



R.E Ideas

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Rites of Passage

Babies, Baptism & Childhood Rituals

Christianity is the main focus of all R.E. teaching, but it is interesting to look at how the other religions celebrate the birth of babies and childhood rites of passage.



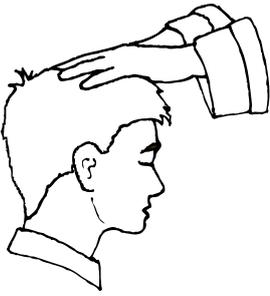
Christianity

Baptism is a sign that sin has been washed away and that the child is being accepted into the Christian faith. It usually takes place as soon after birth as possible. An infant baptism is sometimes called a 'christening'. As babies cannot make the promise to follow Christ that is usual at baptism, their parents and godparents do this on their behalf. The parents will have already decided the name for the child before they bring the child to Church. During the ceremony the Priest/Vicar/Minister marks a cross on the baby's head with holy water from the font. The baby is named and blessed. Often, the child is given a candle to show that they have passed from darkness into light and belong to Christ the "Light of the World". The members of the Church are also asked to promise to help the child in a Christian way. Families usually celebrate with a party. Sometimes adults are baptised by being fully immersed in water.

Confirmation

This usually occurs when a child reaches their early teens and provides the opportunity for them to make their own commitment to Christianity. During the confirmation service the same questions that were asked of parents and godparents at baptism are repeated. This time the person can answer for themselves,

demonstrating that they are taking responsibility for their own spiritual journey of following Christ.



Hinduism

The baby is washed and the symbol 'om' is written on his or her tongue in honey, using a golden pen. Ten to twelve days after the birth, the priest announces the baby's name and prayers are said. Naming the child is a simple ceremony. The father just leans over the child and whispers in its ear "Your name is...". Scarlet threads are tied to the child as a symbol of protection and he or she is given a piece of gold to hold as a sign of good fortune for the future. The child's public and secret names are announced by the oldest woman in the family whilst the other women sing songs to the baby. The first time the baby is taken outside the house, the father recites the Gayatri Mantra: *We contemplate the glorious splendour of the divine life-giver; may he enlighten our minds.*

The Sacred Thread Ceremony

This is only carried out with boys, and these are mainly boys from the top caste. The ceremony can be performed at any age from nine onwards and marks a spiritual rebirth in the child. The child and the priest sit on opposite sides of a sacred fire as prayers and hymns are chanted. After the boy has repeated prayers a special thread is placed across his right shoulder and right hip. The child is handed over to a new guru for instruction, and the guru accepts responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his new pupil.



Islam

Birth

Muslims consider all new-born babies to be a gift from Allah and they are welcomed into the ummah - the world-wide family of Islam - as soon as possible after their birth. Within a few minutes of their birth the baby's father whispers the adhan [the words used during the call to prayer] into the baby's right ear. This is so the words 'Allah is great' are the first words a baby hears. After this has been recited a tiny piece of sugar or date is placed on the baby's tongue by an elderly relative, expressing the hope that the child will grow up to be obedient and kind.

Aqiqa

This ceremony takes place seven days after birth. The Imam [prayer leader] says a prayer in the baby's ear and the baby's head is shaved. The hair is weighed and the equivalent weight of gold or silver is given to charity. Goats or sheep are slaughtered, one for a baby girl, two for a baby boy. Some boys are circumcised at their aqiqa, but this can be done at any time before they are ten. When children reach puberty they are answerable for themselves to Allah.



Judaism



Brit milah

Babies are taken to the synagogue on the Shabbat after their birth and welcomed into the congregation by their Hebrew name. When a baby boy is eight days old he is circumcised because God said to Abraham 'This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man-child among you shall be circumcised' [Genesis 17: 10]. The baby's foreskin is removed by a trained man called a mohel. Prayers are said and the baby is given a drop of wine.

Bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah

Boys are considered adults when they are thirteen and girls when they are twelve. They are then responsible for their own faith. Bar mitzvah means 'son of the commandment'. Bat mitzvah means 'daughter of the commandment'. At his bar mitzvah, the boy reads a passage from the Torah. There is usually a party after the service. The son thanks his father and the father thanks God that he is no longer responsible for his son's religious upbringing. From now on the boy is able to wear the tallit and the tefillin on the appropriate occasions.

There is no traditional service to recognise that girls have come of age.

Buddhism

Rites of passage are not particularly important in the Buddhist religion, though they sometimes adapt rituals indigenous to the culture in which they are living. In some cultures the main ceremonies for a baby would happen when he or she is a month old.

First the head is shaved. [The hair is a sign of a bad life force from a previous life, so Buddhists get rid of it] Then special cotton is tied around the baby's wrists,

the parents hope will bring it luck. The baby is often given a name suggested by the monks. Food is given to the monks when a baby is born.

Sikhism

Birth

The birth of any child is welcomed by the Sikh community as a direct gift from God. When a baby is born the words of the Mool Mantar are whispered into their ear and a few drops of honey are placed on their lips.

A few weeks after a baby is born the whole family go to the Gurdwara, taking with them ingredients for the 'karah parshad'. This sweet is made from flour or semolina mixed with equal quantities of butter and sugar and is shared out amongst the congregation.

The holy book- *Guru Granth Sahib* - is opened at random and the family then have to choose a name using the first letter of the hymn on the left hand page. The Granthi announces the baby's name to the congregation adding 'Singh' [lion] as a surname if the child is a boy 'Kaur' [princess] if the child is a girl.

Amrit Ceremony

When a child is at least 14 years old and accepts the principles of Sikhism they are able to join the Khalsa. Five Sikhs are chosen to represent the original 5 in 1699.

They kneel down and each in turn stirs sugar and water in a bowl with a two-edged sword. There are prayers and readings.

The sugar and water [called amrit] is sprinkled 5 times on the hair, eyes and hands of each new member.

The new members are given new names.
