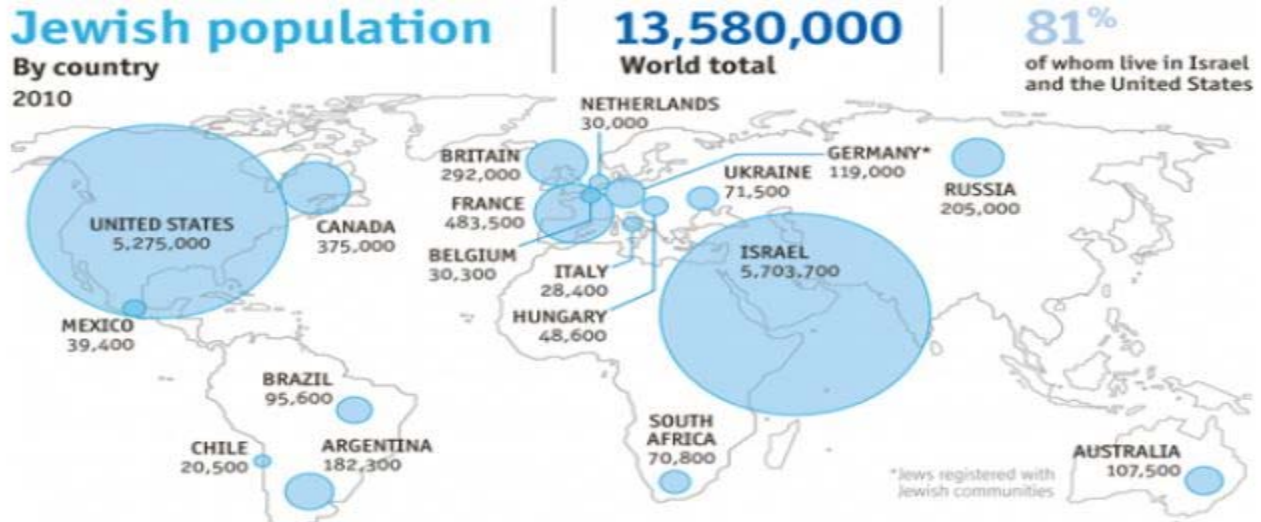


Judaism



Origin/Founder: Abraham, originally from Ur in Mesopotamia, established a covenant with God in exchange for being led to “The Promised Land”, or Canaan, in 2000 BCE.



Canaan is the biblical name for the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, approximately the equivalent of what today comprises the state of Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Israel is considered a holy concept in Judaism, based on the belief that God created the Earth from Jerusalem in the Land of Israel, and He is always closest to this land. Jews believe that this land is where God told the Jewish people to build a society to serve Him, and it is their duty to protect it.

History: Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was the father of the twelve tribes from whom all Jews are considered to be descended from. After many years of drought and famine in Canaan, the Hebrews migrated to Egypt, where they were enslaved. Moses, a Hebrew raised as an Egyptian prince, led the Hebrews out of slavery and back to the Promised Land. Israel had been re-occupied, which led to many ethnic wars, leading the Hebrews to capture Jerusalem, where they established their capitol.



Symbols: The six-pointed Star of David is a common symbol for both Judaism and Israel. Known in Hebrew as a *Magen David* (shield of David), geometrically it is two triangles superimposed on each other, forming the shape of a hexagram. According to the Zohar, a medieval book of Jewish mysticism, the six points of the star represent the six

male *sefirot* (attributes of God), in union with the seventh *sefirah* of the female (the center of the shape).

Tenets: Jews believe that God appointed them to be his “Chosen People” in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behavior for the world. Jews are awaiting the Messianic Era, which means they do not recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah or Savior. Rather, they believe that the promised Messiah has not arrived yet. As a religion, Jews do not actively convert people although they welcome anyone who wishes to become a Jew.

Jews follow a set of dietary laws that dictate what they can or cannot eat and how their food should be prepared; these laws are called kosher. The most common kosher laws are the restrictions on pork and shellfish, since they are seen as unclean foods in the Jewish faith.

Deity: Judaism is the world’s oldest monotheistic religion; they believe in one central, all-powerful God who created and controls the universe. God is also referred to in Jewish texts and scriptures as *Yahweh*, *El-Shaddai*, or *Elohim* in Hebrew.

Afterlife: In Judaism, there is no concentration on the concept of Heaven or Hell for the souls that are awaiting the Messianic era. Jews are encouraged to live a good life following God’s laws in the present, as opposed to worrying what will happen after death.



Scriptures: The *Torah* is the most important of all Jewish writings. The first five books of the Christian Bible’s “Old Testament” make up the Torah. The Torah, also called the Five Books of Moses, contains the basic laws of Judaism and describes the history of the Jews. Jews divide the Hebrew Bible into three parts and call it the *Tanakh*. The three parts are the Torah, which is the first five books; the *Nevi'im*, which are the books of the prophets; and the *Ketuvim*, meaning the Writings, which are other books of history and moral teachings.

Jews believe that Moses brought the Ten Commandments and the Torah down from Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments are special because they were heard by all of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and are believed to teach how to lead a good and moral life.

Jews also believe that there is another part of the Torah called the *Mishnah*, also called the Oral Torah or Oral Law. It explains how to follow the laws written in the 5 books. There is another book, considered to be an explanation of the Mishnah, called the *Gemara*. Together, the Mishna and the Gemara make up the *Talmud*.

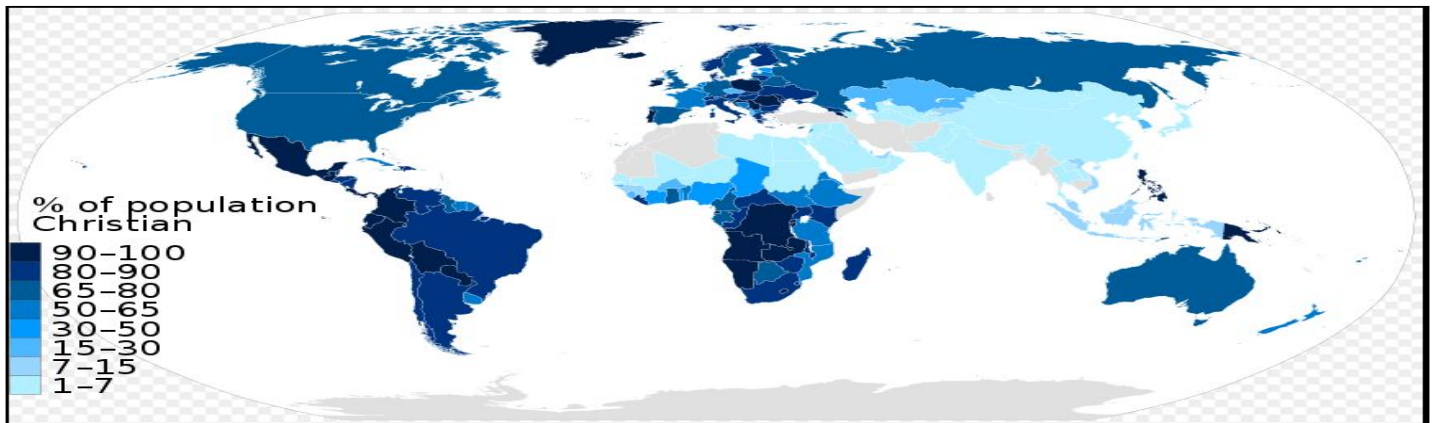
Practices: One of the commandments is to keep the Jewish Sabbath, or *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* starts every Friday at sunset and ends on Saturday at nightfall. Many Jews go to their temple or synagogue to pray on *Shabbat* and on the High Holidays. These are the holiest days of the Jewish year, and they include *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) and *Rosh Hoshannah* (the Jewish New Year).



Passover is a Jewish holiday which commemorates the story of Exodus, where Moses liberated the Jews from Egypt and received the Ten Commandments. Hannukah is another Jewish holiday, which celebrates the Maccabees victory over the Greeks who tried to destroy the Second Temple and the miracle of the oil for their menorah lasting eight nights when there was only enough oil for one.

Jewish rites of passage include a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* at the age of 13 to mark a child's passage into adulthood. Jewish marriages are also celebrated with a ceremony at temple, underneath a *chuppah*, which represents the home and life the couple will build together.

Christianity



Origin/Founder: Jesus of Nazareth, also referred to as Jesus Christ, and his disciples established a ministry in Jerusalem, which was then located in the Roman province of Judea. Jesus' ministry recognized him as the Messiah that was promised by the God of Abraham.

History: The church's growth after Jesus Christ is due to Paul the Apostle, a missionary whose teaching centered on understanding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a central turning point in history. Paul established Christian churches throughout the Roman Empire, including Europe, and even into Africa. However, the Church struggled with persecution for many years, including periods where Roman emperors made it against the law to be a Christian. When a Roman soldier, Constantine, became the Roman emperor, he attributed his success in battle to the Christian God and immediately proclaimed his conversion to Christianity, which became the official religion of the Roman Empire.



Symbols: Christians believe in the Trinity - that is, in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some confuse this and think that Christians believe in three separate gods, which they don't. Christians believe that God took human form as Jesus Christ and that God is present today through the work of the Holy Spirit and evident in the actions of believers. Symbols of Christianity, especially the Cross, represent the relationship between these three forms.

Tenets: The history of Christianity is focused on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is considered to be the son of God. His birth in a stable in Bethlehem is believed by Christians to be the fulfillment of prophecies in the Jewish Old Testament, which claimed that a Messiah would deliver the Jewish people from captivity. After



Jesus began his ministry at age 30, he stated publicly that he spoke with the authority of God. This claim angered the religious authorities in Palestine and they handed Jesus over to the Roman authorities as a revolutionary. He was tried for heresy, condemned and put to death by means of crucifixion. It is believed that he was resurrected three days after death, after which he ascended into heaven.

There are three main branches of Christianity, all of which focus on Jesus Christ's life and teachings. Roman Catholicism is practiced by Catholics who live west of Vatican City under the authority of the Pope. Eastern Orthodoxy is practiced by Catholics who live east of Vatican City, but they reject the authority of the Pope and the Bishopric. Protestantism encompasses all Christian groups that splintered off from Catholicism after the Reformation.

Deity: Christianity is the world's largest monotheistic religion, and it was originally a minor branch of Judaism. Like Judaism, they also believe in the God of Abraham. He is also referred to as God the Creator and God of Holy Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

Afterlife: Christians believe in an afterlife which revolves around concepts of a Heaven and a Hell. For most groups, the way you have lived your life (i.e. following the Ten Commandments, etc.) determines where you will spend the afterlife. Additionally, many groups believe in an additional state of Purgatory, where souls temporarily wait to be accepted into Heaven.

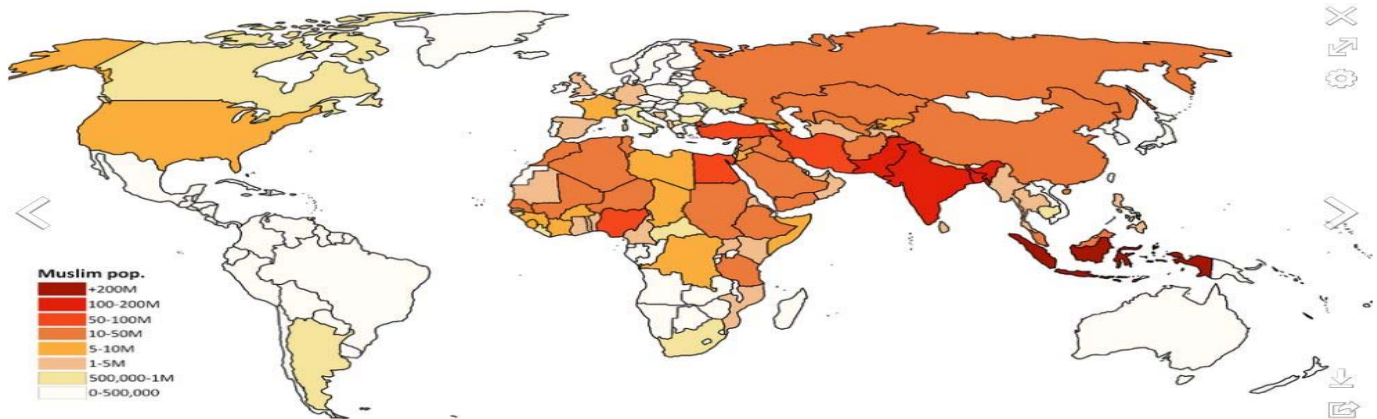


Scriptures: The Bible is a collection of books written by many authors. The Old Testament is the equivalent of the Jewish Torah, in that it chronicles the early history of the faith. The story of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection is told in the writings of his apostles in the New Testament of the Bible.

Practices: While specific practices will vary by the different branches of Christianity, usually a minister/priest will lead services in a church on Sundays. During the service, readings from Scripture and prayers will be said aloud followed by a sermon which usually revolves around the chosen readings. Depending on the branch, Communion may be offered during the service. In addition to weekly church attendance, many Christians complete prayer rituals- in Catholicism, the Rosary can be prayed daily, while in Protestant sects, Bible Study can be conducted at home. For most of the Christian faiths, baptism welcomes you into Christianity in youth, while you complete a Confirmation ceremony in adulthood.



Islam



Origin/Founder: Islam was founded in Saudi Arabia, on the Arabian Peninsula around 600 CE. It is believed to have been revealed to humanity by the Prophet Muhammad. Those who follow Islam are called Muslims.

History: Mohammed was a deeply spiritual man, and he often spent time in meditation on Mount Hira. One night in 610 CE he was meditating in a cave on the mountain when he was visited by the angel Gabriel who ordered him to recite words which Mohammed came to believe were the words of God. The simple, clear-cut belief of only one God attracted many to the Islamic faith, and Mohammed would govern his followers until his death in 632 CE. After his death, arguments over leadership would lead to a division into two main groups: Sunni and Shi'a.

Symbols: While there is no official symbol of Islam, the crescent and star are most identified with the religion. During the 1800s, the crescent and star were the emblems of the Ottoman Empire and the nations that emerged from Persian territories, the majority of which were followers of Islam. During the 1970s, the symbol was embraced by Arab nationalist groups and the Nation of Islam.



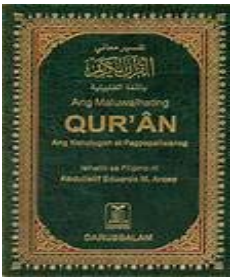
Tenets: While Islam shares many of the same prophets as Judaism & Christianity, including Moses and Jesus, Mohammed is considered the TRUE prophet. Unlike Judaism and Christianity, followers of Islam are not allowed to view or create artistic productions of Mohammed.

All aspects of a Muslim's life are governed by *Sharia*. Sharia law comes from a combination of sources including the *Qur'an* (the Muslim holy book), the *Hadith* (sayings and conduct of the prophet Muhammad) and *fatwas* (the rulings of Islamic scholars). Classical Sharia

manuals are often divided into four parts: laws relating to personal acts of worship, laws relating to commercial dealings, laws relating to marriage and divorce, and penal laws.

Deity: Islam is also a monotheistic religion; like Judaism and Christianity, they also believe in the God of Abraham. In Islam, he is named Allah, which is the Arabic translation of the name “God”.

Afterlife: Muslims believe that on a day decided and known only to Allah, life on earth will come to an end and Allah will destroy everything. On this day all the people who have ever lived will be raised from the dead and will face judgement by Allah. Muslims believe that they will remain in their graves until this day. Allah will then balance the good deeds a person has done in their life against the bad deeds. If the good outweigh the bad, the person will go to *Jannah*, a place of joy and bliss. If the bad outweigh the good, then the person will be punished in hell, *Jahannam*.



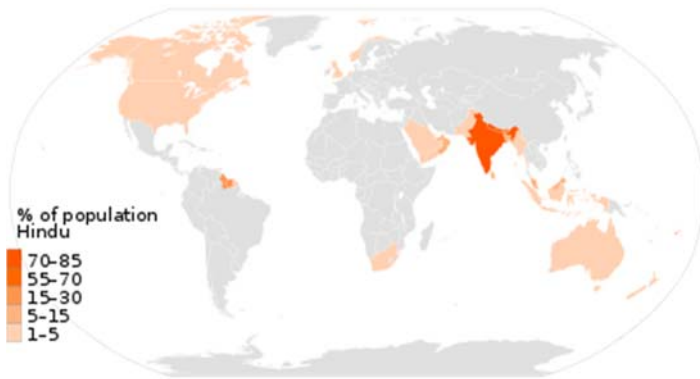
Scriptures: The holy book of Islam is the Quran (or Koran). It is believed to have been revealed by God (Allah) to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel over the span of about 23 years. The Quran is a book of guidance and lessons in 114 *surahs*, or chapters. Regarded as the most important miracle of the Prophet Muhammad, the Quran was put together after his death.

Practices: The 5 Pillars of Faith are the standards that all Muslims are expected to observe and complete in order to live a good and responsible life. They include believing in only one God and accepting that Mohammed is his messenger. Prayers must be completed 5 times a day while you are facing Mecca. You must fast during Ramadan and make charitable contributions throughout your life. Finally, those Muslims who can make the journey must make a pilgrimage to Mecca, a practice known as the Hajj.



For daily living practices, all Muslim followers must wear modest clothing. Depending on the group, women may be required to wear items like burqas or hijabs to cover up. In both public and private settings, genders are separated from each other unless they are married. The Quran also outlines some dietary restrictions, such as abstention from pork and alcohol.

Hinduism



Origin/Founder: Hinduism is the oldest and most complex of all religions. It has no central founder or specific origins. The word *Hinduism* derives from the Indus River Valley (the location of modern-day India), one of the earliest civilizations to teach this religion. India is also the location of the Ganges River, the holiest site in Hindu tradition.



History: Hinduism evolved over thousands of years in India & Nepal, with many different influences. The earliest forms of the religion (its roots) are believed to date back as far as 3000 BC. Development of the religion continued when the Indo-Aryans, nomadic hunters that invaded India around 1500 BCE, brought sacred scriptures that were first sung then later written in Sanskrit.

Symbols: *Aum*, also known as *OM*, is the most important symbol in Hinduism. It is made up of three Sanskrit letters- A, U, and M. All the major Hindu mantras start with *Aum*. *Aum* represents Brahma, the One Supreme Being believed to have created the universe. It is believed to be the sound heard at the beginning of time.



Tenets: Hindu worship, or *puja*, involves images, or icons, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple. Puja is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity. The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where offerings are made and prayers are said. Worshippers repeat mantras (prayers) and offer water, fruit, and other gifts to their favorite gods and goddesses.

All Hindus believe that everyone should strive to achieve a balanced *dharma*, the good conduct, moral law, and righteousness that directly affects your karma. Your *karma* is considered to be good or bad depending on what you have carried with you from your past life and what you shall be rewarded or punished for in your current or next life.



Hindus observe many different rituals, traditions, and festivals. *Diwali*, the Hindu festival of lights, is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia. It is celebrated over five days and commemorates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. For most Hindus, Diwali honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Deity: Hindus are polytheistic; they believe in many gods, three specifically that are a form of the One Supreme Being, Brahma. Brahma and his Goddess, Gayatri, both created the world.



Vishnu is the god of preservation or protector of the universe. When darkness over crosses its limit and dharma is in peril, Vishnu will reincarnate himself and save the earth to protect the good people from evil. Hindus believe that Vishnu has come 9 times, and the 10th is to come soon or has already begun. He controls all the avatars (Krishna). He is considered to be the embodiment of goodness and mercy.

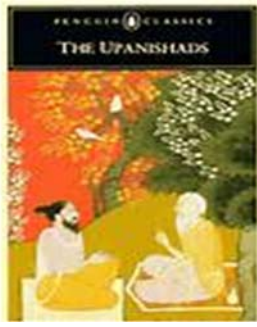
Shiva, also known as the transformer, is the god of destruction and reaction however, Shiva is not considered to be an evil figure. He makes change impossible by destroying the old elements or people in the world so they can be reincarnated.



Afterlife: Reincarnation is the belief that the soul is reborn based on the good (or bad) works a person does in current life, aka *karma*. Hindus believe that souls are not created or destroyed, and change bodies as we change clothes. Souls will become a part of nature or another human in the next life. Cows are considered to be sacred because that is one of the reincarnations a soul will experience; due

to this belief, beef is not eaten.

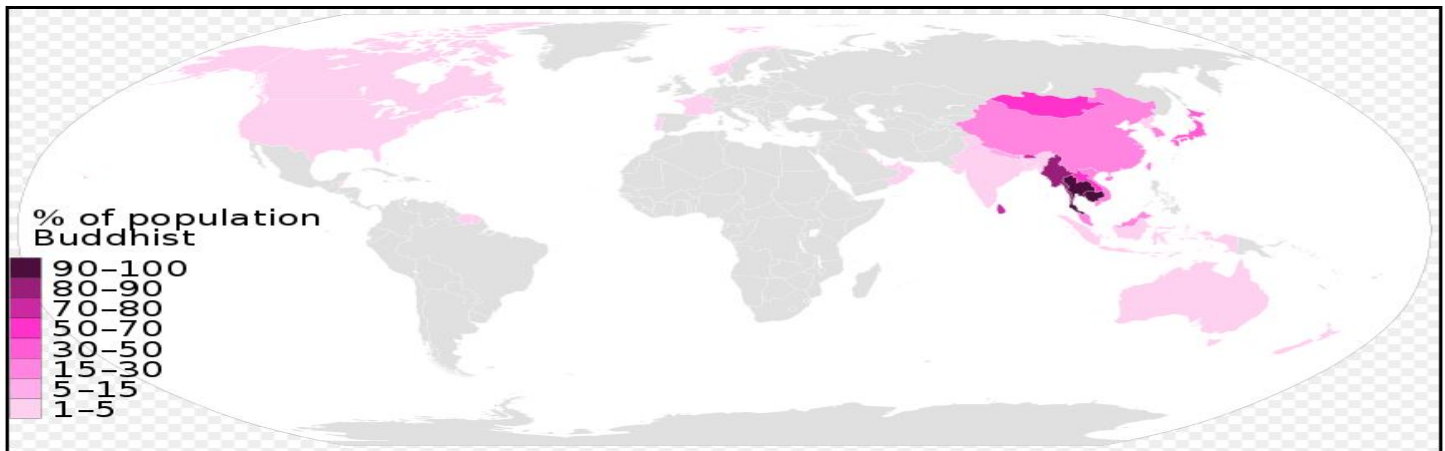
Scriptures: Vedas, brought by the Aryans and written in Sanskrit, are the oldest Hindu scriptures, believed to define truth for Hindus. They believe that the texts were received directly from Brahma and passed on to the next generations by word of mouth.



The Upanishads, mostly composed between 800-200 BCE, are a Vedic text. They reshaped Hinduism by providing believers with philosophical knowledge, especially in regards to human salvation. Central to the Upanishads is the concept of *brahman*, the sacred power which molds reality.

The Bhagavad Gita tells 700 verse story of Krishna and describes the Caste System. The Bhagavad Gita, or "Song of the Lord", is considered to be the world's longest poem. It is one of the most popular Hindu texts, known as a *smriti* (the remembered tradition). In the text, Krishna points out that knowledge, work and devotion are all paths to salvation and that the central value in life is that of loyalty to God.

Buddhism



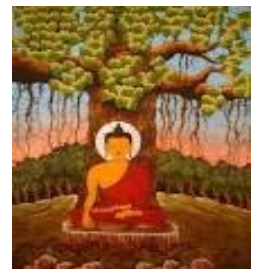
Origin/Founder: Buddhism was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama around 500 B.C.E. Gautama, who came to be called Buddha, taught that peaceful states of minds creates happiness and good fortune. Since then, millions of people around the world have followed the same spiritual path of meditation that Buddha outlined in his teachings.

History: The son of an Indian warrior-king, Siddhartha Gautama led an extravagant life. But when he bored of the indulgences of royal life, Gautama wandered into the world in search of understanding. After encountering an old man, an ill man, a corpse and an ascetic (one who lived plainly), Gautama was convinced that suffering lay at the end of all existence. He became a monk, depriving himself of worldly possessions in the hope of comprehending the truth of the world around him. The culmination of his search came while meditating beneath a tree, where he finally understood how to be free from suffering, and ultimately, to achieve salvation. Following this epiphany, Gautama was known as the Buddha, meaning the "Enlightened One."



Symbols: The dharma wheel, or *dharmachakra*, is a common symbol used to represent the Buddha's teachings. The wheel of dharma often has eight spokes to represent the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to Nirvana. There are many different variations representing different teachings, but the wheel generally represents the dharma, or Buddha's teachings.

Tenets: The Four Noble Truths contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings. It was these four principles that the Buddha came to understand during his meditation under the bodhi tree. The Four Noble Truths include *Dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, dissatisfaction), *Samudāya* (Origin of Dukkha is human desire), *Nirodha* (Freedom from Dukkha), and *Magga* (the follower sets out to achieve the Eightfold Path).



Deity: Buddhism does not worship any one deity; there is no belief in a personal god. Buddhists believe that nothing is fixed or permanent and that change is always possible. The path to Enlightenment is through the practice and development of morality, meditation and wisdom.

Afterlife: Existence is endless because individuals will experience reincarnation over and over again, experiencing suffering throughout many lives. Only achieving liberation, or *nirvana*, can free the soul from the cycle of life, death and rebirth.



Scriptures: The Tripitaka is the earliest collection of Buddhist writings, divided by subject matter. The first collection is Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka), which set out the rules and guidelines for living the monastic life. The second is Discourse (Sutra Pitaka), containing records of the Buddha's teachings and sermons, matters of theology, and moral behavior for all Buddhists. The third are the Special Teachings (Abhidharma Pitaka), a collection of writings containing songs, poetry, and stories of the Buddha and his previous lives. The Tripitaka is the main holy book for those that follow Theravada Buddhism.

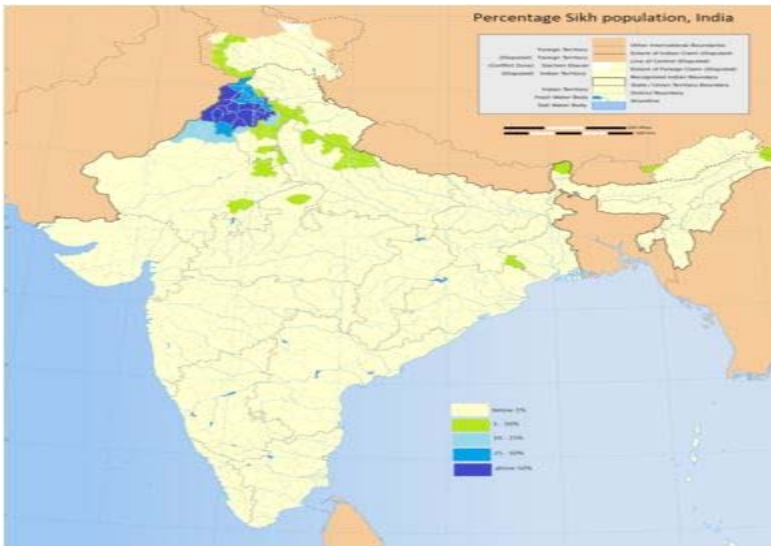
Mahayana Buddhism reveres the Tripitaka as a holy text, they add to it sacred writings called Sutras. The Sutras were put into writing between the second century BCE and the second century CE, when the split between Theravada and Mahayana developed. Since there are so many new works, different divisions of Mahayana develop in different directions depending on which Sutras they use and emphasize.

Practices: The Eightfold Path of the Buddha is taught by all of the sects that exist today. Emphasis is placed on different aspects of the path but the ultimate goal is the same: to achieve Enlightenment and reach Nirvana.

- ❖ Right Views – Define the problem.
- ❖ Right Intent – Are you sure you want enlightenment?
- ❖ Right Speech – Think carefully before you speak.
- ❖ Right Conduct – 5 Rules to Follow
 - Do not kill
 - Do not steal
 - Do not lie
 - Do not be unchaste
 - Do not drink intoxicants
- ❖ Right Livelihood – Engage in occupations that promote life and spiritual progress.
- ❖ Right Effort – Will yourself to continue and you will reach your goal.
- ❖ Right Mindfulness – Become aware of why and how you do every things.
- ❖ Right Concentration – Your mind should be fine tuned to not stray from what you are thinking.



Sikhism

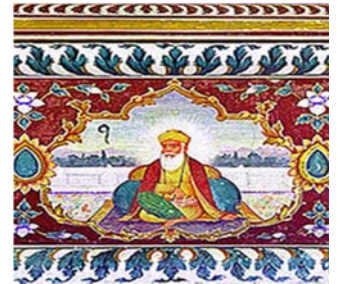


Origin/Founder: Sikhism (seek-ism) was founded in the Punjab region South Asia, which now falls into the present day states of India and Pakistan. The Sikh faith, founded by Guru Nanak, began around 1500 CE and blended elements of both Hinduism and Islam, the main religions in India.

History: Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, completed the establishment of Amritsar as the capital of the Sikh

world, and compiled the first authorized book of Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth*.

However, during Arjan's time Sikhism was seen as a threat by the state; in response, the sixth Guru, Hargobind, started to militarize the community so that they would be able to resist any oppression. The Sikhs fought a number of battles to preserve their faith; the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, recreated the Sikhs as a military group of men and women called the *Khalsa* in 1699, with the intention that the Sikhs should forever be able to defend their faith.



Symbols: The Khanda is the emblem of the Sikh faith, as it illustrates *Deg Tegh Fateh*, a Sikh slogan in the Punjabi language that represents the dual responsibility of the Khalsa: to provide food and protection for the needy and oppressed. The Khanda is made up of a double-edged *khanda* (sword) in the center, a *chakkar* (a circle), and two

single-edged swords, or *kirpan*, crossed at the bottom. They represent the dual characteristics of *Miri-Piri*, indicating the integration of both spiritual and temporal sovereignty together and not treating them as two separate and distinct entities.

Tenets: The faith's teachings emphasize principles of equality of all humans regardless of race, gender, or caste. There are three duties that a Sikh must carry out, and they can be summed up in three words: Pray, Work, Give.

- *Nam Japna* (Pray):
 - o Keeping God in mind at all times.
- *Kirt Karna* (Work):

- Earning an honest living. Since God is truth, a Sikh has to live honestly. This doesn't just mean avoiding crime; Sikhs avoid gambling, begging, or working in the alcohol or tobacco industries.
- *Vand Chhakna* (Give):
 - Literally, sharing one's earnings with others; this includes giving to charity and caring for others

Sikhs try to avoid the five vices (Lust, Covetousness and greed, Attachment to things of this world, Anger, Pride) that make people self-centered and build barriers against God in their lives. If a person can overcome these vices they are on the road to liberation.

Deity: Sikhism is a monotheistic religion, but they do not follow the God of Abraham like Islam. Sikhs refer to God as Waheguru, the one Supreme Being. There is only one God, who is without form or gender. Everyone has direct access to God and everyone is equal before God.

Afterlife: Sikhs believe that human beings spend their time in a cycle of birth, life, and rebirth. They share this belief with followers of other Indian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The quality of each particular life depends on the law of Karma. The only way out of this cycle, which all faiths regard as painful, is to achieve a total knowledge of and union with God.

Scriptures: Guru Granth Sahib is a collection of hymns describing the qualities of God (There are 10 Gurus total). Gobind Singh was the last human Guru. Sikhs now treat their scriptures as their Guru.

Practices: The 5 Articles of Faith taken together symbolize that the Sikh who wears them has dedicated themselves to a life of devotion and submission to the Guru. They are 5 physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa.

The 5 Articles of Faith are:

- *Kirpan* (sword)
- *Kachera* (cotton undergarments)
- *Kara* (steel bracelet)
- *Kangha* (wooden comb)
- Kesh (both men & women do not cut hair)



Confucianism



Origin/Founder: Confucianism was founded in China around 500 BCE. More of a philosophy than a religion, it is based on the life and teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius.

History: Confucius, Kong Fuzi in Chinese, was born in 551 BCE. Confucius devoted himself to learning. At age 30, he turned to teaching others. He tried to convince warlords to lead their people by example, but they ignored him. He returned to his hometown to teach future leaders his ideas on ethics. Confucianism rose to the position of an official religion during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220). It absorbed the elements of Yin (the female principle) and Yang (the male principle) found in Daoism, which had been based on Chinese folklore and tradition for a thousand years previously. With the fall of the Han, Confucianism fell into severe decline. Confucianism lay philosophically dormant for approximately 600 years until the establishment of the Tang dynasty (618–906), when Confucianism began to revive.



Symbols: Confucianism has no official symbol or standard icon. The symbol most commonly used to represent Confucianism is probably the Chinese character for water, which represents life. Other symbols associated with Confucianism include the Yin-Yang, which is shared with Daoism, and portraits of Confucius.

Tenets: Confucians seek to maintain domestic order, preserve tradition, and promote a constant standard of living for the people. Its followers are trained in benevolence, traditional rituals, filial piety, loyalty, respect for superiors and for the aged, and

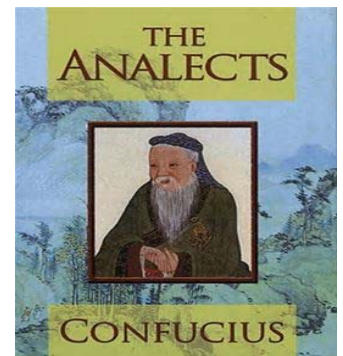
principled flexibility in advising rulers. There are five relationships followers must maintain to preserve balance in one's life:

1. Parent – Child: *Parents love children, children revere parents*
2. Husband – Wife: *Husbands fulfill duty to wife, while wife is obedient*
3. Older Sibling – Younger Sibling: *Elder sibling should be a kind teacher and the younger sibling should be respectful*
4. Friend – Friend: *Friend should be considerate and deferential to each other*
5. Ruler – Subject: *Rulers should be benevolent and subjects should be loyal*

Deity: There is no deity associated with Confucianism.

Afterlife: The concept of an afterlife is beyond the human capacity to understand, so you should concentrate on doing the right thing in this life.

Scriptures: Confucius himself never wrote down his own philosophy, although he apparently made an enormous impact on the lives and attitudes of his disciples, who compiled his teachings into a text that followers use today. The book, known as the Analects, records all the "Confucius said..." aphorisms. The Analects became the basis of the Chinese social lifestyle and the fundamental religious and philosophical point of view of most traditionalist Chinese intellectuals throughout history.



Practices: Confucianism is built on rituals of Chinese traditions. The main goal of a student of Confucianism is to promote harmony in all relationships. The most important of these rituals is practicing good manners, charity, and loyalty. Some of the major concepts of Confucianism include ancestor worship and filial piety. In China, the dead are treated with respect, as they control all the good things that happen to you in exchange for not embarrassing your family name. Filial piety builds on the First Bond, to respect your parents and elders and care for them in their old age.