A Mark of Faith
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Launch of Southwark Multi-Faith Forum (September 2003) at the Damilola Taylor Centre, Peckham.
Just over a year ago, a Muslim teenager tragically died. The family’s neighbours, of many cultures, faiths and backgrounds asked each other: ‘Should you call at the house, who goes to the funeral, do you send flowers?’ They wanted to show respect in the ‘right’ way.

And so came the idea for this booklet ‘A Mark of Faith’. Understanding how people’s faith impacts on daily lives - births, marriages, death, worship and special celebrations - helps us all be good neighbours, work colleagues and friends.

Britain is increasingly a multi-faith country. In Southwark, the 2001 census showed that 66% of people identified themselves as Christian, from many different traditions. Just over 28% said they had no faith. Seven percent said they were Muslim. The remainder identified with many other faiths – including Baha’i, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Rastafarian, and Sikhism.

In any booklet about faith, there is the challenge of different perspectives within and between religions. People of faith and those of no faith will continue to debate among themselves the nature of their own particular beliefs. Our aim is to share local experiences and promote mutual respect and tolerance. So we hear the voices of local people speaking about what faith means for them. We hope it encourages you to find out more.
BIRTH

BIRTH IS AN OCCASION THAT IS CELEBRATED BY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES WITH GREAT JOY. IT IS WHEN GOD IS ASKED TO GIVE BLESSINGS TO THE NEW BORN THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFE. FOR MANY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES THE BIRTH OF A CHILD IS ALSO A TIME FOR EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR THE GOODNESS BESTOWED BY GOD ON ALL CREATION.

ISLAM

The first words that a baby born into a Muslim family ought to hear should be the *adhan* (call to prayer) whispered into the infant’s ear by its father. Some Muslim families hold a big feast to celebrate the birth. The ceremony is called *Aqiqah*; babies also receive their name on this day. Boys are usually circumcised within four weeks of their birth.

“Each child is born innocent. Its [the child’s] environment that brings corruption, so I feel that as a father I must give my child a beautiful name and opportunity to learn.”

OMAR, DULWICH, MUSLIM

BUDDHISM

There is no special ceremony to mark the birth of a child in Buddhism, so people generally follow local customs when celebrating the new arrival into the world.
**CHRISTIANITY**

Christians use the practice of *baptism*, also known as *christening* to introduce the new born into Christianity. *Baptism* is perceived as an act of dedicating the child back to God and of asking for God’s blessings. The service is also used to name the baby in the presence of God, and is often known as a *naming* ceremony.

Some parents may choose a service of *thanksgiving* or *dedication* for their child whereby the congregation gives thanks for the gift of new life.

“Baptism signifies entry into the church of God which is done through blessed water.”

JIM, PECKHAM, CHRISTIAN

“Dedication services... are seen as giving the baby back to God. The baby is blessed in the presence of Jesus.”

ANN, ELEPHANT & CASTLE, CHRISTIAN

**HINDUISM**

Prayers for the child are performed even before the baby is born. Prayers are also given at the birth to welcome the child into the family. A naming ceremony, known as *namakarna*, is carried out.

“For the mother the feeling is that she has brought a new life into this world. The new born becomes the most important thing in the parent’s life...”

SUNIL, DULWICH, HINDU
RASTA

“Those parents who choose to have their children baptised do so only through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Boys are baptised after forty days and girls after eighty days as we believe that infant girls need greater nurturing from their mothers.”

RAS LEVI, CAMBERWELL, RASTAFARIAN

JUDAISM

After a child is born, the parents are honoured in the synagogue (Jewish place of worship) community. Both parents may be called up to the reading of the Torah (Jewish holy book) at the Sabbath morning service. A prayer expressing thanks for the wellbeing of the mother and baby may also be recited.

Baby boys are circumcised on the eighth day of their life by a Mohel (doctor/surgeon); blessings and prayers feature in the accompanying ceremony. The baby boy receives his Hebrew name on this occasion – though this can happen in a naming/blessing ceremony subsequently held in the synagogue. Girl infants receive their Hebrew name at such a naming ceremony.
SIKHISM
When a baby is a few days old, the family take the baby to a gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) for a blessing and naming ceremony. Armit (baptismal water) is placed on the baby's tongue and some is sprinkled on the baby's face and head by the granthi (person directly concerned with the religious affairs of the gurdwara); the remainder is given to the mother to drink.

During the ceremony the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) is opened at random. The first letter of the child's name begins with the first letter of the first word of the first verse on the left hand page; the parents decide the name of the child based on this. If the baby is a boy, ‘Singh’ is added to the name. If the baby is a girl ‘Kaur’ is added to the name.

BAHA’I
Baha’i teachings do not provide for any religious ceremony to mark the arrival of a baby.

“The Baha’i view is that every soul is a creation of God and the soul is created at the moment of conception.”
SHANE, BOROUGH, BAHAI
TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

ADOLESCENCE CAN BE AN EXCITING, BEWILDERING AND CHALLENGING STAGE IN ANYBODY’S LIFE. FOR A YOUNG PERSON FROM A FAITH COMMUNITY, THIS RITE OF PASSAGE ALSO BRINGS WITH IT RESPONSIBILITIES THAT ARE REQUIRED BY THEIR FAITH; RESPONSIBILITIES WHICH ENABLE THE CHILD TO ACQUIRE MATURITY, RESPECT FOR OTHERS, COMPASSION, WISDOM AND OTHER POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES.

A YOUNG PERSON’S TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD IS MARKED BY SPECIAL CEREMONIES IN MOST FAITH COMMUNITIES.

CHRISTIANITY

From the age of seven a young person who had been baptised around the time of their birth, may receive Holy Communion.

“Holy Communion signifies a step towards full initiation as a Christian”
ANONYMOUS, CHRISTIAN

Some Christian denominations undergo the rite of Confirmation. This is where baptism vows are confirmed by the young people themselves. During the ceremony the priest or minister lays hands on the person and declares “Confirm, oh Lord, thy servant”. Confirmation is received by the young person when they feel they are ready, often at the ages of either eleven or fourteen depending on their denomination.

Some denominations carry out the service of believer’s baptism when a young person is deemed to have reached adulthood. A person wishing to be baptised
in this way must be at least sixteen years old as it is believed that only then can a person truly comprehend the relationship they have with *Jesus Christ*.

**BAHA’I**

A child born into the Baha’i faith is taught Baha’i religious teachings by their parents. The child is, however, encouraged to study other faiths. Thus, at the age of fifteen, they can choose to make the decision to remain as a Baha’i, to choose another religion, or to refrain from practising a faith.

“One of principles of the Baha’i faith is independent investigation of the truth i.e. it’s not up to a child to just blindly follow their parents - they should search for themselves.”

SHANE, BOROUGH, BAHÁ’Í

**BUDDHISM**

The different schools of Buddhism encourage young people to develop their own unique identity. Most schools of Buddhism studied in Britain do not have rituals to commemorate a person’s entrance into adulthood.

A large proportion of Buddhists in Britain are converts to the faith – many of whom adopt the faith as they reach adulthood. Conversion to Buddhism, known as ‘seeking refuge’ in Buddhism, can be carried out by someone regardless of their age. It is conducted when a person completes a *refuge* prayer. The *refuge* prayer varies between the different schools of Buddhism and amongst different cultures.
SIKHISM

It is a very special and important occasion when a Sikh boy is given his first turban (headdress) at the age of seven. The turban is tied on the boy's head by a granthi (person directly concerned with religious affairs of gurdwara) or an elderly relative. The event takes place at a gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) and is witnessed by friends and family.

“The life of a Sikh begins at gurdwara and ends at gurdwara. A Sikh has to be attached to the gurdwara at all times. The first step to bringing a child into Sikhism is when the child reaches the age of seven - the age at which we feel a child can begin to understand the teachings of any faith – and this occasion is marked by giving the child his first turban at the gurdwara.”

SURJEET SINGH, HERNE HILL, SIKH

HINDUISM

When a Hindu child reaches four or five years of age, a ceremonial thread is tied around the child's wrist by the priest or a respected elderly person. The thread represents the three debts that they owe. The first debt is to worship God who is the provider of all their needs. The second is to love and respect their parents. The third is to listen to their religious teacher.

This ceremony takes place at school-going age as it is believed that children have an understanding of Hinduism at that age. The Havan (sacred fire) is central to this ceremony.

ISLAM

At the onset of puberty, Muslim girls will often adopt the wearing of the hijab (headscarf). Once young people are physically strong enough, they are also expected to participate in fasting during the month of Ramadan. There are, however, no formal ‘coming of age’ ceremonies commonly practiced in the Muslim faith.
“The parents are responsible for bringing up the child and are responsible for keeping the religion alive for their child. Education is very important. Once they have the education then it is up to them how they live their lives.”
GIWA, PECKHAM, MUSLIM

**JUDAISM**
Jewish parents are responsible for the religious education of the child in their early years. Once children have reached school age, they may attend religious classes, sometimes known as *cheder*, which are held after school or on Sunday mornings at their local *synagogue* (Jewish place of worship). Here they learn about Jewish history and the customs and traditions of Judaism, as well as studying Hebrew.

The coming of age ceremony for boys, the *Bar Mitzvah*, takes place at the age of thirteen. In Liberal Judaism there is also the equivalent ceremony for girls at the age of twelve, known as the *Bat Mitzvah*. These are important ceremonies and a time for great celebration as they mark the stage in life where young people are expected to be responsible for their own actions and to fulfil all the duties of Judaism.

**RASTA**
There is no formal coming of age ceremony in the Rasta community.
MARRIAGE

MARRIAGE IN RELIGIOUS TERMS IS MUCH MORE THAN A CEREMONIAL UNION BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN, BUT ALSO IS THE MOMENT THAT PARTNERS OFFER THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD. MARRIAGE HELPS BIND THE COUPLE THROUGH GOOD AND BAD TIMES, WITH THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD ACTING AS A ROCK ON WHICH THEIR MARRIAGE IS BASED. PARENTING AND BRINGING UP CHILDREN FORM AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE MARRIAGE FOR MOST RELIGIOUS COUPLES.

MARRIAGE IS NOT JUST A MATTER FOR THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED AS THE UNION ALSO IMPACTS UPON WIDER FAMILY AND SOCIETY. MARRIAGE ALSO BRINGS WITH IT LEGAL COMMITMENTS WHICH HAVE TO BE HONOURED.

ISLAM

The parents of a Muslim couple usually play an important role in arranging marriages through recommendations. Family and friends may also introduce, potential couples to one another. However, the couple must both be in agreement to any union.

Once the marriage has been agreed, the new wife is entitled to a gift from the husband. The marriage ceremony includes a formal proposal and a declaration that the couple accepts each other. Sermons and prayers are also read during the celebrations.

“A Muslim marriage is a… marriage like in any other religion but we have some conditions. For example, you have to give some money to the woman you are going to marry – it’s just a gift. It depends on what your future wife demands and it is not necessarily money that has to be given.”

FAISAL, PECKHAM, MUSLIM
**HINDUISM**

Parents and friends often play a part in bringing together potential marriage partners through formal or informal introductions.

“During a Hindu marriage ceremony, Mantras (hymns) are recited by a holy person. The husband and wife have to take seven oaths; the most important one is to be faithful.

They have to walk around the sacred fire which is called Havan, a maximum of seven times [some sections of the community do so a maximum of four times]. This is when they are taking their oaths whilst the priest guides and quotes the Holy Mantras.”

ANONYMOUS, DULWICH, HINDU

**BAHA’I**

In a Baha’i marriage ceremony, the bride and groom each say, in front of witnesses, “We will all, verily, abide by the will of God.” Usually the couple will choose prayers and readings and will have their friends and relatives share in the ceremony.

“Marriage has two elements: the furtherance of the human race and the remembrance of God on earth.”

DANIELE, PECKHAM, BAHAI

**BUDDHISM**

Marriage is perceived as one of the most important ceremonies of life in the Buddhist faith because the success of the partnership depends on the ability of both husband and wife to give to this world their full creative value as individual human beings.
JUDAISM
During a Jewish wedding ceremony, the couple stand under a *chuppah* (a special canopy) and at the end of the service a glass is broken underfoot. There is a formal contract of marriage, known as a *ketubbah*, which is read out during the ceremony.

It is customary for the bride and groom not to see each other for a week preceding the wedding. Some couples fast on the day before the wedding.

SIKHISM
Usually the bride’s father takes the initiative in arranging ceremonial commitments through a mediator.

The wedding is held at the *gurdwara* (Sikh place of worship). The father of the bride gives away the daughter by making her hold one end of a scarf which rests on the groom’s shoulders. The groom holds the other end of the scarf. This is followed by *lavan* (the act of going round the *Guru Granth Sahib* (Sikh holy book)).

Whilst still holding the scarf, the couple circle the *Guru Granth Sahib* in a clockwise direction, where the groom walks ahead of the bride. Four hymns are sung during this ceremony. Upon the completion of each hymn, the bride and groom will have fully gone round the *Guru Granth Sahib*, bowed to it and sat down in front of it to listen to the next hymn. After the final hymn, flowers are showered on the newly wedded couple.
CHRISTIANITY
The priest or minister performs the marriage ceremony for Christian couples. The bride and groom exchange wedding vows. Bible readings, which may have special meaning for the couple, are commonly given at a Christian wedding.

“A commitment is made, for better for worse, for richer for poorer. The important essence of marriage is that it is an outward and visible sign of spiritual grace.”
ANONYMOUS, CHRISTIAN

“Marriage is a covenant ordained by God. Because we are made in God’s image and likeness, man and woman complement each other. And as they consult God in their marriage, who instituted it in the first place, then they carry out His will on earth.”
MICHAEL, PECKHAM RYE, CHRISTIAN

RASTA
Rastas get married within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and subsequently go through another ceremony within the Nyabinghi Order. Nyabinghi is ‘Rasta spiritual order;’ it is a physical gathering to acknowledge and enhance one’s spiritual being. This includes the use of ceremonial drums.

“We unify ourselves with the drums of the Nyabinghi Order. This is a very important part of the ceremony.”
RAS TINNISH, CAMBERWELL, RASTA
DEATH

LOSING A LOVED ONE CAN BE A VERY DIFFICULT TIME. FAITH COMMUNITIES USE THEIR BELIEF IN GOD TO SUPPORT THEM THROUGH THEIR TIME OF GRIEF. PRAYERS ARE SAID FOR THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE, AND THANKS OFFERED TO GOD FOR ALLOWING THEM TO SHARE THEIR LIFE WITH THAT INDIVIDUAL DURING THEIR TIME ON EARTH.

ACROSS ALL FAITHS, FAMILIES OF THE DECEASED WELCOME IMPROMPTU VISITS FROM FRIENDS AND RELATIVES WISHING TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS. ALSO, FLOWERS GIVEN BY WELL-WISHERS AS A SIGN OF COMPASSION AND RESPECT ARE GENERALLY WELCOMED ACROSS SOUTHWARK’S FAITH COMMUNITIES.

HINDUISM

The deceased person belonging to the Hindu faith is usually bathed and dressed in traditional white Indian clothes. Family members pray around the body as soon as possible after their death.

At the funeral, most Hindu women will wear white clothing. Mourners wear sombre colours. The Hindu faith states that the dead must be cremated as the burning of the body signifies the release of their spirit.

“When a loved-one dies, you stay at home until the day of the funeral so that people can come and pay their respects and give their condolences for your loss.

On the day of the funeral we have a Havan [sacred fire] ceremony. We carry the coffin to the funeral ceremony which sometimes takes place in a temple. In the Hindu faith, the funerals are all cremations [except in the case of infants under one year of age who are buried].

It is compulsory to commemorate your loved-one
“In a way, death is a sad thing, but on the other hand they are going to be with God. It’s like going home in a way.”
EMELDA, ELEPHANT & CASTLE, CHRISTIAN

CHRISTIANITY
Christian funerals vary according to the different denominations of the Christian faith. However, there are many similarities which may include speeches and readings by relatives and close friends. Prayers are said for the dead person whose body is either buried or cremated. The funeral encompasses the Christian hope of life beyond death based on belief in Jesus Christ’s resurrection as celebrated at Easter – the core of the Christian faith. Family and friends often send flowers to the funeral, though the immediate family of the deceased sometimes requests that mourners should instead donate money to charity. Black and other dark colours are commonly worn by mourners at funerals.

BAHA’I
Baha’i law states that the body should be buried within one hour’s travelling distance from the place of death. Cremation is forbidden as it breaks the natural cycle and it is perceived that the decomposition of the body in such a manner is too abrupt for the soul.

A programme of prayers and passages from the holy books may be chosen for a Baha’i funeral, and there is also a special prayer which should be recited.

exactly one year after they have passed away. You may choose to continue commemorating that person’s passing after the first year, but it depends on you and your family.”
RAJ, DULWICH, HINDU
“Basically, we don’t cremate people, so it’s a burial. It’s a normal burial but we prepare readings. There is an obligatory prayer for the dead which must be part of the programme; it’s to help the soul progress to the next world.

Also, a ring with the Baha’i symbol is placed on the finger of the deceased person. Another thing is that the body is wrapped with a cotton or silk cloth before it goes into the coffin.”
JUDITH, PECKHAM, BAHAI

**BUDDHISM**

It is common for someone of the Buddhist faith who dies to be cremated. Close family and friends will often offer special ceremonial incense and a eulogy is commonly given. A Buddhist religious leader may give a funeral address which usually includes an explanation of the Buddhist view of death and rebirth. Some parts of the Buddhist community wear white clothing at funerals as this is the colour that is traditionally linked to death by Buddhists.

“When someone dies we hold a funeral where he or she is cremated, where the faith leader explains the meaning of death.

*Life and death are the same. Life is visible, death is invisible; they have the same energy. When someone dies, their energy fuses back to the universe. And when we are born again, it is because the causes are right for us to be born again.*”
OLIVIER, CAMBERWELL, BUDDHIST

**ISLAM**

In most Muslim societies, the body is buried. There is a ritual washing of the body before it is placed in a white shroud (burial cloth wrapping). Burial is not usually in a coffin; burials with the body only in such a wrapping are typical. At burial, the face is turned towards Mecca and prayers are said. Relatives and
friends are generally expected not to mourn excessively as the Islamic faith states that relatives should be comforted with the knowledge that the person who has passed away has the opportunity to enter jannah (heaven/paradise).

The dead are buried as quickly as possible, preferably before sundown on the day of death. Cremation is not practiced in Islam. A funeral prayer is performed for the recently deceased person. For several days after their death, it is common to recite prayers in remembrance of that person.

“Death shows that you need to remember the hereafter. It is a reminder that you are not going to stay in this life.”
MUHAMMAD, PECKHAM, MUSLIM

RASTA
According to the Rasta faith the spirit lives on after the physical body is put to rest, and the spirit moves on to immortality. This is from the Book of Numbers (Chapter 6 in the Old Testament of the Bible).

SIKHISM
When somebody from the Sikh faith dies, relatives and friends are expected to mourn in a relatively reserved manner without showing themselves to be overtly distraught. This is because death is viewed as a time for praising God and prayers are said to acknowledge that death is an act of God.
The deceased person is bathed and dressed in fresh clothes before being cremated; hymns are sung in preparation for the cremation of the body. Their family read the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) in stages. The reading of the Guru Granth Sahib must be completed before the funeral. The final pages are read after the cremation, when family and friends return to the gurdwara (Sikh place of worship). The hymns sung at this time are about death.

Men and women wear sombre clothes to the funeral. Ashes are collected and scattered in running water or in the sea; any aqueous place which holds sentimental value.

The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks. On the first anniversary of the person’s death, the family gather to pray in the gurdwara. The function ends with a meal. All functions in gurdwaras end with a meal, known as langar.

“Death is like a cycle. The reason why we pray is to free us from the cycle of rebirth [...] and so that when we die, our soul can be at the feet of God.”
SAROOP SINGH, EAST DULWICH, SIKH

JUDAISM

Jewish practices relating to death and mourning serve two purposes: to show respect for the dead and to comfort the living who will miss the deceased.

Respect for the dead body is a matter of paramount importance; the body is thoroughly cleaned and wrapped in a simple, plain linen shroud. Orthodox Judaism does not allow cremation but Liberal Judaism does allow cremation. For burials, coffins are not required but if they are used, they must have holes drilled in them so that the body comes in contact with the earth.

The funeral service is quite short and includes the reading of Psalms, an address in memory of the deceased, and Kaddish, the memorial prayer.
Jewish mourning practices are staged over seven days, thirty days and one year. In the first seven days, prayers are said in the home each evening with visitors coming by to look after the mourning family members. On the anniversary of the death of a loved one, Jews light a memorial candle and say *Kaddish*.

“The structure for mourning in the Jewish faith is helpful. The process helps you to move through the stages of grief.”

EVE, DULWICH, JEWISH
WORSHIP PRACTICE

The reasons why people choose to worship are varied. However, there is one underlying common theme amongst worshippers of different faiths – by carrying out the act of worship they believe they are paying their respects to God, giving God the reverence deserved and thanking God for everything given to them. Buddhism is the exception in that it is a religion without a concept of God, with the focus of the faith being on personal enlightenment.

Worship can take the form of a few or many actions. Examples include offering praise and thanks to God, praying for others, meditation and contemplation.

BAHA’I

When there are nine or more Baha’i believers in any given locality, they form a Baha’i spiritual assembly to administer the affairs of the faith because Baha’is have no clergy.

Baha’is believe in the teachings of Baha’u’llah who revealed over one hundred volumes of writings including prayers, meditations and teachings. He has provided prayers for many occasions, including three daily obligatory prayers from which each Baha’i may choose according to preference. Baha’is worship together regularly at the Feasts that happen every nineteen days at the beginning of each Baha’i month.

There is no Baha’i place of worship in Southwark. Baha’i meetings in the borough take place in homes and in rooms available for public hire such as at Peckham Library.

“Baha’is have a holy book – the ‘Book of Law’.  The
name of the book is ‘Aqdas’. The book of Adqas is an updated holy book. When Jesus came he brought the New Testament and updated the Old Testament. The Qu’ran has updated the New Testament. Likewise the Adqas has updated the Qu’ran. In a thousand years time when the new prophet of God appears he will update the Aqdas according to the needs of that time.

ZARIF, BERMONDSEY, BAHAI

Some of the practices of the Baha’i faith include praying each day, fasting nineteen days a year, as well as working to abolish prejudice.

BUDDHISM
The word Buddhism means ‘the way of enlightenment’. The enlightened mind is worshipped, with Buddhists believing all people are capable of enlightenment. To be enlightened means to be compassionate, tolerant, reasonable, moral and engaged in a life that benefits humanity and the natural world.

The type of worship and practice for Buddhists depends on the school of Buddhism being followed. Many Buddhists will place flowers or other plants and light candles and incense before a Buddha-image or some other symbol of the presence of the Buddhahood. People from the Buddhist faith offer a prayer. The central rite of lay Buddhism is the offering of food.

Many congregational meetings of Buddhists take place in people’s homes. There are also two Buddhist centres/temples in Lambeth: one in Kennington and one in Brixton, which many Buddhists from Southwark attend.
“By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, you come to awaken your Buddhahood*.”
MARIANNE, CAMBERWELL, BUDDHIST

(* Buddhists regard Buddhahood as a state where one attains true and indestructible happiness – a condition of perfect and absolute freedom. This is characterised by boundless wisdom, compassion, courage and lifeforce.)

CHRISTIANITY
Christian worship involves praising God in music and speech, readings from scriptures, prayers of various sorts, a ‘sermon’, and various holy ceremonies such as the Eucharist (also known as Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper or Mass) which is a ceremony in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed. Depending on the church, the central meaning of these services may be about remembering the Last Supper, a fellowships’ meal between believers or a time when members believe there is a living presence of Jesus Christ associated with the bread and wine.

Sunday was made the day of Christian worship as it is the day that Christians believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Christians regard worship as something that they not only do for God, but also, through Jesus Christ’s example and the presence of the Holy Spirit, that worship provides help and strength to believers.

Church services on a Sunday divide into two general types: Eucharistic services which focus on the act of Holy Communion; and Services of the Word which do no have this rite but includes a sermon in which the preacher will speak at length to expound a biblical text to bring out its relevance to those present.

Different churches, even within the same denomination will use very different styles of worship; some will be more elaborate with a choir singing, others will hand
the music over to the congregation; some leave much of the action to the preacher, while others encourage greater congregational participation.

Christians attend a variety of venues in order to worship. Many attend churches – some of which were constructed centuries ago, others are modern buildings which at first glance look more like community centres than classically designed churches. Many Christian groups do not have a church of their own but instead hire out other available buildings or even other churches on a regular basis in order to worship God. Finally, there are numerous ‘house churches’ in the borough where groups of Christians meet to worship God in their own homes.

“I worship because I love to sing and, most importantly, because I love God.”
ROSE, ELEPHANT & CASTLE, CHRISTIAN

ISLAM
Worshipping God through prayer is regarded as the most essential obligatory duty which a Muslim must perform. On Fridays, prayer in congregation at a mosque (sometimes referred to by the Arabic form ‘masjid’) known as Jummuah prayer is considered compulsory for men. Women may also attend prayers at the mosque if they choose to do so. Most mosques have separate sections for men and women respectively to pray. However, due to limited space, some mosques do not accommodate women. The Jummuah prayer is performed at noon where an Imam (person leading the prayer) delivers a Khutbah (sermon) which contains guidance for Muslims on how to live their lives in remembrance of God.
There are five mosques in Southwark where Muslims can attend the five daily congregational prayers. In addition, there are numerous small venues where Muslims, and particularly young Muslims, go to learn about their faith and read the Qur’an (Islamic holy book) in small groups.

“I worship because I have to call my God.”
WAHEED, CAMBERWELL, MUSLIM

A Muslim’s duties as described in the Five Pillars of Islam are:

[1] Shahadah – the belief in one’s heart and the declaration that “there is no God but God and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is his prophet.” The name for God in Arabic in the Qur’an is Allah. Once a person declares the Shahadah in Arabic, they become a Muslim.

[2] Salat – to perform prayers five times a day which are be conducted between the break of dawn and night time, often just before sleeping. Muslims must wash their heads, arms and feet before praying. Muslims always face the direction of Mecca when praying which in London is facing south-east.

[3] Zakat – to donate a proportion of one’s savings to the poor and needy on a yearly basis.

[4] Sawm – to fast during the ninth lunar month of the Arabic calendar (Ramadan). Muslims believe this to be the month that Muhammad (peace be upon him) received the first revelation of the Qur’an from God.

[5] Hajj – to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca if Muslims are economically and physically able to.

JUDAISM

For those who choose to practice Judaism, worship means being a part of the synagogue community and attending services there on the Sabbath and on Jewish festivals. In Orthodox synagogues there are prayer services every day of the week. Liberal synagogues have a liturgy for weekdays but focus on the Sabbath and festivals. For both Liberal and Orthodox traditions,
weekday prayers may be recited at home. The key feature of the Sabbath service on Saturday morning is the reading from the Torah (Jewish holy book).

The Shabbat, or Sabbath, begins with the lighting of candles at sunset on Friday and ends with sundown on Saturday evening. Orthodox Jews believe that it is prohibited to travel by car or public transport or to carry out a wide range of activities on the Sabbath that could be defined in any manner as ‘work’. Liberal Judaism permits Jewish people to interpret the restrictions on travel and work more flexibly while not actually hindering their observance of the Sabbath.

The earliest synagogue in south London was established in Elephant & Castle in the late 18th century. However, the Jewish community in the area dwindled in the late 20th century and the synagogue was closed. Today, the majority of the Jewish population of the borough are Liberal Jews, some of whom are very active in the South London Liberal Synagogue in neighbouring Lambeth.
RASTA

The worship ceremony starts with the Ethiopian national anthem as Rastas consider Ethiopia to be the ancestral and spiritual home of their community. Readings are given from the *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, *the Amharic Bible*, ancient scripts/scrolls and, most of all, from the ‘*Utterance of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I*’ and ‘*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty.*’ Chanting and playing of the *harps* (drums) are also integral parts of the service.

Many spiritual and cultural sessions take place in halls and banqueting suites. Rastas who are residents of Southwark worship in the Rasta temple, which is also the Rasta headquarters. It is located in Kennington, and functions as both a religious and social centre for Rastas in London.

HINDUISM

“When we worship, we recite hymns to ask God to make our lives prosperous, like the fire is prosperous.

*During the ceremony, we sip water and pray for peace and we ask that God makes our body, soul and mind pure with pure thoughts in it, just as the water is pure. We touch different parts of our body and pray that God will keep all our senses in perfect working order.*

KANWAR, EAST DULWICH, HINDU

Some Hindu practices incorporate meditation. Other activities from this faith include daily devotions, public rituals and *puja*, a ceremonial dinner for a God.

There are no Hindu temples in Southwark. There are meetings of Hindus in Southwark which take place in community centres and in people’s homes. The principal Hindu group in Southwark meets monthly in Dulwich.
SIKHISM

A gurdwara is a place where Sikhs meet to worship God. There are no fixed days for worship for Sikhs but the main service of the week is held on either Saturday or Sunday. The times of the service are determined by each gurdwara.

Usually, all the family attend the service together. The service commences with the giani reciting the prayer. A giani is a scholar of the Punjabi language and literature; Punjabi is the traditional language spoken by Sikhs.

There is singing of hymns from the scriptures, which is accompanied by tabla (drums) and harmonium, and sometimes other instruments. Religious or historical poetry may also be read, as well as speeches from members of the congregation. People who participate in these activities feel that this is one way in which they can serve their God and fellow Sikhs.

The giani usually gives a sermon which may explain some verses of the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) or provide suggestions as to how Sikhs should conduct themselves in their daily lives.

At the end of the service, Karah Parshad which is made from semolina, clarified butter, sugar and water, is served in small amounts to the congregation. One has to accept it with two hands cupped together and eat the sweet offering straight away. The eating of the Karah Parshad together shows fellowship and equality amongst the congregational members.

A meal is always served after the service, known as langar. There is a Sikh temple in East Dulwich.
**DIET & CLOTHING**

Religion is more than a set of code or rituals. In many cases, it is a complete way of life and a lifestyle that one would lead wholeheartedly to obtain a meaningful life. This includes a common ethical core belief based on an understanding that we should do to others what we would have others do to us.

Many religions prescribe particular ways of eating and dressing which are derived from holy books and divine wisdom. Most religions have the message of modesty and goodness, both in terms of dressing and diet. Some religions forbid alcohol as harmful and unnecessary, whilst others put a particular emphasis on other aspects of life.

**BAHA’I**

There are no specific dietary requirements for Baha’is but vegetarianism is recommended by the Baha’i faith. Alcohol is strictly forbidden whilst smoking is discouraged.

There are no religious requirements for Baha’i dress code except in the consideration of cleanliness, moderation and modesty.

**BUDDHISM**

Most Buddhists believe that to be a Buddhist you have to be a vegetarian. In terms of clothing, many Buddhists state that someone following the faith should not wear clothing, such as leather, that is made of an animal. A lay Buddhist is not required to wear robes.

**CHRISTIANITY**

Christians are not required to adhere to a particular dress code. However, they are expected to wear modest clothing during church services. Some Christians may choose to
make a special effort with the attire they wear to church, which in some cases may be their own national dress.

There are no special dietary requirements amongst the majority of Christian denominations.

“Traditionally Christians chose not to eat meat on a Friday – only fish on this day of the week. This is to do with Jesus Christ being crucified on Good Friday.”

NICHOLAS, CAMBERWELL, CHRISTIAN

Fasting can form an important part of a practising Christian’s life, particularly during the period of Lent. Lent is regarded as a preparation time for Easter.

HINDUISM

Hindu women often wear a long dress, known as a sari, whilst some Hindu men frequently wear a scarf, known as angarkha.

A red powder mark at the parting of hair on the forehead of Hindu women indicates that the woman is married. This red powder mark is different from a bindi, which is what usually appears to be a red dot on the forehead and is also worn by some Hindu women. The bindi is now perceived more as a fashion accessory than having any religious or cultural meaning.

Jewellery usually has religious or cultural significance e.g. a woman’s bangles are only removed on her husband’s death. Some Hindus wear a multi-coloured thread which is tied onto the wrist during religious ceremonies or sometimes tied on the wrist on a regular basis.
Hindus are under strict instructions not to harm living things, and so most of them will be strict vegetarians; some may not eat eggs or fish. Hindus will not eat anything that contains beef products because the cow is sacred as representation of the bounty of the Gods.

The orthodox Hindu diet also excludes alcohol, as well as “overly-stimulating” food such as onions and garlic.

**ISLAM**

Muslim men and women are required by the *Qu’ran* (Islamic holy book) to dress modestly. Therefore all Muslims should wear loose clothes which do not show off their bodies. Muslim women may choose to wear a scarf over their head and upper torso area. This scarf is known as the *hijab*. Some women may also choose to cover their faces with a veil which is referred to as the *nikkab*. Most Muslims believe that Muslim men are not permitted by their faith to wear pure silk or gold. Some Muslims believe smoking to be forbidden by their faith.

Pork is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims. In addition, Muslims will only eat *halal* meat or chicken which means meat that has come from an animal that has been slaughtered without the use of electric stunning. Some Muslims will eat kosher meat as prepared by Jewish people. Alcohol is forbidden in Islam including where it is used as an ingredient in cooking.

**JUDAISM**

Orthodox Jewish men are required to cover their heads in the *synagogue* (Jewish place of worship), while at prayer elsewhere and when visiting cemeteries. Most wear a skullcap known as a *kippah*, *yarmulke* or *kappl*. Some orthodox men wear a *kippah* throughout the day. In Liberal Judaism both men and women are encouraged to wear a *kippah*. 
Jewish religious law deems certain foods kosher which means ‘fit’ or ‘appropriate’. Certain foodstuffs such as pork, rabbit and shellfish are not kosher and there are rules about how animals must be slaughtered. Meat and dairy products must be kept separate.

SIKHISM
Sikh men and boys are often seen in turbans which come in many colours and worn in various styles. A turban is not merely a headscarf – it is directly connected with the Sikh way of life. It also shows that he is proud to be a Sikh.

Sikhs should be in possession of five symbols, which all start with the letter ‘k’:
[1] Kes - the hair on the head and face which must remain uncut. The hair on the head must remain covered.

RASTA
Most Rastas are strict vegetarians though some do eat fish. Rastas also do not consume alcohol.

Rastas wear their hair in locks. This is based on biblical instructions and Rasta liberty derived from the Book of Numbers (Chapter 6 in the Old Testament of the Bible) which states that one's hair should not be cut. Rastas consider their locks to be their ‘crown’, and the headgear they wear is the ‘covering of the crown.’ This is symbolic to the covering of the Arc of the Covenant.
FESTIVAL

IN MOST FAITHS, AN EXTENSIVE ARRAY OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS IS CELEBRATED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES. INSTEAD OF CITING ALL THE FESTIVITIES WHICH TAKE PLACE, THE FOCUS OF THIS SECTION IS TO EXAMINE WHAT A DIVERSE RANGE OF SOUTHWARK WORSHIPPERS - FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE - CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS.

RASTAFARIAN
The birthday of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I is seen as one of the holiest days in the year for Rastas (23rd July). He is revered by Rastas as the incarnation of God on earth.

The coronation of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I (2nd November) is also very significant because within the crowning he was given the name with which he is now known by; before his coronation his name was ‘Ras-tafari.’ The name His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I is translated as the ‘Power of the Holy Trinity.’

HINDUISM
“Diwali takes place in November when there is no moon and is regarded as the most important religious festival in the Hindu faith.

ANONYMOUS, EAST DULWICH, HINDU

Diwali is also known as the ‘Festival of Lights’ and celebrates the New Year. As the calendar used by
Hindus is based on the lunar system, the date of the festival is not fixed. Therefore, the date for Diwali can fall between late October to mid-November.

CHRISTIANITY
“I believe most Christian denominations would regard Easter as the most important religious festival in the Christian calendar, as it marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
NICHOLAS, CAMBERWELL, CHRISTIAN

Easter is the culmination of the Lent and Holy Week period. Lent lasts for forty days. For practising Christians, Lent is seen as a preparation time for Easter. Lent is about abstaining from particular food item(s). Holy Week has three important days leading up to Easter Sunday: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday & Holy Saturday. Maundy Thursday marks the last supper served to Jesus Christ. Good Friday is used to remember the day of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. Holy Saturday is used to symbolise that the church had in effect “died” and was waiting for life to begin again on Easter Sunday.

Easter is a major festival day for all Christian churches who may have very different styles in terms of how they mark the occasion. Easter eggs and Easter bunnies are used to symbolise new life.

Midnight Mass takes place on Christmas Eve and is seen as an important occasion by some Christian denominations. Some Christians, particularly from Africa and the Caribbean, place more emphasis on the celebrations which take place at midnight on the 31st December; by
marking the beginning of the new year they tend to think about families in their countries of origin.

Christians consider Christmas as another important festival in their faith as it marks the birth of Jesus Christ. It follows a month of preparation known as Advent which involves a lot of festivities. The word Advent means ‘coming’ as it refers to the coming of Jesus Christ into this world. Advent celebrations begin on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day. Christians may also choose to use this time to reflect on their own commitment to God.

Black Majority Churches celebrate Christmas and Easter; however they may not place so much emphasis on Lent and Advent.

ISLAM
The word for ‘festival’ in Arabic as related to the Islamic religion is Eid. The two festivals for Muslims are Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha. Muslims use the lunar calendar meaning that, using the western calendar, the dates for each Eid move forward by approximately two weeks from the preceding year.

“Eid al-Adha is the festival for those that do not perform the Hajj [pilgrimage] to celebrate the day after the Arafat. [Arafat is in reference to the site where the Hajj is concluded.] Eid al-Fitr is a festival after a month of fasting which is known as Ramadan. It is to celebrate that we have obeyed Allah and his command to fast in the holy month of Ramadan.”

MUSTAPHA, PECKHAM, MUSLIM

JUDAISM
“I regard Hanukkah as the most important festival in the Jewish calendar.”

MICHAEL, DULWICH, JEWISH

Hanukkah is an eight day holiday starting on the 25th
night of the Jewish month of Kislev. Hanukkah, which means ‘dedication’, is also known as the ‘Festival of Lights.’ The holiday goes back almost 2,400 years. Hanukkah, is a special time for children. Gifts and Hanukkah money are exchanged. Some families give a small present on each of the eight nights of Hanukkah.

SIKHISM
Sikhs call their festivals gurpurbs. The celebration of any festival starts with the Akhand Path. This is the continuous reading of the entire Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book), done in relays of one or two hours by competent readers. It takes 48 hours to complete the reading which starts two days before the gurpurb.

BAHA’I
Baha’i festivals include Baha’i New Year on 21st March, Ridvan (a twelve day period) starting on 21st April and several other important dates on the Baha’i calendar.

Baha’is are expected to fast between sunrise and sunset for 19 days from 2nd March through to 20th March in preparation for the Baha’i New Year on 21st March.

BUDDHISM
“I regard New Year’s as the most important religious festival of the Buddhist faith. On the 31st December at midnight, we chant the “Gongyo” which means assiduous practice. This signifies starting the new year afresh and focuses us on what we want to achieve. Plus, we are celebrating what we have done in the last year.”
EMANUELA, ELEPHANT & CASTLE, BUDDHIST (NICHIREN DAISHONIN SCHOOL OF BUDDHISM)

New Year’s Day marks the first day, the first month, the beginning of the year and the start of spring.
‘A Mark of Faith’ is the second in a series of booklets to promote ‘Celebrating Southwark’. ‘Celebrating Southwark’ is a collaborative project designed to encourage people to build understanding across communities, faiths and generations.

The first booklet, ‘A Sense of Belonging’ looks at what people of Southwark feel about living in a diverse society and how we can celebrate what’s best across traditions of all the different cultures that live in Southwark. Its publication coincided with a production of ‘George’, a play performed by young people and elders about relationships and identity across generations and races.

‘A Mark of Faith’ has been developed by voluntary organisations, the council and Southwark Multi-Faith Forum. In our planning, we were conscious that it would be an impossible task to ensure that every practice and every faith is covered in a booklet such as this. Therefore, we only aim to provide an introduction to some of the daily rituals, which identify some of the faiths practised by residents of Southwark.

For further discussion, or to get up to date information on different faith communities, you can contact Southwark Multi-Faith Forum. The forum exists to promote good relations between different religious and ethnic groups. The forum also supports religious organisations in the borough to get further involved in projects to improve the quality of life for Southwark residents. Their details are:

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