

What must I observe when visiting a Gurdwara?

It is mandatory to follow proper etiquette, which may include covering your head with a headscarf or similar headcovering, removing your shoes, and dressing modestly. It is important to participate respectfully, whether it's through prayer or following the lead of the Granthi (Sikh priest). Gurdwaras also offer free communal meals (*langgar*) to all visitors, and participating in *langgar* is a way to show respect. These 'free' meals are sponsored by the offerings of devotees. Offering your assistance in serving or preparing food for langar is considered a gesture of goodwill and respect.

When is the best time to visit a Gurdwara?

As always, it is recommended to check with Gurdwara beforehand for you to plan your visits accordingly. If you are planning a group visit, it is best to do so during a 'quiet' time. However, if you are doing a solo visit, you can visit anytime between 7am to 7pm when the Gurdwara staff or members of the sangat may be able to assist you.

Dietary Practice

Only vegetarian diet meals known collectively as '*langgar*' are prepared and served in the Gurdwara. Sikhs are prohibited to consume intoxicants. Sikhs might also avoid *Halal* and Kosher meats but otherwise have no strict dietary restrictions. Look for restaurants serving fresh, wholesome foods. Many Sikhs are also vegetarian.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Vesakhi	*Vesakhi* also known as *Vaisakhi* or *Baisakhi* is celebrated either on the 13th or 14th of April every year in the Gregorian calendar. This celebration commemorates the setting up of the order of the *Khalsa* brotherhood and the Sikh way of life. This day symbolises a key event for the Sikh community as it commemorates the establishment of their religion and identity. On *Vesakhi* day, Sikhs gather in their Gurdwaras to listen to hymns or *Kirtans*, attend talks and listen to prayers and readings from the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Other community-based activities, such as sports and cultural activities are usually organised as well.

What you need to know!
Many festivities are open to all. Donations, offering seva (selfless service), or bringing fruits or sweets could be appreciated. Greetings like "Happy Vaisakhi" or "Gurpurab di vadayeeu " might be suitable.

Marriage

The Sikh wedding ceremony is known as the *Anand Karaj* or Sikh Anand Marriage Ceremony. This ceremony can only take place in the Gurdwaras, in the morning. The solemnisation will take place in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the holy congregation known as *sangat*, with members of the community as witnesses.

The ceremony begins as hymns are sung in the Darbar (prayer hall). Both the couple and their parents will stand for prayers to be recited to mark the start of the ceremony. The father of the bride then places the sash or *palla* in the couple's hands to signify the joining of the two individuals. The couple then proceeds to walk around the Guru Granth Sahib Ji for four times. For every round, one of the four prescribed verses or *lavaans* is recited and sung. The significance of the four rounds symbolises 1) entering the marriage with mutual respect, 2) enduring love for each other and God, 3) detachment from pride and worldly desires and growth of devotion to God, and 4) harmony in married life leading to union with God. To conclude the ceremony, hymns are sung and an Ardas or supplication is made and 'parshad' distributed to all present. The couple and their parents then leave the Darbar hall to meet guests outside the hall. Guests congratulate and give their blessings to the couple here.

Funeral

The body of a deceased Sikh is washed, dressed in clean clothes, and covered with a sheet. Sikhs are allowed to pray for the deceased but not allowed to wail. Sikhs believe that death is a natural process that everyone will go through, and it is best done peacefully. At the crematorium, supplications or the *Ardas* is recited for the deceased. This includes the *Kirtan Sohila* which is an anthology of terminal hymns. After the body has been cremated, other *ardas* will be recited when relatives and friends head to and gather at the Gurdwara for the remembrance prayer, and the reading of Guru Granth Sahib Ji. One day after the cremation of the body, the ashes will be collected from the crematorium and usually dispersed at sea. Upon conclusion of the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, a *Bhog* ceremony is held, marking the end of the funeral procession.

Who can you approach?
Local Gurdwaras or Sikh organisations, like Central Sikh Temple or Sikh Advisory Board.

Religious Denominations

Mainly following the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh community in Singapore is united with no distinctive denominations visible.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

The primary scripture is the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

The Guru Granth Sahib contains hymns, prayers, and teachings from Sikh Gurus and other saints, including those from other faith traditions such as Hinduism and Islam.

When handling the physical book, readers are advised to handle with respect, clean hands and with reverence. Head should be covered as well, and scriptures should not be placed on the ground.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes, with many e-versions can be found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Handshaking is generally acceptable across genders.

Religious Authority

Roles

Sikhs have Granthis who lead congregational worship and ceremonies in Gurdwaras, and the Panj Pyare (Five Beloved Ones) can also lead religious rites.

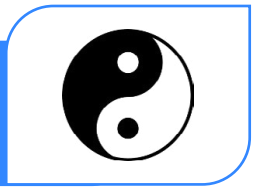
A Granthi is a ceremonial reader of the Guru Granth Sahib. It is someone — a man or woman — who can read the Guru Granth Sahib, which is in the Gurmukhi script. A granthi leads daily worship.

What are their salutations?
Granthi.

Attire

Sikhs, both men and women, would usually wear the Bana (a modest traditional attire). Sikh men can be identified usually with a turban on their heads.

Taoism



Core Belief

Taoism is both a philosophy and religion indigenous to China. It is often linked back to the philosopher Lao Tzu. Throughout history, Taoism has exerted a powerful influence over Chinese culture. Historical evidence indicates that the superior traditions of Taoism philosophies, with widespread and enduring influence, have long been nurturing and soaking the spiritual world amidst the human world. As an intrinsic force to promote social harmony and human development, Taoism has been playing a positive role in aspiring social progress and encouraging national advance.

Taoism holds that humans and animals should live in balance with the Tao. While the Tao can be difficult to define, it is understood as the way of the universe. Taoism teaches that all living creatures ought to live in a state of harmony with the universe, and the energy found in it. Chi, or Qi, is the energy present in the universe and guides everything in it. The Tao Te Ching and other Taoist books serve as guides for the behavioural and spiritual methodology of living in harmony with this energy.

All in all, the Tao aims to equip its practitioners with the tools by which to live their lives. The core of Taoism is to reject hatred and intolerance of human differences and live with balance, harmony, perspective, and compassion. While violence is not precluded in Taoism, it is a last resort. By increasing self-awareness and reducing the influence of ego, which is often at the heart of conflict, Taoism promotes peace within and without.

Taoists are polytheistic. They worship Shen which is gods, Xian which is immortals, and Sheng which is saints. The deities belong to three realms: 1) Wu ji or Limitless Realm, 2) Tai ji or Great Realm, and 3) Xian Shi or Terrestrial Realm. In Singapore, the more popular Taoist gods worshipped are the Jade Emperor and Guan Gong. Taoism seeks to use its teachings to bring forth the innate goodness in every individual and believes that every person is capable of attaining unity through self-cultivation. Taoism is learning about the ways of self-cultivation in order to achieve Tao and practising the teachings of Taoism. The essential message of Taoism is that the universe is governed by a set of natural and unalterable laws, which manifest themselves as a flow of continuous change. This natural order is referred to as the Tao. By recognising and aligning with these laws, one can attain a state of being and achieve harmony with the cosmos. Taoism's main precepts are loyalty and filial piety.

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

To all corners of the world, Taoism's influence has gradually spread far beyond the borders of China. Taoism is a major religion in Taiwan and many Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. In its birthplace, Taoism is one of the five religious doctrines accepted by the People's Republic of China, including its special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau.

In Singapore, Taoism spearheaded by the migration of the Chinese population it was initially more influenced by Dialect group, ancestry and surnames. The more popular Taoist gods worshipped are the Jade Emperor and Guan Gong. Taoism seeks to use its teachings to bring forth the innate goodness in every individual and believes that every person is capable of attaining unity through self-cultivation. Taoism is learning about the ways of self-cultivation in order to achieve Tao and practising the teachings of Taoism. The essential message of Taoism is that the universe is governed by a set of natural and unalterable laws, which manifest themselves as a flow of continuous change. This natural order is referred to as the Tao. By recognising and aligning with these laws, one can attain a state of being and achieve harmony with the cosmos. Taoism's main precepts are Compassion, frugality and humility.

When visiting the temple, devotees are required to wear proper attire and footwear. They must avoid wearing slippers when entering the prayer hall of the temple.

Where can I find a Taoist Temple in Singapore?
There are many Taoist temples in Singapore. A prominent and one of the oldest is the Thian Hock Keng Temple. Other notable ones include the San Ging Qong Temple, Soon Thian Keing Temple and Hong San See Temple.

What must I observe when visiting a Taoist Temple?
Similar to Buddhist Temples, one would need to dress modestly when entering a Taoist Temple. You would also need to remove your shoes before entering certain areas. Silence and respectful behaviours are appreciated during prayers and ceremonies.

When is the best time to visit the Taoist Temple?
Visitors can observe during their prayer times and ceremonies. However, it is always encouraged to check their visiting hours and events that each temple might conduct to ensure an appropriate visit.

Dietary Practice

On special occasions and festive days, Taoists are encouraged to observe a vegetarian diet. Some priests are stricter in their diet and avoid, leeks, shallots, garlic, and onions during periods of special prayers.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Lunar New Year	The Chinese Lunar New Year is not strictly a religious festival but most Chinese, regardless of their faith, celebrate this event. However, during the first and last day of the Lunar New Year, devout Taoists may visit the temples to thank the deities for the past year and to pray for blessings and prosperity for the New Year. It is also a time where the family members gather for the reunion dinner. Chinese traditionally wish one another Happy and Prosperous New Year or *Gong Xi Fa Cai* during this period. Friends and families of other faiths can also wish the Taoists/Chinese community a Happy New Year or *Gong Xi Fa Cai*.
Spring Festival	It is celebrated for 15 days on the 1st month of the Lunar Calendar. The 9th day is the feast day of the Jade Emperor, while the 15th day, the feast day of the Official of Heaven also known as *Chap Goh Mei* or *Yuan Xiao*.
Taoist Day	The Taoist Day is held annually to celebrate the Birthday of Lao Tzu on the 15th day of 2nd lunar month.
Nine Emperor Gods Festival	The Nine Emperor Gods Festival is generally held from the last day of the eighth lunar month to the ninth day of the ninth lunar month among Chinese communities. It begins with the welcoming of the gods into the temple where they are to be worshipped for nine days and ends when the gods are sent off on the ninth day. The festival is known for the temple processions that take place during the celebrations. The oldest and most prominent temple in Singapore dedicated to the Nine Emperor Gods is the Hougang Tou Mu Temple on Upper Serangoon Road.

What you need to know!
Participation might vary. Incense or symbolic gifts could be suitable. Greetings may include "Happy Qingming" or "Happy Ghost Festival."

Marriage

Most Chinese, including the Taoists, may follow the traditional Chinese cultural wedding ceremony. On the wedding day, the bridegroom and best man will go to the home of the bride. At the door, friends of the bride test the worthiness of the bridegroom with questions. The groom has to agree to offer red packets for good luck in order to gain entry into the bride's residence. At the home of the bridegroom, prayers and offerings are made to Heaven and Earth before the family altar honouring the ancestors and worshipping the deities. The couple then offers cups of tea to their parents and the elders in the family during the tea ceremony. After receiving the tea, the elders give them their blessings and good wishes and red packets or jewellery for good luck. An important part of the wedding is the Tea Ceremony. In the evening, the traditional wedding banquet is held, and the bride, bridegroom, and their parents offer toasts to the guests.

Funeral

In a traditional Chinese wake, the coffin is placed either inside the house or in the courtyard outside. The coffin is sealed and placed with the feet of the deceased towards the entrance of the house. Wreaths, gifts and a portrait or photograph of the deceased are placed at the coffin. Food is placed in front of the coffin as an offering to the deceased. During the wake, the family does not wear jewelry or red clothing.

Special clothing is worn by children and daughters-in-law wear black (signifying that they grieve the most), grandchildren blue and great grandchildren light green. Sons-in-law wear white or light coloured clothing, as they are not directly related to the deceased. The children and daughters-in-law also wear a hood of sackcloth over their heads. An altar with burning incense and a lit white candle is placed at the foot of the coffin. Joss paper and prayer money for the deceased in the next life are burnt continuously throughout the wake. Funeral guests are invited to light incense for the deceased and to bow as a sign of respect to the family. Death is believed to be not the end of life but the beginning of the next stage in life in a spiritual form.

Traditionally, Taoists follow the burial ritual, but many in Singapore are now increasingly choosing to cremate the deceased. The cremated remains are then placed in Taoist temples or columbaria as an eternal place of rest for the deceased. The priests will chant verses from Taoist scriptures. It is believed that the souls of the dead face many obstacles, torments and torture before they are allowed to enter into the next life. The prayers, chanting and rituals offered help to smoothen the passage of the deceased person's soul into heaven. These prayers are accompanied by music played on the gong, flute, and trumpet. As a mark of respect, money in white envelopes is usually given to the family. It helps to reduce the family burden of the funeral. Family members may throw a handful of earth into the grave before it is filled. After the funeral, all clothes worn by the mourners will be burned in order to avoid the bad luck associated with death. Family members and friends are presented with a red packet or red string as a sign of good luck.

Who can you approach?
Taoist temples in Singapore, such as Ying Fo Fui Kun, or the Taoist Federation (Singapore).

Religious Denominations

The Singapore Taoist community might engage in both the philosophical and religious traditions, incorporating a blend of teachings and practices from different branches. You might find a diverse community within this religion locally.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

Taoist texts include the Tao Te Ching and the Zhuangzi.

These texts contain philosophical teachings, anecdotes, and wisdoms.

Readers are advised to have general respect when handling these scriptures.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Yes, with limited English translations found online.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Social interactions are typically unrestricted but be mindful of some individual preferences.

Religious Authority

Roles

Taoist priests perform religious ceremonies, conduct rituals, and provide spiritual guidance to followers.

What are their salutations?
Master.

Attire

No specific religious attire for both men and women.

Zoroastrianism



Core Belief

Zoroastrians believe in *Ahura Mazda* as the Almighty God which revealed the religion to Lord Zarathustra. The basic religious tenets are Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds, also known as *Humata Hukhta Huvarshta*. At the central point of the Zoroastrian beliefs, there is a duality of conflicting forces between Spenta Mainyu, the force of good, versus Angra Mainyu, the force of evil and darkness.

Another important Zoroastrian belief is that time is divided into three ages. 1) the spiritual state of creation where all are believed to be created pure, 2) the period of struggle between good and evil in the physical world, and 3) the coming era, when Ahura Mazda will win and the forces of evil will perish, all will be restored to a state of joy and immortality.

1. the spiritual state of creation where all are believed to be created pure
2. the period of struggle between good and evil in the physical world
3. the coming era, when *Ahura Mazda* will win and the forces of evil will perish, all will be restored to a state of joy and immortality

Place of Worship and its Etiquette

Zoroastrians pray at the Fire Temple or places of worship designated for prayers and sacred ceremonies. These places of worship are called *Agiary* or *Atash Behram*. As there is no Fire Temple in Singapore, worship in Singapore is only conducted in private homes. In a Zoroastrian place of worship or Fire Temple, shoes are to be removed and the head must be covered with a cap or a scarf. Before entering the prayer hall, one must wash their hands and feet and do a Kasti prayer. In the innermost sanctum there is a fire on a central altar. This symbolises God's presence and radiant energy. The fire is kept burning day and night and the ashes of the fire are offered to the congregation and applied to the forehead of the devotees.

Where can I find a Fire Temple in Singapore?

The Zoroastrian House is the only place of worship for Zoroastrians in Singapore. The property was acquired and renovated by Mr. Homiyar Vasania, a prominent member of the Zoroastrian community in Singapore, who graciously donated it to the community in April 2011. There is no Fire Temple in Singapore and worship is conducted in private settings.[7]

What must I observe when visiting a Zoroastrian House?

Zoroastrians consider fire as a symbol of purity and divinity. If visiting the Zoroastrian House, follow proper etiquette, which may include dressing modestly and maintaining a respectful demeanour. Show respect for any symbols portrayed at the House and avoid touching them without permission.

When is the best time to visit a Zoroastrian House?

You may wish to check-in with the place before coming down for a visit. Primarily, weekly prayers are conducted every Sunday by the Priest, known as Dasturji.

[7] *www.iccs.sg/visit-singapore/places-of-worship/zoroastrian-house/*

Dietary Practice

Zoroastrians have no dietary restrictions, although some might avoid certain meats and foods, and some might observe a vegetarian diet. They do not fast as they believe that the body needs to be well nourished to carry out daily activities. You may wish to seek restaurants serving Middle Eastern or Persian cuisine.

Festivals

Festival	Significance
Ghambar which translates to "full time" or "proper season"	These Parsi festivals honour the seasons because they are responsible for the prosperity of humanity and they occur six times a year. During these rituals, tribute is paid to the phases in the creation of the world. Each phase of heaven, water, earth, flora, fauna and man is associated with one Gahambar and is celebrated over five days. Those who participate are expected to remember the blessings bestowed by the seasons and also the seven main acts that a good Parsi must perform which are 1) radih or to give charity, 2) rastih or to be truthful 3) to celebrate the Gahambars 4) to observe the four days ceremony after death, 5) to worship God, 6) to build lodgings for the poor, and 7) The Ghambar festival is expected to remind them of the feelings of brotherhood.
Navroz or New Year	*Navroz* is celebrated as a New Year feast by the Parsis of India and is inherited from Zoroastrian Persia. The day of celebration falls on March 21st, which coincides with the spring equinox, and it is called Jamshedi Navroz. It is a festival observed for the onset of spring. People join nature in making a fresh start, full of joy and hope for the coming year.

What you need to know!

Participation might vary. Symbolic gifts like flowers or candles might be suitable. Greetings such as "Nowruz Pirouz" for the New Year might be appropriate.

Marriage

Marriage ceremonies of Zoroastrians are celebrated with the presence of a specially called assembly, the *Anjuman Jastaisted*. The priest officiating the marriage will then question the married couple for their consent to be united in the marriage. By joining their hands, he unites them through a process called *Hathevaro*. This hand-fastening ceremony takes place where a raw twist is passed seven times around the couple, and then it is passed seven times round the knot of the cloth which passes around their chairs. During this process, the sacred prayer of Yatha Ahu Vairyo is recited. Finally, the process is followed by a benediction or address (which may be repeated in Sanskrit), accompanied by the sprinkling of rose petals and rice.

Funeral

Zoroastrians practice the ancient method of sky burial, which is by disposing bodies as far as possible. The body of the deceased is bathed and dressed in the simplest white garment. A dog is shown to the body from a distance at fixed intervals to ward off its defilement. The body will then be brought to the Tower of Silence and placed there. The purpose for leaving the body on the tower is for the vultures to consume. This is a sign and contribution to the life cycle of nature. Zoroastrianism also prohibits cremation as it is a waste of fire and earth's resources. As for the funeral procession of Zoroastrians in Singapore, a dispensation is given as there is a special burial ground for the deceased.

Who can you approach?
Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Singapore.

Religious Denominations

There are no distinctive denominations within the Parsi or Zoroastrian community in Singapore.

Sacred Scriptures

Interacting with sacred scriptures

The primary scripture for Zoroastrians is the *Khordeh Avesta*.

The *Khordeh Avesta* contains *Ahura Mazda's* teachings, teachings to Zoroaster and rituals.

Readers are advised to have general respect and handle these scriptures in the state of cleanliness.

Can I read the scriptures as a non-subscriber to the faith?
Non-subscribers might face restrictions in reading due to its sanctity.

Handshaking with the opposite gender

Handshaking might be acceptable but be mindful of some individual preferences.

Religious Authority

Roles

Zoroastrian high priests, known as Dasturs, conduct religious ceremonies, tend to fire temples and guide followers in Zoroastrian practices.

What are their salutations?
No specific salutations.

Attire

No specific religious attire for both men and women.


Play With Us
Bridges of Faith




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PART FIVE

Working Towards Religious Harmony and Social Cohesion

Quote from Ustazah Liyana Rosli Asmara

> Globalisation and the rise of polarised views and groups will continue to require us to negotiate and deal with differences. As long as we live with a diverse community and in diverse spaces, interfaith engagement continues to remain relevant and important to bridge differences."

Insights from the Parliament of the World's Religions 2023 (https://www.iccs.sg/latest/featureustazahliyanapowr/)

The future of religious harmony will not look exactly like its past.

Communities will change. New generations will ask different questions. Technology will reshape how people encounter faith and authority. Global events will continue to influence local relationships. New forms of identity and belonging may emerge alongside more established religious traditions.

The task is therefore not simply to preserve what has worked before. It is to develop people, communities and relationships capable of responding wisely to what comes next.



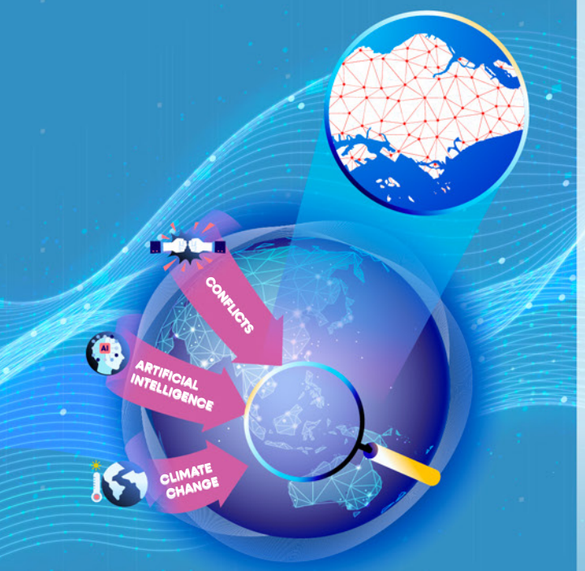
The Enduring Role of Faith in Social Cohesion and Human Flourishing

Celebrating 20 Years of Harmony, Building Peace for Tomorrow

1 VOLATILE WORLD

We live in extremely turbulent times. Our global environment is marked by geopolitical shifts, political divisions and violent conflicts. Rapid technological progress such as artificial intelligence (AI) present opportunities but also raise ethical dilemmas on the protection of human life and livelihood. Human life has become so fragile and we face a rapidly aging society. As a small and open city-state, Singapore must navigate these challenges in an agile and nimble manner.

In light of this, Harmony Centre appointed an Interfaith Futures Workgroup in 2021 to envision the future of social cohesion if faced with different scenarios. The workgroup, made up of interfaith activists, professionals, academics and educators engaged 680 Singaporeans from all walks of life, over a period of 3 years. Together they co-created ideas on how Harmony Centre can continue to play a vital role for peace-building and social cohesion in Singapore.



2 SOCIAL CHANGE NEEDED

People of faith face a great amount of moral dilemmas and challenges in order to live ethically and actively in the world around them.

Situating religion in the world today requires deeper insight into faith which goes beyond the personal capacity. Religion is not just for personal redemption but should also inspire its followers to embrace and care for others, help improve the welfare of their communities, and work towards achieving the common good and improving human life.

Anchored by religious principles that serve as a moral compass, we can build a better community with compassion, centered around human dignity and human flourishing.

Singapore is the most "religiously diverse country in the world" (Pew Research, 2026) and this can lead to a more vibrant and creative society as well as more compassionate ways of living.

After reviewing the feedback and ideas from the public engagement, Harmony Centre then designed its plans within the Theory of Change and an Outcomes Approach that aims to bring about the best social impact for Singaporeans.

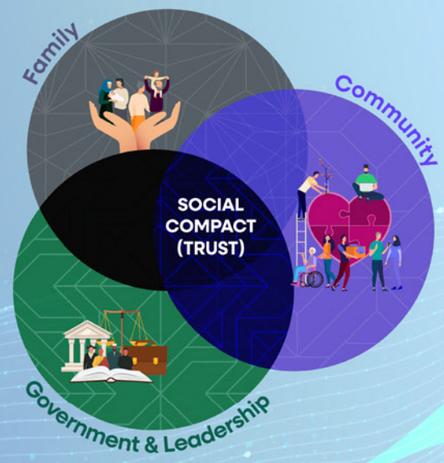
Harmony Centre's Four Focus Areas for the Future are:

1. Mosques as outreach centres for inter-religious understanding and building trust between communities. The Muslim community is an active group of bridge builders.
2. Harmony Centre will focus on relationship-building and trust-making between different groups through deepened engagement and co-creating community-led projects.
3. MUIS and Harmony Centre will be positioned as experts on Interfaith and Islam in Singapore both locally and globally.
4. Harmony Centre becomes a respected institution on understanding faith in public life, a consultant on interfaith, and a driver of social cohesion.



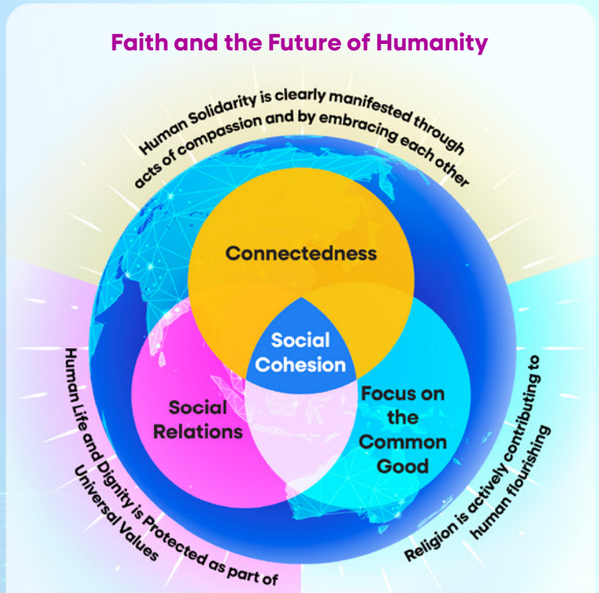
3 SOCIAL COMPACT

The Singapore Muslim Community that Radiates Blessings to All is a key subset of the refreshed Forward Singapore Social Compact, where government, faith leaders and community entrust one another with their respective roles and responsibilities. Together, we can shape the growth of our society both for the present and for the future.



Harmony Centre's Vision for the Future is
Thriving, Interconnected and
Compassionate Faith Communities
in Singapore and Beyond

4 SOCIAL IMPACT



We have a shared stake in our future. This understanding has its roots in a shared sense of humanity which is advanced by all faith traditions.

In inter-religious spaces, the Golden Rule of Reciprocity underpins human relationships that are based on compassion and deep respect. We nurture a more compassionate world when we treat others as sacred, with mutual recognition, each worthy of a dignified life. Using the Stiftung-Bertelsmann framework, social cohesion can be achieved if societies ensure that they uphold good social relations, foster connectedness and focus on achieving the common good.

There have been numerous global interfaith initiatives such as the Common Word, the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace, the Istiqlal Declaration and the ICCS-Singapore Declaration of Religious Harmony. Now, we return to the simple message of **Honouring our Neighbour**, and hope these small simple acts of compassion will have a ripple effect and spread throughout the world as faith continues to uphold human dignity and promote human flourishing. "*...Whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved All of Humanity.*" (Qur'an: 5:32)

Striving for Community and Religious Resilience

Resilience is sometimes understood simply as the ability to withstand difficulty. For religious communities, that definition is too narrow.

A resilient community should be able to remain **grounded in its convictions while responding intelligently to change**. It should possess sufficient confidence not to become fearful whenever society changes, adequate openness to learn, and sufficient relationships with others to navigate uncertainty without retreating into isolation.

Religious resilience should therefore not mean building higher walls around communities. It should mean developing **deeper roots and stronger bridges**. Deep roots give people identity, purpose, ethical guidance and confidence. Strong bridges allow communities to relate to others, learn, cooperate and remain connected when tensions arise. Both matter.

A community with bridges but weak roots may struggle to understand what it brings to the relationship. A community with strong roots but no bridges may become increasingly disconnected from the society around it. Resilience lies in holding the two together.

Resilient Communities are Relational Communities

Community resilience depends upon trust. Singapore's social cohesion does not rest only on whether individual communities are internally strong. It also depends upon the quality of relationships **between** communities, their sense of connectedness and their willingness to contribute towards the common good. Harmony Centre's social-impact framework similarly links social cohesion with social relations, connectedness and a focus on shared wellbeing.

This matters especially during periods of strain.

A global conflict may generate strong emotions locally. An act of extremism may provoke fear. A religious controversy may create misunderstanding. Technology may spread an inflammatory message before communities have time to respond.

Resilience does not mean that communities will never feel tension. It means that tension does not immediately destroy the relationships that have been built.

Religious leaders can call one another. Friends can ask rather than assume. Community organisations can respond together. People have enough confidence in one another to resist narratives that seek to divide them. That kind of resilience is created before the crisis.

Faith as a Resource for Resilience

Religious communities also possess resources that can help societies navigate uncertainty. Faith can offer meaning when circumstances are difficult. Religious traditions can cultivate compassion, hope, discipline, responsibility and concern for people beyond the self. They can mobilise communities to serve, care and respond to human need.

We should place faith within a wider concern for **human flourishing**. Religion is understood not only in terms of the believer's personal life, but also through its ability to inspire care for others, protect dignity and contribute towards the common good.

This outward orientation will become increasingly important. The challenges ahead — whether technological, environmental, social or geopolitical — will rarely belong to one religious community alone. Our responses cannot remain confined within those boundaries either.

Carrying the Work Forward

The future will require religious communities that are grounded without becoming closed, confident without becoming dismissive, and adaptable without losing their moral centre.

It will require practitioners who can understand emerging differences, create meaningful encounters and hold difficult conversations. It will require institutions that preserve knowledge while making space for new leadership.

And it will require relationships strong enough to endure moments when communities do not see the world in the same way.

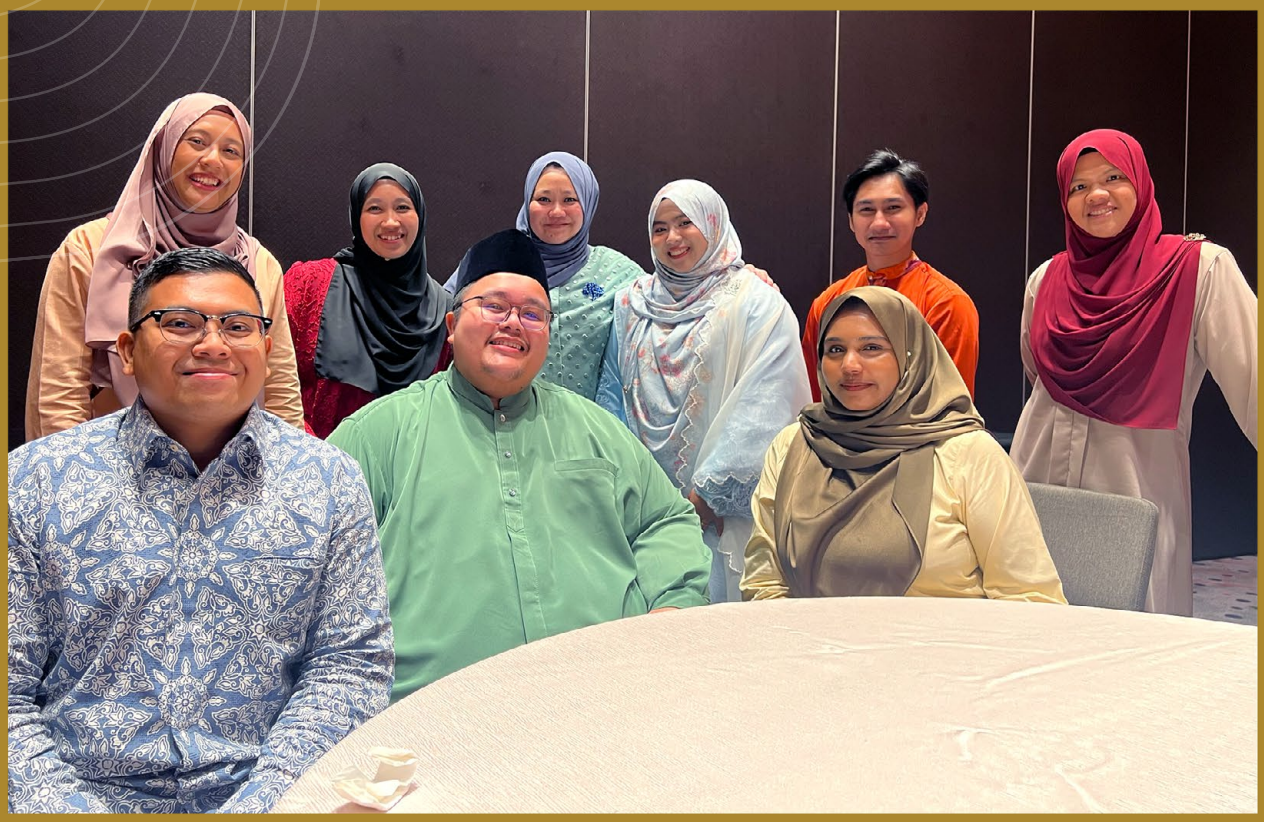
Harmony Centre aspires for **Thriving Interconnected Faith Communities.**

That aspiration brings JIRAN back to where it began: **the neighbour**.

We cannot know every challenge our neighbours will face, nor can we know every difference that future generations will have to navigate. We can, however, strengthen the habits that will help us meet those futures well: curiosity instead of assumption, dignity instead of dismissal, relationship instead of distance, contribution instead of indifference, and the willingness to return to one another when relationships are tested.

The next chapter of religious harmony will be written by people who inherit what previous generations have built. The task is not simply to keep the picture as it is.

It is to care for what has been joined, repair what becomes strained, and make space for the pieces that have yet to arrive.

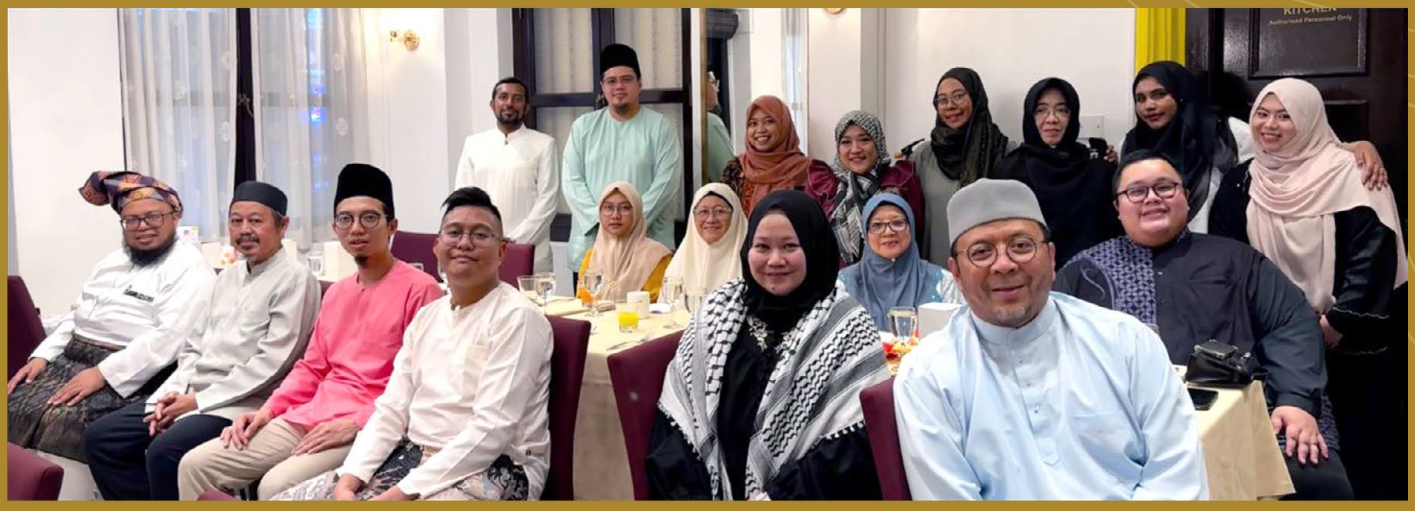



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Glossary

Acronym	Meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CCE	Character and Citizenship Education
FAITH	Faith in the Heartlands
HA	Harmony Centre
IRCC	Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle, the former name of Harmony Circle
JIRAN	Joining In, Respecting All Neighbours
MCCY	Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOSAIC	Map the Landscape; Open Safe and Contributing Spaces; Strengthen Relationships; Advance and Nurture Trust; Initiate Shared Purpose; Continue What Has Been Built
MRHA	Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act
MUIS	Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, also known as the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore
RICAP	Resilience, Inclusiveness, Contributiveness, Adaptability and Progressiveness
SMI	Singapore Muslim Identity

About the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore

Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura
(Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)

The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth (MCCY) and comes under the direct purview of the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs. MUIS' main role is to advise the President of Singapore on all matters pertaining to Islamic affairs in Singapore and to manage all aspects of religious life of the Singapore Muslim Community.

Its aim is to establish a Muslim community of excellence that is religiously profound and socially progressive, and that thrives in a multi-religious society, secular state and globalised world. It seeks to forge a Singapore Muslim identity which is progressive, inclusive, adaptive and contributive. It champions forward-looking discourse in Islam and promotes interfaith understanding through community engagement initiatives to enhance the social cohesion and well-being of the nation.

About the Harmony Centre

The Harmony Centre was officially opened by Singapore's then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 7 October 2006. The Centre is an initiative of The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) to promote better understanding of Muslim life and culture as a response to the post-September 11 era. It addresses queries and misconceptions about Islam and the Singaporean Muslim community.

In partnership with Singapore's Ministry of Education, the Centre has become a learning hub under the national education scheme, welcoming over 78,000 visitors to date. It serves as a meeting point for various faith communities, fostering dialogue and understanding through diverse educational programmes. Notable initiatives include Faith in the Heartlands (F.A.I.T.H), the Building Bridges Series, as well as the Abdul Aleem Siddiqui Memorial Lectures. The Centre also facilitates discussions between youth and faith leaders on religious and contemporary issues, nurturing cross-community friendships and cultivating appreciation for diverse beliefs and practices.

The Centre's efforts are particularly significant in Singapore's multi-religious context, where it plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony. By providing a platform for open dialogue and education, this approach aligns with Singapore's commitment to religious harmony, making the Harmony Centre a vital institution in the nation's ongoing efforts to maintain social cohesion in an increasingly complex global environment. It has also been consulted globally on its interfaith model and shares its experiences regularly to international visitors. The Centre's philosophy is rooted in the belief that there is a positive role of religion in societies, and that faith can contribute to human flourishing.



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