

# THE FAITH PROJECT

***The Faith Project*** intimately observes the rituals of seven young Canadians from different faith traditions. Each of the project's subjects allowed the creative team access to their personal practice and expressions of faith. The user's experience is enriched by the website and app's capacity to expand on these practices within a Canadian context. And while shuttling between the project's short portraits, one observes striking commonalities between different traditions. These articulate, busy young Canadians weave faith into their daily lives not as an obligation but as something that is essential to their identity and place in the world. This immersive experience will captivate and enlighten people of all faiths, and perhaps provide a deeper understanding to those seeking their own personal form of spiritual expression.

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## THE FAITH PROJECT IN THE CLASSROOM

### ABOUT THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD (NFB)

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) creates groundbreaking [interactive works](#), social-issue documentaries and auteur animation. The NFB has produced over 13,000 productions and won over 5,000 awards, including 9 Canadian Screen Awards, 7 Webbys, 12 Oscars and more than 90 Genies. To access acclaimed NFB content, visit [NFB.ca](#) or download its [apps](#) for smartphones, tablets and connected TV.

### ABOUT NFB CAMPUS

The National Film Board of Canada has been a trusted educational resource for over seven decades. Today, thousands of NFB titles in every form and genre—from documentary to animation, feature film to interactive—are instantly available online. Educators who subscribe to CAMPUS can explore more than 3,000 productions: documentaries, animations, feature films and interactive titles. CAMPUS guides, playlists, learning bundles and sharing features allow educators to better tailor their lesson plans to meet their students' needs.

Activate your CAMPUS subscription [here](#).

### ABOUT THE CANADIAN RACE RELATIONS FOUNDATION (CRRF)

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) is Canada's leading agency dedicated to the elimination of racism and the promotion of harmonious race relations in the country. Created 25 years ago as part of the historic Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement, the Foundation's governing legislation was proclaimed in 1996, and its doors opened in 1997. Its mission is to provide independent, outspoken national leadership, to inform national policies and public conversations, and to act as a resource and facilitator to advance Canadian identity in the pursuit of positive race relations, equity, fairness, social harmony and dignity for all Canadians.

[crr.ca/en](#)

### ABOUT INTERFAITH & BELONGING: A CIVIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Funded by the Department of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Canada, the Interfaith and Belonging initiative is intended to facilitate a national dialogue on interfaith cooperation and communication, promote civic education and engagement, and provide the necessary tools to strengthen belonging. It effectually constructs a national framework for dialogue between and among groups of different ethnocultural and faith-based communities and helps to strengthen their participatory role in Canadian society. Through active participation and engagement of communities, the project promotes Canadian democratic values, diversity, and traditions, and works with communities in understanding our rights and responsibilities and how best to encourage a deeper sense of belonging to Canada.

[ib-ia.ca](#)



## ABOUT *THE FAITH PROJECT*

*The Faith Project* is an interactive tablet documentary featuring evocative short films about prayer in the modern world. In short documentary stories, young Canadians share the rituals that define their spiritual lives. We go inside the hearts of seven major faiths to inner, personal landscapes that are sacred yet surprisingly accessible. We listen in on the private thoughts and conflicting emotions that swirl in the minds of everyday practitioners.

We go past dogma and enter the uniquely Canadian spaces where prayer survives despite distraction, time and temptations. Each film is presented in an epic visual style, and is meant to be meaningful and authentic to the practitioners of that faith—as if they themselves made a film that captured their experience.

Despite living in a pluralistic society, we so rarely see—and feel—each other's sacred moments with such intimacy. Through these films, viewers will gain an intuitive understanding of what it means to be a young person of faith—Aboriginal, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh—in Canada today.

## ABOUT THE STUDY GUIDE AND LEARNING BUNDLES

This Study Guide has been designed to support teachers in their use of *The Faith Project* in classrooms across Canada. The guide enables educators to incorporate the app into their lesson plans to address prescribed learning outcomes for students aged 14 and older.

An inquiry-based tool intended to facilitate group discussions, reflections on media literacy, and lesson planning, the guide includes a fact sheet for each of the seven faith traditions covered and a list of online references. These quick guides contain preliminary information on demographics, history, places of worship, sacred scriptures, and basic principles.

CAMPUS subscribers can also make use of *The Faith Project* Learning Bundles, which provide exclusive access to a video of a classroom discussion and explore themes such as spirituality, beliefs, knowledge, the secular world, practising faith in Canada and working together. The video discussion includes extra interview footage with all seven *Faith Project* participants and further investigates each faith and personal approaches to spiritual rituals in 21st-century Canada.

Activate your CAMPUS subscription [here](#) to begin exploring the Learning Bundles.

## RECOMMENDED SUBJECT AREAS

*The Faith Project* can be integrated into the curriculum in the following subject areas at the secondary and post-secondary levels:

- Social Studies
- Humanities
- World Religions
- Comparative Civilizations
- Diversity and Pluralism
- World Issues
- Aboriginal Studies
- Religion, Values and Spirituality
- Diversity and Cohesion
- Global Politics and History
- Personal Development
- Ethics and Religion

## USING *THE FAITH PROJECT* IN CLASS

1) *Collective Viewing*: Educators can engage students in collective viewing of the films featured in the app and then facilitate large-group discussion and learning experiences together. To use *The Faith Project* in the classroom for collective viewing, educators will require the following audiovisual equipment:

- Laptop or computer
- Speakers
- Digital projector
- Screen or blank surface for viewing
- Access to the Internet

2) *Individual Viewing*: Educators can design assignments in which students view the films individually and then engage in shared or individual learning experiences. For individual viewings of *The Faith Project*, students will require access to one of the following devices:

- Laptop or computer
- Tablet
- Access to the Internet

## DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH *THE FAITH PROJECT*

### OBJECTIVE:

Engage classrooms critically and meaningfully with media depicting personal experiences of faith and culture.

#### *What Is Media Literacy?*

Media literacy is the ability to consciously and critically analyze, evaluate and create messages in various media forms, including film, advertising, news, television, social media content and online resources. Media-literate individuals can understand the complexity of media communication and can use these messages to make informed judgments and decisions in daily life.

*The Faith Project* aims to provide educators with tools to explore varying representations of faith and faith communities in the media. Educators can use the films in this app within a wider repertoire of media perspectives in order to show diverse expressions of faith in the contemporary context. Using *The Faith Project* as a springboard, educators are encouraged to practise media literacy skills with students in order to explore the ways in which media can have both a positive and negative impact.

### *Critical Media Literacy Questions to Consider Before Viewing The Faith Project:*

1. What is the NFB? What is different or unique about the Canadian context? Explain.
2. In the *Faith Project* films, who is the subject? What story do they share in the film? Why do you think this individual agreed to share their story?
3. How has this story been shared? Describe the medium and the unique perspectives captured by the filmmaker.
4. Why do you think the filmmaker has selected these perspectives?
5. What are the opportunities and limitations of sharing a story through the medium of interactive documentary?
6. What are some of the images that stand out to you from this interactive documentary? Why do you think the filmmaker included these images?
7. What do you think has been left out of the interactive documentary? Explain.
8. Why do you think the NFB produced this interactive documentary? What purpose does it serve?
9. What questions do you have for the subject of the interactive documentary? For the filmmaker? For the NFB?
10. How is religion portrayed in the media? How are particular faith communities portrayed in the media?
11. What are some of the motivations that drive the media in their portrayal of faith and/or faith communities?



## SPARKING DISCUSSION IN CLASS

### OBJECTIVES:

- Broaden classroom conversations around faith, ritual and sacred space through exposure to personal narratives from various world religions.
- Provide educators and students with tools to explore diverse expressions of faith as individual, communal, and experiential.

Educators can frame class discussion using an overarching inquiry question such as, *How do we understand personal expressions of faith within communities?* The inquiry question can integrate other curriculum concepts of the school year. Educators can then use pre-, during, and post-viewing activities to enhance student engagement with the interactive documentary.

### *Pre-viewing*

Before watching *The Faith Project*, students can be prompted to think about what they already know or assume about the faith community and/or ritual featured in the interactive documentary. How have these assumptions been formed? What questions do students have? Here, educators can make explicit links with the previous topic of study and with the skills associated with media literacy.

### *During Viewing*

Educators can provide students with a space to write their initial perceptions and impressions of the interactive documentary (including but not limited to thoughts, feelings, memories, images, sounds, and questions). The placemat below is an example of such a space:

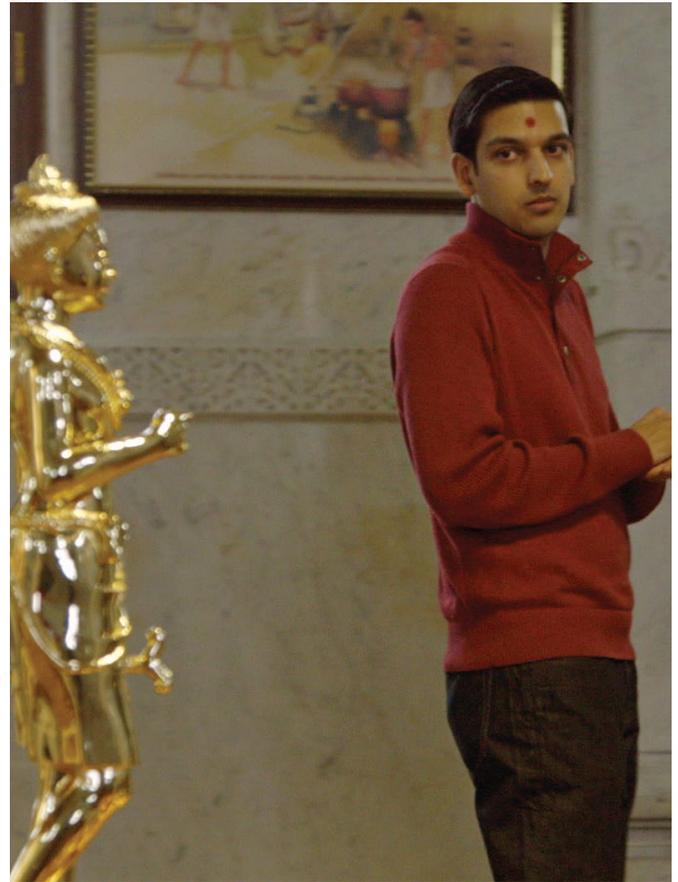
I SEE...	I FEEL...
I REMEMBER...	I THINK...

I WONDER...

*Post-viewing*

Remind students of the class inquiry question (e.g.: *How do we understand personal expressions of faith within communities?*) and begin classroom discussion with sharing of the initial impressions noted on the placemat. Educators can gradually increase the complexity of questioning by following this sequence below:

1. What stands out for you in the interactive documentary? What images stayed with you? What surprised you?
2. What is a ritual? Are rituals always faith-based? What are some examples of rituals from our own daily lives?
3. Describe the rituals featured in the interactive documentary—what do they consist of? Are they individual or communal? Where did the rituals take place?
4. Can you identify any religious or cultural symbols in this film? Describe these.
5. Why are rituals important for individuals and for communities?
6. What did you learn about the individual engaging in the ritual?
7. What did you learn about this faith community that you didn't already know?
8. Does this interactive documentary shift your perspective on faith in any way? Explain.
9. Is it important for us to understand the rituals of different faith communities? Explain.
10. What questions do you have about the content of this interactive documentary? Where can we look for possible responses and more information?



## ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH *THE FAITH PROJECT*

Educators are encouraged to peruse the materials below and modify them as necessary. Activities are built around the following “lenses” for understanding faith: guided inquiry, critical-creative reflection, pluralism, media literacy, transformative and collaborative learning, and self-expression.

All the activities require the specified equipment for viewing (collective or individual). Additional materials are also listed.

### ACTIVITY 1: IDENTIFYING OUR COMMON VALUES

#### OBJECTIVE:

To create a space of respect, compassion and curiosity for engagement with personal and often sensitive or controversial issues related to faith and faith communities.

Possible Inquiry Question: *What values can we share when we learn about diverse faith communities?*

Sequencing: Before viewing the interactive documentary

Additional Materials:

- Flipchart and markers

Activity Description:

1. Facilitate a classroom discussion in which one or two students record ideas on a flipchart so that all students can view the points being made and contribute.
2. Begin by asking the class to define the term “value”: use definitions from a variety of sources and come up with a shared definition.
3. Together, discuss the values that will frame classroom engagement with *The Faith Project*.
  - a. What is important to us as a class when we learn about faith communities that we may or may not belong to? For example: honesty, critical thought, compassion, curiosity, and open-mindedness.
  - b. What do we want our classroom discussion and learning experiences to look like? Feel like? For example: comfort, full participation, and listening to multiple perspectives.
4. As each student shares, ensure that ideas are captured on the flipchart. Encourage students to think and speak in terms of shared values—what is important to all of us?
5. Highlight for students that in creating this list, we are agreeing to live by these values to the best of our ability, and we will hold each other accountable to this.
6. Post the flipchart of Common Values in the classroom or on a class blog, where it can be referenced easily.



**ACTIVITY 2: EXPLORING RITUAL**

**OBJECTIVE:**

To broaden our understanding of ritual as a process of connection with spirit, a process of self-expression, and of constructing meaning.

Possible Inquiry Question: *How do I understand rituals in the world around me?*

Sequencing: Interactive documentary viewing included in the activity

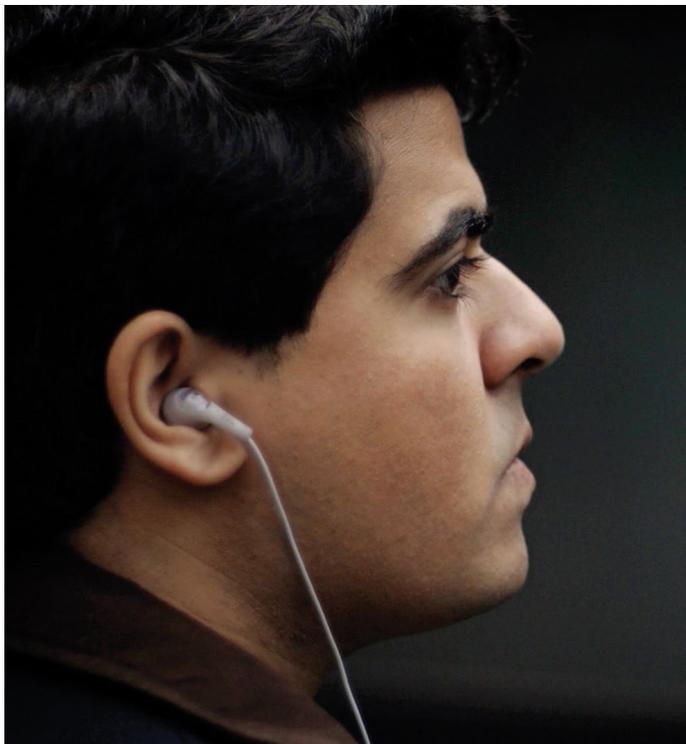
**Additional Materials:**

- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Notepaper and pencils/pens

**Activity Description:**

1. Educators can build upon the discussion questions related to ritual (see the section on “Sparkling Discussion in Class”) and pose the question, *What is a ritual?* Students can think individually, discuss thoughts with their neighbour, and then share responses with the class.
2. Pre-viewing: Together, explore the concept of a ritual and the role a ritual plays in different communities. Students can share examples from their own experiences, depending on their comfort level.
3. Facilitate two viewings of one of the **Faith Project** interactive documentary films. To prepare for the viewings, students can create a T-chart or table. They can label the columns as seen here:

MY DESCRIPTION	WORDS/PHRASES FROM THE FILM



During viewing: First, play a clip of the interactive documentary without audio and have the students describe what they see in the first column. Next, play the clip with audio and have students write down phrases and words spoken by subjects in the film in the second column.

4. Post-viewing: Students can look at the two descriptions and compare them:
  - a. What are their similarities? What are their differences? Circle words that occur in both columns.
  - b. Why might the two descriptions be similar/different?
  - c. How does the subject of the clip make this ritual personal?
  - d. For the subject of the clip, what is important about this ritual?
  - e. Is this ritual a form of self-expression? Explain.
  - f. What does this ritual mean to the person who is performing it?
  - g. What do you learn about the subject and their faith community through this ritual?
  - h. Do you see any connection with any other faith communities?
  - i. Do you see any connection with yourself and what you value in life?

### ACTIVITY 3: EXPLORING SYMBOLS IN FAITH AND CULTURE

#### OBJECTIVE:

To explore the use of symbols in faith and culture and to identify personal symbols that carry meaning.

Possible Inquiry Question: *What is a symbol and why are symbols powerful? What are some examples of symbols in my life?*

Sequencing: Before or after watching the interactive documentary

#### Additional Materials:

- Symbolic images (photographs, images in PowerPoint, etc.)
- Definitions of the word “symbol”
- Flipchart and markers
- Art supplies

#### Activity Description:

1. Show students 5–10 images of commonly understood symbols that are part of the cultural context. Examples can represent significant people, concepts or events. Encourage students to share associations for each image. For example, a lion can symbolize courage or bravery, a flag can symbolize patriotism, and a heart can symbolize love or care.
2. Discuss the concept of a symbol:
  - a. What is a symbol?
  - b. Why are symbols powerful?
  - c. Why are symbols important in faith communities?
  - d. Identify 2–3 symbols that stand out to you from the **Faith Project** interactive documentary. (This can be a “during viewing” question, if you plan to watch the interactive documentary as part of this activity.)
  - e. What do these symbols represent?
  - f. Are symbols personal or communal? Explain.
  - g. Can symbols be shared among people of different faith backgrounds? Explain.
3. Discuss some examples from faith communities and highlight the personal and communal nature of symbols.
  - a. Light and water are two symbols that can be researched and analyzed in class.
4. In groups of four, students can brainstorm ideas that are personal and communal for them in order to practise creating a symbol. You can ask:
  - a. What are some significant people, concepts or events for your group? What is important to everyone in the group?

5. As a group, students pick one of their ideas and create a symbol to represent this idea. Students can create a visual to share with the class and write a rationale for the association between the idea and the symbol.
6. Students can begin presentations by asking their peers to predict what the image symbolizes. Once the group shares their rationale, the class can discuss the group’s idea and explore the viability of alternative ideas.
7. To summarize, the class can highlight the power of symbols in eliciting multiple interpretations and connect this back to symbolism in faith communities. Faith is individual and communal, as we see from the narratives shared in the film: symbols are powerful because they can unify people, and they can allow for personal construction of meaning.

### ACTIVITY 4: EXPLORING SACRED SPACES

#### OBJECTIVE:

To explore our relationship with sacred space and to investigate how spaces shape who we are as human beings.

Possible Inquiry Question: *What are sacred spaces and how do spaces impact us?*

Sequencing: Interactive documentary viewing included in activity

#### Additional Materials:

- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers
- Large paper, art supplies and pencils for blueprint activity
- Notepaper and pens for reflection

#### Activity Description:

1. List some common or familiar spaces on small slips of paper (e.g., classroom, movie theatre, soccer field, beach). Students can volunteer to silently role-play how they would act in that space, and the class can guess the name of the space.
2. Together, discuss spaces and our actions within a space: How did you know where that person was? What actions helped you guess?

3. Discuss the concept of a space:
  - a. What is a space?
  - b. What gives a space meaning?
  - c. How do we use spaces?
  - d. What is a sacred space?
  - e. How do we define the word sacred? What makes a space sacred?  
 Note: If students have access to Internet/research tools, they can find many perspectives on “sacred space” to compare and contrast. For example, students can look at the difference between a library in a university and a prayer room in an airport. How are these spaces sacred? Educators can lengthen this component of the activity to include the creation of a shared definition of sacred space.
4. View one of the *Faith Project* films through the lens of sacred space. A suggested prompt would be: Describe the sacred space shown in this film.
5. Post-viewing: Students can work in pairs or groups to discuss their ideas about this example of sacred space:
  - a. What important objects are included in the space?
  - b. What is the lighting like?
  - c. Is this space private or public?
  - d. How is the space used? What actions and interactions are taking place here?
  - e. What makes this space sacred for the individual(s) in the film?
  - f. Why do you think the individual(s) chose this space for their ritual practice?
  - g. On the whiteboard, write the statement “Sacred spaces are religious spaces.” Engage students with this statement through debate-style discussion. Is this statement always true?
6. Individually, students can explore the personal impact of spaces. Students can create a visual blueprint of a physical space (such as their home, school, dance studio, gym) that is special to them.
  - a. Students can label the areas/parts of the space according to the function they fulfill and the values they represent. For example:  
 Dance Studio
    - i. The reception area of a dance studio is where people enter the studio, are greeted by a welcoming individual, inquire about the facility/schedule and sign up for class. This space can represent the values of organization, hospitality, and information.
    - ii. The studio area functions as a space for dancers to practise their art, perfect their movements, learn from others and express their passion for dance. This space can represent the values of creativity, physical health, music, technique, and practice.
    - iii. The changing room functions as a storage area for personal belongings, a meeting space for dancers, and a way to prepare oneself for dance class. This space can represent the values of preparedness, focus, physical possessions, and building relationships.
7. As a class, explore the space depicted in the interactive documentary:
  - a. Why is this space important to this individual? What values does it represent for this individual? Educators can connect this inquiry to the classroom guidelines, a classroom charter, and/or the shared values of the class. For example, “Our classroom represents the value of learning for me—this is where I come to understand things that happen in the world around me.”
  - b. How does the individual impact the sacred space? What does the individual bring into the space?
  - c. How does the sacred space in the film impact the individual?
8. Students can conclude by creating a written reflection:
  - a. What is the meaning of sacred space in your own life?
  - b. Do you have a space that you consider sacred in your life? Explain the impact this space has on you.



## ACTIVITY 5: EXPLORING MY IDENTITY THROUGH FILM

### OBJECTIVE:

To provide students with an opportunity to synthesize their learning based on **The Faith Project** and to share dimensions of their own identity through the medium of film.

Possible Inquiry Question: *If you could share a dimension of your identity through the medium of film, what would you record? How and why would you record it?*

Sequencing: After deeply engaging with the interactive documentary through activities/discussions

### Additional Materials:

- Large-sized paper
- Markers, pens and art supplies
- Recording equipment if available (camera, smartphone, etc.)

### Activity Description:

Students can begin by revisiting one of the **Faith Project** films and identifying the dimensions of the interactive documentary through the lens of media literacy (source, subject of clips, choice of space, story being shared and choice of details, motivation to share the story, method of filming, etc.). See the section in this guide on “Developing Media Literacy Skills Through **The Faith Project**.”

1. Students can then begin to create their own film idea based on the inquiry question:
  - a. What experience would you want to share with others?
  - b. Why would you want to share this experience?
  - c. What would you want your audience to know about you through this film?
  - d. Is your story filmed in a space that is sacred to you? Explain.
  - e. How would you make your audience feel like they are present in the experience? What techniques would you use to film this experience?
  - f. What questions would you want your audience to ask you?
  - g. What would you title your film? Explain.
2. Once students have brainstormed, they can create a storyboard (template included in the study guide) on large paper that shows a simple sequence of at least three “frames” for their film idea. Each frame can have a caption that would be read out as a voiceover during the film. These voiceovers can be based on the responses from Step 1.
3. Students can then share their storyboards with the class. If equipment is available, students can work in groups of two or three to film their personal experiences for collective viewing. Classmates can then use media literacy questions to critically engage with and understand the work of their peers.

## RELATED FILMS AND INTERACTIVE PROJECTS FROM THE NFB

*Circle of the Sun*, 1960, 29:40

*The Hutterites*, 1964, 27:56

*These Are My People...*, 1969, 13:18

*The People of the Book*, 1973, 28:05

*Afterlife*, 1978, 7:12

*The Followers*, 1981, 78:58

*Behind the Veil: Nuns*, 1984, 130:04

*Discussion in Bioethics: The Courage of One's Convictions*, 1985, 14:59

*A Song for Tibet*, 1991, 56:41

*Scared Sacred*, 2004, 104:53

*Me and the Mosque*, 2005, 52:45

*Mystical Brain*, 2006, 52:15

*The Trap*, 2007, 19:25

*For the Cause*, 2011, 52:56

*Exile*, 2012, 97:16

*Holy Mountain*, 2010 – NFB Interactive Web Documentary, [holymountain.nfb.ca/#/holymountain](http://holymountain.nfb.ca/#/holymountain)

*Similkameen Crossroads*, 2013 - NFB Interactive Photo Essay, [crossroads.nfb.ca/#/crossroads](http://crossroads.nfb.ca/#/crossroads)

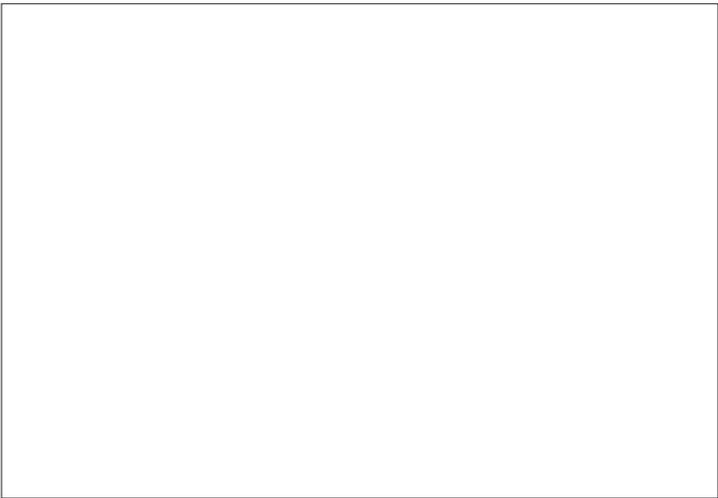
## CREDITS

**The Faith Project** Study Guide and the Quick Guide Faith Fact Sheets were written by Noorin Fazal. Noorin—a teacher, mentor and researcher—is passionate about interfaith and intercultural education. Noorin is actively involved in the development of cross-cultural curriculum. Her scholarly work focuses on virtue ethics pedagogy (“What does it mean to be human?”) and the teaching and learning processes of media literacy. For the 2013-2014 academic year, Noorin launched a secondary religious education program in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, the first of its kind in East Africa. Currently, Noorin is based in Toronto.

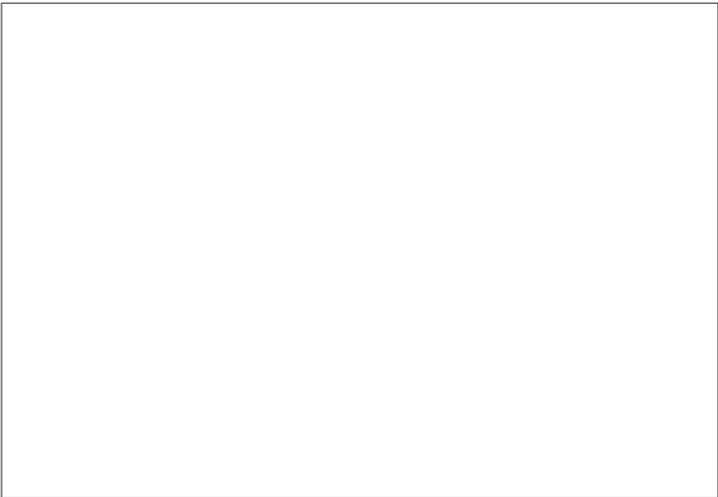
This study guide was produced by NFB Education and prepared by Anne Koizumi, NFB Education Specialist and Workshop Facilitator.

# STORYBOARD

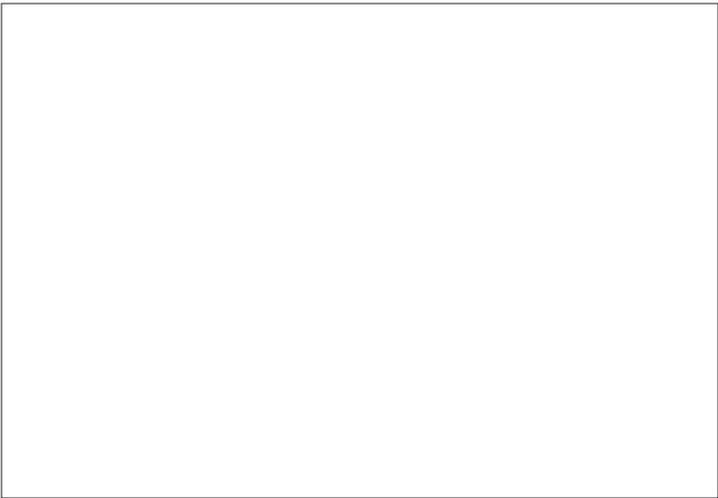
ACTIONS



Four horizontal lines for writing actions corresponding to the first storyboard panel.



Four horizontal lines for writing actions corresponding to the second storyboard panel.



Four horizontal lines for writing actions corresponding to the third storyboard panel.

## POPULATION IN CANADA:

~1,400,000 or ~4% of Canadians (~700,000 First Nations people, ~420,000 Métis, ~56,000 Inuit and ~210,000 Non-Status Indians)

## HISTORY:

Aboriginal peoples are the traditional inhabitants of what we now call Canada. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 11th century, Aboriginal communities thrived by recognizing their deep partnership with the natural environment.

Sources identify three broad groups: the First Nations who historically lived in North America from the Pacific to the Atlantic, the Inuit who lived along the coast and on the northern islands of Canada, and the Métis who descend from the historical connection between the First Nations communities and the Europeans.

The First Nations, Inuit and Métis have their own distinct histories, cultures, spiritual beliefs and practices based on their traditional geographic region. Within these communities there is rich diversity. For example, some sources categorize the 617 First Nations communities into six groups based on geography: Woodland, Iroquoian, Plains, Plateau, Pacific Coast, and Mackenzie and Yukon River Basins. There are more than 50 Aboriginal languages in Canada; some languages have common roots and therefore are understood by many groups.

In the presence of such diversity, Aboriginal communities are united in their integrated way of living. Spirituality is more a worldview than a set of specific cultural practices. In this worldview, sacredness is interwoven through all dimensions of life; humankind strives for holistic, balanced, harmonious existence. There is no dichotomy between “religion” and regular daily life—it is not seen as separate from the overall human experiences of living, knowing and learning.

Aboriginal spiritual traditions can include mythology and ceremonies. Complex, diverse sets of customs within each community enable members to understand and engage with the sacred and supernatural. Myths (understood as stories that hold perennial truths) can highlight origins of ritual practice, the cosmos, death, ethical action and religious institutions.

In recent history, Aboriginal communities in Canada have experienced profound injustice in the wake of European settlement (including abusive trade relationships, treaties and policies, establishment of residential schools, and forced integration). As a result, many Aboriginal teachings, beliefs and practices have been lost over time. Honouring these teachings is essential for Canada’s future as a pluralistic society.

## FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

None. Practices take place in open air, and also within a longhouse. Sacred Scripture(s): Beliefs and myths are shared as part of an oral tradition.

## SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Human beings are created to live in harmony with the natural world. The concept of Relationship is integral to Aboriginal spiritual traditions. The natural world is alive, intelligent and integrated with humankind.
- There is a profound interconnectedness among all of creation. All animate and inanimate parts of the environment are endowed with powerful and mysterious spirits, and thus deserve the utmost respect.
- Gratitude is a central concept in Aboriginal traditions—humankind expresses gratitude to the natural world for abundant gifts that ensure survival and flourishing.
- Elders hold crucial roles as teachers and role models within the community. They pass on the traditions, values, rituals and practices to younger generations. Elders and healers are recognized for their vast wisdom.
- Values and traditions of the people are gifts from the Creator. Values such as wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth enable right living and healing.
- Sacred medicines are used within spiritual ceremonies for purification and healing. Some sources describe a medicine wheel with four directions and four corresponding sacred medicines: Sweetgrass in the North, Tobacco in the East, Cedar in the South and Sage in the West. Each of these medicines attends to a different dimension of human experience (spiritual, mental, emotional and physical). Approaches to medicine and healing within Aboriginal Spiritual Traditions are often seen as antithetical to Western medicine, but this is not the case.
- Prayer can be personal and communal. Offerings, such as tobacco, can be made to the spirits.
- Ceremonies and cultural practices can include powwows, sweat lodges, smudging, fasting, singing/chanting and dancing. Such practices are seen as expressions of spirituality within a holistic, balanced and harmonious worldview.

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## POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~376 million

## POPULATION IN CANADA:

~367,000 or ~1% of Canadians

## HISTORY:

Over 2,500 years ago, in northern India (present-day Lumbini, Nepal), a prince named Siddhartha Gautama was born. He lived a life of luxury and security until he decided to explore the world beyond the walls of his palace. For the first time in his sheltered life, he encountered suffering. He saw different types of human suffering: old age, sickness, death; he also saw a response to them in the form of asceticism. After living a life of extreme wealth, Siddhartha adopted the life of an ascetic and studied the practices of meditation and self-denial. However, these rigorous ascetic experiences did not enable Siddhartha to understand and respond to the condition of human suffering. He eventually chose a “middle way”—a path balanced between excess and asceticism.

One day in Bodhgaya, India, beneath a Bodhi tree, Siddhartha became absorbed in meditation and reflection. He vowed to sit beneath this “tree of awakening” until he gained insight into the cause and cessation of suffering. He meditated through the night; when the morning star appeared, Siddhartha had gained the liberating insight that severed the causes of suffering and become “the Buddha,” or the awakened one. This state of awakening, called *nirvana*, implies the release from all sources of suffering. Upon attainment of *nirvana*, the compassionate Buddha began to teach others about the path toward liberation. He taught in the cities and villages of North India for 45 years and died in 483 BCE in Kushinigar, India.

Today, there is much rich diversity within the Buddhist tradition. Some sources identify two major streams: the Theravada tradition (common in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos) and the Mahayana tradition (common in China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan). The latter stream includes the Vajrayana tradition of Tibet. In a contemporary context, Buddhist traditions flow and mingle together in many parts of the world, including Canada.

## FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Temple

## SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

There are a variety of scriptures within the Buddhist tradition; none of these is considered authoritative for the entire Buddhist community. The Pali canon is authoritative in the Theravada tradition.

## SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Believers in Buddhism, called Buddhists, do not believe in a personal God.
- To be Buddhist means to “take refuge” in the Three Treasures or Jewels: the Buddha, the *dharma* (the teachings) and the *sangha* (the community that follows these teachings).
- The Buddha’s first sermon in Sarnath, India, explained the concept of suffering and the cessation of suffering. This first “turning of the Wheel of Dharma” was introduced as the “Four Noble Truths.” The first Noble Truth teaches that life involves suffering—*dukkha* in the Pali language. The second Noble Truth is that suffering is caused by ignorance and attachment. The third Noble Truth is that there is a cessation to suffering: one can be released from suffering. The fourth Noble Truth is the Eightfold Path: a comprehensive system that leads to liberation. Often the Eightfold Path is divided into three basic subdivisions: Ethical actions of body, speech and mind; Concentration, which includes Mindfulness practices; and Wisdom—the direct perception into the nature of reality which eliminates the roots of ignorance (*avidya* in Sanskrit). Through the teaching of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, Buddha diagnosed the cause of human suffering and introduced a cure to alleviate it.
- Buddhists believe that existence is impermanent. No state, good or bad, is eternal.

The concept of *karma* (action), also found in Hinduism, is significant. *Karma* can be explained in Buddhism through the metaphor of planting seeds: good deeds will lead to good fruit and bad deeds will lead to bad fruit. In this way, past actions impact us and present actions reverberate into the future. Although our previous actions in part create how we experience our reality, we have the opportunity as humans to transform our minds and our karma.

## OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:

- *Theravada* is a Sanskrit word meaning “the teachings of the Elders.”
- *Mahayana* is a Sanskrit word meaning “the great vehicle.”
- *Vajrayana* is a Sanskrit word meaning “the diamond vehicle.”

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### POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~2.3 billion

### POPULATION IN CANADA:

~22,000,000 or ~67.3% of Canadians

### HISTORY:

The faith of Christianity, one of three Abrahamic faiths (the other two are Islam and Judaism), is based on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of a man known as Jesus Christ. According to Christian sacred scripture, called the Bible, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judaea. He was conceived to Mary, a young unmarried virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Though not much is known of Jesus' childhood, the Bible says that Jesus was about 30 years old when he was baptized by John the Baptist—the event which marks the beginning of his ministry. It is believed that his ministry lasted approximately three years.

Jesus, understood by Christians to be the Son of God, shared the urgent message of God's justice, mercy, love and generosity. As a healer and wisdom teacher, Jesus challenged traditional ways and angered many leaders, particularly the Roman authorities. They eventually charged him with sedition and executed him. He was nailed to a cross, an act known as crucifixion (a common practice in the Roman Empire). Shortly after his execution, Jesus' beloved followers experienced his living, physical presence, and they joyfully proclaimed that he was raised from the dead. Resurrection is central to the celebration of Easter, and is highly symbolic for Christians.

Today, some sources would identify three major branches of Christianity: the Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, and Protestant churches and movements. Other branches include Anglicanism, Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism, and historic peace churches like those of the Quakers and Mennonites. These broad streams consist of many diverse communities of interpretation that have developed over the centuries. As with other religious traditions, communities of interpretation within Christianity continue to emerge today.

### FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Church (also understood as an institution or an assembly of the baptized gathered for worship)

### SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

Bible

- The Bible (not one book but an entire collection) has two sections, commonly called the Old Testament and the New Testament; the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, is the sacred scripture of Judaism.
- The New Testament comprises 27 books falling into two major categories: the Gospels and the Letters.
- The Gospels included in the traditional collection portray the life and teachings of Jesus; these four books (known as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) provide distinct perspectives on Jesus' life.

### SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Christianity is a monotheistic faith: followers believe that there is only one God.
- Three dimensions of God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—are often referred to as the Trinity. Jesus, as Son of God, is understood to reveal God in human form.
- Through trust in Jesus and the significant meanings of his life, Christians experience a "right" relationship with God.
- Christians can get to know God through God's grace: divine love, power and generosity.
- Prayer is an important dimension of Christian faith. Prayer can be formal or informal. It can be based on community and ritual; it can also be personal and spontaneous. Some Christians at times direct their prayers through an intermediary such as a martyr or saint.
- The Eucharist, meaning thanksgiving, is a rite performed in commemoration of the Last Supper shared by Jesus and his disciples, prior to Jesus' death. Wine and bread have deep significance.

### OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:

- "Christ" comes from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning Anointed One; akin to the Hebrew word *Messiah*.
- The word "Gospel" comes from the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning good news.

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## POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~900 million

## POPULATION IN CANADA:

~498,000 or ~1.5% of Canadians

## HISTORY:

Hinduism is considered to be the oldest continuing religion in the world. Hinduism is often described as a pluralistic faith because of its rich history encompassing many key figures, many sources of inspiration and many philosophies. The majority of people in India and Nepal identify themselves as being “Hindu.” This identification is complex due in part to a long history of integration.

Since the Bronze Age, ancient communities in South Asia lived on the plains of the Indus River Valley, in addition to vast settlements along other major river systems in India. From the remains of these cities, archaeologists and historians have uncovered evidence of an intricate ritual life, inclusive of such elements as ritual bathing, fire sacrifices, yoga and other practices still prevalent in the Hindu tradition.

Recent scholarship from several prominent archaeologists has suggested that the cultural life of these Bronze Age settlements continued indigenously within the Indian subcontinent, and that the key elements of Hindu language, literary works and ritual practices were present in the region since at least the second millennium BCE. Such research further suggests that these components did not develop externally, contrary to established views that major elements of Hindu culture were imported from Central Asia. Continued archaeological research and excavations have increasingly supported the notion of a strong, unbroken continuity between the early Bronze Age culture of India and later periods in which Hinduism flourished in the sub-continent.

## FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Mandir or Temple, which can be either public or personal (many Hindus have household shrines).

## SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

Vedas

- The Vedas are a collection of ancient prayers, rituals, hymns and philosophical texts, made up of four compositions: the Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. These works contain the basis for Hindu theology, cosmology and philosophical structures.
- The Vedas are known as *shruti*—“heard”—because they were historically shared orally.

- Veda, meaning “wisdom” or “knowledge,” can also be used to refer to the general wisdom and authority of the whole Hindu tradition.
- Several other prominent Hindu scriptures are attributed with spiritual wisdom and authority. The *Puranas* and *Itihasa* are narratives of ancient and divine histories. Some of Hinduism’s most beloved accounts of incarnations of God are detailed within these works, including the Ramayana and Srimad Bhagavad Purana. Other texts such as the highly venerated Bhagavad Gita address philosophical concerns.

## SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Many adherents to the Hindu tradition believe that divinity permeates the universe and is present in all things. In Hinduism, the unifying force behind the universe and all of its components is God, known by many names, including Parabrahman, Paramatman and Bhagavan. The presence of God is also manifest in the *atmas*, or souls, of all living beings.
- Hindu scriptures assert that there are many gods and goddesses, such as Vishnu, Shiva and Devi. These higher beings manage various aspects of the universe; however, they are all understood in relation to God’s oneness. Though the Divine can be perceived through an infinite number of forms and names, the multitude of gods and goddesses in Hinduism are ultimately governed by the supreme will of Parabrahman, as revealed in several key philosophical sources including the Upanishads.
- *Dharma* can be defined in many ways, including duty, ritual, ethics, law, order, morality and religion. *Dharma* refers to the force that upholds the universe. Ritual action and social order are part of *dharma*. Guidance on dharma originates from the Vedas and is discussed in several important works, including the great Hindu epic poem Mahabharata.
- *Jnana* or *gnan* can be understood as deep insight, wisdom or knowledge. To acquire this insight, one needs guidance from a *guru* or spiritual teacher.
- *Karma* means “action.” Through action, human beings engage with the issues and concerns of the world. *Karma* refers to one’s own actions and their consequences. The Hindu teachings surrounding karma suggest detached action—individuals are taught to not covet the fruits of their actions as this can reinforce false egotism and selfish desires. Instead, Hinduism teaches that actions performed with selflessness in devotion to God can lead to spiritual release, or *moksha*, from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth, known as the cycle of samsara. *Karma* is also a concept in the religions of Buddhism and Jainism, although it is understood differently in these traditions.
- *Bhakti* means devotion in a spiritual sense. In Hinduism, devotion to God can be both personal and communal, and it is expressed in many ways, including hymns, or *bhajans*, temple worship, plays and dances. *Bhakti* is a central aspect in many traditions of Hinduism and is highlighted as a fundamental path to spiritual liberation in several scriptural works, including the revered *Bhagavad Gita*.

### **OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:**

- *Veda* is a Sanskrit word meaning “wisdom” or “knowledge.”
- *Bhagavad Gita* is Sanskrit for “Song of Bhagavan [God].”

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## POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~1.5 billion

## POPULATION IN CANADA:

~1,000,000 or 3% of Canadians

## HISTORY:

The faith of Islam originated in the Arabian city of Mecca, the site of the holy Kaaba. An orphaned merchant named Muhammad received the first Qur'anic revelation in the year 610 through a heavenly intermediary known as Angel Gabriel. Prophet Muhammad's mission sparked transformation in the socially stratified tribal society of Arabia. His new moral order deemed all humans equal under one true God. Muslims, believers in Islam, see the Prophet as a model for righteous living; his death marked the beginning of a longstanding debate on the question of rightful leadership and succession.

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is an Abrahamic faith. Islam is practised all around the world; currently, Indonesia holds the largest population of Muslims. Since the time of the Prophet, Muslims have responded to the word of God in their own context, culture and language. The diversity of the *Ummah* (global Muslim community) is vast, and there are many communities of interpretation. Sources often categorize Islam into three major communities: Sunnism, Shiism and Sufism.

## FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Mosque

## SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

Qur'an

- The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters and about 6,000 verses; it is understood to be the message of God as revealed to his final messenger.
- In Arabic, *Qur'an* means "recitation"—revelation is meant to be recited, as there is a distinct poetic nature and beauty to the text.

## SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Islam is a monotheistic faith: Muslims believe that there is only one God.
- God has sent many messengers and revelations to communities throughout history so that they may know how to live nobly—the Qur'an is the final and complete message.
- In Islam, faith and world are inextricably linked; Muslims pursue balance and noble conduct.
- Muslims honour their interconnected responsibilities as exemplified by the Prophet: the horizontal relationship (ethical action and care for creation) and the vertical relationship (God-consciousness).
- Muslims fulfill central obligations and ethical responsibilities through rituals of prayer, pilgrimage, giving and sacrifice
- In the *shahada*, Muslims proclaim that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his messenger; this profession serves as a formal statement of intention to pursue a straight path laid out by God.

## OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:

- *Islam* is an Arabic word that refers to the act of submission. *Salaam* is often translated as "peace" in English, and *Muslim* as "one who submits."

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## POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~13 million

## POPULATION IN CANADA:

~329,000 or 1% of Canadians

## HISTORY:

Over 3,500 years ago in the Middle East, Judaism came into being ; it is known as the oldest of the three Abrahamic faiths (the other two are Christianity and Islam). The Prophet Moses received the Torah on behalf of the community, providing them with a charter for living as God's people. Through Moses as an emissary, God freed the Jewish community from enslavement in Egypt and led them to the Holy Land, an event referred to as the Exodus. Since then, the Jewish community has spread around the world, even in the presence of severe persecution, including the Holocaust, during which 6 million Jews were murdered.

Judaism embraces the diversity of the manifold communities and cultures of Jewish people, whose native tongues include Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino. As in other faiths, there are many communities of interpretation in Judaism, including individuals who consider themselves Jewish but do not necessarily observe Jewish law. Some sources categorize four branches of Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist.

## FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Synagogue

## SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

Torah

- The Torah, part of the Hebrew scriptures, includes 613 *mitzvot* or divine commandments given to the Prophet Moses; specifically, the Torah refers to the five books of the Bible called the Pentateuch, and generally it refers to all of Jewish sacred literature, learning and law, and Judaism as a way of life.
- The Ten Commandments are the most well-known of the *mitzvot*; they teach about ethical living.
- The compilation of the oral Torah is referred to as the Talmud. The Talmud includes discussions around the Jewish legal system (the Way). The Jewish legal system is known as *halacha*.

## SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Judaism is a monotheistic faith: followers believe that there is only one God.
- Judaism can be understood as a triad of interconnected reference points: God, Torah and the people of Israel or the Jewish community (these symbols are interdependent but can vary in emphasis).
- Each individual has a personal and direct connection with God, and this is based on a covenant to uphold God's laws in daily life.
- In the covenant, the symbol of God represents the vertical relationship that human beings have with their creator, the symbol of Israel represents the horizontal relationship among members of the Jewish community, and the Torah represents the vertical and horizontal relationship as it outlines the way of living for an entire people in the context of their connection with God.
- Some sources identify social justice (understood particularly as respect for the dignity of others) as a central dimension of the Torah.

## OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:

- *Torah* is a Hebrew word referring to instruction or teaching.

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## POPULATION IN THE WORLD:

~20 million

## POPULATION IN CANADA:

~455,000 or 1.4% of Canadians

## HISTORY:

Sikhism traces its roots back to the Punjab region of South Asia (modern-day India and Pakistan). Around 1500 CE, an individual named Guru Nanak received a vision that led him to teach the people how to reach God. Sikhism is based on Guru Nanak's teachings and those of the nine gurus who came after him. Each of these gurus was in deep communion with God, and their spiritual guidance is found within the sacred scripture.

The 10th guru, named Guru Gobind Singh, died in 1708. Before he died, he did not pass on the authority of the guruship to a human being. Instead, this authority was passed on through the *Guru Granth* (scripture) and *Guru Panth* (spiritual community). The word *khalsa* (derived from Arabic, meaning "pure") refers to the community of Sikhs who have been initiated into the faith and thereby dedicated their lives to *sarbat da bhalla* (the good of all). There are five distinct physical symbols of this initiation, commonly referred to as the 5 Ks. There is great diversity among the communities of Sikhs around the world, and ritual expression is based on cultural context. As in other faiths, Sikhs do not believe in performing empty rituals or observing superstitions.

## FORMAL PLACE OF WORSHIP:

Gurdwara

## SACRED SCRIPTURE(S):

Torah

- The *Guru Granth*, sometimes respectfully called "Sri Guru Granth Sahib," is a unique scripture because it includes inspired hymns by non-Sikhs. It is considered to be a living guide and inspiration for all Sikhs.
- These hymns contain the divinely inspired word of God, described as both mystical and practical.

## SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES:

- Sikhism is a monotheistic faith: followers believe that there is only one God.
- The internal religious state of the individual is paramount.
- Each individual has a personal and direct link with God, and all individuals are equal.
- Ethical action and truthful living are more important than mere performance of ritual.
- There are three duties that must be carried out by Sikhs: remembering God at all times (*Nam Japna*); earning an honest living (*Kirt Karnā*); and sharing one's wealth and caring for others (*Vand Chhakna*).
- Human beings spend their time in a cycle of birth, life and rebirth, and the quality of this life depends on the law of *karma*—the nature of one's current life is based on the good and the deeds performed in the previous life.

## OTHER IMPORTANT TRANSLATIONS:

- *Guru* is a Sanskrit word meaning teacher, saint or honoured/religious person.
- *Sikh* is a Punjabi word for disciple or student and refers to followers of Sikhism.

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