

Created by J. Bylo Chadeu, 2005	MAJOR SYMBOL	FOUNDER	WHERE DID IT START & WHERE IS IT NOW?	SACRED TEXTS	WHERE DO THEY WORSHIP?	RELIGIOUS PEOPLE	KEY BELIEFS	MORALS & VALUES
HINDU- ISM								
ISLAM								
JUDAISM								
SHINTO								



ANIMISM

Animism is the oldest known type of belief system in the world. It is still practiced in a variety of forms in many traditional societies.

The Basics

- Founder-There is no one person who is considered the founder of Animism.
- Geographic Origin-Developed simultaneously in different parts of the world.
- Currently Practiced-World-wide, but most common in areas of Africa and the Americas.
- Significant Writings-Most traditional cultures that practice Animism also have an oral tradition of storytelling, rather than a developed writing system.
- Places of Worship-Animist rituals tend to take place outdoors in nature.
- Significant Religious People-Animist rituals are typically conducted by a Shaman, Medicine Man, or Medicine Woman.

Teachings and Beliefs

Animists practice nature worship. They believe that everything in the universe has a spirit. This is exemplified by the practices of the Plains Indians in North America who would praise the spirit of the buffalo that they killed for giving its life to them so that they might survive. Animists also believed that ancestors watch over the living from the spirit world. This belief resulted in ancestor worship as a means of communicating with and showing respect to ancestors.

Morals (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/1699/African.html>)

Many beliefs common among different African religions appear in their creation stories such as:

1. The spiritual cosmos populated by divine beings, sometimes in a hierarchical order.
2. The belief of Earth and material life as created.
3. A multitude of Gods and other spirits.
4. The role of ancestors.
5. A belief in sacred places and spaces such as a mountain that God inhabits.
6. Males and females as parts of the cosmic scheme.
7. Idea of society being organized around values and traditions drawn from common beginnings in history.

The religious leaders in many of Africa's religions have tried, sometimes in vain, to preserve the society from foreigners encroaching upon their lands and customs.

Their role has always been to preserve the histories and traditions of the people. They teach the ways of survival to the people, be it wedding procedures or planting times the village priest is there to and serve through the God. The rituals practiced in many traditional African societies are all connected by the belief of being stepping stones to the ultimate goal of death and the afterlife. There are rituals that enhance all of the transitional stages of life such as birth, puberty, initiation into adulthood, marriage, having children, old age, death and life after death. The rituals allow the people celebrating to know what is expected of them in the next stage of their life and what is socially acceptable.



HINDUISM

Hinduism is a polytheistic religion that was formed from a variety of different religious practices.

The Basics

- Established-Elements of the Hindu religion can be traced back to the Shiva, the ancient Indus River Valley civilization (approximately 3000 BCE) in modern-day Pakistan.
- Founder-It has been theorized that Hinduism is a result of cultural diffusion that occurred between Aryan invaders and the native peoples of India sometime around 1500 BCE.
- Geographic Origin-Developed on the Indian subcontinent.
- Currently Practiced-Most common in India.
- Significant Writings-Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita.
- Places of Worship-While Hindu temples do exist, Hinduism is usually practiced in the home where there is usually a shrine dedicated to a favored deity.
- Significant Religious People-Hindu priests carry out traditional religious practices in temples.
- Symbols-
- Population-

Teachings and Beliefs

In Hinduism, salvation is achieved through a spiritual oneness of the soul, atman, with the ultimate reality of the universe, Brahma. To achieve this goal, the soul must obtain moksha, or liberation from the samsara, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. As a result of these basic teachings, Hindus believe in reincarnation, which is influenced by karma (material actions resulting from the consequences of previous actions), and dharma (fulfilling one's duty in life). Because all forms of animal life possess souls, Hindus believe in ahimsa, or that all life is sacred, and should not be harmed. In fact, one animal which Hindus consider to be extremely sacred is the cow. The peaceful and contented existence of cows is considered virtuous by Hindus and would represent a rewarding reincarnation for a soul. For this reason, most Hindus are vegetarians so that they do not harm other living beings. The belief in reincarnation, karma, and dharma also provides the religious justification for the existence of the rigid social structure known as the Caste System.

Samsara

Rivers represent reincarnation to Hindus. Samsara, or reincarnation, is a central teaching of Hinduism. Rivers are sometimes thought to symbolize reincarnation because they constantly flow, yet follow the same course. Perhaps the most sacred river is the Ganges, which is used for spiritual cleansing, funeral rites, and other Hindu rituals.

The concept of reincarnation can best be represented by the infinity symbol. When one is born, they are given life by Brahman, as they pass through life, they are preserved by Vishnu, until finally Shiva claims you in death. Then the cycle is repeated over and over again until one finally achieves moksha.

Morals (<http://wri.leaderu.com/wri-table2/hinduism.html>)

Because of the vast number of reincarnations of any given individual, Hinduism recognizes that most people's lack of spiritual development means they must lead normal lives. However, it is thought that as a person matures he can grow closer to the ideal of full renunciation of the personality. Thus, pursuit of wealth and love of the opposite sex are considered proper to certain stages of life, but when people grow old they often leave behind their worldly possessions to pursue the life of a wandering monk.

Yet no matter what stage of life one is in, "renouncing the fruits of your labors" is the supreme law of morality. Hindus seek to remain conscious of the illusory nature of this world and so progressively deny themselves, at least in thought, all forms of material, emotional, and even spiritual rewards and property.

For centuries the notions of reincarnation and karma have been used to support the cruelties of the Indian caste system, which relegates the majority of people to poverty and subservience. Probably as a result of Western influence the caste system has been substantially dismantled, although the idea that all human suffering is deserved is still responsible for a great deal of injustice.



JUDAISM

Judaism is the oldest known monotheistic religion still practiced in the world today. Its fundamental teachings have been influential and are the basis for more recently developed religions such as Christianity and Islam.

The Basics

- Founder-Abraham is generally recognized as the founder of Moses and the Ten Commandments Judaism due to his covenant with God. However, Moses is also considered a founder due to his role in the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt, and his delivery of the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai sometime around 2000 BCE.
- Geographic Origin-Developed in the Middle East in and around the area that is currently Israel.
- Currently Practiced-World-wide, but the greatest majority of Jews reside in Israel, the United States, and the former Soviet Union.
- Significant Writings-Torah and Talmud.
- Places of Worship-Jews worship in temples called synagogues.
- Significant Religious People-Rabbis are Jewish holy men charged with conducting religious services, ensuring that Jewish laws are observed, and serving as a spiritual guide for the community.

Teachings and Beliefs

Judaism teaches that there is one God who is the creator of all things. After the Hebrew exodus from Egypt, many Hebrews began to lose their faith in God. During this time, Moses went atop Mount Sinai and returned with two stone tablets containing laws that all Hebrews needed to follow. These laws, recorded in the Exodus 20:3-17, became known as the Ten Commandments and include:

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make yourself any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down yourself to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing mercy and steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maid-servant, your domestic animals, or the sojourner within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heavens and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
5. Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land the Lord your God gives you.
6. You shall not commit murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not witness falsely against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Morals (<http://wri.leaderu.com/wri-table2/judaism.html>)

Torah ("to point the way, give direction"), often translated "law," refers in Judaism to a total pattern of behavior, applicable to all aspects of communal and individual life. It is to be found not only in the Old Testament Scriptures but also in a wide variety of oral traditions, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and commentaries on Scripture.

Jews have often tried to develop rules of behavior to cover each situation encountered in their various cultures. Thus a gigantic literature covering codes of conduct has arisen. From time to time movements have emerged that have tried to cut through those rules and get back to the original meaning of torah, but legalism has been a perennial problem of Judaism.

As can be seen in the Ten Commandments, much of Jewish morality is related primarily to the good of the community. The Jewish prophets were perhaps the first strong proponents of social justice in the ancient world, and concern with economic justice continues to be an integral part of Judaism.

But material possessions are generally not considered bad in themselves, even the prophets did not denounce wealth as such, but wanted a greater number of people to have more.

Marriage and children are held in high regard by Judaism. Singleness is looked down on even for religious leaders, and much time is spent teaching children the precepts of the faith.



BUDDHISM

Buddhism developed in India, and is based on many of the core concepts of Hinduism.

The Basics

- Founder-Siddhartha Gautama, or Buddha, which means "enlightened one."
- Geographic Origin-Developed in India.
- Currently Practiced-Most common in Southeast Asia and Japan..
- Significant Writings-Tripitka, or Three Baskets of Wisdom.
- Places of Worship-Buddhism may be practiced individually, but temples and monasteries do exist.
- Significant Religious People-The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan sect of Buddhism, and is considered to be the reincarnation of the bodhisattva, or "buddha-to-be." Buddhist monks can be identified by their traditional orange robes.

Teachings and Beliefs

Siddhartha was born into the Brahmin caste, and by all account led a luxurious lifestyle. However, he was troubled by the human misery that he saw around him everyday. Upon reflection, he deduced that desire was the root caused of all suffering. This idea has been recorded as the Four Noble Truths.

Four Noble Truths

Siddhartha's philosophy of the nature of human suffering and its relation to desire is articulated by these four statements:

1. Life is full of pain and suffering.
2. Human desire causes this suffering.
3. By putting an end to desire, humans can end suffering.
4. Humans can end desire by following the Eightfold Path.

Eightfold Path

The Wheel of Life is one of the most important symbols of Buddhism, as it represents the endless cycle of life through reincarnation and because each of its eight spokes represents one of the teachings of the Eightfold Path.

1. Know that suffering is caused by desire.
2. Be selfless and love all life.
3. Do not lie, or speak without cause.
4. Do not kill, steal, or commit other unrighteous acts.
5. Do not do things which promote evil.
6. Take effort to promote righteousness.
7. Be aware of your physical actions, state of mind, and emotions.
8. Learn to meditate.

Reincarnation

Buddhists believe in an endless cycle of reincarnation, or samsara, which is similar to beliefs of Hinduism. However, Buddhists do not believe that deities are responsible for the phenomenon. In addition, the Caste System is rejected by Buddhists who believe instead that one is reincarnated until they can achieve nirvana, best described as spiritual enlightenment.

Morals (<http://wri.leaderu.com/wri-table2/buddhism.html>)

Buddhist laity are urged to follow the Five Precepts, which prohibit killing (including animals), stealing, illicit sexual relations, wrong speech (including gossiping), and drugs or alcohol. In addition they are expected to support the community of monks.

Monks and nuns follow a path of moderate asceticism, including strict celibacy and the repudiation of all personal property. Buddhist religious leaders often are involved in education and charity and even take part in politics; other leaders separate themselves in their monasteries, contacting the public only to gain funds.

Original and Theravada teaching indicate that a Buddhist can for the most part help his fellow man only by showing him an example of dedication to meditation and self-denial. Mahayana teaching emphasizes "compassion," which involves aiding people in all areas of their lives, even though such aid does not lead directly toward nirvana.



CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is currently the most popular religion in the world based on the number of worshippers found throughout the world. While this monotheistic religion developed from Judaism, there are several key differences in its teachings.

The Basics

- Founder-Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples who helped spread his teachings.
- Geographic Origin-Developed in Judea (now Israel), located in the Middle East bordering the Mediterranean Sea sometime around the year 30 CE.
- Currently Practiced-Christianity is the dominant religion in North America, South America, Europe, and Russia.
- Significant Writings-The Holy Bible, consisting of both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- Places of Worship-Christians practice their faith in temples usually referred to as churches.
- Significant Religious People-Priests and ministers are Christian holy men and women who are charged with conducting religious services, ensuring that Jewish laws are observed, and serving as a spiritual guide for the community. In addition, deacons, nuns, and monks are people who have dedicated their lives to Christian service.

Teachings and Beliefs

Because Christianity evolved from Judaism, there are certain concepts that these two religions share. For example, both Jews and Christians subscribe to the Ten Commandments found in the Book of Exodus. In addition, prophecies of Jewish prophets contained in several books of the Old Testament stated that God would send a savior, or messiah, to the people of Israel. While Judaism clearly states that this event has not yet occurred, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, sent to redeem the world of sin. This has led the Christian faith to proclaim that there is a Holy Trinity, formed by the Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son), and Sustainer (Holy Spirit). Christians believe that these three entities are all part of a single higher power.

Christians are expected to attend church services regularly, usually on Sundays and holy days such as Christmas and Easter. On these occasions Christians take part in sacraments, which are religious practices such as baptism, and receiving the Eucharist.

Morals

These are some key quotations from the Christian Bible that describe the morals of Christianity.

Love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27 – eight times in the bible)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control: against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8).

In as much as you did it to one of the least of these people, so you did it to me. (Matthew 25:37)



ISLAM

Islam, which when translated from Arabic, means "to submit to the will of Allah," is the youngest of the world's major religions. Worshippers of this monotheistic religion are known as Muslims, which means "one who submits to the will of Allah." Islam is currently the second most practiced religion in the world, and experts predict that it will overtake Christianity as the most popular religion in the world sometime during the 21st century.

The Basics

- Founder-Islam was founded by the prophet Mohammed.
- Geographic Origin-Developed on the Arabian Peninsula in the year 622 CE, and quickly spread to other regions.
- Currently Practiced- Islam is most dominant throughout the Middle East, including Southwest Asia and North Africa.
- Significant Writings-The teachings of Islam are collected in the Qur'an.
- Places of Worship-Muslims may gather to worship in temples called Mosques (see picture above).
- Significant Religious People-The Caliph, or successor to the Prophet Mohammed; Imam, leader of prayers; and the Muzzein, or one who rings the bells of a Mosque as a call to prayer.

Teachings and Beliefs

Mohammed received the word of God, or Allah, through the angel Gabriel while living in the city of Mecca. Townspeople soon became fearful of the Mohammed's preaching and he began to receive threats. As a result, he fled to the nearby city of Medina, where people began to believe in his message. The flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Median was instrumental to the founding of the religion of Islam, and is known as the Hegira. Thus, in 622 CE Islam was founded and this date became the starting point for the Islamic calendar.

Mohammed and his followers later returned to Mecca and declared a jihad, or holy war, after which he captured the city. Under Mohammed's leadership, the basic teachings of Islam were established, which are known as the Five Pillars of Islam. Every Muslim is expected to follow these rules in order to lead an ethical life:

1. Confession of Faith: The belief that "there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet."
2. Prayer: Muslims must pray five times per day, facing towards Mecca.
3. Charity: Muslims must give alms to the poor, and support the local Mosque by donating a portion of their income.
4. Fasting: During the Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, all Muslims must fast during daylight hours, except the very young or sick.
5. Pilgrimage: If possible financially, each Muslim must make a hajj, or holy pilgrimage, to the city of Mecca.

Morals (<http://wri.leaderu.com/wri-table2/islam.html>)

Islam presents a "straight path" of clear-cut duties and commands. Islamic morals are a combination of genuine acts of love and justice on the one hand and legalistic performances on the other.

Muhammad is pictured in the Koran as a loving person, helping the poor and slow to take revenge. Nevertheless the firm belief that Muslims possess the one truth has led to much violence on the behalf of Allah through the ages.

Although the Koran actually worked to elevate the horribly degraded position of women in Arab society, women continue to be regarded more as possible temptations to sin for men than as human beings with their own responsibilities before God. Many modern Muslims take the Koran's approval of multiple wives to be applicable only to ancient times.



CONFUCIANISM

Confucius lived in China during the Chou Dynasty, when there was mass disorder and confusion and degrading moral standards. Confucius was appalled by what appeared to be the fracturing of Chinese society. He believed that the only cure

was to stress a sense of social order and mutual respect, a philosophy that later became known as Confucianism.

The Basics

- Founder-Kong Fu Zi, which was translated as Confucius by Europeans. His teachings were later refined and spread by Mencius.
- Geographic Origin-Developed in China around 500 BCE..
- Currently Practiced-Elements of this philosophy are still practiced in Southeast Asia.
- Significant Writings-The Analects.

Teachings and Beliefs

Confucianism teaches that there is a natural social order to society, which can best be explained through the Five Relationships:

1. Ruler to ruled.
2. Father to son.
3. Older brother to younger brother.
4. Husband to wife.
5. Friend to friend.

In these relationships, the second role is considered subordinate to the first. It was taught that if everyone knew their place in society, then order would prevail. There are several concepts that needed to be practiced in order to achieve an ordered society:

Jen-Human kindness should be shown towards one another.

Li-Proper etiquette should always be used, and one should strive to achieve perfect virtue.

Filial Piety-One should respect their elders.

Morals (<http://www.religion-cults.com/Eastern/Confucianism/confuci.html>)

The "universal virtues" are: Wisdom, Benevolence, and Fortitude... Asked about what is "Benevolence", he answered: "It is to love all men"; what is "knowledge?": "It is to know all men"... The "perfect virtue": "Gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness".

Confucius said: A virtuous man has three awes:

- 1- Awe for Heaven's decree,
- 2- Awe for great men.
- 3- Awe for saints' words... When worshipping God, one must feel as if He were visibly present.

Confucius laid great stress on the cultivation of character, purity of heart and conduct. He exhorted the people to develop a good character first, which is a priceless jewel and which is the best of all virtues.

The nature of man, according to Confucius, is fundamentally good inclined towards goodness. Perfection of goodness can be found in sages and saints. Every man should attempt to reach the ideal by leading a virtuous life, by possessing a very noble character, and by doing his duty unselfishly with sincerity and truthfulness. He who is endowed with a good character and divine virtue is a princely type of man. The princely man sticks to virtue, and the inferior man clings to material comfort. The princely man is just while the inferior man expects rewards and favors. The princely man is dignified, noble, magnanimous, and humble while the inferior man is mean, proud, crooked, and arrogant.



SHINTO

Shinto, which means "Way of the Gods," is the traditional religion of Japan that focuses on nature. Many consider Shinto to be a form of Animism due to the many similarities found between them.

Basics

- Established: Shinto was founded around the year 500 BC.
- Torri Founder: Evolved from a mixture of tribal religions with similar beliefs.
- Geographic Origin: Developed on the Japanese archipelago.
- Currently Practiced: Most common in Japan.
- Significant Writings: Kokiji, or Record of Ancient Matters and Nikong, or Chronicles of Japan.
- Places of Worship: Shinto shrines are usually dedicated near sites of impressive natural beauty (e.g., mountains, lakes, etc.), or of historical importance to Japan. The entrance to these shrines is usually indicated by the presence of a red gateway called a torri.
- Significant Religious People: Traditionally, the Emperor of Japan was considered to be a direct descendant of the Sun Goddess who created the Japanese islands. Therefore, the Emperor was considered divine by the people who practiced Shinto. After Japan surrendered to the United States in WWII, Emperor Hirohito renounce his divinity and political authority.

Teachings and Beliefs

Shinto teaches that there is a sacredness of the whole universe and that humans can be in tune with this sacredness. Every mountain, river, plant, animal, and all the diverse phenomena of heaven and earth have spirits, or kami, which inhabit them. Reverence is paid to the ancestors through the practice of ancestor worship.

Morals (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinto#Characteristics_of_Shinto)

Though Shinto has no absolute commandments for its adherents outside of living "a simple and harmonious life with nature and people", there are said to be "Four Affirmations" of the Shinto spirit:

- * Tradition and the family: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.
- * Love of nature: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the kami. Natural objects are worshipped as containing sacred spirits.
- * Physical cleanliness: Followers of Shinto take baths, wash their hands, and rinse out their mouth often.
- * "Matsuri": Any festival dedicated to the Kami, of which there are many each year.