



INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS

Dr. Mark Luttio

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mark Luttio has been a professor at Lynn University most of his teaching career since earning his Ph.D. in Theology at the University of Notre Dame. He moved to South Florida from Notre Dame, Indiana, where he served on the faculty of Saint Mary's College in the Department of Religious Studies.

He joined the faculty at Lynn University in 2002 and now serves as Full Professor of Religious Studies in the College of Arts & Sciences, teaching a variety of courses in both the Dialogues of Belief and Reason and the Humanities.

Dr. Luttio is a U.S. citizen, but was born and raised in Asia, and thus finds himself at home in the international ethos of Lynn University. He is often described as an Asian soul in a Caucasian body. He has travelled and lectured in numerous international venues, most recently at the University of Haifa, Israel, and in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

PREFACE

“Not all those who wander are lost.”

—J.R.R. Tolkien

In the spring of 2017, I set-out on a journey circumnavigating the globe in search of the reasons and causes of religious intolerance and ways of overcoming them. I was the recipient of the Kathleen Cheek-Milby Endowed Faculty Fellowship, granting me a fully paid six-month sabbatical with research funds to follow my passion. A complete account of my research will be available in my forthcoming book, *Pathways to Peace*. For now, each chapter in this Multi-touch book will begin with a vignette from my travels regarding each of the religious traditions examined.

When all was said and done, in six months’ time, I had crisscrossed the globe by plane, train, boat, bus, car, tuk-tuk, rickshaw, bicycle, camel, even elephant, and walking (yes, lots of walking), in all traveling nearly 75,000 miles while wondering if I should title my quest *Confessions of a Religious Tourist* instead of the loftier proposal, *Pathways to Peace*. I spent significant amounts of time in all of the religious epicenters of our world, including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism,



Author and Lynn University Professor Mark Luttio before (left) and after (right) his journey. Six months after embarking, he returned 20 pounds lighter and as a Sadhu (holy man).

Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Bahá'í. I travelled to Japan, China, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, the West Bank-Palestine, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, India, Dubai, and the U.S.—in that order spanning more than 55 cities, too many to enumerate in this text.

I did all of this with just a small backpack and one change of clothes, just to see if I could do, and discovered with how little we can exist in this life. As I travelled, I found myself changing: becoming vegetarian, embracing the life of Ahimsa (non-violence), getting by with just two meals a day, not cutting any hair on my body (this after spending time with the Sikhs in Punjab—hair is God’s gift to us, why should we desecrate it?). I walked through and ate in the Langar (the common kitchen for the Sikhs), amazed by how at this golden temple they feed over 100,000 people every day with no questions asked. Everyone is welcome, everyone eats

until they are satisfied, and everyone contributes in some way, whether by preparing food, cooking, serving, or cleaning. There is no hierarchy; there is only complete equality.

I came back 15 pounds lighter, unshaven, unkempt, and with a tattoo on my wrist from a Coptic Christian family in the Old City of Jerusalem who has been doing this for pilgrims since the 1300s. My wife took one look at me when I returned and said, “Who are you?” Clearly, I had changed.

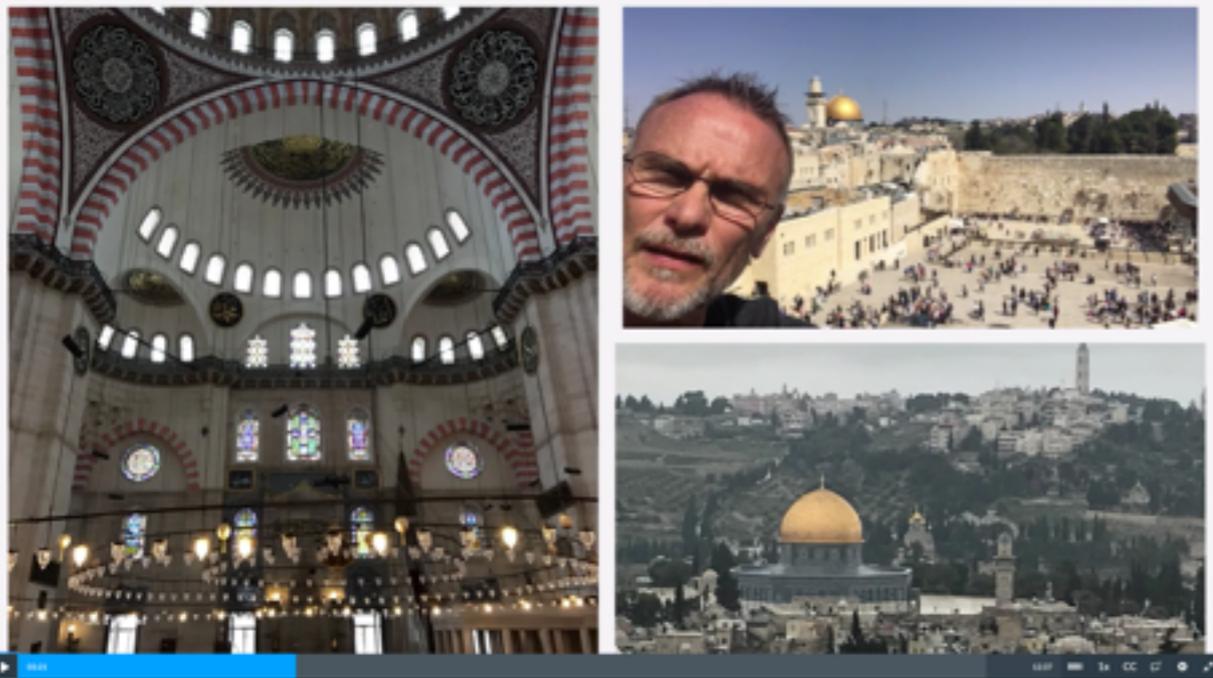
After all, I had climbed Mount Hua in China, one of the five sacred peaks of Taoism, and saw with my own eyes the Nestorians Stone at Xi'an. I prayed Isha (daily nighttime prayer) with Muslims in the Blue Mosque of Istanbul, directly opposite of Hagia Sophia, the famed church of Christendom where the western and eastern worlds collide at the Bosphorus Strait: two cultures, two religions, both of whom worship the God of Abraham.

I stood shoulder to shoulder with Jews at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and with Muslims in Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. I kept vigil all night, locked into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the tomb of Jesus’s burial site) celebrating mass at dawn at the foot of the cross. I walked the gardens of Bahá’í in Haifa and conversed with Druze and the Ahmadiyya Muslims (a persecuted group). I climbed Mount Sinai in Egypt through the night and prayed with Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the top, and at dawn gave honor to Moses, the prophet all three religions honor. I chanted with the monks of Saint Katherine’s monastery at the foot of the mountain. Two weeks later, ISIS tried to bomb it. The armed escort I received suddenly made sense. Every square inch of this land of the Middle East—being the cradle of civilization—is fraught with spiritual, cultural, and political intensity. I stood at the border of Syria and saw the desolation of war, and drove a rental car to the sacred sites across Jordan and Palestine.

I traveled to the cathedrals of eastern and western Europe and found myself asking, “Would Jesus even recognize the religion that bears his name?” I spent a long and painful day at Auschwitz asking myself alongside of Elie Wiesel, “Where is God?” I spent Holy Week in Rome at all the Papal Liturgies with Papa Francesco. I retreated to Assisi with Francis. The highlight of the week had to be the Good Friday Liturgy in Saint Peter’s Basilica with Papa Francesco, listening to Allegri’s “Miserere mei, Deus” as we gave adoration to the cross, which transported me somewhere between heaven and Earth, floating up in the clouds. I soaked up the tolerance of the Moors in Spain, in Toledo and Cordoba, where Judaism, Christianity, and Islam lived in relative peace for more than 700 years. I witnessed the exuberance of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Moscow.

But then came India. INDIA! Nothing can prepare you for India. It was one of those transformative experiences in life. It defies words and is impossible to explain. It grabs hold of you and will not let you go until you face it and come to terms with it, living with the cows, with the Dalits (untouchables) and the Sannyasins (the renouncers of this world). India is the birthplace of all the great eastern religions. I went to the sacred waters of the Ganges in the city of Varanasi (the holiest city for Hindus, tantamount to Mecca for Muslims or Jerusalem for Jews) to watch the morning ablutions and cremations of the corpses of Hindus being returned to the water, to the Golden Temple of the Sikhs in Amritsar to participate in the chanting of their holy book—the Adi Granth—to the monastery of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala up in the Himalaya Mountains (to chant with the Tibetan monks and drink their goat milk offered to me after the early morning chant), to Bodhgaya to spend time at the place of Siddhartha’s enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, to the nude “sky-clad” Jains in Sarnath, to the tomb of Mother Teresa in Kolkata, and Gandhi’s burial/cremation grounds in Delhi. I prayed with the Sufis at the famed Mosque of the Saint Chisti outside of Pushkar, and went on to Goa and the “Mummified Saint” of Francis Xavier so named by Hindus who came in

droves with bare feet and marigold garlands in-hand to place on the Christian grave. And, finally, on to Chennai (Madras), with Jesus on a peacock, Mary in a Sari, and Thomas downstairs in the crypt of the Basilica (and, of course, the full complement of Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma). By the end of my journey, people were coming up to me and asking, “Are you a Sadhu (a Holy Man)?” I answered, “I hope so...”



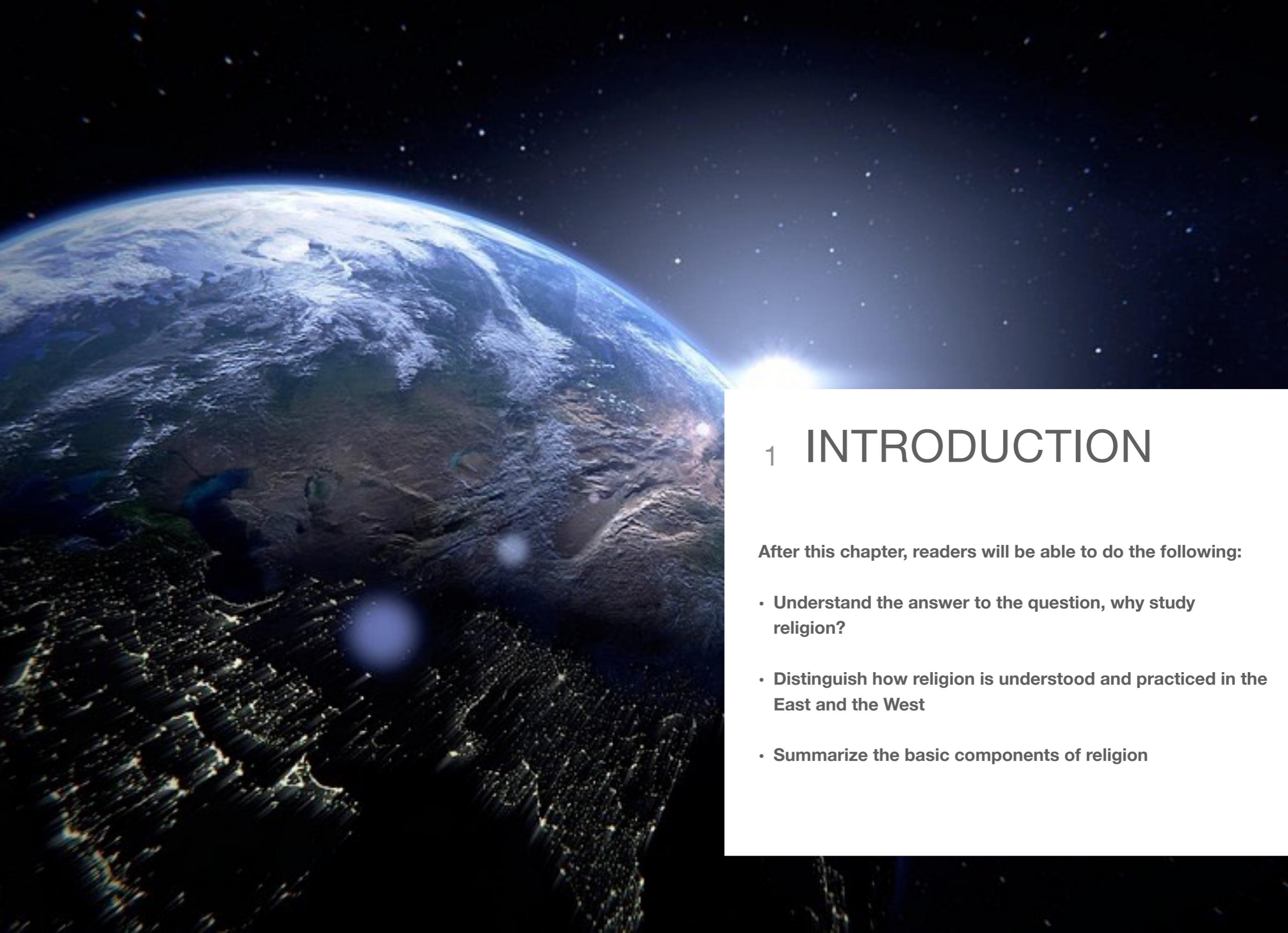
A caveat & disclaimer

What this Multi-touch book is not is an exhaustive textbook on the subject of world religions. It is not meant to serve as a replacement for what has already been written on the subject. Rather, it is a prolegomenon to the conversation, more akin to a primer—an entry-level discourse on the subject.

Each chapter begins with a story from my travels in the first person. It goes on to describe the key tenets and practices of the religion at-hand, including its origin and historical development. It concludes with questions for further consideration.

My hope is that this work will inspire the reader to dig deeper into each of the religions presented herein, however briefly, in order to facilitate conversations that will build “pathways to peace” for our world.

Happy reading.



1 INTRODUCTION

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- **Understand the answer to the question, why study religion?**
- **Distinguish how religion is understood and practiced in the East and the West**
- **Summarize the basic components of religion**

“It is a matter of fact that if people do not understand the character of religions, they cannot make sense of much that happens in the world today...for much of the world as we know it is shaped by the formation of society and culture around religious beliefs.”

—Jacob Neusner, *Why Study*

Religion?

I’m standing in my father’s robes on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, looking out into the vast expanse of the great chasm between the two rims. My father’s robes are Japanese robes called “Yukata.” I’m approaching 60 and he is in his mid-90s. How did they get on me? Why are they Japanese? How was it that my father, who fought in WWII in the Battle of Iwo Jima and was severely wounded but survived, made his way back to Japan as a missionary carrying bibles rather than bullets?

And what is the significance of wearing my father’s robes? I feel like Isaac wearing Abraham’s cloak, or Jacob wearing Isaac’s, the passing of the mantle from one generation to the next. Perhaps religion is a little bit like that—something that is passed down through the generations like a mantle, an identity that gives us purpose and place until it rubs up against mantles unlike yours. That is where the conflict begins.

You see, I do not look Japanese, but I certainly identified myself as Japanese. After all, I was born in the Land of the Rising Sun. My first language was Japanese. I went to Japanese preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school. But I had blonde hair and blue eyes, and that was not, according to those around me, Japanese. I was called, “gaijin” (foreigner). Looking in the mirror, it became painfully obvious that I was not going to blend in very well with the rest of society. So, how did I end up as a teenager in a swarm of protestors in Ikebukuro Station on the north side of Tokyo, hearing shouts of

Why study the religions of the world?

At the outset, we might well ask the question, “Why bother with the study of the religions of the world?” Indeed, why should we bother with that which seems so removed from our experience of the modern-day world? Ever since Friedrich Nietzsche so emphatically declared that “God is dead...and we have killed him,” religion no longer seems necessary and even out-of-step with our enlightened way of life.

Truth be told, religion is still very much a part of our world. Witness the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 by an Islamic revolution, the fall of the Berlin wall in

1989 and the crumbling of the atheistic Soviet Union, the bombing of the Twin Towers on September 11th in New York City by radical Muslims, and the recent rise of



1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

ISIS in the Middle East. Witness further the impact of evangelical Christianity on the political process in the United States or the impact of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness practices among the elite of Silicon Valley. No one questions the relevance of studying the religions of the world any longer.

In fact, if we are to understand the events of our modern world, we might well argue that we must understand the religious sentiments and persuasions that undergird these events, for many of our world events are in fact animated by religion. On any given day, it is nearly impossible to read the newspaper or watch the nightly news without realizing that there is a profound connection between world events and the religions of the

world. In short, if we are to understand the world we live in, then we must understand the religions that give our world its impulse and meaning.

Religion is, without a doubt, one of the single most potent forces in the world we live in. Hardly a day goes by without reading about or seeing news events that are motivated by a particular religious perspective or agenda. Indeed, if we are to understand the world we live in, and provide a possible paradigm for dialogue and tolerance in the 21st century, we must understand and be able to speak to the religious traditions which impact so many of our world events.

One might even say, to be human is to be religious; notwithstanding the recent common description of labeling oneself as “spiritual” rather than “religious,” or “religious but unaffiliated.” Simply put, there has never been a time in the history of human civilization when people have not asked questions of ultimate concern such as: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? What happens when I die?

In broad brushstrokes, we will understand religion simply to mean the organization around a group of people’s “ultimate concern” (to use Paul Tillich’s definition): asking questions of ultimate meaning. Further, we will use Tillich’s definition of God as simply “the ground of being”—that entity which provides a foundation for all of existence. As an aside, it is instructive to note that while nearly all religions require some notion of God, Buddhism—at least in its original form—had no need for such a concept or entity.

Finally, our examination of the religions of the world reveals the fact that all religions have two essential components without exception; namely, dogma and ritual (sometimes called belief and practice). Though these same components can be found in other enterprises, such as politics, in the religious arena “belief” typically has a transcendent referent and “practice” typically has a cosmic urgency about it. These qualities are unique to the world of religion.

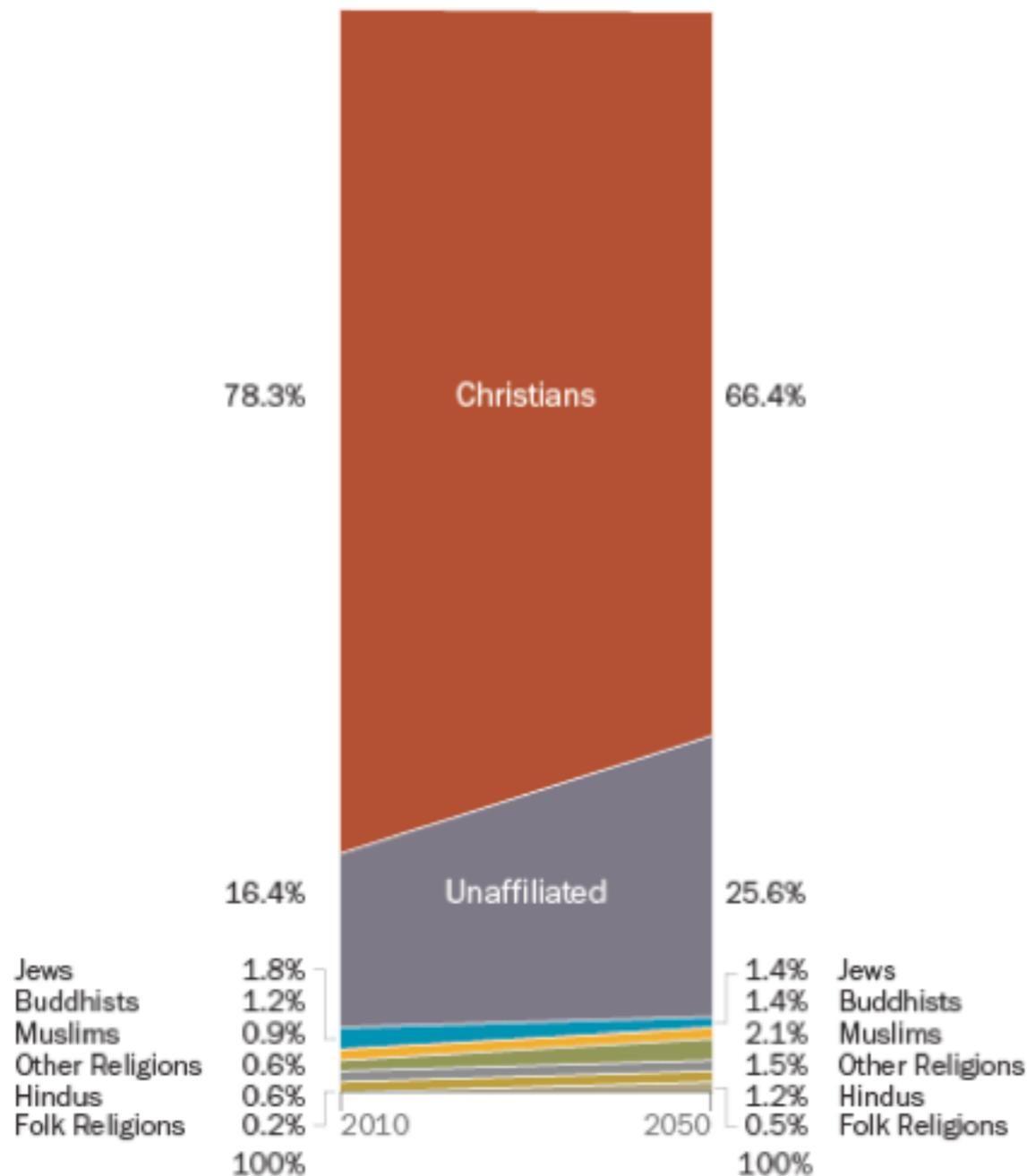
Our examination will focus primarily on the ritual, belief, and historical development of each religion along with the inclusion of some of the sacred texts that are essential to each religion. The intent, however, is not for this to be an exhaustive textbook on world religions (these have already been written and should continue to be consulted), but rather a primer, a summary, or an entrée into the study of world religions.

The religions presented here were selected with two criteria in mind: first, that they are a “world” phenomena (i.e., that they exist on a global scale), and second, that they are a “living” tradition (that is to say, they are currently practiced). This would preclude the inclusion of ancient Egyptian or Mesopotamian religions, for example, as these are no longer practiced, as well as African tribal religions or Native American religion, as these are localized to specific geographic areas and are not global in their practice. In accordance with these named criteria, this textbook will examine the following world religions: Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Baha’i. Ultimately, our goal will be to research and examine how religion might serve as a bridge to global understanding and create strategies that might be employed to bring religious tolerance and understanding in the midst of our diversity, rather than barriers of hatred, as so often is the case.

The role of religion and its function in the world

Conventional wisdom suggests that religion, along with other “sensitive” subjects, is best left out of polite dinner conversation. To be sure, one’s religious convictions are often a source of great contention in the web of human relationships. And yet, religious beliefs and practices are also a source of great social cohesion as the famed French father of sociology, David Émile Durkheim, suggests: “It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison” (Durkheim, 1915).

Religious Composition of the United States, 2010-2050



Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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Whatever the veracity of the truth claims in a religious system, and whatever the possibility that religion may have been invented by human beings as a collective fantasy (as the materialist perspective claims), Durkheim and other sociologists have argued that religion functions primarily as a means of social cohesion. This “functionalist perspective,” as it is sometimes called, understands the role of religion as that which helps human societies to organize themselves—engendering a sense of unity and purpose around shared belief and practice. As Durkheim notes, “It is by uttering the same cry....performing the same gesture...that they become in unison” (Durkheim, 1915).

Religion gives paradigm for life. It answers the question where we come from, where we are going, and what our purpose is. It gives a sense of identity for the individual, family, and community. It serves to provide acceptable norms for social behavior, giving us a paradigm for morality. It serves to thwart and moderate social upheaval, giving an established frame of reference to communities. It may also encourage social change and reform when deemed necessary. In the end, religion serves as a means toward social cohesion, giving communities a sense of rootedness, security, meaning and order, even in the midst of an ever-changing world.

East vs. West

Though religion serves a common purpose, it is often understood and practiced in different ways, depending on the part of the globe one is living in; each locale has its unique particularity. At the risk of being grossly over-simplified, it is interesting to note the difference between religion in the East and the West; that is to say, the difference in the role of religion between the Eastern cultures of Asia and the Western cultures of Europe and North America. We begin with the West.

Western religions

In general, the West has usually understood itself as an individual-oriented civilization. Certainly, there are the exceptions to this norm. Nonetheless, it is a civilization that has, as one of its principal categories of reality, the concept of the self. In the West, reality is understood to revolve around—or be in relation to—the individual self. Society is thus conceived of as a composite of discrete individual selves.

Furthermore, the primary activity of the self in the Western world is usually understood to be the process of cognition. To know oneself is one of the highest virtues (cf. Socrates). To think is to be (cf. Descartes). Thus, in the West, the self apprehends and participates in the world primarily through the process of individual cognition, what might be called a dominant “axis of ideology” on humanity’s grid of existence. As a result, the mind is always given primary importance; the body is only secondary. Therefore, the principal concern in the West is not how to act with the body, but what to believe with the mind. Thus, in religious terms, dogma is given precedence over ritual.

Religion in the West is understood primarily as an organized ideology or belief system. Membership in this religious system is usually thought of as “shared belief,” or mutual assent to ideology. Groups are thought to basically be an amalgamation of individuals who have given mutual assent of their selves, connecting with one another through shared belief. Of course, there are also elements of mutual ritual assent (e.g., the Catholic Mass), not just ideological assent; nevertheless, preference is given to shared ideology.

In this kind of model, the world is understood primarily as a place of interactive, and often competing, ideologies, all of which the self is capable of directly relating to. With this Western emphasis on “mind” and “reason,” a high priority is inevitably placed upon thought systems and ideologies that possess “logical coherence.”

This insistence upon logical coherence, in turn, results in the Western insistence upon ideological particularism—the refusal to adhere to a blending of two conflicting thought systems. The outcome is a religious marketplace where belief systems are thought to be competing entities.

In the West, a religious person is one who is said to have a “belief” in a set of ideas or dogma. The emphasis is on intellectual assent, not on ritual. Furthermore, the dogma is understood as mutually exclusive of all other competing religious systems. One is a Protestant or a Catholic, but certainly not both. One is a Jew or a Muslim, but certainly not both at the same time. These religious enterprises, seen in the West as mutually exclusive, are understood as competing sets of dogma/ideology. Finally,

INTERACTIVE 1.1 Map of the World’s Religions



religion is ultimately understood as a matter of personal, and often extremely private, preference.

It might well be said that religion in the West stands at a crossroads in the 21st century. As the ideology of religion fails to connect with the next generation, the practice of religion will be greatly diminished and no longer a compelling force in Western society. The cathedrals of Europe have become empty shells, except for the occasional tourist or culturally curious at Easter and Christmas. In short, the role of religion in the West is in question. Now for the East.

Eastern religions

The East (Asia, and Japan in particular), if generalities again will be permitted, has usually understood itself as a group-oriented civilization. Rather than the category of the autonomous, individual “self” holding primary importance (as is the case in the West), in the East it is the concept of the “group” which holds supreme. This is not to say that the concept of self does not exist in the East, just that it is secondary to the larger category of the group. In other words, the self exists only in relation to the group. For example, when people in the East introduce themselves, it is generally by surname (the clan/group/family name), and secondly (if at all) by given name.

Furthermore, at the end of life, one is buried in the family grave, not an individual plot. The group is at the center of the Eastern world. All of reality revolves around or is in relation to the corporate group.

Moreover, the principal activity of the self in relation to the group is not “thinking” (as is the case in the West), but rather “doing.” It is thus ritual, not dogma, that holds primacy in the practice and role of religion. The reason for this, quite simply, is that ritual activity is the means for identification with and method of belonging to the group, ultimately serving as a way of including or excluding members. Thus, in the East, the world

is primarily conceived of and experienced through corporate ritual, what might be called a dominant “ritual axis” on the grid of human existence. In this way, corporate ritual is understood to be the essential means by which group identification and patronage to that group is established and maintained. What is of fundamental importance to note, in this Eastern system, is that it is sacred ritual (as opposed to

religious ideology) that, in fact, creates and maintains the solidarity and identification of the group, as well as giving the group a way of apprehending and understanding the lived world. Thus, the group requires obligatory participation in sacred corporate ritual of all its members if they truly intend to become

Projected Cumulative Change Due to Religious Switching, 2010-2050

	Switching in	Switching out	Net change
Unaffiliated	97,080,000	35,590,000	+61,490,000
Muslims	12,620,000	9,400,000	+3,220,000
Folk Religions	5,460,000	2,850,000	+2,610,000
Other Religions	3,040,000	1,160,000	+1,880,000
Hindus	260,000	250,000	+10,000
Jews	320,000	630,000	-310,000
Buddhists	3,370,000	6,210,000	-2,850,000
Christians	40,060,000	106,110,000	-66,050,000

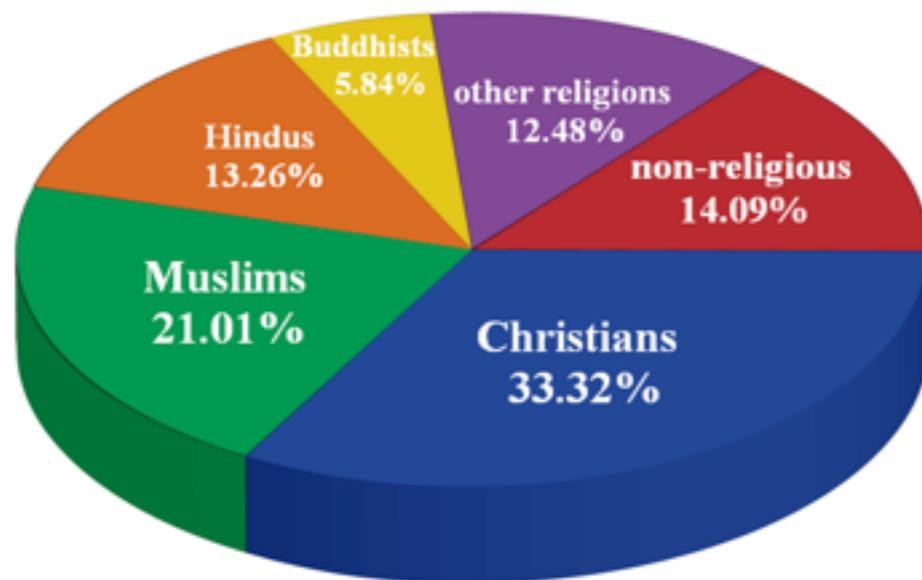
Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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constituent parts of the whole. What is of ultimate importance is not that the ritual should be understood (or an ideology adhered to or believed in), but rather that the sacred ritual actually be performed and participated in.

In sum, in the East, engagement in ritual does not necessarily require uniformity of belief but rather uniformity of action. This is why religion in the East, at least from the Western perspective, looks like full-scale eclecticism. The reason for this is simply the fact that uniform belief is not required for the formation of group cohesion—uniform ritual is. This is why there is an implicit toleration of multiplicities of ideology in the East. The toleration exists because of the understanding that it is the ritual action that gives the group its identity, rather than adherence to a uniform belief system. Therefore, what is ultimately of importance in the East is that the ritual is actually performed and actively participated in, for this is how the group receives its identity and unity.

World Religions by percentage



How does this practically look in Asia? In Japan—a country of profound tradition and decorum—one is said to be born a Shinto, married a Christian, and buried a Buddhist. It simply is a matter of what stage/juncture in life one is. The Pew Research Center (2017) found that 70.4% of the Japanese population identified as Shinto, 69.8% identify as Buddhist, while 1.5% identify as Christian (demonstrating how the Japanese identify with multiple religions), and others also claim to be Daoist and Confucian. While in our Western way of thinking, we may find this incredulous that there would be an overlap of competing religious systems being adhered to simultaneously, for the Asian practitioner this makes complete sense.

Religion is simply the social fabric that holds a people together. Practiced as ritual (rather than dogma) and not demanding of logical coherence but rather corporate participation, religion is that very glue which binds a people together into an inextricably linked society. The East apprehends itself, and its relationship to the world, through the lens of ritual. It understands that it is through the process of corporate ritual activity that the group is defined, and the social order is established.

In short, it is not whether you have “faith” in the dogma of the religion. It is not whether you “believe” in its teaching. Rather, it is whether you assent to and participate in the requisite and group-constitutive ritual. As Confucius taught, if Li (“holy ritual”) is properly in place, then all of society will be well ordered and properly in place. Living in Asia, one is Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian at one and the same time, reaffirming the social fabric that knits society together.

Questions for further consideration

1. Is religion a dying force/institution in society?
2. What should we think about the distinction between dogma and ritual?
3. Which of these two are dominant in yourself? In your culture?
4. How does religion serve to define and/or coalesce a group’s identity?
5. Is uniformity of either belief or ritual a requirement?
6. How might these lessons apply to other social institutions and settings in common life? Such as the ritual and message of politics. Or the ritual of football teams and fans who attend?
7. Has the West’s preoccupation with dogma and logical coherence (over ritual) ultimately contributed or led to its demise?

Suggestions for further reading

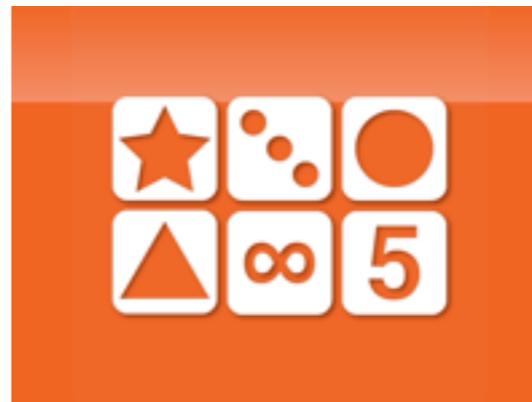
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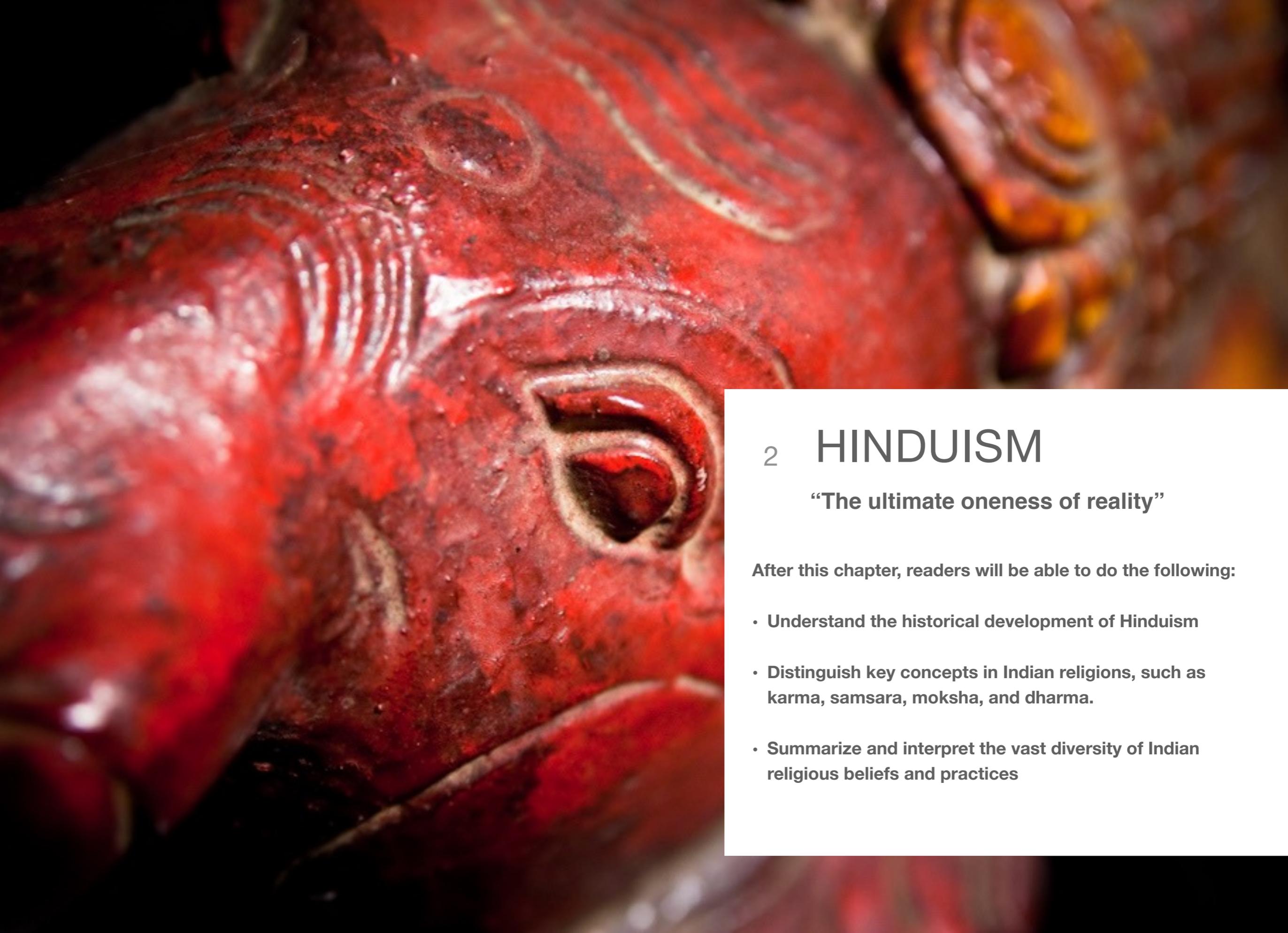
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**INTERACTIVE 1.2 Matching:
Houses of Worship &
Religion**



A close-up photograph of a Hindu deity's face, likely Lord Venkateswara of Tirumala, painted in a vibrant red color. The face is highly detailed with intricate carvings and patterns, particularly around the eyes and forehead. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the paint and the depth of the carvings.

2 HINDUISM

“The ultimate oneness of reality”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- **Understand the historical development of Hinduism**
- **Distinguish key concepts in Indian religions, such as karma, samsara, moksha, and dharma.**
- **Summarize and interpret the vast diversity of Indian religious beliefs and practices**

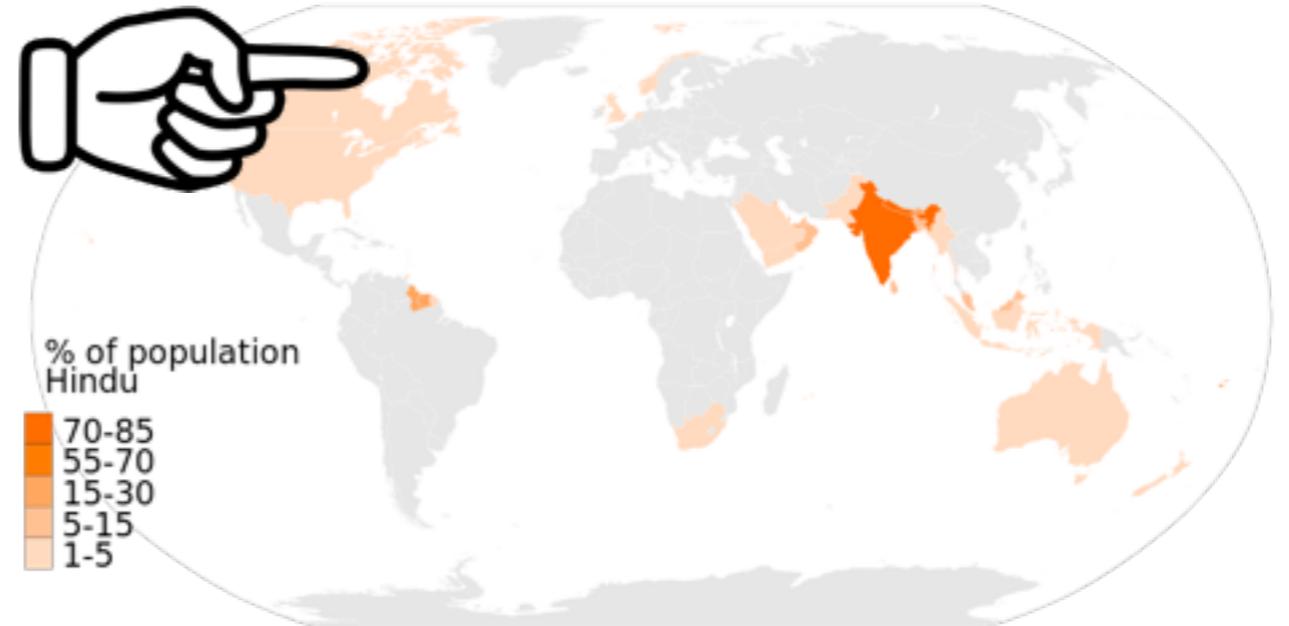
“O Lord of my being, I realize you in me and me in you. Our relationship is eternal. Through this body assumed by me, my service to you and your progeny is complete now. I dissolve this body to its original state. Mother Earth, you gave form to me. I have made use of it as I ought to. In recognition of its purity may you kindly absorb it into your womb.”

Ramayana

It's 4:30 a.m. and I hear the preparations for prayer outside my hotel window right alongside the Shivala Ghat in Varanasi, India. I am awake getting ready to go out on the river: The morning ablution ritual is calling me! I already see children down by the river starting to bathe in the Ganges. As I climb onto the boat, I see a group of four beautiful women bonding as they dip into Mother Ganga. She is there waiting for them, promising to absorb all of their troubles and trials, their misfortunes and sins. They are washed clean, spiritually and physically. I notice their contented, smiling faces. Varanasi, the holiest of places for Hindus.

The ablutions come to an end, but the fires along the banks of the river are only just beginning. They will burn all day, reducing to ash the bodies of those loved ones who have been brought here to die. Cremation in Varanasi, with their ash spread out on the Ganges, most certainly guarantees Moksha (liberation) from reincarnation.

My small rowboat glides quietly by the acrid smell of corpses burning on the funeral pyre. We keep a respectful distance. I disembark on the other bank and begin to walk up the steps into the city where I am met by a cacophony of sound, an onslaught of smell, and a dizzying display of both brilliant color and abject poverty. It is overwhelming. How can one go in the space of only a few steps and see, hear, and smell such a



Introduction

We begin our examination of world religions with Hinduism, arguably the world's oldest extant religion, at least in the East. It is largely centered in the subcontinent of India, although it exists in other parts of the world as well (essentially wherever Indians have immigrated), and has over one billion adherents, making it the third largest world religion (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Hinduism, ironically, defies definition in the normal sense of how religion is conceived. In almost all other religious traditions, scholars can point to a historical founder, a sacred text that defines its dogma, and essential rituals that express the core of its faith. In the case of Hinduism, however, these do not exist; at least not in the usual way we understand them. There is no founder, there is no codified text, there is no systematic doctrine, there is no essential ritual, and there is no active proselytizing (with the exception of some sects within Hinduism such as the Hare Krishna movement in the West). This does not mean that dogma and ritual—along with historical religious leaders—do not exist; in fact, there is

a vast array of each of these. However, they are not systematized into a coherent whole as they are in other religions. There is a cadre of influential religious leaders who have shaped Hinduism. There are numerous texts (written in Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism) that make up the corpus of sacred literature (the Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishads to name a few). There are a dizzying number of rituals performed and festivals celebrated throughout the year. This diversity of belief and practice cannot be overstated. It encapsulates the fundamental notion of Hinduism: Religious truth lies beyond all verbal assertion or ritual expression, and thus, in short, to be Hindu defies definition.

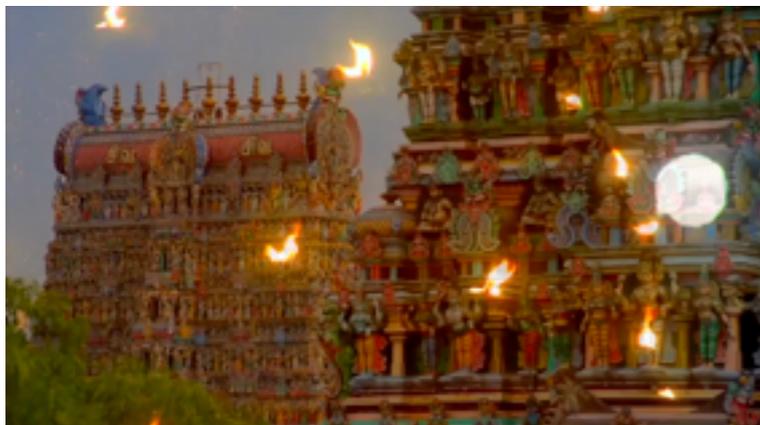
Nevertheless, from its inception in the Indus Valley circa 8000 B.C.E. to the present, Hinduism developed certain key beliefs that are central to its identity (with notable exceptions at certain periods); namely, the notions of Brahman, samsāra, karma, moksha, and dharma. These are important to note.

Key beliefs

Brahman

Brahman is the principle of the inherent unity of all reality. All is one (sometimes called “monism” in Western philosophy). Everything is fundamentally connected to all else—the absolute oneness of all things. Further, within this principle of oneness is expressed the understanding of the inherent presence of the divine in all things. By “divine,” Hinduism does not expressly mean God.

MOVIE 2.1 Glimpse of Hinduism



In fact, the existence or nonexistence of a personal God is hardly important. One may be a theist, an atheist, a monotheist, a polytheist, a pantheist, a panentheist, a pluralist, etc., and it hardly matters. Each is a valid expression since in the end all things are one.

The brahman is in all and all is within the brahman. In addition, Hinduism allows for and encourages devotion to the deity of one’s choice, as they are all emanations of the brahman (this may be, for example, Vishnu (or his Avatars such as Krishna or Rama), Shiva, Brahma, Kali, or even religious figures from other religions). This is sometimes referred to as “saguna brahman,” the personification of “nirguna brahman” (the principle of brahman) in the form of the gods.

Hinduism does have a notion of atman (the “individual self”), which seems to suggest that duality, or differentiation within reality, is part of its metaphysics. However, here again the atman is simply part of the brahman. Hinduism teaches that, as humanity, we are not in search of God nor created in the image of God, but rather that we are God. And since all is one, there is no subject-object distinction to reality; no I versus you. Our true self is one and the same with the absolute universal self. Further, the brahman is expressed as both male and female, not as one over the other. The female aspect of reality embodies energetic, emotional, and sometimes violent attributes, while the male aspect of reality embodies calm and dispassionate attributes.

Samsāra, karma, moksha, dharma & marga

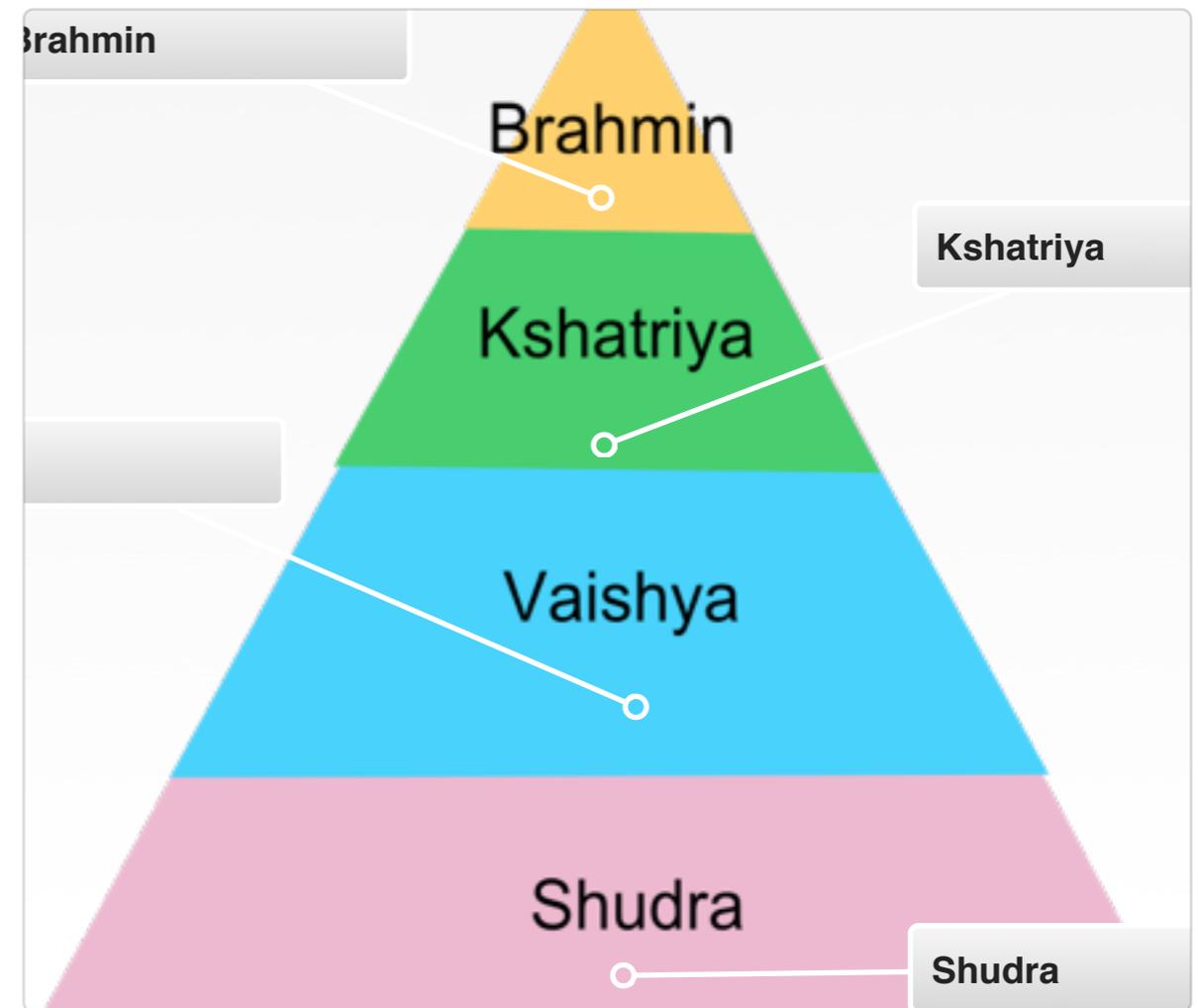
Samsara is the understanding that all of existence is caught in an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (popularly called “reincarnation”) that is determined by the principle of karma, or the good/bad effect of our actions. Ultimately, with enough good karma, one will reach moksha, or “liberation,” and thereby ultimate release from samsara and complete unity with the brahman, when one’s individual form is no longer distinguishable from the brahman but subsumed completely by it. How

moksha is achieved is a subject of debate; however, most Hindu scholars agree that it is in keeping the dharma (moral order/law) and marga (pathways) of duty, knowledge, and devotion. The Bhagavad-Gita (“the song of God”), the well-known segment within the sacred text Mahabharata, emphasizes this point well. In it, the Hindu prince, Arjuna, is faced with the prospect of going to battle against another clan. Across the battle lines, he sees faces of his cousins on the opposing side and does not want to kill them. Arjuna’s charioteer (who appears as Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu) convinces him that it is his “duty” (dharma) as a member of the Kshatriya caste to go to war, no matter the outcome. This is the pathway (marga) of liberation (moksha)—doing what must be done without regard for self or the outcome. Yoga is another example of a pathway to liberation, through physical and mindful training of the body. Though the Gita is less well known in the West, yoga is widely practiced and has become synonymous with holistic health and well-being. Finally, Dharma is fulfilled when one knows their station in life, their stage in life, and their aim in life as explained in the adjacent interactive graphic.

Caste system

One of the more unique (and often criticized) aspects of Hinduism and the social ordering of India is what is commonly called the caste system (or jati, meaning “birth”). The caste system began in the Vedic age (c. 1500-500 BCE). This social stratification, which one is born into (though women may have mobility through marriage), ensures the proper ordering of duties requisite for smooth operation and governance of society. These castes include the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. These anatomically correspond, respectively, to the head, the arms, the legs, and the feet of the human body. In addition to these, understanding that all of existence is caught in an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (referred to as reincarnation), which is determined by the principle of karma or the good/bad effect of our actions. Ultimately, with enough good

INTERACTIVE 2.1 Hindu Caste System



karma, four castes are what came to be called the Chandalas, or outcastes.

The Brahmins are the priests—those entrusted with the proper ordering of Hindu regulation and the performance of requisite rituals, especially in life passages. They are the spiritual and intellectual leaders of society. The Kshatriyas are the rulers, warriors, and nobility—those who administer and protect the land. The Vaishyas are those charged with the economic welfare—the merchants, traders, and farmers. They ensure the proper flow of commerce and material exchange throughout the land; e.g., the economic experts. The Shudras are the manual laborers and servants—those who supply the necessary services needed by the other three

castes. Over time, a fifth caste emerged and were charged with tasks so unclean (the removal of human waste, disposal of corpses, butchering of animals, etc.) that they were called the Chandalas or Dalits (“untouchables” or “outcastes”). These tasks and those performing them were considered so abhorrent that they were often excluded from communal rituals, not allowed into certain temples, and required to identify themselves when walking on public roads.

Mahatma Gandhi took up their cause in his social activism, and publicly renamed this lowest of the castes the Harijans (“the children of God”). In

GALLERY 2.1 Mahatma Gandhi



Gandhi at age 7 in the earliest known photograph of him.



1950, the Indian government formally abolished the caste system, but for all intents and purposes, it is still very much alive and normative for India’s social ordering today. Underlying this social stratification is the implicit assertion that, without following the duties of each of these castes, one cannot hope to achieve moksha, or release from samsara. It should also be noted that in traditional Hindu thinking, only those who are male and of the upper caste (the Brahmin) can achieve moksha. Thus all others, by definition, were excluded.

Life aims

There is no singular purpose or aim in life for Hinduism aside from moksha (liberation). Having said that, it recognizes that in fact there are four unique purposes or motivations that govern one’s actions throughout life. These are dharma, artha, kama, and moksha.

Dharma, or duty, as explained above is simply doing what is required of us—not because we want to, but because we must. This is the most fundamental aim in life, living in accord with one’s duty, as well as recognizing and honoring the duty of others.

Artha is doing things for the sake of material gain—the amassing of wealth or power. There is nothing wrong or immoral about gaining wealth; the search for material gain is a noble and recognized aim in life. But there should never be a conflict between dharma and artha. If they are at odds, dharma must always take precedence.

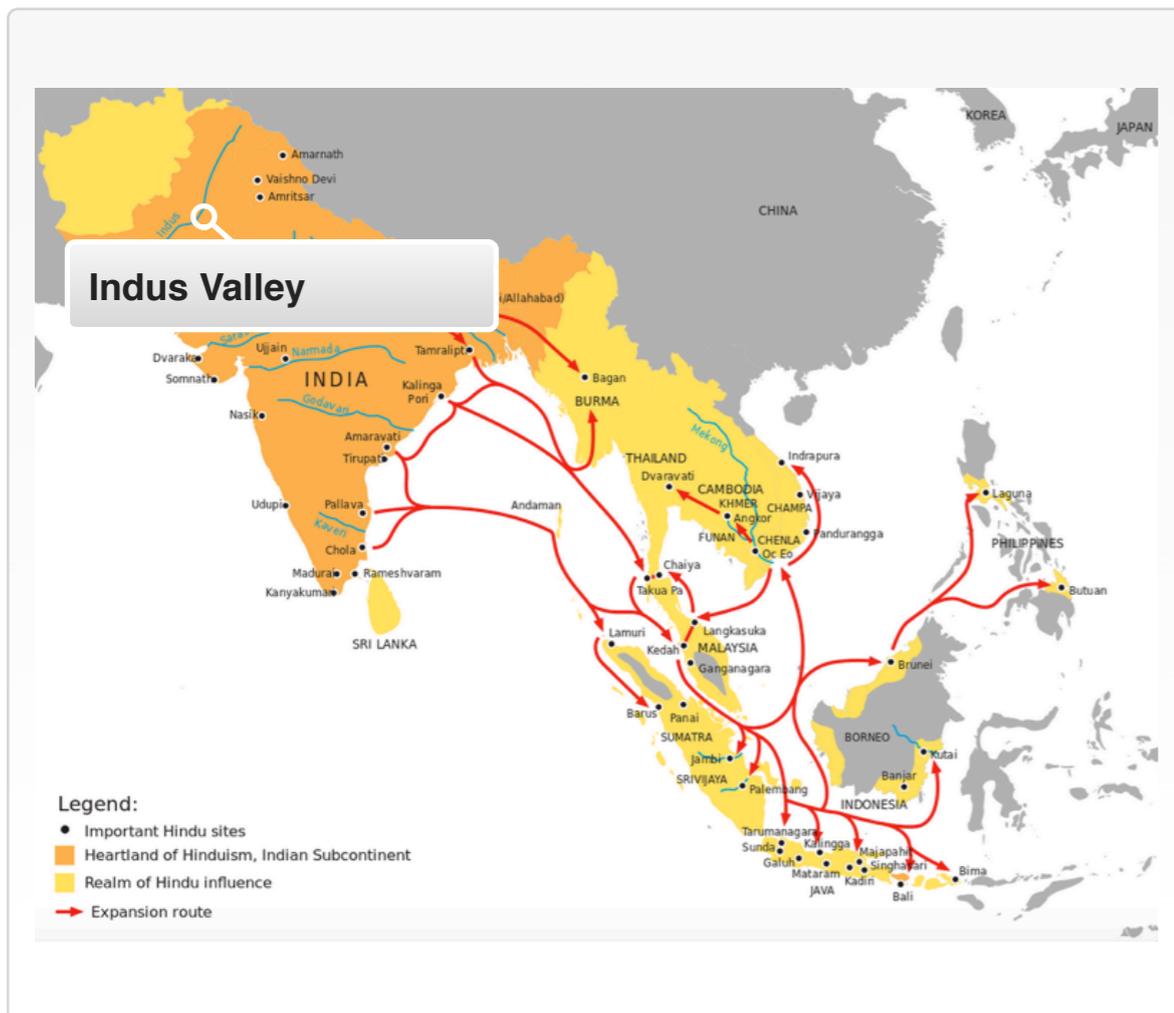
Kama is doing things for obtaining pleasure, and there is nothing wrong with seeking pleasure in life. The quality of pleasure should be of higher value than simply the quantity of pleasure. And in all cases, pleasure should be tempered again by a sense of dharma—pleasure tempered by the requirements of duty.

Finally, the highest aim is moksha, or doing things in order to achieve liberation.

Life stages

One of the more ingenious and innovative aspects of Hinduism is its practical method for preparing for the next life by providing a means for a gradual move away from the present life. This is accomplished by acknowledging four distinct “stages in life,” each lasting approximately 25 years, that allows for the unique aspects of each to be fully experienced and celebrated, yet always mindful of the ultimate aim of “leaving” this life

INTERACTIVE 2.2 Expansion of Hinduism



behind in the hope of achieving samsara. The four stages are brahmacarin (student, youth), grihashta (householder, adulthood), vanaprastha (forest dweller, middle age), and finally sannyasin (renouncer, old age).

INTERACTIVE 2.3 History of Hinduism Timeline



The first 25 years of life, called the student stage, are marked by a chaste life of studying under the auspices of a guru (teacher) whom one serves with absolute loyalty and humility. The next 25 years is the householder stage, which is marked by marriage (including the active enjoyment of a sexual life), raising children, accumulating material wealth, and running a household. Manuals, such as the Kama Sutra, were written expressly for this purpose in order for the householder to fully enjoy the sensual pleasures of this stage in life.

The next stage is the forest dweller, at the outset of grey hair, where one begins to gradually detach from the material world while spending long periods in the forest contemplating spiritual matters and cultivating a readiness to move beyond the material world. This may occur with or without one's spouse.

The final stage is the renouncer (at age 75), where one completely renounces all material possessions, desires, and attachments (including familial relationships), and becomes a wandering ascetic in preparation for death. These latter two stages are observed more in spirit than literally being followed (especially the final stage), but some do in fact carry this

through to the end and, as we shall see, this provides an inspiration to a central teaching and practice in both Jainism and Buddhism.

Practices

How is Hinduism practiced? The short answer is, in any number of different ways. As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, there simply are no required rituals or practices, nor for that matter dogmas, which must be ascribed to. Hinduism is beyond definition. It simply is. One may consider oneself a Hindu even while espousing any number of different beliefs or practices. The principle of the Brahman dictates that all is one, and therefore any number of emanations of God or expressions of faith are permitted inasmuch as they all originate and end in the same source of all reality: the Brahman. Traditionally, however, the three deities most commonly held in esteem with devotional practice attached to them are, Vishnu (with his avatar Rama and Krishna), Shiva, and Kali (Devi Goddess). Each has its particular attributes and uniqueness, and each is shown devotion towards, depending on one's personal penchant. This may include particular feast days and fast days, particular communal celebrations at the local temple (e.g., Diwali or Holi), and keeping Puja (devotional rituals) at home in front of divine images. The women of the household often traditionally keep the rituals in the homes, with the male Brahmin priests performing the public ceremonies. Most traditional Hindus are vegetarian (though there is ample evidence that this was not always so), and the norm for marriage is through arrangement between families, with the bride often leaving her own family to go live with her in-laws in a multi-generational household.

Conclusion

In summary, it can be argued that Hinduism is the oldest and most diverse of all the world's religions. It defies the normal definitions of religion such as having a codified text, systematic dogma, or requisite core ritual. It

allows for a multiplicity of viewpoints and practices. One can easily be (from the Hindu perspective) a Christian, or a Muslim, or any other religion, and a Hindu at the same time; there is no competition or inconsistency inasmuch as all religions express the essential unity of reality. All is one, and so is religion. Thus, it is not uncommon to find living within the same household those who are Muslim, Christian, and Hindu all at once. Unfortunately, this remarkable ability to accommodate other religions is not necessarily given the same reciprocity from the reverse direction. Nor is it true that there is always unbounded tolerance in all quarters in the Hindu world for all other religious practices. Prejudice and intolerance does not escape India: Witness especially the recent century's violence between Hindus and Muslims. In the final analysis, Hinduism can be critiqued for a number of different aspects—for its treatment of women (e.g., the Code of Manu), for its subjugation of the Dalit caste (citing the fatalism of birth), for its indifference to the destitute that is simply dismissed with the notion of karma, and numerous other ways when one peels back the seemingly bucolic layers of Hinduism.

Questions for further consideration

1. What are some of the distinct hallmarks of Hinduism that defy the usual definition of religion?
2. Is Hinduism considered a monotheistic or a polytheistic religion? Both? Neither? Why?
3. How is it possible for Hinduism to allow for any number of different religions (with their disparate beliefs and practices) under its own umbrella?
4. Is Hinduism ultimately tied to a specific ethnicity or is it accessible to all peoples?
5. What are some of the negative aspects of Hinduism that can be critiqued?

GALLERY 2.2 The River Ganges/Mother Ganga



Early morning ablutions in Varanasi along the banks of the River Ganges



INTERACTIVE 2.4 Hinduism Crossword Puzzle





3 JAINISM

“Liberation through renunciation”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- **Understand the historical development of Jainism**
- **Determine how Jainism began as a reaction to Hinduism**
- **Summarize how Jains practice today and what makes them unique**

“All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, unchangeable, eternal law...Correctly understanding the law, one should arrive at indifference for the impressions of the sense, and not act on the motives of the world.”

— Akaranga Sutra, IV:

Lesson I

It is a hot day in Sarnath. 107° Fahrenheit. I spot the Jain temple off to the left; it’s dedicated to the 7th Tirthankara in the Jain “pantheon.” It is rather unassuming, especially in contrast to the deer park I had just toured where Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism, gave his first sermon to his disciples. Still, it looks intriguing to me, and this is India—the birthplace of all the great eastern religions. I am compelled to climb the steps and explore.

As I approach the threshold to the sacred space, I hear a voice from behind the pillar that serves as a demarcation between the sacred and profane.

“Take off your shoes” the voice calls out. “And your socks, too.”

A man peers at me from behind a desk, taking inventory of my appearance.

“Take off your hat and your belt as well,” he says in his distinctly Indian accent. “They both are made of leather!”

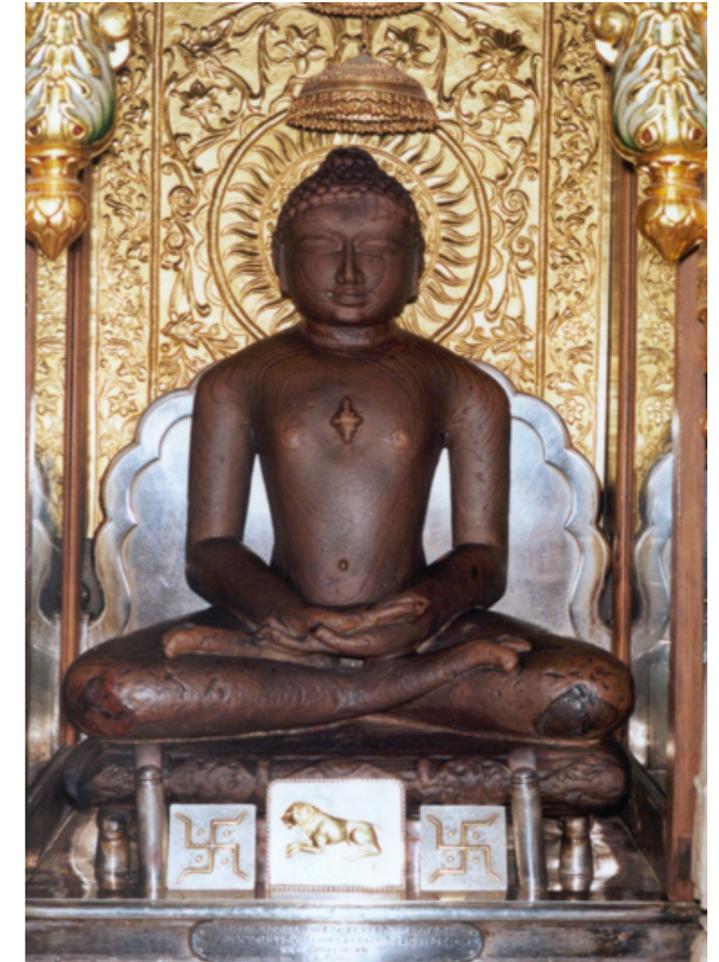
And then, as if to give his final warning, he says, “Do you have any other leather products on you? They are strictly forbidden inside the temple!”

I assure him I did not.

“Then wash your hands and you may enter”

Introduction

The story of world religion is really a story of dialogue with both its caustic and benign attributes, where there emerges an antithesis from what precedes it and results in a synthesis of the two positions. In other words, religion never exists nor emerges in a vacuum, but rather engages with the culture and the prevailing religion that precedes it. In short, religion builds on what comes prior and continues to interact with what comes after. It is like building blocks: one layer built atop another. Jainism, as we shall see, is no exception.



Statue of Mahavira, the “Great Hero”

Unlike Hinduism, Jainism has a founder whose historical life and teachings served as the basis of the religion. Jainism’s founder is Mahavira (c. 599-527 B.C.E.), meaning “Great Hero.” Mahavira lived in India at the highpoint of Brahmin control. He was born into the Hindu Kshatriya caste as the son of a rajah, or wealthy ruler. At the age of 30, having become disenfranchised with his privileged life, Mahavira renounced both his possessions and position and wandered off in search of spiritual liberation. After 12 years of extreme ascetical practice—including silence, fasting, the deprivation of all physical needs, and abandonment of all possessions (including clothing, choosing rather

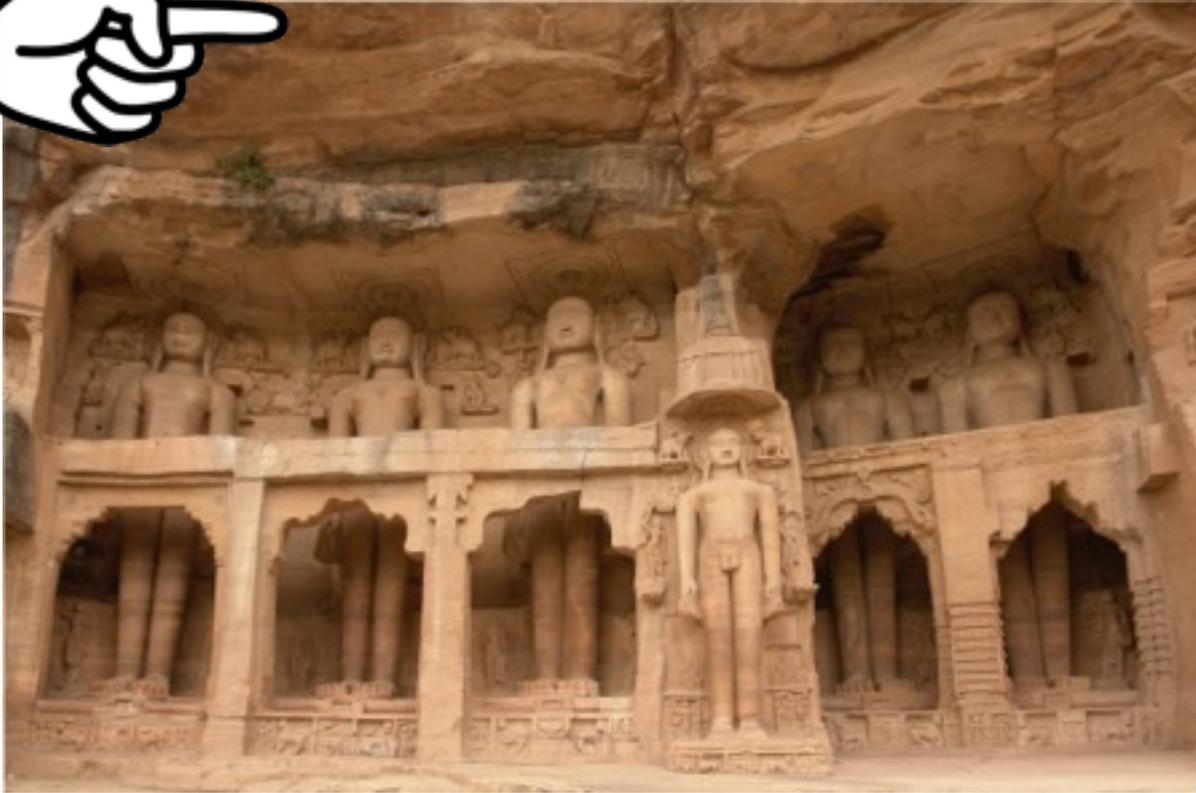


to live in the nude)—he is said to have achieved complete liberation (moksha) and perfection. He spent the rest of his life, until dying at age 72, gathering a community around him and teaching his new way of achieving self-liberation through extreme asceticism. The birth of the Jain religion, therefore, is tied to the liberation and freedom that Mahavira achieved through his ascetical practice. Jain (Jina in Sanskrit) in fact means “victor.” To be a Jain is to ascribe to this hope of becoming a “victor” over the senses through the subjugation of one’s physical body.

Jains believe that the teachings of Mahavira did not originate with him but rather began long ago with the first of the Tirthankaras (“fordmakers”) who reordered human civilization after a period of great moral decline and ensuing evil. Mahavira then is simply understood as the 24th in a long line of Tirthankaras. Jains also believe that these “fordmakers” are not to be worshiped as intercessory deities but rather as inspirations for us to live up to, inasmuch as they are the embodiment of spiritual perfection. Tap on the image below to learn more about Tirthankaras:

Jainism provided a challenge to the prevailing religion of its day, Hinduism. Whereas Hinduism kept social structures in place with the caste system and the concomitant duties associated with each, Jainism dismantled the caste system. In particular, Mahavira took exception to the stranglehold that the priestly Brahmin caste had on all Hindu rituals, and dismantled their practice. He further took exception to the notion of the existence of Hindu deities (even if they were understood as emanations of the one Brahman), and suggested that one is best served as an atheist; simply put, there was no need or justification for a personal/creator God (the universe is without beginning or end, without creation and without ultimate destruction).

In contrast to Hinduism’s “monism,” Mahavira espoused a metaphysical duality—that is, soul (“Jiva”) and non-soul (“Ajiva”), or the



division of spirit and matter. Karma (our action and its consequences) is understood as Ajiva, particles clinging to our Jiva. The goal is to rid oneself of these material particles through the process of purification, as well as to guard against any accumulation (by simply acting as little as possible), and in doing so, achieving true liberation.

Three ethical pillars

The process by which this liberation takes place is by following the three ethical pillars of Jainism: Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and Anekantwad. It is Mahavira's answer to the problem of karma and the freeing of the soul.

Ahimsa

The first pillar is Ahimsa, or “non-violence.” It is perhaps the most prominent hallmark of all Jain practice: the absolute and unequivocal insistence of refraining from harming or injuring any living organism. According to Jain understanding, the universe is filled with living

creatures, both microscopic and macroscopic, all of which deserve to live out their existence without injury or harm. To bring injury, even inadvertently, is tantamount to bringing upon oneself a negative karmic effect. Thus, a devout Jain is a strict vegetarian, sweeps the ground in front of them (keeping their gaze upon the pathway) in order to ensure non-injury to any organism by inadvertently stepping on them, strains their liquids before drinking, and covers their mouth with a cloth in order to avoid inhaling or swallowing any living creatures.

Further, Ahimsa includes taking special care in conversation with others to avoid abusive language or thoughts about others. In fact, the less interaction one has with others, the better. Doing so permits a practitioner to avoid the possibility of inadvertently harming another, as harming others is harming one's own soul. As a side note, this principle of Ahimsa greatly influenced two distinguished 20th century leaders: Mahatma Gandhi in his non-violent resistance movement against the British while aiding India gain its independence, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in his civil rights activism in the United States.

Aparigraha

The second pillar is Aparigraha, or “non-attachment.” Underlying this principle is the understanding that our desires and ego encumber our existence, obstructing the path to true liberation. Aparigraha insists that inasmuch as our possessions inevitably end up possessing us, true liberation is accomplished only by divesting oneself of all matter, both spiritual and material. Thus, like Mahavira who renounced all things, we are free only

MOVIE 3.1 Glimpse of Jainism





Svetambaras women

when we have absolutely no attachments.

Anekantwad

The third pillar is Anekantwad, or “non-absolutism.” Jains believe that truth comes through a variety

of means and

ultimate truth has many sides. Simply put, it is impossible to insist on only one way of believing or seeing things since there are multiplicities of perception. Thus, Jains avoid absolute positions on any topic since the same issue can be viewed from any number of different angles.

Jains like to recount the anecdote of the blind that were asked to describe an elephant. The one who touched the trunk of the elephant claimed it was like a tree branch. The one who touched the leg claimed it was a pillar. The one who touched the ear said it was a fan. The one who touched the tail said it was a rope. Finally, the one who touched the side said it was a wall. The point being, they were all right. In the end, we only have a partial grasp of the truth, and thus we must reserve judgement or absolute positions. In short, the fullness of truth has many sides to it.

After Mahavira’s death in 527 B.C.E., his followers faithfully carried on his teaching and practice without benefit of any written text since it was determined that doing so would be tantamount to creating a possession/ attachment that was antithetical to the religion’s key dogma of Aparigraha. Rather, they chose to pass on the words of “the great hero” orally from one generation to the next. Nonetheless, by the 3rd century B.C.E., a

canon of 45 books emerged as the definitive documents of the religion (though there is disagreement among Jain groups about which have authoritative status).

Texts notwithstanding, the followers of Mahavira eventually divided in the 1st century C.E. into two distinct groups: the Digambaras (“sky-clad”) community and the Svetambaras (“white-clad”) community. The Digambaras believed that the renouncing of clothing (thus living “clad by the sky” in the nude) was a requirement of Mahavira’s, and thus should be maintained among all Jains. They further maintained that women are not able to renounce clothing and live naked, nor are they capable of

achieving liberation, and because they are of lower social status, they should therefore wait to be reborn as a male before hoping to reach moksha. The Svetambaras, on the other hand, made accommodations to Mahavira’s teaching and allowed for those who chose to do so to clad themselves in white clothing. Further, they accepted women into their community as equally able to achieve the same spiritual achievements as men; namely, liberation and perfection.

Twelve Vows

Regardless of the division of Jainism, both agree on the Twelve Vows that came to sum up the teaching and practice of Mahavira. These vows are expected of all Jain aspirants. The first five vows are of particular importance, becoming the definitive hallmarks of the religion as well as the most critical.

INTERACTIVE 3.1 History of Jainism Timeline



They are as follows:

1. The vow of non-violence
2. The vow of telling the truth at all times
3. The vow of never stealing or taking what has not been given
4. The vow of chastity in marriage
5. The vow of limiting wealth and giving away excess
6. The vow of avoiding temptation by refraining from travel
7. The vow of simple living by limiting material possessions
8. The vow of abstaining from purposeless and harmful activities
9. The vow of meditating and reading scripture
10. The vow of observing special periods of self-denial
11. The vow of spending time as a monk for occasional periods
12. The vow of giving alms generously, especially to monks and nuns

Conclusion

Today, Jains number close to six million and it most certainly is considered to be a global religion. However, until the past century, the religion was largely limited in geographic scope to the subcontinent of India. This was so, in particular, because of the vow to limit travel (as a way to limit karmic attachment). But in this contemporary world, Jains live in various parts of the world, including the United States, and have become successful and influential members of global society. Ultimately, there is no interest in proselytizing others since, like Hinduism, one is born into this religion as a way of life rather than converted into it. Modern accommodations have,

however, been made in recent years to allow for modified ways to practice this religion, one in particular is the “semi-monk” community initiated by Acharya Tulsi in the 20th century.

In the final analysis, one may say that Jains are the marines of religious practitioners, espousing a level of spiritual rigor rarely seen in other religions. This is so in that they insist it is the only way to achieve moksha from samsara—that is, through extreme asceticism.

Questions for further consideration

1. Why do you suppose the story of religion is a story of dialogue and building blocks?
2. What caused Mahavira to wander off into the forest? Have you ever felt this way?
3. What does it mean to act as little as possible? Why is this important to a Jain?
4. How does the role/position of women come to play in the Jain religion?
5. Why are Jains, like Hindus, uninterested in proselytizing others?
6. Describe the heroic feat of self-liberation through extreme asceticism as espoused by Jainism. Does this seem achievable for you? Can you imagine yourself as a Jain?
7. Why do you suppose that Jains are highly successful people in today’s world?
8. Is Jainism a religion or an ethical paradigm for life? Both?
9. In what way did Jainism influence both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.?

GALLERY 3.1 Tirthankaras & the Jain Temple



Prerequisites before entering the Jain temple



INTERACTIVE 3.2 Jainism Crossword Puzzle





4 BUDDHISM

“The middle way”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- Understand the historical development of Buddhism
- Distinguish the differences among various Buddhist schools and traditions
- Identify and interpret core Buddhist concepts, such as dharma, anatman, and nirvana

“There are two extremes, O monks, that should not be practiced by one who has assumed that homeless life. And what are these two? That devoted to passions and luxury—which is low, vulgar, unworthy and useless; and that devoted to self-mortification—which is painful, unworthy, and useless. By avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata (one who has discovered the truth) has gained enlightenment of that Middle Path, which gives insight of knowledge; which leads to calmness, to higher knowledge and enlightenment—Nirvana.”

—The teachings of the compassionate Buddha

I am driving from the Golden Temple of the Sikhs in Amritsar to the Dalai Lama’s monastery in Dharamsala, traversing the land of northern India. What I notice while driving instead of flying is that I see everything: the land, the people, the housing, the agriculture, and the industry. I notice the driving etiquette on the roads, or the absence thereof! The routine practice appears to be honking your horn as much possible, which is to warn people of your presence as you approach from behind. This is real life, and not the pageantry of display one finds in heavily frequented tourist sites. What I see is life as it is lived for the average person. I see garbage dumps burning and off-gassing putrid smells, factories belching out polluted air (the index is at a hazardous level), men and women packed on backs of motorcycles designed for one person, but often riding three or more, with no helmets protecting them. I notice lorries jammed with possessions being transported and produce to sell in the markets. People packed into the beds of pickup trucks like cargo—a medium-sized truck is holding 25-30 people in what was otherwise intended to carry 10, all standing in the bed and packed in like sardines, squished together like on a rush hour train. Clearly, traffic rules in this part of the world are suggestive, not prescriptive.

India is a bizarre and rather disturbing juxtaposition of the haves and have-nots. In some ways, it is like I have journeyed back in

Introduction

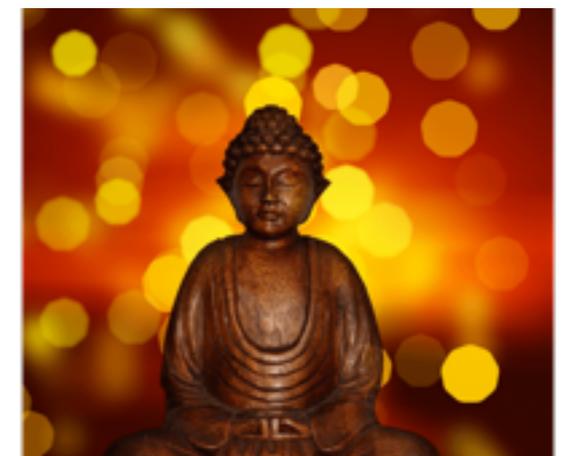
The story of Buddhism, like its contemporary Jainism (as we observed in the preceding chapter), is founded upon a historical figure and as a reaction to the prevailing religion of its day—Hinduism. Buddhism begins with Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563-483 BCE). Though we have no textual accounts from the time, since what was passed on was an oral tradition and only later came to be written down (notably in the common language of Pāli dialect in reaction to the high-brow language of Hindu Sanskrit), most scholars agree that Siddhartha was born into the privileged Kshatriya caste in the ancient kingdom of Shakya (the current border region between Nepal and India).

There are many legends surrounding his life, including his virgin birth and prophecy of greatness. However, what we know for certain is that Siddhartha led a privileged life of nobility where every desire and wish was granted, and yet he discovered that this life of privilege was ultimately unfulfilling. One day, as the legend is told, he escaped his sequestered walls of privilege and set out to see the world. What he saw (these came to be called “the four sightings”) greatly disturbed him and ultimately changed the course of his life.

Four sightings

The first sighting was that of a decrepit old man leaning on his staff as he walked. The second sighting was that of a sick person, in pain and misery, soiled by their own incontinence and living in the stench of human waste. The third sighting was that of a dead person, a human corpse rotting in the sun

INTERACTIVE 4.1 History of Buddhism Timeline



as it was carried to the funeral pyre. The fourth sighting was that of a mendicant, ascetic monk in a saffron robe and clean-shaven head at peace with himself, in search of spiritual happiness rather than material wealth. None of these sights had ever been in his consciousness before (his father and mother had tried to hide these from him), and each one thrust him progressively deeper into the vexing reality of our human existence—that of suffering and the pathway to its cessation.

Having come to the realization that existence is unavoidably composed of suffering that we all must endure, Siddhartha determined to leave his life of luxury and home (including his wife and son) and set out to find a solution to ending human anguish. It was the fourth sighting—that of the monk—that particularly piqued his interest. This was likely that of a person in the fourth and final stage of life, according to the Hindu ideal of gradually moving away from this life into the next; namely, a sannyasin (“renouncer”).

The middle way & awakening

Resolved to publicly make his own Great Renunciation, Siddhartha left home and allied himself with one Brahmin guru after the next in his quest for achieving a higher state of consciousness. However, ultimately unsatisfied, Siddhartha left and undertook six years of extreme asceticism

MOVIE 4.1 Glimpse of Buddhism



and self-denial on his own. This extreme asceticism nearly left him dead. Realizing that extreme spiritual practices are not the answer any more than a life of indulgence, he set forth to discover a new way—what he came to call the middle way. When his

followers saw him break his fast and take nourishment, preaching that neither extreme of self-indulgence nor self-denial was helpful, they were scandalized and abandoned him.



It was while sitting under a Bodhi tree one day, in deep meditation, Siddhartha came into his Buddha state (literally, “awakened”). He immediately gathered his first disciples and preached his first sermon in a deer park, setting forth the simple yet brilliant fundamentals of Buddhist dharma (“teachings of Buddha”)—namely, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. These are given much like a physician gives a diagnosis and then a prescription for healing; only in this case, he is a physician of the soul or human condition.

The Four Noble Truths

The First Noble Truth is that all of life is inevitably comprised of impermanence and thus suffering, and that there is simply no escaping this reality. Every existential phenomenon, by definition, is in a state of dukkha (“suffering”). Whether it is the decrepit old man who shows signs of aging, the sick man whose body is racked with pain, or the dead man whose end has come, the journey of life is one toward death with suffering along the way. In short, existence equates suffering. To be sure, we may have momentary happiness, but this is fleeting and never permanent.

Ultimately we all experience grief, anguish, and pain—there is simply no escaping this reality.

The Second Noble Truth is that the cause of suffering is rooted in tanhā (“desire”). In other words, it is our desires and cravings that produce suffering. These may be material or immaterial attachments. These attachments cannot ultimately be possessed in that they are by nature impermanent (anitya) and always in a state of flux and change. Suffering then comes as a result of our desire, and in particular, of our desire to hold on to things in perceived permanence.

INTERACTIVE 4.2 Expansion of Buddhism



The Third Noble Truth is remarkably simple, yet difficult to attain: Eliminate tanhā and you eliminate dukkha. Be rid of your desires and attachments and you will be rid of suffering. To put this another way, freedom from dukkha comes when one is able to sever all ties to tanhā. This is possible when one understands and embraces the principle of anatman, the non-self. Our egos (and desires which are wrapped up in our egos) do not really exist, or at least have no permanence. They are momentary illusions in time, which eventually pass beyond into another state of being. When one achieves the elimination of tanhā through the realization of anatman, it is tantamount to the state of nirvana, or “blowing out” of the ego, and thus egoless bliss.

The Fourth Noble Truth is that the elimination of tanhā is possible by following the middle way. This is the life of a detached, wise sage who avoids either the extreme of self-indulgence or the extreme of self-denial. The practical instruction for living this middle way is spelled out in what is termed, “The Noble Eightfold Path.” These consist of the following eight points:

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. Right Understanding: comprehending reality correctly through the prism of the Four Noble Truths.
2. Right Intention: living with the right motives in our thinking and actions, free from desire or attachment; open, honest, and at peace.
3. Right Speech: refraining from lies, slander, or abusive speech; rather speaking with words that create harmony and peace.



The Spread of Buddhism

In contrast to Hinduism and Jainism, from its beginnings Buddhism was intent upon spreading the teachings (dharma) of the Buddha far, wide, and quickly, and did so along the ancient trade routes of Asia. This was undertaken, not so much out of a sense of competition, but rather out of compassion and mercy for the suffering experienced in this life. If the Buddha had discovered a cure to the problem of suffering in the world, it needed to be disseminated—out of love—for all beings.

The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path began to be taught and promulgated far and wide, into China, Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan.

The Buddhist schools

Over time, two distinct schools of practice emerged: Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. It must be noted, though, that there are many unique “denominations” within each of these.

Theravada

Theravada (“Way of the Elders”) is the oldest surviving school, dating back to the time closest to Siddhartha’s life. Located primarily in India and Southeast Asia, it emphasizes the ideal of living as a Buddhist monk in order to reach nirvana. Monastic discipline, including shaven head, donning saffron robes, chanting in corporate unison, and engaging in long hours of solitary meditation are the hallmarks of this way of life. In short, only a monk that is a renouncer of all worldly attachment is capable of attaining nirvana and able to be released from suffering.

Mahāyāna

Mahāyāna Buddhism developed as a school of thought and practice at a much later period (likely in the first century CE), and its centered primarily

in China, Korea, and Japan (though it exists in pockets elsewhere). Mahāyāna (“Great Vehicle”) developed out of the reality that not all individuals were able to live the life of a monk; it simply was not practical. Nor was it always possible to achieve these Buddhist ideals simply on one’s own strength or merit. Thus, Mahāyāna teaches that an individual is able to aspire to nirvana and ultimately Samsāra, not as monk but simply as a layperson of the world, relying on the grace of other Buddhas (“awakened ones”) who have already achieved liberation.

In other words, if the first Buddha’s heart was one of intense compassion for all beings, then it follows that not just monks but also laypeople should be directed to that goal and given the opportunity for liberation from suffering. One of the early Mahāyāna texts, the Lotus Sutra, puts forward the notion of a bodhisattva—a person who is so dedicated to helping others with achieving freedom from suffering that they delay their own. By way of example, in Japan there is the beloved image Kannon (the goddess of mercy), a bodhisattva who showers grace upon the lay. In short, Mahāyāna is accessible for all and its hallmarks are that of compassion and mercy. As to be expected, there are numerous derivations of Mahayana Buddhism, too many to enumerate within this text.

Vajrayana

A third school of Buddhism can be argued to exist, and is called Vajrayana (“Thunderbolt”) Buddhism, but most scholars agree that it can be similarly argued that it is an offshoot of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It resides primarily in Tibet and thus is often referred to as Tibetan Buddhism. Vajrayana Buddhism amalgamated with the indigenous, shamanic Bön religion of Tibet, and is known for its esoteric, tantric, and supernatural (occult and magical) practices with perceivable influences from Hinduism. Emphasis is placed on symbolic gesture with hands and fingers, on mantras (esoteric formularies based on the power of sound), and visual aids such

as Mandalas, which incarnate particular bodhisattvas and bring mystical union with the devotee.

One of Vajrayana’s most cherished texts is the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which serves as a guide to navigate the afterlife “bardo” (liminal) stage between death and rebirth. It serves to give instruction on how to traverse the harrowing and difficult journey from this life to the next. Certainly, the most visibly recognizable spokesperson for Tibetan Buddhism today is His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his nonviolent struggle of liberation on behalf of the Tibetan people. He is a frequent visitor to the West to promote the Tibetan cause as well as to spread the message of compassion.



In the final analysis, all three schools, and the various “denominations” within them, agree that whatever the differences, everyone who wishes to ascribe to the Buddhist way of life must take refuge in what is called “The Triple Gem;” namely, the Buddha himself (the enlightened one), the dharma (the teachings he gave), and the sangha (the Buddhist community). These three ensure success in one’s endeavor.

The Buddha

The Buddha, Siddhartha, who was the first “awakened” one, is not worshiped as a deity. In fact, Buddhism can be said to be a non-theistic religion. There is no god, and certainly the Buddha is not looked upon as such. He is honored and viewed as an inspiration, but he is not prayed to. His compassion for others inspires us to do the same.

The dharma

The dharma (teachings of the Buddha) is to be taken as one takes a prescriptive medicine to heal an illness. Following the timeless dharma cures the individual from suffering. Chief among the teachings, in addition to the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, are the concepts of *anitya*, *anātman*, *śūnyatā*, and *nirvana*. *Anitya* means “impermanence” and simply undergirds the truth in the source of our suffering. Since everything is impermanent, as hard as we may try to find happiness in possessing material wealth or relationships, everything passes and thus is an illusion. *Anātman* means no-self, or the principle that there is no eternal ego or self. This is critical for eradicating *tanhā* (desires). If we realize that, ultimately, there is no eternal self or ego, then whatever desires we may have are only illusions. *Śūnyatā* means “emptiness.” It is a key concept in Zen Buddhism. It undergirds the notion of *nirvana* (blowing-out or extinguishing). *Nirvana* is reached when one resides in the deep recesses of emptiness, for it is only there that one achieves cessation of ego and desire.

The sangha

The sangha (“association”), or the Buddhist community, supports the individual aspirant along the pathway to *nirvana*. This may take the form of a monastery, a temple, a devotional gathering in a home, etc. For the celibate monk, the monastery provides a place of refuge, mutual support, and tangible needs for existence. For the lay practitioner, the temple

gathering provides accountability, while home meetings provide mutual encouragement. In all cases—Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana—Buddhism relies on the sangha, the community.

While the Buddha took the radical position for his day in welcoming women monastics (nuns) as equals, treating them as perfectly capable of achieving enlightenment, over time things changed. The cultural patterns of male-dominated and hierarchical Asia took over and displaced women, forcing them back into subservient roles.

Conclusion

Buddhism today has expanded across the globe with nearly 500 million adherents, making it the fourth most populous world religion after Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, respectively. While it remains most highly concentrated in Asia, today it has a strong presence in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, North America (Zen Buddhism in particular), Latin America, and the Caribbean. In the United States, there is a strong Buddhist presence beginning in the 20th century and with the advent of Buddhist monasteries (particularly on the West Coast), and with academics such as Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, Thich Nhat Hanh, and others who have interpreted Buddhism to the West.

The vexing question that remains is how to classify Buddhism. Some scholars insist it is a philosophy as opposed to a religion. They point to the fact that at its core, Buddhism teaches a way of life, or a prescription for spiritual and physical health. Others argue that Buddhism, whatever it originally intended to be, is most definitely a religion with all of the concomitant rituals (e.g., incense, candles, and robes), hierarchy of roles, and places of worship. While the vitality of Buddhism has ebbed and flowed throughout history, what is certain is that Siddhartha’s teaching will continue to inspire humanity through the ages and leave its mark on the human condition and imagination.

Questions for further consideration

1. In your estimation, is Buddhism primarily a religion or a philosophy? Why? Why not?
2. What is unique and what is similar to the religions of Hinduism and Jainism, both of which existed in Siddhartha's day?
3. What is significant about Siddhartha's Four Sightings?
4. Are there any parallels, or hints of similarities, to any of the monotheistic religions practiced in the West?
5. What is the middle way, and how is this different from both Hinduism and Jainism?

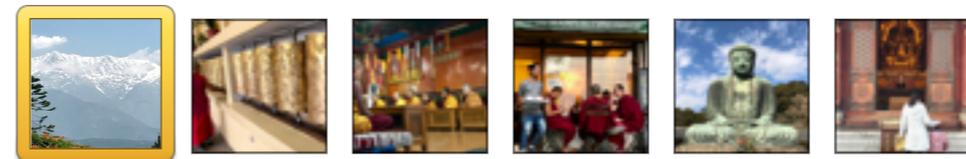
INTERACTIVE 4.2 Buddhism Crossword Puzzle

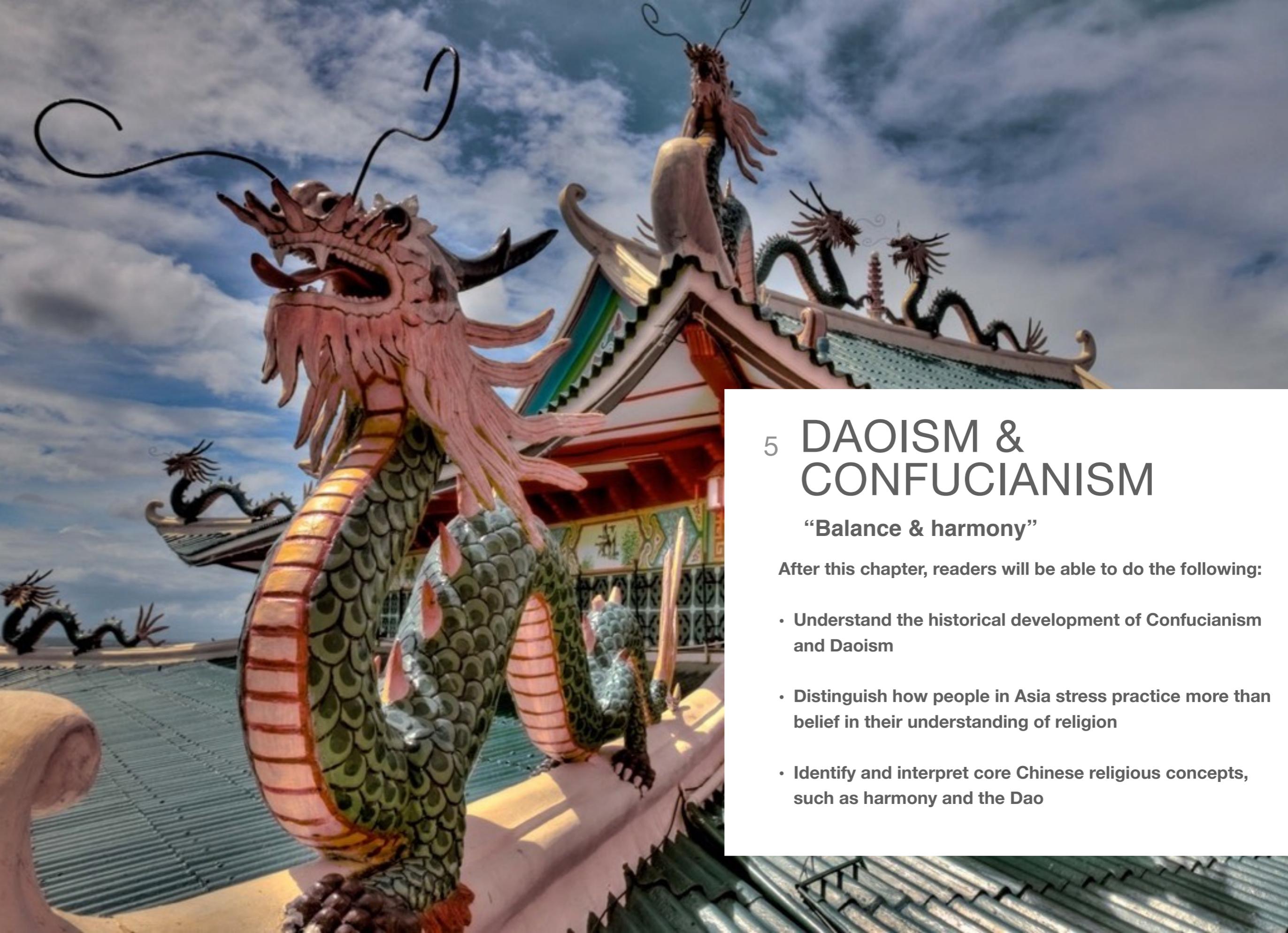


GALLERY 4.1 Images of Buddhism



Climbing the Himalayas at the Dalai Lama's monastery





5 DAOISM & CONFUCIANISM

“Balance & harmony”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- Understand the historical development of Confucianism and Daoism
- Distinguish how people in Asia stress practice more than belief in their understanding of religion
- Identify and interpret core Chinese religious concepts, such as harmony and the Dao

“The Dao that can be named is not the Absolute Dao, The Names that can be given are not Absolute Names. The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; the Named is the Mother of All Things.”

—Tao Te Ching, Verse 1

“All modalities of being, from a rock to Heaven, are integral parts of a continuum which is often referred to as the “great transformation.” Since nothing is outside of this continuum, the chain of being is never broken....The continuous presence of ‘qi’ in all modalities of being makes everything flow together as the unfolding of a single process. Nothing, not even an almighty creator, is external to this process.”

—Tu Weiming, The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature

I have set off to the western reaches of China and the city of X'ian, the ancient capital of the Tang Dynasty where one can find the famed Terracota Army exhumed from the Earth. Interesting, to be sure, but this is not why I have trekked across China. I have come to ascend one of the five sacred peaks of Taoism: Mount Hua, where according to legend, over 100 people die each year traversing the side of the cliff! Maybe it is the daredevil in me, or maybe it is realizing that if I am going to understand a religion, I have to experience it in its totality—in my body. In either case, I strap the safety belt through my harness and step out on to the plank, which is affectionately called “highway in the sky” or “stairway to heaven.” My guide refuses to come with me, saying he will wait for me to return. It is a sheer drop of over 3,000 feet straight down, and I feel my legs going limp and my heart racing. I am not sure I am going to be able to continue, but then I tell myself, “If you quit now, you’ll regret it the rest of your life.” So, I press on, finally getting to the end of the “plank road” to find myself on a small outcrop of rock with a Taoist temple carved into the edge of the cliff. I see the image of Lao Tzu inside and I smell the incense sticks burning in front of him. Clearly, coming here

Introduction

In this chapter, we move from the subcontinent of India to the far reaches of East Asia—in particular Chūgoku (China), literally “Middle Kingdom.” It is a place where the diverse and eclectic religious traditions of its vast region exist side-by-side in a unique amalgamation that gives its people their identity.

中国

We begin with an anecdote. The story is told of a Chinese scholar who was queried by the emperor as to whether he was a Buddhist. The scholar pointed to his Daoist hat. “So, you’re Daoist,” whereupon the scholar lifted his skirt to reveal his Confucian shoes. “Ah,” the emperor



Statue of Lao Tzu

INTERACTIVE 5.1 History of Daosim Timeline



said, “you are in fact a Confucian.” At that point, the scholar tugged at his Buddhist prayer scarf wrapped around his neck. The point being, for most East Asians, it is not just possible but in fact desirable to belong to any number of religious traditions at the same time. This is so in that religion is understood not as a mutually exclusive

competitive enterprise, but rather as an inclusive endeavor that fulfills the complementary needs of their adherents.

Tap on the image below to read a verse of Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*:

Whether one is a Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, or otherwise, each of these religions fulfills a specific task in keeping the social fabric of Chinese society knit together. In particular, these include:

- The cult of ancestors (remembering the dead)
- The identification of the self with the corporate group over individual consciousness
- The creation of harmony (both in the social and the natural world)
- The maintenance of balance in all things (in particular, the opposing forces of yin and yang)

These are critical, central concepts that undergird and predate the prevailing religions of China. Each of these are essential to the Chinese social fabric, and by extension the rest of East Asia, and are thus

accounted for and celebrated in specific ways, as we shall see, in each religious tradition.

Ancestors, and the corpus of rites and rituals for their remembrance, are a critical component for the Chinese social fabric. We do not exist in a vacuum, nor are we islands unto ourselves. Remembering the ancestors and the generations who have preceded us ensures both a sense of being a part of something larger than oneself (i.e., it precludes narcissistic “navel gazing” and obsessive self-examination) as well as ensuring the continuity of traditions that keep society held together (i.e., if it has “always been done that way,” then there is good reason to continue doing it that way). The individual self is always understood in relation to the corporate group. By way of example, in Asia, one introduces him or herself by surname first, and only then by first name, if at all. Ancestors kept it this way: family, clan, and nation, all superseding the self. In short, to remember the dead is to ensure the proper place of the living.

Yin & Yang

Harmony, both within social constructs and within nature itself, is of paramount importance as it safeguards a peaceful existence for the living. The principle of yin and yang makes this possible. Developed as early as 1000 B.C.E., and thus predating any of the religious traditions of China, it establishes a distinction between opposing yet interacting forces (ch’i/qì) within all life. Yin represents the dark, cold, mysterious feminine force.



行攘無辭仍無敵孰無兵禍莫於輕敵輕敵幾喪吾
 寶故抗兵相加哀者勝矣
 吾言甚易知甚易行天下莫能行言有宗事有君夫惟
 無知是以不知知我者命則我貴矣是以聖人被禍懷至
 知不知上不知知病夫唯病病是以不病聖人不病以其病病是
 是以不病
 民不畏威大威至矣無狹其所居無厭其所生夫惟不厭是
 以不厭是以聖人自知不自見自愛不自貴故去彼取此

Yang represents the bright, warm, direct masculine force. These are not mutually exclusive. Rather, each has a small portion of the other force within it, as noted in the classic yin-yang symbol where there appears a small dot of the other within each. All creation is imbued with these two life forces (ch'i/qi), and true harmony, whether social or cosmological, exists when these two are held in proper balance and in proper tension.

Daoism: The way of nature & the universe

Daoism, literally “the Way,” begins with the legend of Lao Tzu (meaning, “old master”)—“legend” inasmuch as there is no historical record of such a person having lived. Nevertheless, as the legend is told, Lao Tzu, a curator of the royal library in the Zhou dynasty c. 500 B.C.E., heads for the hills in dissatisfaction with court life at the ripe old age of 160. Recognized as the “wise old master” by a border guard, he is not permitted to pass through the gates of the Great Wall until he has imparted his great wisdom by putting ink brush to paper. This he does in 5,000 characters, leaving behind his beloved and poetic legacy, the *Tao Te Ching* (“the Classic of the Way”), still in print today and second only to the Bible in number of translations in the Western world. Whatever the historical origins of the document, and there are many theories, the *Tao Te Ching* is at the heart of Daoist dogma and practice. From the incipit verse, “The Dao that can be named is no longer the Dao,” there is a deeply mystical sense about all things being ordered by the Dao, but eludes definition or regimen. It is, in short, the undifferentiated life force (ch'i/qi) that permeates and animates all creation.

MOVIE 5.1 Glimpse of Daosim



Key beliefs and practices



At its heart, Daoism is about cultivating harmony within the cosmos and between oneself and all living things. This is accomplished through a variety of key methods and principles. The first is to realize the essential unity of all things. This is accomplished when one is able to transcend the differentiation and penchant for personal preference, choosing rather to accept things as they are, not as one wishes them to be. Water is the quintessential example of this principle from nature. It moves gently and effortlessly across terrain, flowing around obstacles rather than being impeded by them in frustration. Bamboo is the other element from nature that speaks to this. It bends with the wind and the forces of nature, outlasting storms, rather than opposing them and subsequently snapping.

So it is with the person of Dao, gently living in harmony with the storms of life rather than defying them.

Wu wei

This principle is summed up in the notion of wu wei or “effortless action” (sometimes translated as the paradoxical “actionless action”). It allows for the natural unfolding of the Dao rather than a forced or intentional action. This means not interfering with or manipulating the course of events, and rather living in harmony with them, with impartial spontaneity. As a corollary to this, architecture and design are important features to households and communities, as these either assemble the world in harmony with nature/the Dao, or are opposed and ultimately destroyed by the force (the allusions to Star Wars should not be missed!). One should note the penchant in Asia to build in harmony with nature, ergo allowing the universe to enfold the architecture, rather than shutting out the elements of nature as is usually exhibited in Western architecture. For example, it is not uncommon to see homes built around large trees, even allowing them to grow right through the roof, rather than felling them down and then building in their absence.

Chiao

Another concept is that of chiao (“relativity”). All things have relative significance. There is no good, bad, right, or wrong. There are no absolutes. It does not share in conventional human values, and it is empty of self. The Dao shows no partiality and plays no favorites. Things just are, and the person of Dao is able to accept things for what they are rather than to pass judgment about them. In fact, what is perceived as polar opposites (hot and cold, finite and infinite, etc.) are not dualities, but rather identical aspects of the same reality. In fact, the Dao is most apparent when the seeming duality of opposing forces, such as yin and yang, are in balance and harmony, living in simplicity. When this

happens, according to Daoism, transformation into a state of tranquility and peace is the result.

Dao

Finally, it should be noted that in most Asian art forms, such as martial arts, calligraphy, or traditional tea ceremonies to name just a few, the Dao is not only implicit to the notion of its intention, but also explicitly used as such. For example, “Dao” or “Do” in judo, aikido, and taekwondo all employ the suffix “do,” meaning “the way of,” from Daoism. To master these forms is to place oneself in harmony with the “way” of the universe.

Confucianism: The practice of virtue

Confucianism is founded upon the figure K’ung Fu Tzu (literally, “Master Kung”). Though his actual existence is historicity questioned by some, most scholars agree that Master Kung (or “Confucius,” as he is called in the West) is in fact an historical person that lived from c. 551-479 B.C.E. as a Chinese bureaucrat. Confucius saw himself not as beginning a new religion but rather as recovering the ancient values of Chinese tradition. As he stated, “I am a transmitter and not a creator. I believe in and have a passion for the ancients” (Analects, Book VII, v.1).

MOVIE 5.2 Glimpse of Confucianism



In these values were housed, in essence, a system of overlapping patriarchies based upon a lineage of father to eldest son, culminating in the emperor himself who was required





to ensure the “mandate of Heaven” through charitable rule and promulgation of proper ritual (“li”). The preservation of the social fabric was assured through the veneration of the ancestors—in particular, the male patronage.

In broad brushstrokes, it can be argued that whereas Lao Tzu, the legendary founder of

Daoism, was concerned with the vertical aspect of harmony (harmony within the cosmos), Confucius was intent on bringing harmony to the horizontal dimension of existence (harmony among social relationships).

Master Kung (Confucius) imparted his wisdom to his disciples in short, aphoristic sayings, which came to be written down in a collection known as the Analects, which are often translated in the West in the proverbial form of “Confucius says...”

The central message of Confucianism is found in this pithy collection, which remains in print having withstood the test of time, and still provides much influence over wide swaths of Asia including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, in addition to China. Some have argued that Confucianism, at its heart, is more an ethical paradigm than a religion, and more of a system for promulgating virtue rather than dogma. Regardless, Confucianism undergirds (as does religion in general) the social structure and keeps the social fabric well in place through its central teachings.

Key beliefs and practices

Ren

Foremost among the virtues promulgated in the Analects is the concept of Ren (benevolence). One who employs Ren is without guile, is

unconcerned with self, and rather is devoted to seeking the welfare of others. This begins with the ruler/emperor himself, who leads by example. If the emperor is compassionate, all others will be as well.

Further, Ren is schooled and honed beginning with the social relationships within the family. The right ordering of relationships in the home is the foundation to the right ordering of all of society. It begins with parent to child, and vice versa, and in particular, the father to the eldest son. Further, between the older and younger siblings and between husband and wife. When these are learned and exercised properly in the home, then by extension all relationships will fall into place.

Xiào



Peace and harmony begins in the home and extends beyond to society, government, and the universe itself. The obligation of the eldest son to the father is of particular importance as this mirrors the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. This is why, traditionally in Chinese and Asian societies, sons (and daughters) were named as First

INTERACTIVE 5.2 History of Confucianism Timeline



Son, Second Son, and so on. The Confucian concept of Xiào (“filial piety”)—showing absolute respect to one’s parents, elders, and ancestors—ensures the harmonious continuation and interplay of social structure. According to Confucius, children are to support one’s parent, never humiliate them, and give them glory; ranked in order of importance. Not surprisingly, Confucius embraced and ensured

the continuation of the cult of ancestors within Chinese society as he saw this simply as an extension of filial piety.

Li

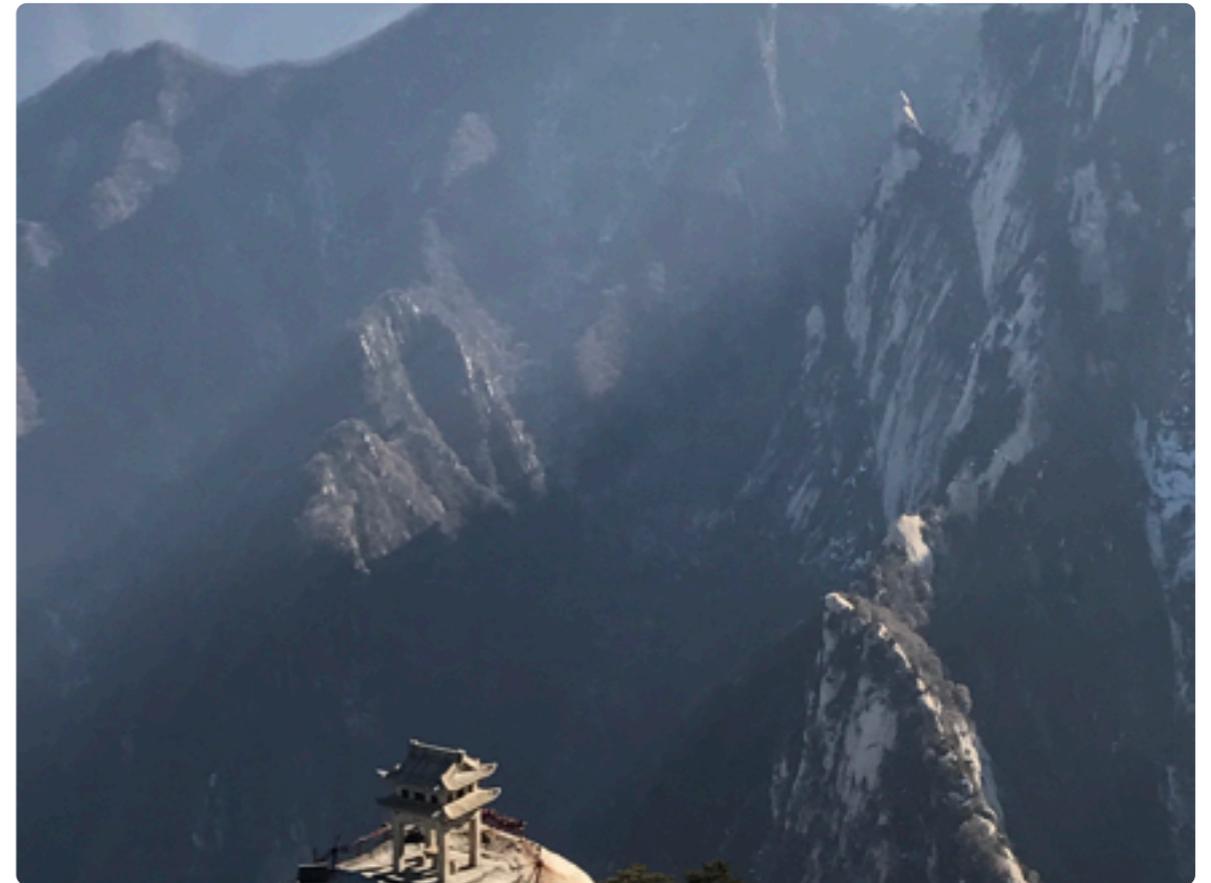
In order to safeguard this proper ordering of society, together with the concepts of Ren (benevolence) and Xiào (filial piety), Confucius disseminated the practice of Li (propriety of ritual in all things), which entails honoring the ancestors, respecting the elders, showing love and devotion to one’s parents, having benevolence for those below you, and in all things showing proper respect and decorum. Li, in essence, is a manual for normative social behavior.

Unfortunately, within this system, the role of women is largely relegated to a subservient position where their worth is found in their dependence upon the males in their life; first on their father (in youth), then their husband (in adulthood), and then their son (in old age). In life, women are to conduct themselves by first knowing their station in life, second not speaking unless spoken to, keeping physically presentable, and finally properly dispensing her duties of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the household.

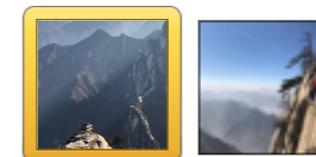
Conclusion

After the communist takeover of China in 1949 and the further Cultural Revolution beginning in 1966, Confucianism came to an abrupt end in the Chinese social landscape. There was no room for hierarchy and propriety of station in life among comrades of equals. Nevertheless, China today has experienced a rebirth of Confucianism and the value of teaching the ethics of respect, benevolence, and propriety among the school children of her citizens. Thus said, it has never lost its place of importance as an ethical paradigm that helps knit together the social fabric of countries like Vietnam, Korea, and Japan.

GALLERY 5.1 Sacred Mountains of China



Daoist temple in the Huashan Mountains



Questions for further consideration

1. It is interesting to note that both Daoism and Confucianism developed around the same time period. What is further remarkable is that this is also the same time period as the life of the Buddha and Mahavira in India, the Golden Age of Athens (Plato and Aristotle), and the Age of the Great Hebrew Prophets. What significance and reason, if any, does this have?
2. Does the notion of impartial spontaneity and inactive action that is effortless sound close to anything you have heard in Western pop-psychology/philosophy? Live and let live? To each their own?
3. What are the ramifications for this sort of philosophy in the world today?
4. Are there any absolutes in the world, or is it a world of paradoxical relativism, like it or not? What difference would this make?
5. What might the West learn from the key concepts in Confucian thought, especially around the notion of Ren and Li?
6. Why did communist China, for a time, impeach the teachings of Confucius?
7. Are these religions of Daoism and Confucianism truly religions in the usual sense of the word, or can one argue that they are in fact philosophies? Or both? Is this even a useful question to ask, or is it peculiarly a western dichotomy that has no meaning in the East?

INTERACTIVE 5.3 Daoism & Confucianism Crossword Puzzle





6 SHINTO

“The way of the Gods”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- Understand the historical development of Shinto
- Distinguish how the Japanese stress practice more than belief in their understanding of religion
- Identify and interpret core Shinto concepts, such as kami and the immanence of the Gods in all things

神道

Introduction

Last but not least in our examination of Asian religions is what we discover when moving across the Yellow and East China Sea to the Far East. Here, we come to an island country with an indigenous religion where there is no founder, no codified text, no essential ritual, no rigid dogma, and no active proselytizing.

If this sounds like what we discovered in Hinduism, it should. The parallels are striking. This is the Land of the Rising Sun (or Nihon, literally, “the source of the sun” as is depicted on their national flag), commonly referred to as Japan in the West.

Japan is an island country isolated from the rest of the world where there exists a language like no other. In fact, linguists are not certain of its origin or relationship to any of the other languages of the world. The Japanese people developed a unique language, culture, and way of life whose origins largely remain a mystery to anthropologists. This is the context out of which the mythos of the Japanese indigenous religion of Shinto originated, giving its people their continued sense of unique history and place in the world.

Shinto literally means “the way of the Gods”—gods being plural beyond count. What is certain is that their presence is in all things, everywhere, especially permeating the entirety of nature. How so? Consider the fact that Japan lies along the Pacific Rim and the Ring of Fire fault line,



MOVIE 6.1 Glimpse of Shinto

“The great imperial land, Japan, is the august country where the divine ancestral goddess Amaterasu Omikami was born, a superb country...According to her divine pleasure, this land was decreed to be the country of the imperial descendants... so that even now, without deviation from the divine age, the land might continue in tranquility and in accord with the will of the kami, a country ruled in peace.”

—Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801)

“Natural Religion is the spontaneous awareness of the Divine that can be found in any culture...The Spirit of Great Nature may be a flower, may be the beauty of the mountains, the pure snow, the soft rains or the gentle breeze. Kannagara means being in communion with these forms of beauty and so with the highest level of experiences of life. When people respond to the silent and provocative beauty of the natural order, they are aware of Kannagara. When they respond in life in a similar way, by following ways ‘according the kami,’ they are expressing kannagara in their lives. They are living according to the natural flow of the universe and will benefit and develop by so doing.”

—Yukitaka Yamamoto (1987)

Once a year, I have a tradition of taking some of my university students with me back to the land of my birth and introducing them to the land of the kami and the people who refer to themselves as “wareware Nihonjin” (literally, “we Japanese”). It is always fun seeing young adults from the U.S. and across the globe immerse themselves in this ancient culture that has an unbroken line of emperors dating back more than 2,500 years, with all of its rituals and expectations of decorum that date back nearly as far. And yet, right alongside the immaculately manicured gardens, temples, shrines, and ancient tea houses are the dizzyingly, fast-paced, neon-studded, techno-inspired streets of Tokyo.

INTERACTIVE 6.1 History of Shinto Timeline



which has colliding tectonic plates that result in daily earthquakes, active volcanoes, boiling springs pouring out of the mountains, torrential rains, and the devastation of typhoons and tsunamis. To the adherents of Shinto, nature is rife with the presence of the supernatural. It is best to pay attention to its presence and make sure one does not upset the balance of man and nature.

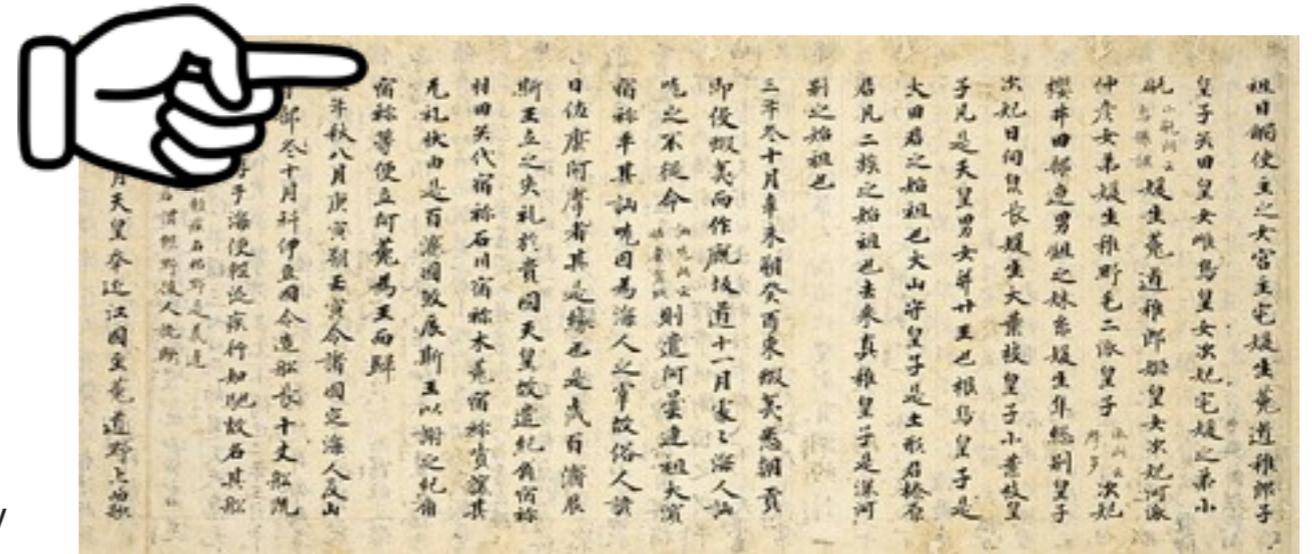
Oldest religion in Japan

It should be noted that Shinto predates any other religious system that resides in Japan, and thus escapes the need for definition or differentiation until the advent of Buddhism in China during the 6th century C.E., and later Christianity from the West in the 16th century C.E. As an aside, Daoism and Confucianism were never seen as competitors to Shinto, but rather complimentary systems of thought and action. Scholars of religion have argued that, whereas Buddhism found its proper place in the Japanese religious landscape as the preferred means for preparing for the afterlife and caring for the dead, Christianity never found a niche for itself and thus remained on the outside. This is somewhat attenuated by the current inclination among Japanese young people to get married in a Christian church.

Sacred narrative

While other religions do exist in Japan, Shinto is ultimately what gives the Japanese their unique identity. The mythology, understood as “sacred narrative,” discusses how the Japanese came into existence and is told in the Shinto texts, the Kojiki and Nihongi. In short, these texts tell the story

of how Japan and the Japanese people were created by the gods, Izanami and Izanagi, as they stood over the bridge of heaven overlooking the waters below. Izanagi dipped his sword into the waters of the Pacific and the droplets that fell formed the archipelago of the Japanese islands. Tap on the image below to read more information about the Shoku Nihongi:



Through Izanagi’s and Izanami’s conjugal relations, the various tribes and clans of the Japanese were formed from their offspring. One of the gods that came into being as a result of their sexual union was Amaterasu—the sun goddess. She, in particular, became the patroness of the Japanese. Her descendant, Jimmu, became the first emperor of Japan, which has resulted in an unbroken line of divine emperors, regarded as gods, that persists to this day. The implications of this sacred mythology are abundantly clear: The Japanese islands are of divine creation, as are its people a divine race, and most importantly, the emperor himself is considered a god—a direct descendant of Amaterasu in an unbroken line of divinity.

The importance of this mythology ebbed and flowed at various times throughout Japanese history, but as one might suspect, it was extremely important as recent as World War II when it was used by those in political

power to show that it was the divine destiny of the Japanese to colonize and rule over the rest of Asia. Part of the acceptability of this myth by the Japanese was the very real fact that its islands had never been conquered by a foreign power. Even when Kublai Khan's Mongols tried to invade Japan in the 13th century C.E. with a massive flotilla, a typhoon—or as the Japanese called it, kamikaze (“wind of the Gods”)—blew them back in a failed attempt. The same narrative was used during WWII by the Japanese military to embolden their air force while sending their pilots on suicide bombing missions against the allied navy over the Pacific Ocean, calling them “kamikaze pilots.” Ultimately, the approach failed.

GALLERY 6.1 Shinto Shrines



Itsukushima Shrine (exterior)



Not until the mid-20th century C.E. with the Japanese defeat at the end of WWII at the hands of the allied forces, did the nation first experience the occupation of their land by foreign powers. Obviously, this left the Japanese severely shaken, questioning their claim to uniqueness and state-sponsored Shinto. One of the requirements of surrender, which General Douglas McArthur demanded, was for the emperor to publicly denounce his claim to divinity. It was the first time the nation heard the voice of the emperor, the voice of a god being so sacred that one never was allowed to hear it. Furthermore, the Japanese people heard it for the first time by being told that he was not a god. The Japanese were dumbfounded. Shinto and the government were extracted from each other. Whereas during the war all Japanese were required to be Shinto and show reverence for the gods by bowing before the emperor and the local Shinto shrine, after the war, Shinto (and allegiance to “the way of the Gods”) was no longer a required adherence.



Tsukisam Shinto Shrine Festival



If the Japanese government had misused Shinto in this way, with its abject failure, it was time to return to the true essence of the Shinto religion—one that was rooted in nature and harmony. At its heart, Shinto espouses a sacred relationship between humans and nature; as the Association of Shinto Shrines has recently commented: “[Traditionally] the Japanese viewed nature not as an adversary to be subdued, but rather a sacred space overflowing with the blessings of the kami, and toward which they were to act with restraint...by reconsidering the role of the sacred groves...we hope to heighten Japanese consciousness, and expand the circle of active involvement in environmental preservation” (Jinja-Honcho, 1997).

Beliefs & practices

Union with nature

In other words, while each of East Asia’s religions that have been examined in the text thus far have a specific role to play (Confucianism with its ethical paradigm for social structure and Buddhism with its cure of suffering and concern for the afterlife), Shinto offers a way to structure and bring into harmony the relationship between man and the unpredictability of nature. If nature is rife with kami, and kami are everywhere (in rocks, trees, rivers, mountains, etc.), then one must learn to live with a sense of kinship with nature and in harmony with its forces. One approach to doing this is by showing respect to the kami at one of the more than 100,000 shrines across Japan, many of which are atop mountains. Further, each community/tribe/clan was understood to have its own tutelary kami that provided protection and blessings upon that community for abundant harvest and health.

As an aside, one of the reasons Japan is so crowded is that a population nearly half that of the United States is living in a landmass the size of the state of California. Only 20% of the land is inhabitable while the other 80% is mountainous, where the kami live, and one does not want to live in their habitat and possibly disturb them.

Ritual

One of the essential elements to Shinto is the preservation of purity (kiyomi), and the cleansing of any impurity (kegare), should it present itself on persons or objects. The original state of beauty and purity with which we are created (as exemplified in the comfortability for Japanese traditionally to bathe together communally, both in the home and in public) is celebrated in Japan. However, impurities which can come about as a result of human action need to be purified by their removal; normally done by a Shinto priest making use of Oharai (a ceremony where the priest waves a branch from the sacred sakaki tree (an evergreen indigenous to Japan) to purify the object, person, or area. As an example, this is often done at the beginning of erecting a new building or purchasing a new car.

Another important ritual is misogi, the purification ritual, conducted by standing under a waterfall, usually during icy cold temperatures and torrential rain. Misogi washes the body and soul clean. Water is also



used prior to entering a Shinto shrine (Buddhism also adopted this practice in Japan), where one cleans the hands and mouth at the temizuya before approaching the shrine for prayers.

As an aside, parallels of this can be seen in virtually all of the world's religions, where water is used as a means of entrance to a sacred site or state of being. Salt is also used for purification, sprinkling it on the ground, as witnessed with sumo wrestlers before their bouts. Purity is another reason why shoes are always taken off when entering a shrine, temple, or one's home.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Shinto is practiced today as a means for remaining in balance and harmony with the kami who reside in nature. It is also a means to restore the original beauty and grace we are born into, by being aware of and taking measures to be rid of impurity. This is done on an almost daily basis (visiting the communal shrines in one's geographic area), but also at significant rites of passages such as conception, at birth, at the ages of three, five, and seven, and at marriage.

At one time, death was included in that list. However, with the advent of Buddhism incoming from China, this passage has been enveloped by Buddhism, which marketed itself as the premier means of caring for the dead and the afterlife. Finally, the numerous Matsuri that are celebrated across the land of Japan, in virtually every village and at different seasonal waypoints for varying reasons, are the quintessential means for the community to reestablish itself in relation to the kami, to each other, and to the ancestors; finding once again a perfect balance and harmony between mankind and "the way of the Gods."

Questions for further consideration

1. Watch Professor Luttio's video on the Yasukuni Shrine. What are the main issues raised? What are your reactions?



2. Is it fair to call Shinto a world religion if, in fact, one must be Japanese to belong?
3. Can one be Shinto and non-Japanese (a new attempt at non-exclusivity)? Interestingly, in today's 21st century world, there are those (non-Japanese) who would like to consider themselves Shinto. The Japanese are rather bemused by this. Take, for example, the first-ever Shinto shrine built outside of Japan in Stockton, California (now moved to Washington), and others in Hawaii and Colorado.
4. How is it possible for a Japanese person to be born a Shinto, married a Christian, and buried a Buddhist without any sense of inconsistency? Would this work in the West? What are your thoughts on this practice?

5. Why do you suppose water is an important symbol that is used in the Shinto faith, and virtually all other religions of the world? What does it symbolize? What does it bring into being?

6. How might the Shinto agenda for harmony with nature and the “care of the Earth” be a touchstone for dialogue among those who have a similar agenda for environmental preservation? For example, as found in Wicca, neopaganism, the Goddess movement, and other Gaia-related religions, which are particularly popular today.

7. How is Shinto similar and different from Daoism?

INTERACTIVE 6.2 Shinto Crossword Puzzle



GALLERY 6.2 Glimpses of Shinto & Japan



Shinto Shrine in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan



7 THE EMERGENCE OF MONOTHEISM



“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

—The Jewish Torah, Deuteronomy 6:4

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and Earth.”

—The Christian Nicene Creed

“There is no God but God...”

—The Islamic declaration of faith, Shahada

It is 2 a.m., the agreed upon time to awake and embark upon our trek up Mt. Sinai, deep at the southern end of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. I arrived just the day before, staying with the monks at Saint Katherine’s Monastery in Egypt. Chanting, or rather listening to the chant, of the monks at the Vespers liturgy the night before had been a real treat. With clouds of incense wafting up into the rafters of the sacred space, I could only imagine what the four walls of this place had experience over the 1,700 years of its use. This was the place, according to tradition, that Moses met God in the burning bush. After Vespers concluded, one of the monks took me to the very spot and excitedly showed me the very bush, many iterations removed of course. The veracity of the claim notwithstanding, it was a moving moment to behold. But the real treat was yet to come—the climb to the top of the mountain, 7,500 feet high, where according to tradition the very spot that Moses received the Ten Commandments was located.

So, at 2 a.m., my guide is there quietly waiting for me just outside of the walls of the famed monastery.

“The first part we go by camel!” he informs me as he helps me up onto the hump-backed animal. He hands me a cigarette, saying, “Off we go!”

The stars are beyond description in splendor. No flashlights are needed. It is such a quiet, tranquil night. No sounds are made, and all that can be heard is the soft padding of the camel’s feet on the desert terrain. Halfway up the mountain, we dismount. The

Introduction

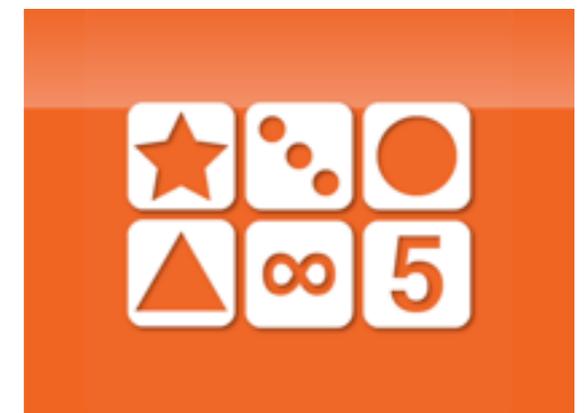
Having completed our examination of the religions of the Eastern world, particularly Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Shinto, we now turn our attention to the monotheistic religions of the world (the doctrine of Brahman in Hinduism notwithstanding) that have their origin in the Middle East—namely, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Bahá’í. The one exception to this list is Sikhism, which has its origin not in the Middle East but in Northern India. We will conclude with a final chapter on the future of religion, looking in particular at mysticism and other pathways toward unity.

There is one important aspect to bear in mind: With the story of religion, each tradition seems to have built upon, borrowed from, or reacted to the religious tradition that has immediately preceded it. This was clearly evident in the East with Jainism and Buddhism as they emerged out of a particular historical context within Hindu India. The same is evident in the story of monotheism, particularly with the first three of the monotheistic traditions we will be examining: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Each of these traditions builds on its antecedent, creating a building-block edifice that comes to characterize their self-understanding. These three in particular trace their origins back to the historical figure of Abraham and understand themselves to be deeply connected to the historical context of the Semites (speakers of Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic).

Though each tradition draws on the previous, progressing chronologically from Judaism to Christianity to Islam, no single tradition understands itself as existing in a vacuum apart from the others. Rather, they see themselves

INTERACTIVE 7.1 Matching: Religion & Religious Leader



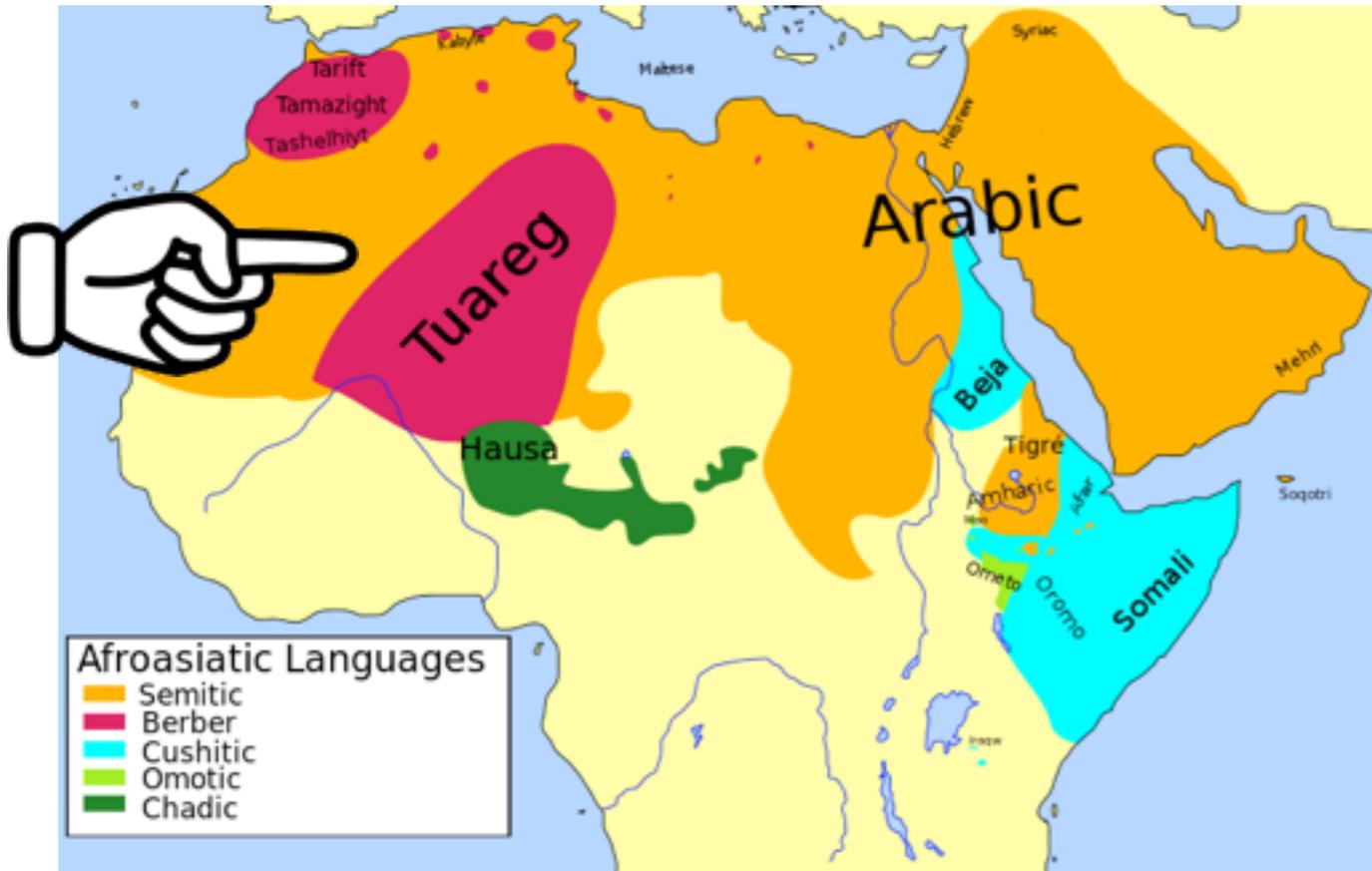
as being the truest rendition or example of what began with Abraham—a tradition that is sometimes called “ethical monotheism.” All three of these religions share ten commonly held positions and similarities that are important to note before we begin our examination of each individually. It should also be cautioned, however, that while all ten can be found in each of the three noted faiths, the development of these positions is more like a tapestry interweaving points of commonality rather than proclamations that arise ex nihilo.

Further, while these positions have developed over time and in some ways expressly through dialogue with each other, within each tradition there is great variance and variety of ways in which these positions are set forward, which is illuminated in dogma and expressed in ritual. The following scrolling text box provides a concise explication in numeric order of the ten similarities of the religions of Semitic, Abrahamic origin:

1. **God:** All three believe in a single divine being who is personal; possessing mind and will; eternal; not subject to the limits of time or change; all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), and all-good (omnibenevolent). These religions are sometimes referred to as ethical monotheism.
2. **Creation:** God created a world distinct from himself, a world that is real, not illusory, and totally dependent on God—a world that is good.
3. **Revelation:** In a unique historical event, God revealed his will, requiring obedience (disobedience being understood as sin). Revelation in each religion is given in writing. For each tradition, these are called the sacred scriptures: the Tanakh, the New Testament, and the Qur’an.
4. **Immortality and judgment:** There is life after death. At death, God will judge each individual for reward or

Sound.	Moabite, 800 B.C.	Hebrew, 700 B.C.	Phoenician, 200 B.C.	Samaritan, 500 A.D.	Hebrew, 100 A.D.	Palmyrene, 200 A.D.
A	𐤀	א	𐤀	𐤀	א	𐤀
B	𐤁	ב	𐤁	𐤁	ב	𐤁
G	𐤂	ג	𐤂	𐤂	ג	𐤂
D	𐤃	ד	𐤃	ד	ד	𐤃
H	𐤄	ה	𐤄	ה	ה	𐤄
V	𐤅	ו	𐤅	ו	ו	𐤅
Z	𐤆	ז	𐤆	ז	ז	𐤆
KH	𐤇	ח	𐤇	ח	ח	𐤇
T	𐤈	ט	𐤈	ט	ט	𐤈
Y	𐤉	י	𐤉	י	י	𐤉
C	𐤊	כ	𐤊	כ	כ	𐤊
L	𐤋	ל	𐤋	ל	ל	𐤋
M	𐤌	מ	𐤌	מ	מ	𐤌
N	𐤍	נ	𐤍	נ	נ	𐤍
S	𐤎	ס	𐤎	ס	ס	𐤎
E	𐤏	ע	𐤏	ע	ע	𐤏
P	𐤐	פ	𐤐	פ	פ	𐤐
TS	𐤑	צ	𐤑	צ	צ	𐤑
K	𐤒	ק	𐤒	ק	ק	𐤒
R	𐤓	ר	𐤓	ר	ר	𐤓
SH	𐤔	ש	𐤔	ש	ש	𐤔
TH	𐤕	ת	𐤕	ת	ת	𐤕

Tap on the map below to reveal details about the Semitic languages:



GALLERY 7.1 Landscapes of the heartland



The camels we would ride midway up Mt. Sinai





8 JUDAISM

“People of the covenant”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- Understand the importance of Zoroastrianism as a religious bridge between East and West
- Distinguish how Judaism has changed over time and in different places
- Summarize and interpret core Jewish beliefs and practices and begin to understand the core similarities between the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him...’Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations...I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.’”

—Genesis 17

As I walk down the narrow and well-worn cobblestone streets of ancient Jerusalem, I feel the electricity in the air. Every square inch of this land called “Holy” is fraught with a sense of spiritual expectation laid claim to by all three of the Abrahamic religions. It is late in the day and the sun is casting shadows along the labyrinth of passageways leading to the sacred wall.

I make my way with my students from the university where I teach to the place most sacred to Jews: the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, with its monolithic stones dating back to the time of King Herod. This is the spiritual navel of Judaism, the closest thing left of the Jewish Temple. Jews come here to pray. The world comes to pray. Indeed, all the great spiritual leaders of the world have come here at one time or another to offer their prayers.

“Don’t take long,” I say to my Lynn University students, each of who represents a different faith tradition, as they head to the wall. A short time later, all 12 of them return with tears in their eyes.

“Did you feel it?” one of them asks.

“Yup, most definitely!” another answers.

And then another, and another, all in the affirmative.

“What did you feel?” I ask.

Introduction

We begin our examination of the monotheistic religions of the world with Judaism. It is the oldest living religion in the world that has, at its core, the dogma and practice that there is but one God. It is a small but greatly influential religion in that virtually all monotheistic religions that followed inevitably drew from and referenced their Jewish antecedent.

Today, there are only approximately 14 million Jews living worldwide, most concentrated in the Middle East (Israel), Europe, and North America, (Pew Research Center, 2012). Jews understand themselves in one of three ways, or as a combination of the three: as a religious entity (Judaism proper), as a political entity (Zionism and specifically identifying with the State of Israel), and as an ethnicity (a cultural heritage passed on through the generations). While the latter two are of interest, for the purposes of this book, we will primarily examine the religious categorization of Judaism.

Abraham

The story of Judaism begins c. 2000 B.C.E. with Abraham. Though there are other key persons in the sacred narrative that came prior—Adam and Even, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, the Tower of Babel—Abraham is the first person that we have a historical reference point with mention of dates, places, and times. More importantly, at least as it is recounted in the biblical narrative, he is the one who first articulates the core doctrine and ideas that undergird Judaism—in

MOVIE 8.1 Glimpse of Judaism



particular, the notion of ethical monotheism.

According to the Genesis account, Abraham was a Semitic nomad from the Sumerian city of Ur in ancient Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) who settled in Haran (present day Turkey), but then is summoned by God to settle in the land of Canaan (present day Israel and Palestine). According to tradition and the recorded account in the Hebrew Scriptures, God tells Abraham to “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you,” (Genesis 12:1). Abraham obeyed and God—named Yahweh in Hebrew—promised him that he would be the father of a great nation, as many as there are stars in heaven. God will be their God and they will be God’s people: the chosen people.

12 Tribes of Israel

The sign of this special relationship—this covenant that is made between Abraham and his descendants—is circumcision: the cutting-off of the foreskin of every male’s penis on the eighth day after birth. “You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

Throughout your generations, every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old,” (Genesis 17:11-12). Abraham and his wife Sarah had a son named Isaac. Isaac and his wife Rebekah birthed

Jacob. Jacob and his wife Rachel then had twelve sons, which came to be known as the 12 Tribes of Israel (formerly known as Jacob). All of this is recorded and told in the sacred narrative, Genesis. Tap on the map above to learn more about the 12 Tribes of Israel.

In short order, the core dogmas of Judaism are ensconced and established for all time. These beliefs and practices, which persist all the way to the present day, are largely in tact and remain remarkably impactful on all other religions.

1. God is God; there is no other. While the Hebrew language uses a variety of monikers to get around the ineffable attributes of God, such as Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, etc., at its core, Judaism believes that the name of God is inexpressible.
2. God has made a special covenant between Abraham’s offspring and himself. God is their God, and they are God’s chosen people. For Jews, this is defined as those within the ranks of the 12 Tribes (the 12 sons of Jacob), though as we shall see, this notion gets expanded by future religions.
3. The sign of the covenant is the circumcision of all males done on the eighth day after birth.

Moses

The second historical figure that leaves his mark on Judaism is the imposing figure of Moses (c. 1300 B.C.E.), often dubbed the Lawgiver. According to tradition, Moses (a Levite baby) was rescued by the pharaoh’s daughter during the time of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt.

INTERACTIVE 8.1 History of Judaism Timeline



Raised in the pharaoh's house of privilege, he later comes to understand his true relationship with the Hebrews and that he was, in fact, a Jew. God gives him the mandate to go to the pharaoh and demand that he "Let my people go."

The second book of the Hebrew Scriptures chronicles these events, which lead to the Israelites' release from captivity—Exodus. According to tradition, it is while wandering the desert en route to the Promised Land that Moses is given the tablets of God's Law (Torah literally translates to "law" in Hebrew) while atop Mount Sinai. These come to be known as the Decalogue—the Ten Sayings, or more commonly, the Ten Commandments. Thus, Moses is the Lawgiver, having provided all of which are contained within the Pentateuch to go along with the stories of creation, flood, etc. **Tap on the scroll below** to learn more about the commandments: In actuality, there are 613 commandments given in the Pentateuch (also referred to as the Torah), which is composed of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These are the books that, according to tradition, were written by Moses and permanently put in place the requirements for keeping the covenant with Yahweh. In other words, while the sign of the covenant may be circumcision (as given to Abraham), the living-out of the covenant is the Torah as recorded by Moses. It should be noted that, in addition to the five books of the Torah, the Hebrew Scriptures (called the Tanakh) contain the Books of the Prophets

and other writings. Ultimately, Moses led God's people back to the Promised Land, but was unable to return himself. The Davidic line

The third historical figure integral to Judaism is David, who lived c. 1000 B.C.E. He was a shepherd boy who became the beloved second King of Israel, and who ushered in a golden age of prosperity and peace involving a clear shift from a nomadic to agrarian society. However, it was David's son, King Solomon, who is credited with the paradigmatic, cultic shift in Jewish practice and identity: namely, building the First Temple for the Israelites where daily sacrifices were made; a practice that persisted until the destruction of the temple at the hands of the conquering Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. (Fisher, 2008).

Without a temple cult in place, and with the dispersing of the Jews into captivity yet again, this time in Babylon rather than Egypt, a system of synagogue worship developed, displacing the temple. Synagogues are for study and prayer, not sacrifice. There exists no need for priests. Rather, rabbis (teachers of the Torah) head congregations, instructing and guiding followers in the ways of Judaism.

It should also be noted that during this period, there is evidence that Judaism came into contact with Zoroastrianism, the monotheistic religion of Persia, and some of the core tenets of this religion made their way into the Jewish faith: an immortal soul, judgment at death, an afterlife, the apocalypse, and the resurrection of the body. These tenets do not appear

in



Judaism until after this period of cultural contact with Zoroastrianism in Persia. It is possible that the Magi, who are mentioned in the New Testament narrative seeking “the child born king of the Jews” at the court of Herod in Jerusalem, are in fact part of the Zoroastrian faith as well.

In time, the Jews were allowed to return from Babylon in 538 B.C.E. when the temple was rebuilt, being completed in 516 B.C.E., and remaining in full operation until the Roman destruction of it and the mandated Jewish diaspora of 70 C.E. (Fisher, 2008). The Israelites had gone from being a nomadic, wandering people beginning with Abraham, with the central object of devotion (the tablets of the Torah) being placed in a portable ark, to becoming a settled agrarian society, with the central place of worship at an immovable temple in which resided permanently the Ark of the Covenant. In a complete unraveling, all of this was destroyed with the temple’s destruction and the diaspora of the Jews. In effect, Judaism reverted back to its original state of existence as a nomadic, wandering religion.

During the period 63 B.C.E.-70 C.E., leading up to the destruction of the Second Temple, apocalyptic and messianic fervor reached a climactic pitch surrounding the prophecies of a Davidic king who would appear and restore Israel to its golden era. It is within this context, as we shall see in the next chapter, that a rabbi from Nazareth makes his apocalyptic foray and begins a movement that results in the birth of a new religion.

Early divisions

Other groups that were dominant at this point in time were the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes. Sadducees were the status quo elites: the wealthy, conservative, preservers of the priestly tradition. The Pharisees were more liberal in their outlook, from all classes of society, and more interested in the study of Torah (law) rather than the temple cult (sacrifice). It was from among this class of Jews—namely, the Pharisees—that the rabbis were born. Zealots were, in essence, a socio-political

movement whose aim was to overthrow the Roman occupation and restore the Kingdom of Israel through any means possible; particularly violent means. Finally, the Essenes were those who were more concerned with their internal piety rather than the external form of religion. In contrast to the other three groups, they developed their own sequestered community in the Judean desert where they lived a life of intense prayer and ritual purity.



Masada overlooking the Dead Sea

After the destruction of the Second Temple at the hands of the Romans in 70 C.E., including the dramatic last stand of the zealots at the desert fortress of Masada in 73 C.E., a final revolt by the Jews took place in 135 C.E. (Fisher, 2008). This time, the Romans mercilessly razed the entire city, evicted all remaining Jews from Jerusalem, and forbid them from re-entering. In time, Jerusalem was rebuilt as a Roman city, and those Jews that did remain were prohibited from practicing their religion, studying Torah, or circumcising their children. Judaism had lost its geographic heart and soul.

The Diaspora & Modern Judaism

As a result of the final destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the ensuing diaspora (meaning “scattering”), the focal point of all subsequent Jewish religion centered on the synagogue and the teachers of the Torah—in short, Rabbinic Judaism as opposed to the sacrificial temple cult. As an interesting aside, many synagogues (literally “gatherings”) preferred to



use the word “temple” euphemistically attached to their name, rather than the term “synagogue,” as a way to keep alive the earlier tradition of the temple cult.

The diaspora led to two great migration patterns over the ensuing millennia: the Ashkenazim (French, German, and Eastern European migration) and the Sephardim (the North African and Iberian Jews). Each developed their own unique customs and ways of worship, as well as their unique pronunciation of the Hebrew language and adaptation of culture. These differences persist even to today.

This brings us to Judaism in the modern world. Jews had survived nearly 2,000 years of diaspora. They had endured countless persecutions in the Middle Ages, especially during the time of the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, and later pogroms throughout Europe. These maltreatments culminated in 1933 the horrific Holocaust (literally, “whole burnt offering”) at the hands of the Nazis before ending in 1945 with the cessation of WWII. In the wake of six million Jews being systematically exterminated, they were once again given a homeland by a United Nations mandate in 1948, in the region of Palestine—the state of Israel. It has been anything but a smooth and welcome event in the Middle East ever since. The crucible of this phenomenon has been well chronicled, and continues to be a source of great tension, which is beyond the purview of this textbook.



Branches

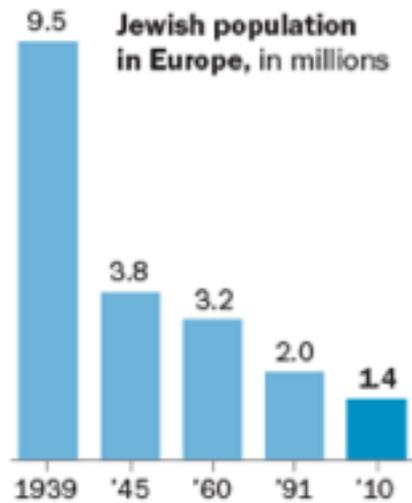
Orthodox Judaism

As it exists and is practiced today, there are three main branches to Judaism: the Orthodox (the Hasidic and Ultra-Orthodox), the Reform, and the Conservative branches. The Orthodox, as the name suggests, is the strictest form. The laws of the Torah are carefully followed, in most cases literally, as enumerated and explicated by the rabbis. For example,

remaining kosher “kosher,” meaning an adherence to dietary restrictions such as not consuming pork, shellfish, or beef prepared with milk, and following strict gender segregation at all times. It should be noted that Orthodox Judaism is the official state religion of Israel.

The Jewish Population in Europe Since 1939

Seven decades after the Holocaust, the number of Jews on the continent continues to decline.



% of world's Jews in Europe



Source: 2010 estimates are from the Pew Research Center's Global Religious Landscape report. All other years' estimates are based on research by Sergio DellaPergola of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism, as the name suggests, is an attempt at reforming and bringing the Jewish religion to currency with the modern world. This attempt took place first in Germany during the 19th century and persists today worldwide in a continual endeavor to modernize Judaism wherever it exists.

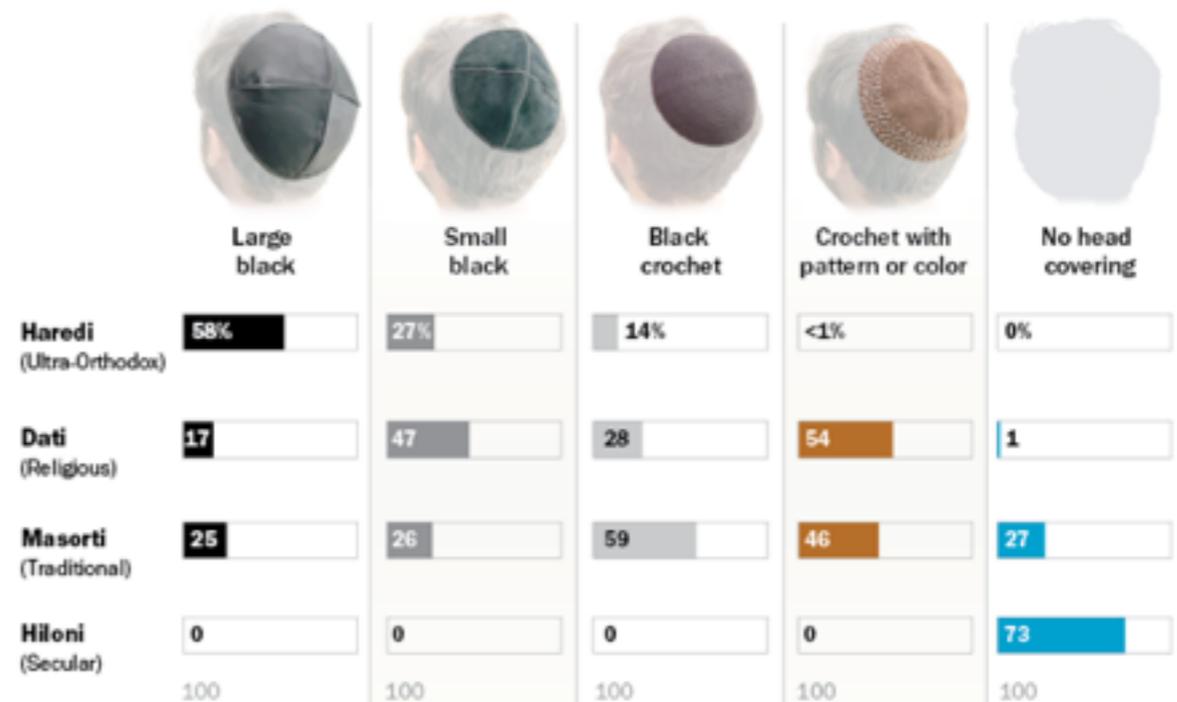
Reform Judaism has particularly thrived in the United States. While the basic doctrines of Judaism are followed, the branch does not follow Mosaic Law literally, and in recent times—by way of example—the sect has ordained women as rabbis, allowed girls to receive bat mitzvah, and has advocated for gay rights among their rabbis.

Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism is a movement splintered from Reform Judaism in the 19th century and that persists today. The branch is an attempt at finding a balance between the strict nature of orthodoxy and the perceived laxness of the Reform movement. Conservative Jews, for instance, keep a modified version of kosher dietary laws.

What different types of kippot say about Israeli Jewish men

Among Israeli Jewish men who wear each type of kippa (or no head covering), % who say their religious identity is...



Among Israeli Jewish men who wear each type of kippa (or no head covering), % who say their political ideology is ...



Note: Based on respondents who provided a political ideology. Respondents in the survey were asked to place themselves on a political spectrum from 1-6, with 1 representing the left and 6 representing the right. For purposes of analysis, 1 and 2 make up the "left" category, 3 and 4 are "center," and 5 and 6 are "right." Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Source: Survey conducted October 2014-May 2015. "Israel's Religiously Divided Society"

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Kabbalah

A further branch of Judaism is the mystical branch called Kabbalah, a tradition that has been in existence at least as early as the second century C.E., flourished further in the Middle Ages, and has recently come into vogue in the modern era. Like all forms of mysticism, Kabbalah emphasizes the possibility for experiencing the divine in a direct, immediate, and transformative manner. Its core book of teaching is found in the Zohar, a massive compilation of mystical teaching.

Beliefs & practices

At the heart of Judaism are the core dogmas that have defined it and have been held through the ages: There is no God but God; one God, indivisible. God has chosen the children of Israel (Abraham and his offspring) as his people, and he agrees to be their exclusive God. This is the heart of the covenant, a sacred pact between Abraham's offspring and God. The Torah (law) is given as a signpost for remaining in the sacred covenant; like a roadmap or guidepost, it gives direction for life's passage.

Key observances in Judaism

1. Circumcision on the eighth day for all males as the sign of the Covenant.
2. Bar mitzvah on the thirteenth year for of all males (becoming literally, "a son of the commandment").
3. The keeping of Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) as a sign of following God's commandments, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.
4. Celebrating Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, and

Key observances in Judaism, which have persisted in various forms throughout history, are numerous. Centrally, however, are the following:

Conclusion

At the heart of God is his love for humanity. Humanity is his crowning work of creation. God is understood in a myriad of ways—as Lord, as nursing mother, as light, anthropomorphic as in changing his mind, beyond comprehension, all powerful (omnipotent), and all knowing (omniscient). Life is understood as sacred—a means by which we are blessed in order that we should be a blessing to others. Suffering is redemptive, and faith is restorative. Faith is passed on through the matrilineal line of descent, as opposed to the prevailing patrilineal line so common in most other religions. Proselytizing is not actively practiced but accepted, as in the story of Ruth.

Questions for further consideration

1. What does it mean for Jews to identify themselves in one of three ways (or a combination of the three)?
2. What are the parts of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Scriptures) and how does it form the Jewish identity?
3. How are the Talmud and Midrash understood in relation to Torah?
4. What might some of the reasons be for Judaism's great influence across history and geography, yet with so few adherents?
5. How does modern Judaism (whether Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox) perceive the other monotheistic religions that claim allegiance to Abraham?

INTERACTIVE 8.2 Judaism Crossword Puzzle

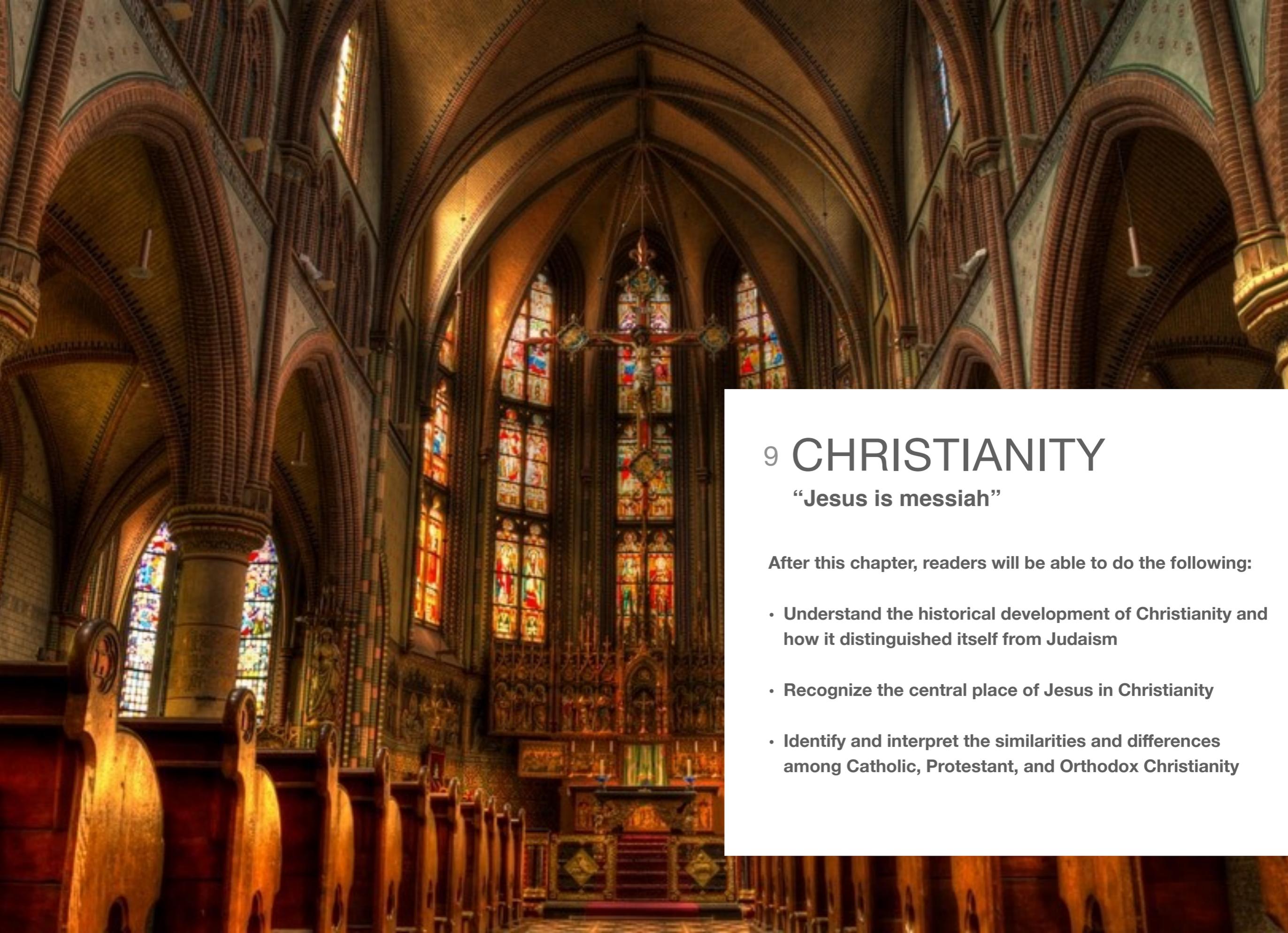


GALLERY 8.1 Jerusalem



Walking the ancient pathways of Jerusalem





9 CHRISTIANITY

“Jesus is messiah”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- Understand the historical development of Christianity and how it distinguished itself from Judaism
- Recognize the central place of Jesus in Christianity
- Identify and interpret the similarities and differences among Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christianity

“[Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

***‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’***

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”

—The Gospel of Luke, 4:16-21

Traversing the world and encountering the two billion plus membership of global Christendom, there are vignettes and memorable moments too many to recount. From the humble gathering of Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity on the banks of the River Ganges in India, to the exuberance of the Russian Orthodox Easter liturgy in Moscow, to attending mass inside Saint Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican City where I am not sure Christ would recognize the religion that bears his name, to the zen-like austerity of Catholics in Tokyo—there are so many stories to tell. But perhaps the most memorable was again with my Lynn University students.

It is Pentecost Sunday in Haifa. We set out to attend Catholic Mass at the local cathedral, Saint Joseph’s Latin parish. Walking into the church, we immediately notice the display of red—the color of the feast of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). We find our seats

Introduction

From a small town called Nazareth, off the beaten track in the northern reaches of Israel, appeared an obscure, itinerate Jewish rabbi named Yeshua (anglicized as “Jesus”), born around the year 4 B.C.E., who gathered a ragtag band of illiterate Jewish fishermen, and together they turned a movement that by all accounts should never have succeeded into what is today the world’s largest and most geographically expansive religion: Christianity.

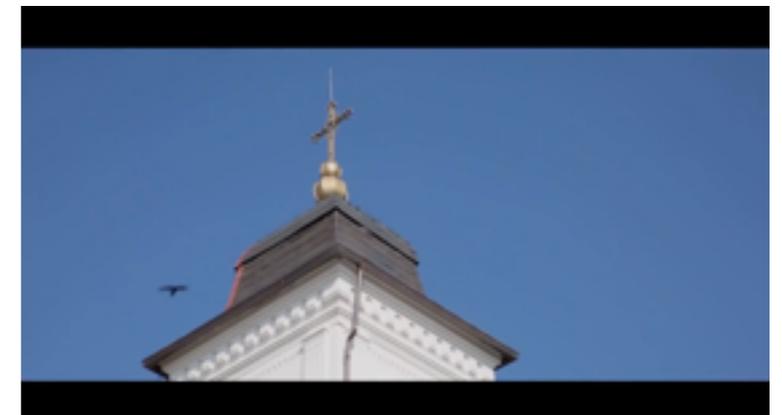
By 30 C.E., Jesus was put to death by the Romans, his disciples scattered, and his movement nearly stopped short. Yet today, two millennia later, it is the world’s largest religion. With over 2.2 billion adherents, living on virtually every continent of the globe, 32% of the world’s population claim to practice a religion that began simply as an obscure Jewish reform movement (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Jesus of Nazareth

That Christianity was founded upon the historical person of Jesus, who was called the Christ (God’s “anointed”) by his followers, is commonly understood. But what most people fail to realize is that Jesus was a Jew, and one not intent on starting a new religion, but rather reforming his own Jewish tradition as a Jewish rabbi. This perhaps, more than anything, will help in understanding what is at the heart of this tradition that comes to be called Christianity.

Most of the infancy narratives found in the New

MOVIE 9.1 Glimpse of Christianity



INTERACTIVE 9.1 History of Christianity Timeline



Testament record the birth of Jesus, as foretold by the prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures, as a fulfillment of what God had promised the Jewish people: a savior, a messiah, an anointed one to restore the Kingdom of Israel. These passages can be found especially in the account given by Luke.

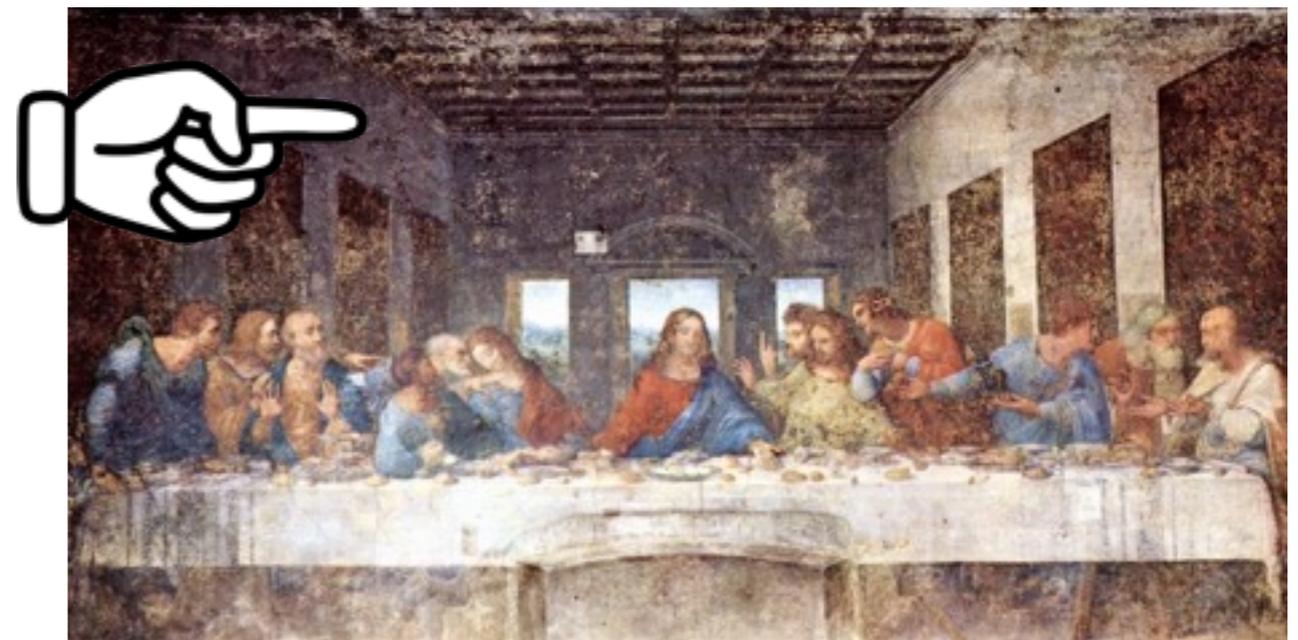
Not until Jesus was 30 years of age do we encounter him as one who has come into his prime and ready

to fulfill his mission after being baptized and confirmed as God's chosen not to abolish the Torah, but to fulfill it, or to bring new understanding to it. For example, Jesus and his disciples are criticized for not exercising careful observance regarding Sabbath laws; Jesus retorts that the Sabbath was made for humanity's benefit, not the other way around.

Further, challenging the religious status quo of his day, and in particular the dietary laws of keeping kosher, Jesus says it is not the food that defiles a person, but rather the thoughts of the heart. Like a gadfly, he lambasted the Pharisees of his day (those who were the gatekeepers of the law) and called them "whitewashed tombs." They may look beautiful and perfect on the outside, but on the inside, their hearts are like rotting corpses. What counts is not the external form of Torah, rather the intent of Torah to keep God's people in relationship with him. At the heart of this message of Jesus is love and forgiveness. God so loves all humanity that he reaches out to us through Jesus. This love is so radical that it includes even those traditionally thought to be outside the fold of God's chosen. In short, the message of Jesus is love.

Much has been made of the miracles surrounding the life of Jesus. These are important, but they must be understood as markers that show the validity of Jesus's message, and further show in concrete, visual ways the content of the message of Jesus; namely, God so loves us that he heals the whole person—our souls and our physical illnesses.

The end of his life is a rehearsal of Passover; only now it is the life of Jesus, in contrast to the slaughtering of the Passover lambs, that brings redemption to Israel and all humanity. According to the Gospel accounts, at the end of Jesus' life, he is put to death on the cross at the precise time the Jews are remembering the miracle of the Passover. That is to say, the freedom out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land, as marked by the blood of the lambs who were slaughtered and smeared on the doorposts in order that those who lived there may have life (in the face of death). Tap on Leonardo Da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*, on the following page to learn more about the seder that was Jesus' final meal.



The followers of Jesus unabashedly proclaim, post-crucifixion, that Jesus is the new Passover lamb who brings life in the face of death, and spiritual freedom in the face of slavery to sin. It is a radical new interpretation of

the Mosaic tradition, and everything hitherto taught by the leaders of the Jewish faith. According to the disciples of Jesus, three days after his death, he rose from the tomb alive and appeared to the disciples for 40 days, at which point he ascended into heaven with the promise to come back again; sending the Holy Spirit on his followers on Pentecost (the 50th day after his resurrection) to remain as their advocate and source of comfort and power.

As with Jesus, the early disciples had no inclination that a break with their Jewish faith was on the horizon. As far as they were concerned, they were simply faithful Jews with a new understanding of the Covenant, the Torah, and specifically the meaning of Pasach (Passover). Their early creed came to be “Jesus is Lord.” “Jesus is the Messiah.” “Jesus is our Passover Lamb”—a final sacrifice for sin for all time, once and forever.

Birth of a new religion

Peter “the rock,” the simple fisherman from the hinterlands, upon whom the new community of Jesus’ followers would be built (according to Jesus’ own words), was eager to keep the requirements of Torah as faithful followers of their Jewish identity. This gets remarkably challenged in the dramatic narrative account found in the New Testament book, “The Acts of the Apostles,” (cf. Chapter 11). In essence, Peter hears the voice of God in a vision that the dietary kosher laws no longer apply, and further that those thought to be outside of the covenant (e.g., the uncircumcised gentiles/goyim) are to be admitted into this new covenant.

Paul, a Pharisee and not one of the original disciples but one who has a dramatic conversion experience with the post-resurrection Jesus, takes this further. He is compelled to proclaim the new covenant to the gentiles of the world by taking this message to the vast reaches of the Roman Empire on his many missionary journeys. It is at this point that the break with the early disciples’ Jewish roots becomes irreversible; the followers of this new way (for that is what they are first called, “followers of the way”)

include now both Jews and gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised, keepers of the Torah and those not bound by it. Paul unequivocally states that circumcision is no longer necessary to be considered one of the new covenant. In short, this movement becomes a uniquely autonomous and distinct religion called Christianity, where Jews and gentiles alike are welcomed and accepted.

Though persecutions of this new movement ebbed and flowed during the first few centuries, incited by both Romans and Jews, it managed not only to survive but also flourish as it expanded across the geographic region of the Roman Empire. The decisive turning point in the history of

INTERACTIVE 9.2 Expansion of Christianity



Christianity, however, occurred in 313 C.E., when the Roman emperor Constantine—as a result of a vision he had to place the sign of Christ on his soldiers’ shields, which propels him to victory—declares Christianity to no longer be an outlawed religion, but have privilege within the Roman Empire. By 380 C.E., it had become the official religion of the empire. In a short span of history, an obscure messianic movement with apocalyptic overtones went from being a persecuted and nearly extinct phenomenon to a religion that expanded to the furthest reaches of the Roman Empire.

With official status in the Roman Empire came the need for Christianity to more clearly define what lies at the heart of its doctrine and teaching. In 325 C.E., at the behest of Constantine, the Nicene Creed was formulated dealing in particular with the notion of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ (divine and human). It is a creed that is still used and recited in nearly all Christian churches around the globe today.

It should be noted that, as a result of and in many ways as a reaction to the official status of Christianity in the Roman world, monasticism exponentially grew as a way to flee from the perceived adulteration of the purity of Christianity. Centers for this movement into a sequestered life away from the empire flourished, especially in the deserts of Egypt and the remote mountains and forests of Europe.

As a result of the official status that Christianity was given within the Roman Empire, it flourished and floundered as a religion based on the geopolitical narrative of the empire. It flourished—some would argue to its detriment—by being granted buildings (often Roman basilicas erstwhile used as courts of law), taking on the vesture of those in prominent Roman positions, and adopting the decorum and manners of courtly life. This was a far cry from the Judean desert or Galilean hillside of the early disciples.

The Church

The Roman Empire was not going to hold together forever, and in a perfect mirroring of that fact, the Church would not either. Though called “Christianity” from early on, implying that it was a religion revolving around the person of Christ—literally, “the anointed one”—the organizational structure of the Church understood itself as Catholic, meaning “universal,” or kata holos, literally meaning, “according to the whole.”

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven



Panoramic view of Vatican City

Within these clusters of faith—be it Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch, or Jerusalem—it was Rome, mirroring the influence of the empire itself, that began to assert the religion’s central place. The Bishop of Rome (the first being Peter) was understood to be “first among equals.” This tentative understanding held until 1054 C.E. when the Eastern clusters of influence (called the “Patriarchs”) officially left the sphere of influence by Rome (understood as the Western Church) and asserted their independence.

Both sides excommunicated the other, not over heresy (they both practiced essentially the same faith), but over the assertion of authority. The Great Schism persists even to today, with papal authority and sacramental practices still cited as reasons. Although the mutual excommunication was finally revoked in 1965 C.E., the breach of trust and disparity of practice persists, and thus they remain as separate entities.

The Reformation

In the West, with the seat of ecclesiastical power firmly ensconced in Rome, the Church hierarchy continued to exert an iron-fisted control over all matters of faith and practice. Not until 1517 C.E. did this begin to crumble. It was a little-known German monk by the name of Martin Luther who, by nailing his 95 theses (what amounted to a declaration of dissent) to the door of the

castle church in Wittenberg, called the whole system of church authority into question.

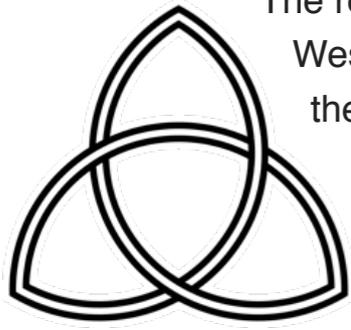
According to Luther, salvation was to be understood as a free gift received by faith alone, without price or control by church hierarchy as was happening with the sale of “Indulgences” by the church). Each individual was in possession of his own volition and eternal destiny, and the Holy Scriptures were to be accessible to all peoples in their own native tongue.

As such, the whole cradle to the grave sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church was called into question, and in one fell swoop, completely undermined. With the protest unleashed across Europe, it would never recover the sphere of control or influence it had enjoyed unabated since 313 CE.



Martin Luther

Splintering



The result of the protest, of course, was the splintering of the Western church into an infinite number of labels to where there are now over 41,000 different groups who call themselves Protestant. Within the Protestant movement, there have been various streams enumerated, numbering usually somewhere around seven major currents. At a minimum these can be placed into two categories: mainline protestants dating back to the early stages of the Protestant movement of the 16th and 17th centuries, mostly stemming out of Europe, and the American Evangelical movement which has its roots in the American Frontier of the 17th and 18th centuries and the American Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition of the 20th century, which seeks a direct and immediate encounter with the divine through supernatural gifts, such as speaking in unlearned languages (called “tongues”), miraculous healing, and divine prophecies of the future.

The American Evangelical movement has followed the global reach of American culture and made inroads into virtually all places internationally where America exerts its influence. It does so usually extolling its emotive brand of spirituality through the means of pop culture. Doing so, they seek a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, and require a public act of commitment (a “decision”) to follow Jesus as Lord and savior of their life.

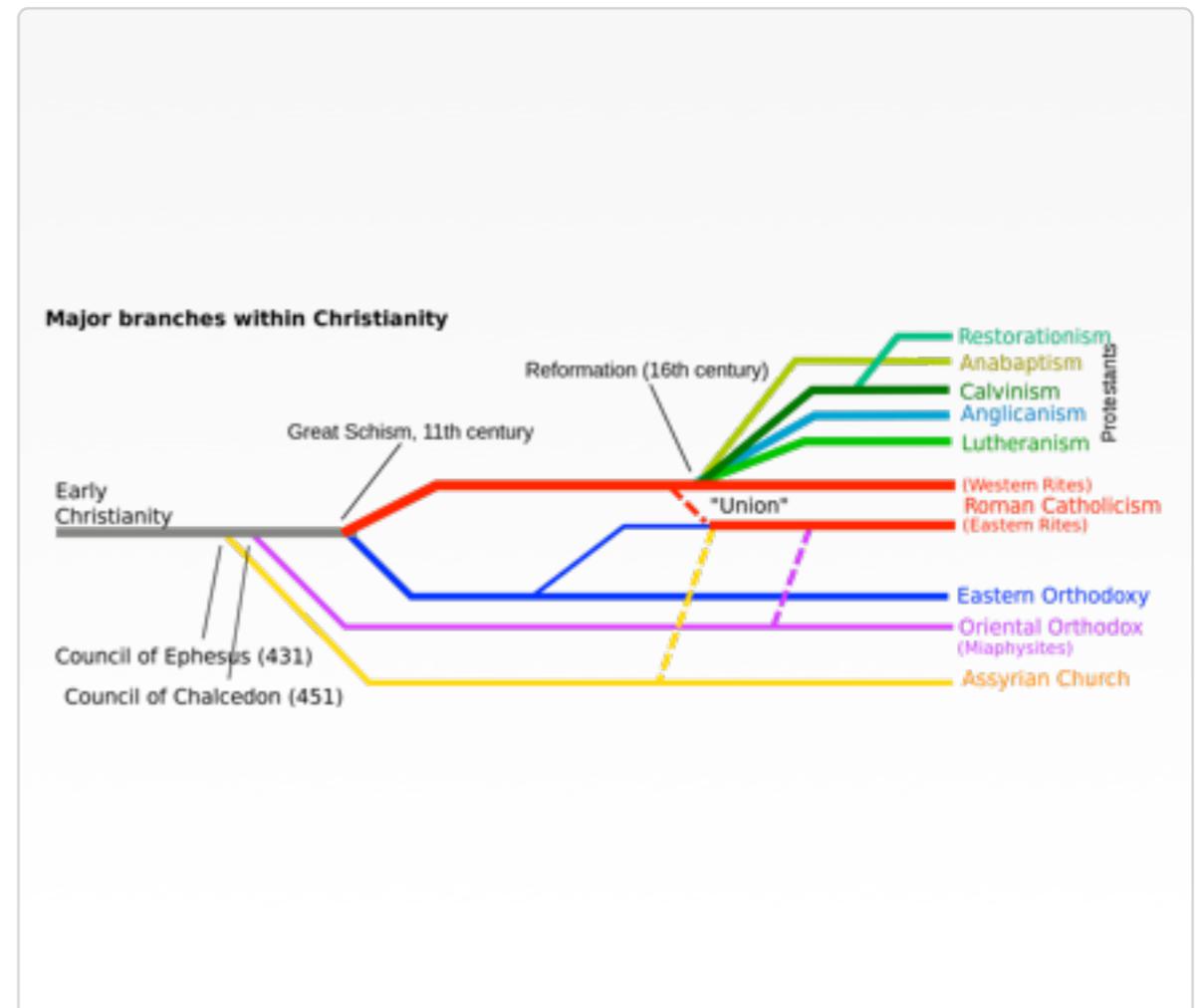
Ecumenism

Since the 16th century, these various churches have worked toward unity in what is called ecumenism, but with varying degrees of success. The Catholic Church has experienced its own reform with the Second Vatican Council in the 20th century (1962-1965 C.E.), and making headway

towards unity has been accomplished by the World Council of Churches. Similarly, rapprochement has been attempted by the Eastern Churches and Rome.

However, it seems that the particularities of each tradition preclude this possibility, and perhaps for good reason, from being subsumed by each other. The same is true with interfaith dialogue that has been undertaken in the modern era: There has been a desire to acknowledge the universality of the religious quest (God loves all people), while maintaining the particularity of the Christian message; namely, salvation through Christ alone.

INTERACTIVE 9.3 Major Branches of Christianity



Note the recent gestures in the past decade by Pope Benedict the XVI and Pope Francis by praying on numerous occasions in an interfaith context (e.g., Pope Benedict and Muslim clerics in the Blue Mosque of Istanbul in November of 2006). Within the Christian religion, the three distinct branches of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism are all clearly delineated; each with their peculiarities in practice and faith, while yet acknowledging their shared history and tradition as well.

Beliefs

What are the core beliefs of this religion? There are many nuanced differences to be sure. However, at its heart, Christianity teaches that God so loved the world that he sent his son Jesus into it, and that as a consequence, we as a human family would find ourselves back in relationship with the one who created and sustains us. Central is the concept that Jesus is God's son and his life and teaching are the way to God—not by birthright as with Judaism, but by adoption. Thus, just as Jews and Muslims call Abraham “the Father of Faith” so, too, do Christians. They acknowledge one God, but believe God is revealed fully in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Their mission is to spread the message of Jesus throughout the world, and thus proselytizing is a core teaching and practice. They also believe they have a mandate to care for the less fortunate, the poor, the destitute, and thus they are known for providing education, medical attention, shelter, food, and services for the handicapped around the globe. It is their duty and mandate—witness, by way of example, Mother Teresa (Saint Teresa of Calcutta).

Practices

What are the core practices of this religion? In keeping with their Jewish antecedent, the notion of Covenant is very important. However, rather

than circumcision being its sign, baptism is the sign of the new covenant. Furthermore, rather than temple sacrifice (as was done up until the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 C.E.), the death of Jesus is understood as the final sacrifice, once and for all time, for the atonement of sin.

The fact that Jesus' crucifixion on the cross occurs at the Passover is no accident. He is understood to be the true Paschal lamb. This sacrifice is re-encountered through *anamnesis* (literally “remembered” and bloodlessly repeated) in every occurrence of the Eucharist/Mass across time. It is a sacrament (*sacramentum* in Latin, *mysterion* in Greek)—a means of grace through tangible form. Other sacraments include Confirmation (similar to Bar-Mitzvah), matrimony, reconciliation, anointing, and Holy Orders. Remembering sacred time is of paramount importance. They take form not only during weekly gatherings on Sunday (this is not the Sabbath, but rather the remembrance of the day of resurrection), but also specific occasions such as Christmas (the birth of Jesus), Easter (the resurrection of Jesus), Pentecost (the descent of the Holy Spirit), etc. The role of Mary, the mother of Jesus (as the one who is the new “living ark of



the covenant”), and the Saints (those who held to the faith across time and inspired commitment) is of incredible importance. The role of prayer and contemplation—especially among monastics—and its practice by all members occurs at set times throughout the day, seven times a day for clerics and twice daily for lay (non-ordained) members.

GALLERY 9.1 Pentecost Sunday in Haifa



Lynn University students asking questions like, “Did we just hear a Catholic Bishop praying to Allah?”

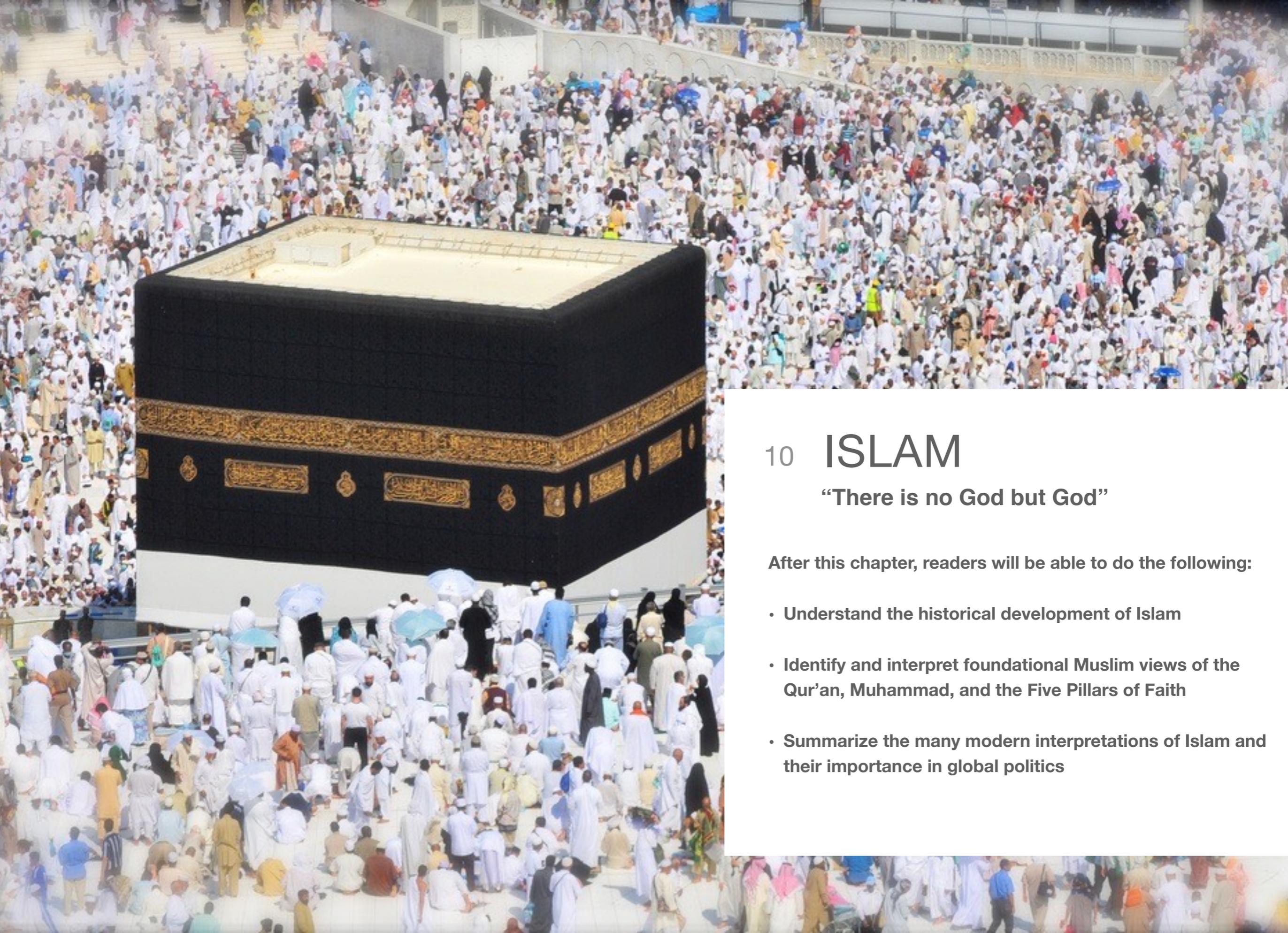


Questions for further consideration

1. What is the significance of the statement, “Jesus was a Jew”?
2. In what ways did the early disciples of Jesus assume that they were carrying on their own Jewish tradition (as a reform movement), rather than starting a new religious tradition?
3. What belief and/or practice was the breaking point between Jews and the followers of Jesus?
4. What was significant about the decision by the Roman emperor to no longer persecute the Christian Church in 313 C.E.?
5. If Jesus were to come back and see the religion that bears his name, Christianity, would he recognize it? What might he criticize?
6. What is the connection between the Eucharist and temple sacrifice?
7. What is the connection between baptism and circumcision?
8. What is the connection between Mary (the Mother of Jesus) and the Ark of the Covenant?
9. How do present-day Christians understand themselves to be connected to Judaism, if at all? How can they call Abraham “father”?
10. What is the doctrine of the Incarnation? How is this similar to Hinduism? How is the Holy Trinity, and the notion that God is revealed in three persons, similar to Hinduism?
11. In what ways are the teaching of Jesus (in particular his message to deny oneself) and the teaching of the Buddha (in particular Siddhartha’s Four Noble Truths) similar?

**INTERACTIVE 9.4 Christianity
Crossword Puzzle**





10 ISLAM

“There is no God but God”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- **Understand the historical development of Islam**
- **Identify and interpret foundational Muslim views of the Qur’an, Muhammad, and the Five Pillars of Faith**
- **Summarize the many modern interpretations of Islam and their importance in global politics**

“Our fractured world is in turmoil. Mother Earth gathered all of her children into the folds of her embrace to wipe away tears. Why do you fight?... You were created from male and female and made into nations and tribes so you could get to know one another and learn to coexist.”

—Qur’an, 49:13

I landed in Istanbul and made my way to the hotel within the Old City’s walls around the Golden Horn in the shadows of the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia. At 8:01 p.m., I hear the call to prayer bellowing out from the minarets of the Blue Mosque for the hour of Isha, and I cannot contain my excitement. I have to go. I quickly put on my shoes and jacket and wind my way up the maze of streets leading to the place of prayer. When I arrive, there are already hoards of people inside beginning the requisite gestures and prayers that go with Islamic prayer five times a day. I quickly take my shoes off paying no attention to the sign that says, “The mosque is closed to visitors during the hours of prayer.” After all, my hotel manager told me that the hours of prayer are open for all who wish to pray. I wished it, and so I am doing it.

Putting my shoes into the plastic bags made available at the entrance, I quickly stuff them into the shoe box near the entrance and find myself in this enormous and overwhelmingly beautiful space, large and round and without ornamentation except for the inscriptions on the walls from the Qur’an. I stand behind the line where the sign reads, “Visitors stay behind this line.” I try not to look too conspicuous or out of place, eagerly imitating the gestures of those lined up in front of me to pray. It was then that I saw the large-framed guard marching towards me. “Oh great,” I think to myself. “This is where I get kicked out, or worse.” I let my imagination run wild. But when the guard saw that I was imitating those in prostration, he takes me by the arm and beckoned me to enter the area reserved for Muslim prayer and join them. I do! And wow, what an experience! Bending at the

waist, hands to my ears, kneeling, and then prostrating my

Introduction

The third monotheistic religion in a historical line of religions that traces their roots to Abraham is Islam. It is the fastest growing religion today, and the second largest numerically (after Christianity) with 1.6 billion adherents, equaling 23% of the world’s population (Pew Research Center, 2012). Islam is concentrated in the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa. Contrary to popular perception, only 20% of the world’s Muslim population resides in the Middle East (Pew Research Center, 2012).

The largest concentration is actually in South Asia, particularly in Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. However, whereas nearly all people of the Middle East are Muslim, only one in four are Muslim in Asia. This is so because of the high population density of Asia in contrast to that of the Middle East.

Perhaps the single most defining aspect of Islam, in contrast to its monotheistic predecessors, is the notion that Islam understands itself as simply the true form of what Judaism and Christianity ought to be, and would have been, had they remained faithful to their original inspiration. Nowhere is this more evident than in the understanding and use of sacred scripture. While Islam understands Judaism and Christianity as “People of The Book,” inasmuch as they have been given God’s revelation (i.e., Qur’an 17:2 states “We also gave Moses the Scripture, and made it a

MOVIE 10.1 Glimpse of Islam



guide for the Children of Israel”). Nonetheless, it is Islam’s view that “The Book” has been corrupted over time in their careless transmission of it. Jews and Christians are people of “The Book,” but have unfortunately distorted the pure monotheism of Abraham. Thankfully this is corrected in the Qur’an, which is God’s revelation to Mohammed through the angel Gabriel. Thus, in one way, Islam understands itself simply as the reform or correction to the monotheism of Judaism and Christianity. Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Mary all are a part of the story. It is a story, however, that is retold in correct form in the Qur’an and ends with the last of a long line of prophets—foremost of them, Mohammed.

We begin where every good Muslim begins the journey: with the declaration of faith, “There is no God but God.” We might well ask, where have we heard that before? In fact, it ought to sound familiar as we find Islam echoing (and in many cases, from Islam’s perspective, correcting) the tradition of the book from Judaism and Christianity. “There is no God but God” is in fact an echo of the First Commandment in the Jewish Torah: “You shall have no other Gods before me,” (Exodus 20:3).

In Islam, the single most important thing is to acknowledge the absolute supremacy of God as echoed in the declaration of faith and one’s commitment to acknowledge that supremacy in all one does. Thus, it is no accident that the word “Islam” literally means “submission” or “surrender,” and one who does this is called a “Muslim,” which in turn translates to “one who submits.”

INTERACTIVE 10.1 History of Islam Timeline



Further, a faithful Muslim will end all sentences of future intent with “insha’Allah,” literally “God willing” or “if God wills it.” For example, “Good night, see you tomorrow” would be followed by “God willing.” This is simply the way in which every Muslim is reminded that God is in control; a faithful Muslim’s task is simply to surrender to God’s will.

The Prophet Mohammed

While most scholars will point to the origin of Islam as beginning with the Prophet Mohammed (c. 570-632 CE) (Mary Pat Fisher, 2008, p 376ff), Muslims themselves will in fact understand their origin and designation of being God’s chosen people—a similarity to Judaism—as beginning with Abraham’s firstborn son Ishmael—not Isaac, as is the case in the Jewish narrative, who is the second son. It was Abraham who first declared, “there is no God but God.” In doing so, God blessed him with a firstborn son, Ishmael, through Hagar, the second wife of Abraham (according to Jewish tradition, she was not a wife of Abraham but rather the maidservant of Sarah). After Isaac’s birth, through Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael were sent into the Arabian desert by Abraham at Sarah’s insistence after a fit of jealousy. Ishmael and his mother Hagar settled in Mecca, which was the site of Adam’s first worship of God and the sanctuary which Abraham and Ishmael constructed. There, the Ka’bah (a large black meteorite) was located. According to tradition, God instructs Abraham to make the Ka’bah a place of pilgrimage. While Abraham is the founder and model of monotheistic faith (as witnessed by his absolute surrender to God’s will in the narrative of sacrificing Isaac), it is Ishmael that gives rise to the line of descendants that reclaim and renew the faith of monotheism with the birth of Mohammed in the sixth century. In short, Muslims understand themselves to be God’s chosen people through the lineage of Ishmael, Abraham’s first-born son and true heir, through which

“NO LONGER WILL YOU BE CALLED ABRAM; YOUR NAME WILL BE ABRAHAM, FOR I HAVE MADE YOU A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS. I WILL MAKE YOU VERY FRUITFUL; I WILL MAKE NATIONS OF YOU, AND KINGS WILL COME FROM YOU. I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT AS AN EVERLASTING COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU AND YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME, TO BE YOUR GOD AND THE GOD OF YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU.” GENESIS 17: 5-7



Mt. Hira Cave

the blessing of God is handed down. Witness the passage of sacred narrative from the first book of the Torah, Genesis:

In other words, this covenant is for all of Abraham's descendants—not just the Jews, but also the Muslims of Ishmael's descent.

Centuries later, after generations had passed and Ishmael's progeny had forgotten the monotheistic covenant God made with Abraham and his offspring, God came to the Prophet Mohammed through the mouthpiece of the Angel Gabriel, and over the following 23 years, gave him the words of the Qur'an—the book that calls people back to true faith.

When Mohammed was 40 years old, in the year 610 C.E., he was making a spiritual retreat during the lunar month of Ramadan and first heard the words of the Angel Gabriel while in a cave in a high outcrop of rock on Mount Hira (seen on the next page), outside the city of Mecca. The first word he heard was, "Recite!" or "Proclaim!," which in Arabic is "Qur'an!"

But he hesitated, saying that he was a man unschooled and illiterate. Three times the angel repeated himself, and finally Mohammed cried out, "What say I proclaim?" The answer came, "Proclaim, in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher..." For the next 23 years, he received these messages from God, reciting them to his followers who then wrote them down on an assortment of parchments. Eventually, they were compiled and meticulously transcribed by his followers in the wake of the prophet's death, thus composing the Holy Qur'an, which was canonized in 650 C.E.

Today, a devout Muslim will commit all 114 chapters (called Surahs) to memory, being assured of the exactitude of accuracy of the text handed down over the past 1,400 years—hardly a small feat. It should be noted that the veracity of the text is maintained, even while avoiding the historical-critical scrutiny demanded by scholarship. For this reason the Qur'an has always been understood as a sacred text to be spoken (recited) aloud, rather than read silently.

The very sound of the text is understood as holy, and further, the very language in which it was first recited (Arabic) is considered holy and thus the only recognized version of the Qur'an. God gives the Qur'an verbatim, to Mohammed. Interestingly, the Qur'an has many of the same stories (sometimes told in different form) from Jewish and Christian scriptures, as these narratives are considered to be part of the essential fabric of Islam.

The ensuing story of Mohammed's life is a fascinating one, pocked with struggle, doubt, flight, and final vindication among his kinsmen and the people of Mecca. Trade was a vital economic stream for the Meccans, and Mohammed's ideas threatened to disrupt business. In 622, in flight

(in Arabic called the Hijrah) under cover of night to the city of Medina, Mohammed made his new home where they accepted him and his teachings, quickly converting the people to this new way of life, unifying the political powers with the spiritual/religious powers of his new-old

religion, and seeing them integrally unified (rather than separate, as is the case in much of the modern world). For this reason, Medina is affectionately called, “City of the Prophet” and 622 C.E. is considered the first year of the Muslim calendar. As an interesting side note, when Mohammed was a teenager traveling with his uncle, a Christian monk in Syria first noticed Mohammed and the “mark of God” upon him, calling him a prophet (Fisher, p. 379). In the year 630 C.E., Mohammed triumphantly returned to Mecca with a large army, bloodlessly taking over the city as the inhabitants are persuaded not to fight. He also commanded his followers to respect and protect the Jews and Christians of his day as “people of the book,” believing that they would eventually convert to his faith on their own.

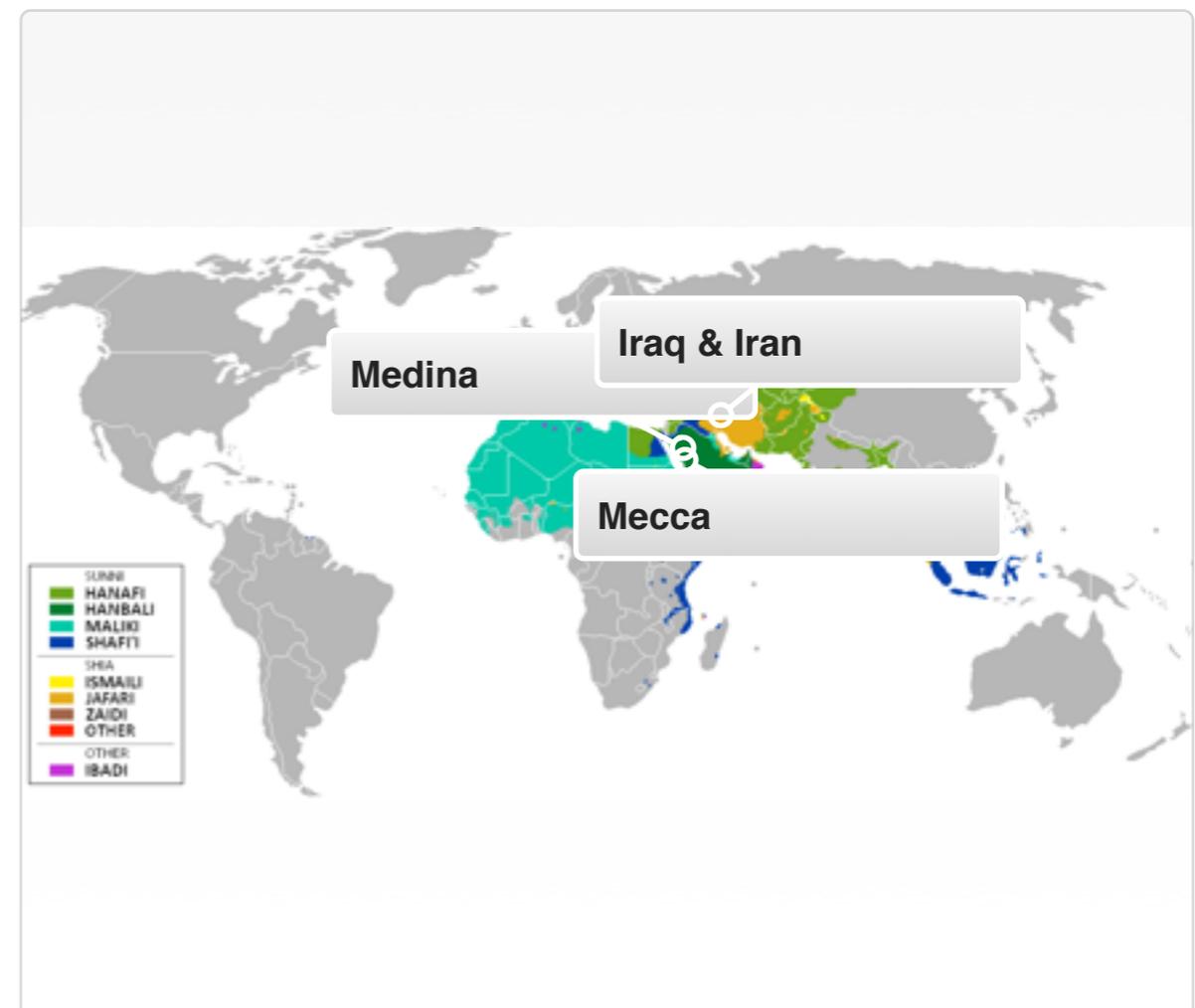
Two years later, the prophet passed away. With the election of Mohammed’s trusted friend and confidant Abu Bakr as the first caliph (meaning “deputy of God” in Arabic), the spread of Islam began in earnest. For the next 100 years, Islam spread into Europe, North Africa, the rest of the Middle East, and much of Asia. Though the Qur’an forbids coercion as a means of conversion, citing instead that people of other faiths will naturally want to convert when they see the beautiful way of life of the Islamic faith, subsequent history is rife with examples of anything but this happening. It should be noted, though, that nearly all religions of the world have the unfortunate blot of forced conversion as a part of their history.

Succession: Sunni & Shi’a

After Mohammed’s death, some of the followers felt strongly that the successor (caliph) should be a blood relative of the prophet. In this case, they insisted it should be Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, being married to his favorite daughter Fatima. The prevailing consensus was that the blood lineage of succession should not matter, and rather it should be decided by majority affirmation. Herein lies the greatest difference between the two prevailing sects of Islam through the ages.

The former, those who insist on blood-lineage of succession, are called Shi’ites, making up about 10-15% of the world’s Muslim population and primarily found in present day Iran, parts of Iraq, Pakistan, India and pockets elsewhere. Further, the Imams were permitted to decide questions of law and governance of the community. The latter, those who believe that succession should be decided by vote of affirmation and consensus of the Muslim Ummah (Arabic for “community”), are called Sunni, making up the majority of Muslims across the globe at 85-90% of the population (Pew Research Center 2012.) The rule of law was to be decided by consensus of the community rather than the autocracy of the Imams. Though there are other notable differences of practice between these two, it is, in short, primarily a problem of succession and

INTERACTIVE 10.2 Sects of Islam Map



governance that divides the Muslim world from its beginnings through the present.

Though there are a small minority of Muslims who call themselves Sufi, the mystical branch of Islam (some of the famous poets of this sect are Rumi and Kahlil-Gibran) as well as other lesser known sects, the great majority of Muslims understand themselves to be either Sunni or Shi'a.

Only with the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924 by the Ottoman Empire (and its Turkish National Assembly), after 1,300 years of an unbroken chain of successors dating back to Mohammed, did this unified system of governance and religious uniformity come to an end. That is, until the specter of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria) reared its horrific head, claiming to be the legitimate successor to the caliphate, with its self-proclaimed leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Nearly all worldwide Muslim leaders, however, disavow this claim saying there is no legitimacy to ISIS.

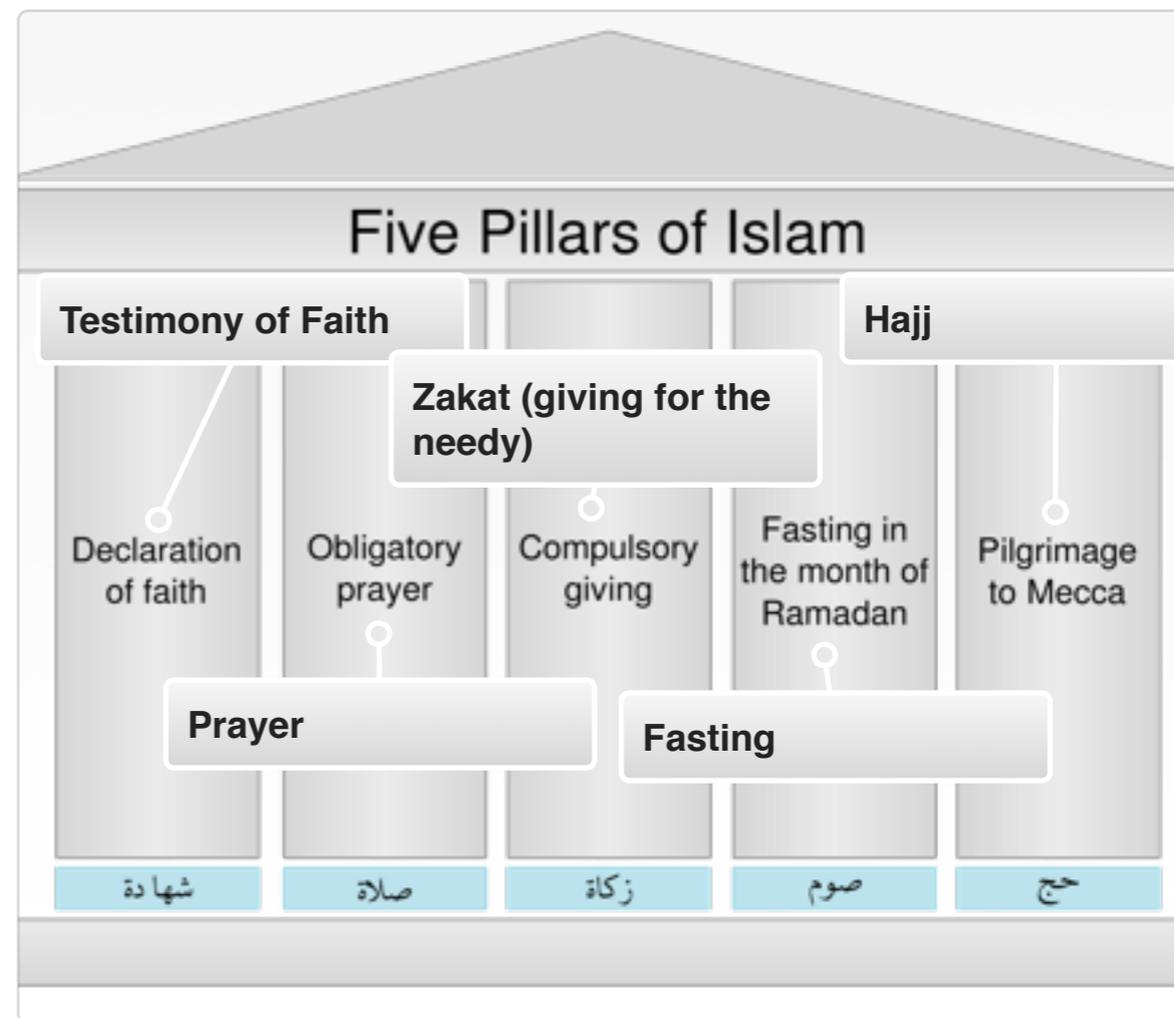
Five Pillars of Faith

Islam teaches that there are five essential pillars to the practice of the faith. Every Muslim is required to do these, to the best of their ability, in response to God's command.

1. The Shahadah: the witness of faith and proclamation that "there is no god but God, and Mohammed is his prophet" (some say, "Mohammed is his final messenger"). Shi'as notably add at the end of this, "Ali is the Master of the believers." Reciting the Shahadah in the presence of the Muslim community with intent in one's heart to be a Muslim, makes one a Muslim. This is all that is required. Shahadah is recited at other significant moments in the religious life of a Muslim, such as during the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

2. The Salaat, or prayers: five times a day at dawn, midday, midafternoon, sunset, and before bed, which unites Muslims in a single

INTERACTIVE 10.3 Five Pillars of Islam



global family. This act is predicated upon ritual ablutions (called wudhu) of washing the hands, arms, neck, and feet, removal of shoes, laying a prayer carpet facing Mecca, kneeling and bowing with head to the ground, saying specific prayers depending on the time of day, and quoting passages from the Qur'an. There is no imam or prayer leader required; all have access to God directly. Friday at noon is when the entire Muslim community gathers at the local mosque for corporate prayer (which may also include a sermon), shoulder to shoulder with their brothers, woman behind men so as not to cause distraction.

3. Zakat, or charity and almsgiving: Every Muslim is required to donate at least 2.5% of their yearly income including wealth and assets to needy

Muslims in their community (normally collected by their local mosque). This provides a kind of social safety net that ensures a leveling of material wealth.

4. Sawm, or fasting: While every Muslim is encouraged to fast frequently, during the month of Ramadan—the lunar month when Mohammed first received the words of the Qur’an—it is required. As an aside, it is interesting to note that both the Jewish and Christian calendars follow a lunar cycle as well, and still do with the exception of Western Christianity. During Ramadan, everyone who has undergone puberty, who is not infirm, pregnant, or otherwise indisposed, is required to fast during the daylight hours. This means no eating, no drinking, no smoking, and no sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset. It is an ultimate test of faith and an act of devotion: surrendering oneself completely and totally to the divine supremacy of God. As one fasts, impurities are eliminated and one finds an unsurpassed unity with God unlike any other occasion. A Muslim joyfully enters into this lunar month of abstinence. Each day ends with a joyous communal breaking of the fast, iftar, and the month of Ramadan is celebrated with the Eid al-Fitr celebration.

5. Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca: Every Muslim who is physically sound and financially able is required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. It is the ultimate act of faith which binds the Muslim to God through a successive number of rituals. Pilgrims from every corner of the world converge on the holiest city of Islam, Mecca (Medina being the second holiest as the place of the Hijrah “migration/flight” and the prophets final resting place, and Jerusalem being the third most holy). The pilgrims discard any defining identifiers or class distinctions, such as jewelry and clothing, instead donning a simple white cloth that shows the unity of the ummah—the global Muslim community. Central to the experience is walking around the Ka’bah, the altar first built by Adam to worship God, further enhanced by Abraham and his son Ishmael, and considered holy by Arabians even before the advent of Islam. Pilgrims

circumnavigate the Ka’bah seven times in unity with all others on pilgrimage.



What is especially interesting, besides all the intricate requisite rituals that are a part of this experience (you may wish to do further research on the topic, cf. [“What Muslims Do on Hajj, and Why,”](#) the Hajj itself is an allusion toward and remembrance of the one who faithfully took Ishmael into the Arabian desert and raised him. Her name in Arabic is Hajjar, or in English Haggar: the wife of Abraham according to Islamic understanding, or maidservant of Sarah according to Jewish teaching. Thus, the word Hajj itself is a call to mirror the same journey of faith that Hajjar herself took.

Sacred texts

Though the Qur’an is understood as the final authority of all things Muslim, other documents which help illuminate the faith are important to consider. These are the Sunna, the Hadith, and Shari’a. The Sunna is a compilation of all that Mohammed said or did in his lifetime, and serves as an authoritative inspiration for how to live as a Muslim. These are preserved in a body of work called the Hadith, which recounts the stories of Mohammed’s life. Shari’a provides the legal guidance of “right and

wrong” for all matters of life; interpreting such issues as marriage, divorce, business transactions, legal code/justice, etc., giving Muslims interpretation of the Qur’an for matters of everyday life. To learn more about the Qur’an, tap on the image of the scripture on this page.



Practices

There are many practices and beliefs undertaken by Muslims that mirror their Jewish and Christian cousins, as well as uniquely held practices. Witness, for example, the similarity of requiring ablutions (washing) prior to prayer (required in Orthodox Judaism) and its similarity to Christian Baptism. Muslim males are required to be circumcised, like Jews, as a sign of commitment and belonging (not mentioned in the Qur’an but rather in the Hadith); but instead of at birth, there is no fixed age and thus varies across the spectrum. Muslims are also required to keep halal, the equivalent to keeping kosher for Jews. For example, both halal and kosher laws forbid the consumption of pork. In matters of marriage, Muslim males are able to marry non-Muslim women of The Book (i.e.,

Jewish and Christian women), however, Muslim females are only allowed to marry Muslim men. In death, Muslims wash the body (by the same sex) and place the body into the ground (cremation is disallowed) on its right side facing Mecca. Like Jews and Christians, the Muslim community is organized around the local house of prayer, the mosque, with a communal gathering once a week on Friday at noon for *Jumma*, which is routinely led by a male member of the clergy with inclusion of a sermon.

As referenced above, the key beliefs in Islam are the absolute supremacy of God, the surrender of ones will to God, the recognition that God has

GALLERY 10.1 Ramadan, Iftar & Eid al-Fitr



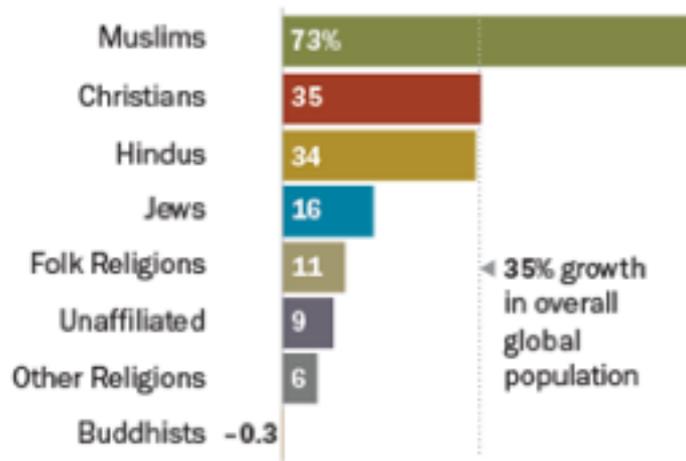
Ramadan decorations



Islam Growing Fastest

Muslims are the only major religious group projected to increase faster than the world's population as a whole.

Estimated change in population size, 2010-2050



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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revealed himself through the long line of prophets, but especially through Mohammed and the revelation of the Qur'an, and lastly that the goal is to seek unity for humanity as a global family under God. If much of this sounds similar to the Judeo-Christian paradigm and account of religious truth and practice, it should. As stated earlier, Islam affirms these monotheistic religious traditions that preceded it, while correcting the perceived mistakes in their

transmission. The essential doctrinal similarities can be seen in the Chapter 7 (The Emergence of Monotheism) preceding the Chapter 8 (Judaism).

However, there are some key differences, some of which have already been noted. In regard to Judaism, Hagar is the wife of Abraham and not the maidservant of Sarah, thus by law the firstborn and inheritor of Abraham's lineage. Ishmael—not Isaac—is the one whom Abraham is commanded to sacrifice on Mt. Moriah (modern day Temple Mount in Jerusalem, covered by the Dome of the Rock). It was an act of supreme obedience where God supplied a ram at the last moment, and serves as an example of complete surrender to the will of God. This, by the way, is the same rock according to tradition that Mohammed ascended (and descended) into heaven on his night journey. In regard to Christianity, Islam insists that Jesus is not put on the cross to die, but rather someone

else takes his place, and when he promises that after him will come the Paraclete ("helper/advocate")—it is the foreshadowing of the coming of the Prophet Mohammed.

Modern day issues

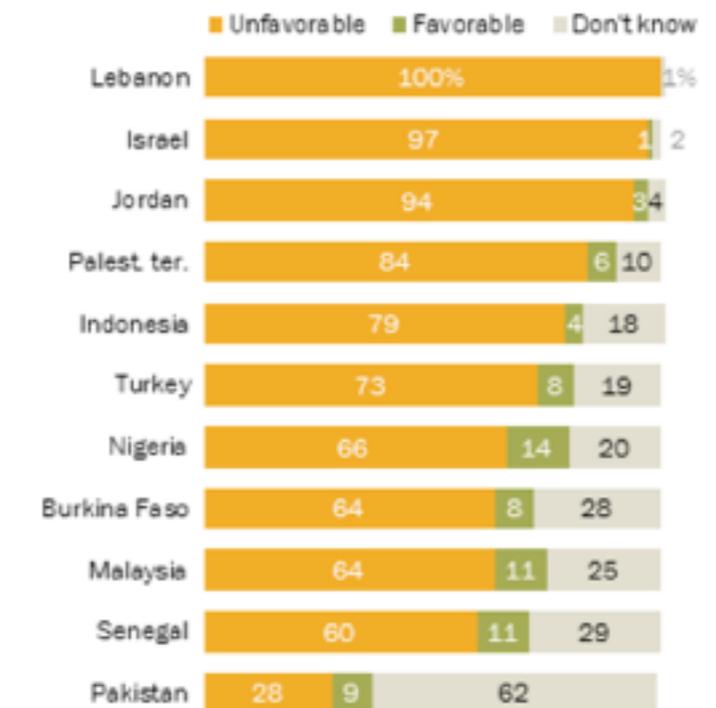
The modern day issues of Islam vexing our world is without question the issue of Islamic terrorism, the claim of a new caliphate by ISIS, the ensuing chaos of political upheaval of the Arab Spring (and its internecine violence), the Western foray into armed conflict in the Middle East post 9/11 and their subsequent involvement in nation-building, and the increasing extremism of Muslims who are indoctrinated at radical madrasas (schools) and mosques.

The scope of these problems is beyond the purview of this textbook, however. One factor, in particular, seems to be at the root of much of the conflict; namely, the understanding and use of the Arabic term jihad, which can be translated as "struggle" as well as "holy war." It is this latter translation that is so often misused, both by Muslim extremists as well as detractors of a peaceful coexistence with Islam.

Mohammed encouraged one to wage jihad in an internal struggle to purify oneself. It was about righting the wrongs of the heart and mind. The external

Views of ISIS Overwhelmingly Negative

Do you have a ___ opinion of the Islamic militant group in Iraq and Syria known as ISIS?



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.

Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, Q12n.

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struggle was to protect the way of God against the forces of evil, but this can only occur once the internal struggle has prevailed. Further, it was never meant to result in disequilibrium.

The other issue that should be noted is the recent trend of many of the madrasas of Islam to increasingly teach a narrow and fundamental view of Islam. These include inaccuracies in historical facts, insensitivity to religious diversity in the world, the promotion of violence in the name of Islam, encouragement of prejudice shown towards women and minorities, and the preclusion of critical thought. In short, without the ability to be self-critical and self-reforming, any institution risks the proclivity towards spiritual and moral autocracy.

Conclusion

In the end, it is hoped that Islam will reclaim its original inspiration as a religion of peace. Vestiges of this value are evident everywhere throughout Islamic history, but nowhere more so perhaps than in the greeting all Muslim faithful offer to each other: As'salam alaikum ("Peace be unto you"), and the response, Wa'alaikum Salam ("And upon you, Peace"). At its core, Islam is a religion of peace, and wishes all to be at peace and live in peace with each other.

When Mohammed was asked how one ought best practice Islam, he replied, "The best Islam is that you feed the hungry and spread peace among people you know and those you do not know," from the Hadith (Fisher, 2008). A contemporary Muslim theologian has put it thusly: "If one knows the true meaning of Islam, there will be no wars. All that will be heard are the sounds of prayer and the greetings of peace. Only the resonance of God will be heard. That is the ocean of Islam. That is unity. That is our wealth and our true weapon. Not the sword in your hand," (Fisher, 2008).

Finally, we close as we began, with an excerpt from the source of Islam, the Qur'an itself: "Our fractured world is in turmoil. Mother Earth gathered all of her children into the folds of her embrace to wipe away tears. Why do you fight....You were created from male and female and made into nations and tribes so you could get to know one another and learn to coexist" (Qur'an, Surah 49:13).

Questions for further consideration

1. If Islam shares so much in common with Judaism and Christianity, why does it look so different?
2. To what extent can we find elements of Judaism and Christianity within Islam? Name a few.
3. Is there a sense among Muslims that when they say the word for God in Arabic (namely, "Allah") they are in fact invoking/worshipping a different God than the God in the Hebrew Bible or New Testament (i.e., Jews and Christians)? How is this perceived in reverse direction?
4. How is Islam inclusive of Judaism and Christianity, and yet exclusive in their understanding of covenant? How is it Universalist in its acceptance of all people into their faith?
5. How does Islam use the story of Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn, to justify their own sacred narrative? What in particular is unique to their story? What is similar to both Judaism and Christianity?
6. How does Islam's understanding of the relationship between religion and politics radically differ from Christianity (especially as practiced in the United States)? Exceptions would be the Holy Roman Empire, the Catholic Church in Middle Ages, the State Churches of Europe, the Puritans in New England, etc.

7. How can Muslims claim the historical veracity of the Qur'anic text transmitted, both orally and textually, over the last 1,400 years?

Islam Crossword Puzzle



GALLERY 10.2 Istanbul, Turkey



The author outside of the famed Blue Mosque of Istanbul, Turkey





11 SIKHISM

“God is neither Hindu nor Muslim”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- **Understand the historical development of Sikhism**
- **Understand how this began as a reaction to Hinduism and Islam, and distinguish its unique characteristics**
- **Summarize how it is similar to the other monotheistic religions, as well as dissimilar**

***“O human, where dost thou seek me?
Lo! I am beside thee.
I am neither in temple nor in mosque:
I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies; nor in yoga and
renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me:
thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.
Kabir says, ‘O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath.’”***

—Songs of Kabir

***“There is One God
Whose Name is Truth,
The Creator,
Without fear, without hate,
Eternal Being,
Beyond birth and death,
Self-existent,
Realized by the Guru’s grace.”***

—The Mul Mantra of Guru Nanak

Arriving at the Golden Temple of the Sikhs in the Punjab of Northern India, I immediately hear the distinctive sounds of drumming, accordion-like instruments, and voice chants being sung from the pages of the Adi Granth (the sacred book for Sikhs). It is mesmerizingly beautiful, almost trance inducing. The gold leaf on the temple, the water surrounding it on all sides, the droves of devotees lined up making pilgrimages, shoes off before entering this sacred space. I dutifully do the same and cover my head with an orange cloth provided to me. I think to myself, “Why do so many religions have adherents that cover their head? What

Introduction

Sikhism—a religion that burst onto the scene in the Punjab region of northern India in the 15th century—is a relative latecomer to the world stage of religions. It developed as a devotional Bhakti form of Hinduism, which has at its core the insistence of a deep and abiding devotion to God through the means of an intense personal relationship with the divine. It has only 28 million adherents, yet that figure misrepresents the importance and influence that this religion holds in the global arena (Pew Research Center, 2012.)

The majority of the Sikh population is concentrated in Punjab (approximately 20 million), forming a two-thirds majority of those living there. The remainder of the population are scattered throughout the world, with concentrations in North America, Europe, and Australia-New Zealand. Here is how it all began.

History

What we know about Sikhism and its founder Nanak is largely based on the oral tradition of the faithful, and only later was recorded in writing. Nanak, later known as Guru (literally, “wise one” or “teacher”) Nanak, was born in the Punjab region of India circa 1469 C.E. at a time when half the population of the area was Muslim and the other half Hindu.

At the age of 30 (as it seems with many of the religious leaders we have examined), he set out on his own. His life is dramatically transformed when, in an act of radical

MOVIE 11.1 Glimpse of Sikhism



surrender after conducting his morning prayers at the banks of a river, he was immersed in the water, not emerging for three days (sound familiar to someone else being entombed for three days?). Assuming he had drowned, the river was dredged to recover his body, but to no avail. Three days later, Nanak emerged from the river and famously declared, “There is neither Hindu nor Muslim; so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow God’s path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and the path I follow is God’s.”

Equity

At the heart of Guru Nanak’s teaching is the fundamental truth that God is beyond religious categories, and worship of God should be without religious designations. Essentially, God is beyond label. We should live without religious classification, which only serves to divide and oppress. Thus, Nanak believed in the equality of the sexes. Men and women are equals (as seen in the practices of the common kitchen called the langar. One is not greater than another. There are to be no castes or classes of people, as all are created equal in the eyes of God. All that one makes (always by means of an honest wage) is to be shared with those who are needy.

As opposed to living a life of self-denial and detachment, such as with the

INTERACTIVE 11.1 History of Sikhism Timeline



forest dweller stage in Hinduism, Sikhs are called to live in the world as responsible members, helping those who are in need. Central to Nanak’s teaching is the assertion of possessing a pure and passionate personal love of the divine. He is quoted as saying, “Oh my mind, love God as a fish loves water: The more the water, the happier is the fish” (Fisher, 2008).



Disciples

Those who came to follow Nanak’s new way of life came to be called Sikhs (literally, “disciples”). Sikhs believe that there were a total of ten gurus in a long line beginning with Guru Nanak and ending with Guru Gobind Singh (1666 C.E. – 1708 C.E.), all of whom embodied the same single-minded spirit: the spirit of the eternal Guru Nanak. Historically, the third and fourth guru, Amar Das and Ram Das, helped organize the Sikh community as well as founded the holy city of Amritsar. The fifth guru, Arjun Dev, built the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs, the Golden Temple (with a door on each of the four sides of the building in a show of openness to people of all faiths), as well as compiled the Adi Granth (literally, “first book”), which is the holy book of Sikhism based on Guru Nanak’s poetry (all 1,430 pages of it).

It was the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, who proclaimed the line of gurus would end with him. In its place, the Adi Granth would serve that purpose, and thus the holy book came to be called Guru Granth Sahib (Sahib meaning “Lord”), transferring the spirit of the gurus onto the holy book. Further, in 1699 C.E., Gobind Singh instituted the order of the Khalsa

(“pure ones”) as a way to revitalize the Sikh religion and redefine those essential elements of their faith.

Beliefs & Practices

Five Ks

The legend is told of Guru Singh standing before the assembly of Sikhs asking for volunteers who would offer their heads—literally—for the cause of their religion and as an act of complete obedience and selfless dedication. Five stepped forward, all of who were from the lower classes

INTERACTIVE 11.2 Map of Punjab, India



and from different geographic areas. One by one, they were led into the tent of Guru Singh, and after each, Guru Singh would emerge alone with a blood-soaked sword. After the last, the guru brought all five out alive, dressed in new clothes, and having been given the new designation of Khalsa, the pure ones, having withstood the test of faith and coming forth resurrected, as it were, from the dead.



Kanga, Kara, and Kirpan

As part of this new designation, the five were sworn to wear five distinct symbols of their faith, called the Five Ks. These are:

1. The Kesh (uncut hair)
2. The Kanga (the wooden comb for hair)
3. The Kara (the steel wrist-guard/bracelet),
4. The Kirpan (the sword/dagger)
5. The Kach (the short trouser undergarment).

These came to be worn by all faithful Sikhs, men and women alike. Furthermore, the uncut hair was normally covered, with a turban for men or a veil for women.

Sikhism today

Today, Sikhism is most overtly practiced around the Gurdwara—the house of worship, where the holy book of the Guru Granth Sahib is kept enshrined. It is also where the congregation (sangat) gathers for public worship and for the daily common meal in the langar (the common kitchen). All are treated as equals. There is no priestly class, and there is no distinction between men and women. In many langars, the men serve the women the common meal, and all work side by side together in its preparation and its cleanup. All are expected to partake of the meal sitting together alongside of each other, rich and poor, men and women, without distinction. This often occurs daily, but at the very least, once a week and often in a show of accommodation to Western culture on Sundays. Vegetarian cuisine is valued, but not a requirement.

Four rites of passage

Sikhs, like Hindus, do not believe in proselytizing. However, they encourage anyone who wishes to join the Panth (meaning, “path,” and representing the Sikh community) to do so. In addition to the daily/weekly gathering at the gurdwara, there are four rites of passage observed:

1. The naming of the child after birth
2. Initiation
3. Marriage
4. Death

There are morning and evening prayers (a two-hour affair), the chanting of the Adi Granth, random recitations of passages that are intuitively guided, and as such are similar to mysticism. As to ethical



norms for this life, Sikhs are expected to focus on loving meditation of God, honesty in work, and generosity to those in need.

In the end, Sikhism may well be considered a reform movement of Hinduism, at least in its origin, and certainly as a syncretism of Islam and Hinduism as it is the first to put forward the notion of God being without religious categorization, in the 15th-16th century Punjab region. God, accordingly, is neither Muslim nor Hindu. God is both imminent and transcendent. Monotheism and reincarnation exist alongside each other. The self-denial of the Buddhist is eschewed, but discipline is valued and encouraged.

Indeed, the word “Sikh” literally means “disciple,” assuming discipline. The non-violence of the Jains is respected (Ahimsa), but the Khalsa may be called upon to use their swords (the Kirpan) in defense of their faith, as they have from time to time across history in violent confrontations with others, believing in the Just War theory. This can be witnessed in reflection of the massacre in 1919 at the Golden Temple at the hands of the British, or the Indian army in 1984 (Fisher, 2008).

In short, Sikhism’s contribution to the dialogue of world religions across the globe may well be summed up in its insistence on God being beyond definition of boundary, the essential unity of all religions, the insistence on the equality of the sexes, the banishment of the caste/class system of society, the creation of a non-sectarian world, and the beauty of their assertion that when we eat together, we find unity with each other in the communal kitchen. Long live the langar!

Questions for further consideration

1. What is the significance of Guru Nanak’s statement (when coming up out of the water) in relation to world religions?
2. What is unique to Sikhism in the Gurdwara?

3. If Sikhism is ultimately about the unity of religion without prejudice, and the understanding of God without labels, how do Sikhs justify the killing of those of other faiths?

4. In a unique twist, Sikhs believe in reincarnation, but also espouse monotheism, which traditionally denies reincarnation. Are these two incompatible? Why? Why not?

5. What other religious traditions use a weapon (like a sword) to symbolize their faith and dedication? Knights of Columbus? Others?

GALLERY 11.1 The Golden Temple, Amristar, India

**INTERACTIVE 11.3 Sikhism
Crossword Puzzle**



The Golden Temple in Amristar





12 BAHÁ'Í

“A religion of world peace & universal love”

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- **Understand how Bahá'í emerged as an off-shoot of Shi'a Islam**
- **Distinguish its unique characteristics from other religions**
- **Summarize its basic practices and beliefs**

This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness.

—From the writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Spending a day at the Terraces of the Bahá'í Faith, also known as the Hanging Gardens of Haifa, Israel, is a bit like spending the day in what one might imagine paradise to be: a perfectly manicured world that is beyond peaceful and it listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site.

“That’s the very reason we do this,” our guide tells us as we descend the steps to the Shrine of the Báb (the tomb of its founder, Siyyid `Alí Muhammad Shírází, who lived from 1819-1850) at the base of the hillside.

The terraces themselves represent the first 18 disciples of the Báb. Millions of dollars are spent each year simply to keep the gardens perfectly manicured, which is the Bahá'í way to show the world the unity that is possible.

Our guide is a university professor from Chicago—one who was disillusioned with religion until introduced to Bahá'í. He reminds me of the couple I remember meeting in Florida, ten years earlier: raised Catholic, they left organized religion and then returned as Bahai'i.

Introduction

Bahá'í is the newest of the world's monotheistic religions that exists on a global scale with a presence in every continent of the world, totaling over seven million followers (Pew Research Center, 2012.) It is, in short, a religion which has at the heart of its teaching, a plea for world peace and the universality of all religion. Accordingly, humankind's supreme end is the love of God, and by extension, the love of all people.

To love God requires love of all others, for divine love transcends race, sect, creed, or class. A Bahá'í is one who accepts the teaching of, shows devotion towards, and lives by the precepts of its founder, Bahá'u'lláh. It is, in short, a religion that attempts to unite all of humanity under the banner of God's universal love.

Islamic roots

The religion began in the mid-19th century in present day Iran, with roots in the Shi'ite branch of Islam. As discussed in the chapter on Islam, Shi'ite Muslims disagree with Sunni Muslims in their interpretation of Mohammed's successor, believing Ali (the son-in-law of Mohammed) to be the legitimate heir, instead of Abu Bakr (whom the Sunni's insist was legitimately elected as his successor). Shi'ites came to believe there were 12 legitimate descendants to Ali. They are known as Imams, sometimes called babs (“gates”) since they functioned as the gatekeepers of the faith. According to tradition, the twelfth imam mysteriously disappeared in the 9th century, and as legend has it, will reappear one day as the Messiah.

INTERACTIVE 12.1 History of Bahá'í Timeline





In 1844, a Shi'ite Muslim by the name of Ali Mohammed (1819-1850 C.E.) publicly declared that he was in fact the long-awaited Messiah (12th Imam), and gave himself the title of the Bab. Many came to his side as disciples, but in the end, the Persian government saw him as a threat and had the Bab publicly executed (along with 22,000 followers). However, this did not occur before he gave his remaining disciples hope that after him, there would come a religious leader greater than him to help establish this new religion based on universal

love. The Bab is buried in present day Haifa, Israel.

One of the Bab's disciples, Mirza Hussain Ali (1817-1892 C.E.), was so moved by the Bab's witness, he abandoned his family name and privileged position, and assumed the name Bahá'u'lláh ("Glory of God"). Recognized by the fledgling community as the Bab's rightful successor, but under persecution by the Persian government, he and his followers were banished in 1863 C.E.

After a tumultuous meandering route of persecution, they finally landed in the city of Akko (present day Acre, Israel) under house arrest. Eventually, they won their freedom and settled on the slopes of Mount Carmel above the port city of Haifa. There, they built the magnificent gardens and the shrine to the Bab, which houses his grave. When Bahá'u'lláh died, he was buried according to his wishes in Acre with the graves of himself and the Bab facing each other. Today, there are no professional clergy in the

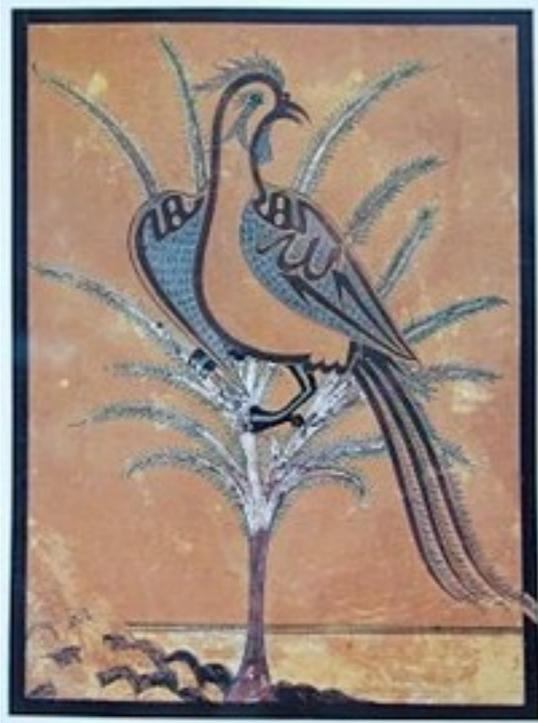
ranks of the Bahá'í religion, and all are considered equals without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, language, or culture.

Beliefs

An awareness that at the heart of human existence rests an essential unity of all mankind is what animates and informs the Bahá'í faith. The following 12 principals are at the heart of this religion, which can be found in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, seen on the following in a scrolling text box:

The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh

1. **Humanity:** All people of the world are created by God, and thus they are essentially one—one human family.
2. **Truth:** Truth is not abstract nor is it fractured. Truth is one and must be sought after as such. Truth has been revealed in a long line of God's faithful prophets— Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Krishna, and the Buddha. It is also revealed in sacred text, which the Bahá'u'lláh has given us.
3. **Religions:** All religions arise out of the same concern and thus must not be used as weapons for division. Our desire to love and be loved is found in all the religions of the world. Thus, not only the monotheistic religions have legitimacy, but also polytheism as found in Hinduism, Shinto, and Buddhism as well.
4. **Religion and science:** Science helps us understand our faith. It is not opposed to faith.
5. **Gender equality:** The equality of men and women is of



Artwork of Mishkín Qalam, a prominent Bahá'í and one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh.

Practices

Bahá'í, unlike most other religions, has no essential worship or ritual. There are no professional ranks of clergy. They have no houses of worship; though they have erected one large temple per continent around the globe; these are primarily for pilgrimage and special events. The Bahá'í community rather chooses to meet in each other's homes. The central act of Bahá'í members is to pray. This is done morning, noon, and evening with prostrations (not dissimilar to the Muslim tradition).

There is also the requirement to participate in the Nineteen Day Fast,

abstaining from food, drink, and smoke from sunrise to sunset during the 19th calendar month of `Ala. The Bahá'í are required to always abstain from any mind-altering substances, like drugs or alcohol. They must pray daily and remain faithful in a monogamous marriage.

The main temple on each continent is constructed with nine doors with a large dome, symbolizing the unity of mankind. Nine is the largest single digit and thus most symbolic of inclusion. As one of the Bahá'í texts states, "All nations will become one, all religions will be unified" (Fisher p. 486).

Questions for further consideration

1. Is Bahá'í essentially an offshoot of Islam? Why or why not?
2. Why does Islam think Bahá'í is a heresy?
3. What do you suppose the Bahá'í view on the United Nations is?
4. If Bahá'í espouses monotheism, how does it account for and legitimize polytheism?
5. The Bahá'í govern by consensus without regard for personality or ownership of ideas. How might this be applied in modern politics?
6. If the Bahá'í religion fundamentally accepts the divinely inspired witness of all prophets, including Abraham, Jesus, Krishna, Confucius, and the Buddha, why would it be so actively engaged in proselytizing in an attempt to gather new members?

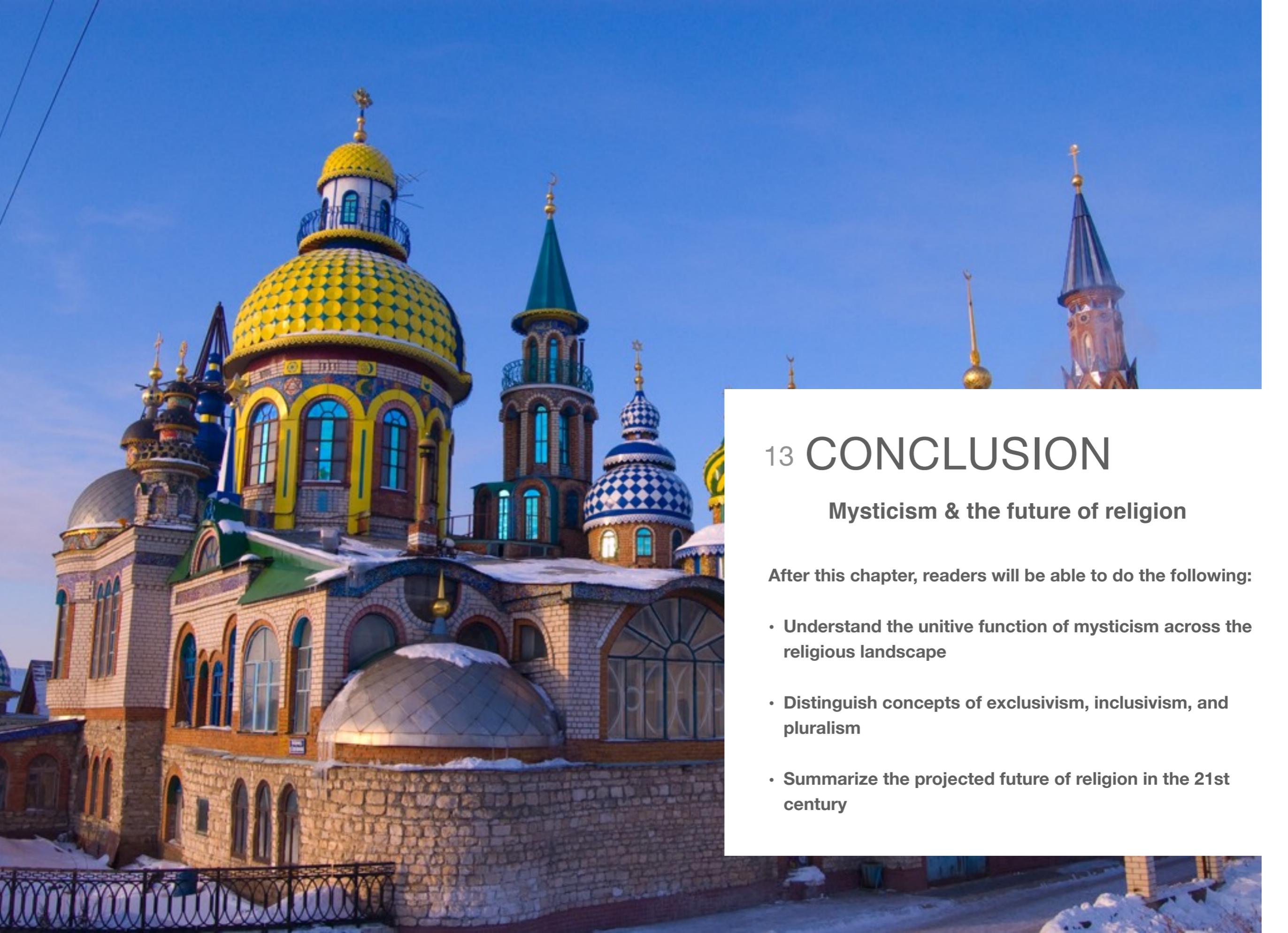
GALLERY 12.1 The Terraces of the Bahá'í Faith

INTERACTIVE 12.2 Bahá'í
Crossword Puzzle



Descending into the gardens toward the Shrine of the Báb





13 CONCLUSION

Mysticism & the future of religion

After this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

- Understand the unitive function of mysticism across the religious landscape
- Distinguish concepts of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism
- Summarize the projected future of religion in the 21st century

“Our great challenge is to create a culture of encounter, which encourages individuals and groups to share the richness of their traditions and experiences, to break down walls and to build bridges.”

—Pope Francis, address to the USCCB

“To be a child of Abraham is to learn to respect the other children of Abraham even if their way is not ours, their covenant not ours, their understanding of God different from ours. Our common humanity must precede our religious differences. Now is the time for us to say what we have failed to say in the past: We are all the children of Abraham. We are precious in the sight of God. We are blessed. And to be blessed, no one has to be cursed. God’s love does not work that way. God is calling us to let go of hate and the preaching of hate, and to live at last as brothers and sisters, true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith, honoring God’s name by honoring his image, humankind.”

—Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth)

So, what does it all mean? And where does this all lead to? We end where we began, as I recounted in the preface of this book. In my journey circumnavigating the globe, I climbed the Huashan Mountain of China in search of the heart of Taoism, I saw with my own eyes the stone monolith of the Nestorians in Xian. I prayed Isha (night prayer) with Muslims in the Blue Mosque of Istanbul. I stood shoulder to shoulder with Jews at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and with Muslims in Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. I kept vigil all night, locked into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the tomb of Jesus’s burial site), celebrating mass at dawn at

10 Countries With the Largest Other Religions Populations, 2010 and 2050

	2010 OTHER RELIGIONS POPULATION	% OF WORLD'S OTHER RELIGIONS POPULATION IN 2010		2050 OTHER RELIGIONS POPULATION	% OF WORLD'S OTHER RELIGIONS POPULATION IN 2050
1 India	27,560,000	47.4%	1 India	26,050,000	42.4%
2 China	9,080,000	15.6	2 China	9,250,000	15.1
3 Japan	5,890,000	10.1	3 United States	5,760,000	9.4
4 Taiwan	3,760,000	6.5	4 Japan	4,180,000	6.8
5 North Korea	3,140,000	5.4	5 North Korea	3,400,000	5.5
6 United States	1,900,000	3.3	6 Taiwan	2,740,000	4.5
7 Cameroon	530,000	0.9	7 Cameroon	1,030,000	1.7
8 Kenya	500,000	0.9	8 Kenya	860,000	1.4
9 Singapore	490,000	0.8	9 Canada	780,000	1.3
10 United Kingdom	460,000	0.8	10 United Kingdom	550,000	0.9
Subtotal	53,310,000	91.7	Subtotal	54,610,000	88.9
Subtotal for Rest of World	4,840,000	8.3	Subtotal for Rest of World	6,850,000	11.1
World Total	58,150,000	100.0	World Total	61,450,000	100.0

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. Population estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers.

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the foot of the cross. I walked the gardens of Bahá’í in Haifa and conversed with Druze and the Ahmadiyya Muslims. I climbed Mt. Sinai in Egypt through the night and prayed with Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the top, at sunrise, giving honor to Moses—the prophet that all three religions honor. I chanted with the monks of Saint Katherine’s monastery at the foot of the mountain. I stood at the border of Syria and saw the desolation of war. I drove a rental car to the sacred sites across Jordan and Palestine.

I traveled to the cathedrals of eastern and western Europe and I found myself asking, “Would Jesus even recognize the religion that bears his name?” I spent a long and painful day at Auschwitz asking myself

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups

	2010 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2010	PROJECTED 2050 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050
Christians	2,168,330,000	31.4%	2,918,070,000	31.4%	749,740,000
Muslims	1,599,700,000	23.2	2,761,480,000	29.7	1,161,780,000
Unaffiliated	1,131,150,000	16.4	1,230,340,000	13.2	99,190,000
Hindus	1,032,210,000	15.0	1,384,360,000	14.9	352,140,000
Buddhists	487,760,000	7.1	486,270,000	5.2	-1,490,000
Folk Religions	404,690,000	5.9	449,140,000	4.8	44,450,000
Other Religions	58,150,000	0.8	61,450,000	0.7	3,300,000
Jews	13,860,000	0.2	16,090,000	0.2	2,230,000
World total	6,895,850,000	100.0	9,307,190,000	100.0	2,411,340,000

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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alongside of Elie Wiesel, “Where is God?” I spent Holy Week in Rome at all the Papal Liturgies with Papa Francesco. I retreated to the hills of Assisi where Saint Francis discarded the trappings of religion. I soaked up the tolerance of the Moors in Spain, in Toledo and Cordoba where Judaism, Christianity, and Islam lived in relative peace for more than 700 years. I witnessed the exuberance of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Moscow, where their gatherings were overflowing with participants.

I lived among the cows of India, with the Dalits (untouchables) and the Sannyasins (the renouncers of this world). I went to the sacred waters of the Ganges in the city of Varanasi to watch the morning ablutions and cremation of the corpses of Hindus being returned to the water. I went to the Golden Temple of the Sikhs in Amritsar to participate in the chanting of their holy book, the Adi Granth. I spent time at the monastery of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in the Himalaya Mountains to chant with the Tibetan monks and drink their goat milk offered to me after the early morning chant. I continued on to Bodhgaya to spend time at the place of Siddhartha’s enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, to the nude, “sky-clad”

Jains in Sarnath, to the tomb of Mother Teresa in Kolkata, and Gandhi’s burial/cremation grounds in Delhi. I prayed with the Sufis at the famed Mosque of Saint Chishti outside of Pushkar, and went on to Goa and the “Mummified Saint” of Francis Xavier, so named by Hindus who came in droves with bare feet and marigold garlands in-hand to place on the Christian grave. And, finally, on to Chennai (Madras) with Jesus on a peacock, Mary in a Sari, and Thomas downstairs in the crypt of the Basilica (and, of course, the full complement of Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma by his side). By the end of my journey, people were coming up to me and asking, “Are you a Sadhu (a holy man)?” I answered, “I hope so.” And in the end, I believe that is what the journey of life and the religious quest is all about: Sharing life together in a mutual respect and appreciation for the answers each tradition brings to the universal questions of meaning, purpose, and identity.

What certainly became clear in my six months of travelling the world was the fact that religion need not be an occasion for division, bigotry, or tribalism as it so often becomes, but rather a conduit for seeing the larger global picture of unity and social cohesion.

As trite as this may initially sound, the common link between every religion —as I experienced it—is a built-in awareness of the central role and transformative power of food (literally, of course, but also metaphorically). In fact, it is the one thing that bonds people together and breaks down barriers, just like my experience on the overnight train from Xi’an to Shanghai, China (see Chapter 5: Daoism & Confucianism). You cannot very well hate each other when your mouth is full. It is hard to spew vitriol when you are breaking bread together, sharing the same meal at the same table. Conversations over food change our perceptions of each other—our pre-judgments, our prejudices. Truly, every religion intuitively knows this somehow. Sikhs do it in the shared kitchen of the gurdwara where men and women serve each other. Muslims do it with the breaking of the fast during Ramadan, when they invite strangers to share in the

occasion. Christians implicitly understand this in the Eucharistic meal, and Jews do it in the shared Shabbat dinner. Food breaks down barriers.

Sharing an experience of ritual gathering in the tradition of another's religion produces new awareness of possibilities previously unfathomable. It breaks down the barriers of intolerance and begins the process of building bridges. This tribal expression may be unique to each person's religious tradition, but if you see beyond this to the Divine Image (the "imago dei") in each person, you then recognize the universal presence of God within that person and their tradition and are able to say "namaste" (the divine within me recognizes and acknowledges the divine within you). Where this happens, hate ceases to exist. We eat, pray, and love!

In the end, what is clear is that we all basically want the same things in life: meaning, purpose, identity, and community. We want to know we belong, that we have a purpose, we have a role to play, we have a reason for being. We long for love, for family, for relationship. It simply comes down to the fact that we are all looking for the same things, but in different ways, using different languages, imagery, culture. If we can start there, we can go on to a symbiotic dialogue of mutual blessing.

Having come to the end of our examination of world religions, it remains for us to address the question: What is the future of religion? In a world where it is increasingly becoming popular to identify oneself as spiritual but not religious, it begs the question, is there a future for religion in the world? And if so, what might it look like?

Clearly, one of the adverse aspects of organized religion that is readily apparent is the tendency toward dualistic propositional thinking—seeing the world in black and white, right and wrong, insider and outsider, us versus them. There is no room in such a world for plurality of belief systems or ways of ritualizing life's passages. In the name of orthodoxy, religion becomes largely about rules and regulations rather than its original inspiration of providing meaning and purpose. Divine imagination

gives way to the suffocating controls of human invention. Is it any wonder that our current generation is calling religion into question?

And yet, just as we have witnessed across time, religion cannot be wished away. It is, has been, and likely always will be a part of our human existence. Indeed, some argue that to be human is to be religious. That is to say, part of our human makeup is deeply spiritual, however we understand that. Some will insist on it taking an organizational format (the structural aspect), others are comfortable with it being spontaneous and without definition (the spiritual aspect). In either case, the essence (the spiritual content) must be housed in some kind of substance (the religious form) or it will lack definition. If spirituality is the water, religion must be the vessel that holds it. Further, some will insist that it requires a belief in God while others—atheists included—are quite comfortable seeing value in religion but without a notion of a god attached to it (e.g., Alain de Botton's *Religion for Atheists*). Inasmuch, even "religious atheists" see the value of religion broadening our horizons and giving us a framework in which to see and understand life.

Some call this framework the monomyth—the common sacred narrative told across time and space, across cultural and linguistic divides, that gives meaning to the questions of origin, knowledge and ethics (e.g., Karl Jaspers' Axial Age). It asks the same questions of how did we get here? How did all this come into being? What is my place in the grand



architecture of the universe? How am I to know how to live my life? Is there a code that unlocks these mysteries?

In whatever way we understand the spiritual dimension to our human makeup and lived experiences, we know that religion is not about to disappear; it may, however, take on a very different look and feel. In short, religion is here to stay, but the ecosystem of religion in the modern world may look very different. Modern religious scholars point out that there are three current trends to the practice of religion: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

Exclusivism, inclusivism & pluralism

Exclusivism is the position taken by those who place nearly the entire weight of the valid practice of their religion on external forms such as purity codes. These are sometimes called fundamentalists in that they see their religion as an exclusive enterprise, as, over, and against all others (e.g., Jonestown, Westboro Baptists, etc.). The further extreme of this exclusivism is found in what we know as modern day terrorism: the use of abject, evil means to enforce their religious system. Examples of this are rife within the operations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS), Abu Sayyaf, the Lord's Resistance Army, Sikrikim, and other organizations.

Inclusivism takes the exact opposite position of exclusivism in that it advocates for the inclusion of all other religious systems without regard for differentiation (e.g., Bahá'í). Pluralism advocates for inclusion, but not at the expense of differentiation. It takes the position that unity is not predicated upon uniformity. We can have our different systems of belief and practice without subsuming each other into a kind of religious mash-up, and still find ways to not simply tolerate but rather advocate for each one's tradition as valid ways of expressing the religious quest. Pluralism is about drilling down deeper into one's own tradition while branching out ever further in dialogue and common enterprise with the other religions of

the world. Thich Nhat Hanh, the well-known Buddhist of Plum Village, puts it thusly: Do not convert to Buddhism unless you have no other religious tradition. Rather, rediscover your own religious upbringing and bless it with your further and invigorated involvement. In this way we will find our pathway to peace.

Future of religion

So, what is the future of religion? Will it look different in the years to come? Indeed, it will. Imagine a world where religion serves not to divide but unite, and not to obviate but rather make essential our distinctive traditions. Again, unity is not predicated upon uniformity, and religion is no exception to this dictum. In fact, one could argue that the very reality of diversity is what enlarges our awareness of our common, core essential unity. "We are more alike than different," the television advertisement declares (see YouTube video below). The difference in fact highlights the essential similarity we find when we strip away the divisions. Imagine this world: one of religious diversity without borders or divisions—a diversity that finds unity in the mystery. This tradition is not new but will be newly rediscovered in the future; it is a tradition called mysticism, and it is the



future of religion. This is religion without walls and emphasizes spirituality without borders.

Whether it is chanting in Arabic alongside Rumi, the mystic of the 13th century Islamic world, praying with Shimon bar Yochai, the 2nd century rabbi who gave the world The Zohar used in Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, or meditating with the likes of Hildegard von Bingen, Francis of Assisi, or Julian of Norwich, all Christian mystics—we share a common vision of religion being celebrated without division or borders. In today's world, this is already happening in common gatherings for the practice of mindfulness, meditation, yoga, tai chi, and other vehicles of spirituality.

GALLERY 13.1 The transformative power of food



The author's favorite food, zaru soba (cold buckwheat noodles)



Having come to the end of our exploration of world religions, we close with a quote from a contemporary mystic, Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest living in New Mexico, in which he captures the essence of what this concluding chapter has been about. He writes, “salvation’ has little to do with belief systems, belonging to the right group, or correct ritual practice. It has everything to do with living right here, right now, and knowing a beautiful and fully accepting God is this very moment giving to you. All you can do is sit down at the banquet and eat” (Rohr, 2005).

Bon appétit, everyone!

Questions for further consideration

1. Hardly any religion in the world (even the most peace-loving one) can claim a history without some form of violence as a part of its history. Why do you suppose religion often elicits or incites violence?
2. Is it possible to have something of a spiritual nature without it inevitably taking on form and organizational structure over time?
3. Truth be told, mysticism has more in common across the religious divides than often among their own fold. Why do you suppose this is the case?
4. What is the future of religion? What will it look like? What will it NOT be?
5. What is the essential element that lies at the heart of all religions? Would you agree that it is love?



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