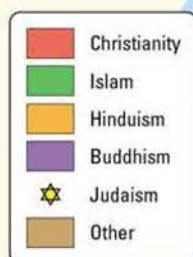


A Global View

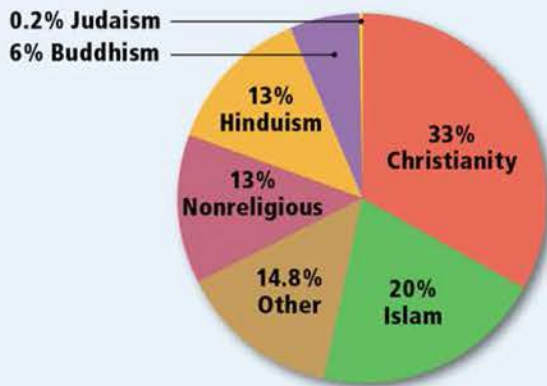
Thousands of religions are practiced in the world. A religion is an organized system of beliefs and practices, often centered on one or more gods. The following pages focus on five major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. This handbook also discusses Confucianism, an ethical system. Like a religion, an ethical system provides direction on how to live your life. Unlike religions, however, ethical systems do not center on the worship of gods.

In this book, you have learned about many different religions. You have learned how religions have spread and brought people together. You have also learned how religions have divided people throughout history. Religions continue to be powerful forces today. They affect people all over the world. The chart on the opposite page shows what percentages of the world population practice the five major religions. The map shows where these religions are practiced.

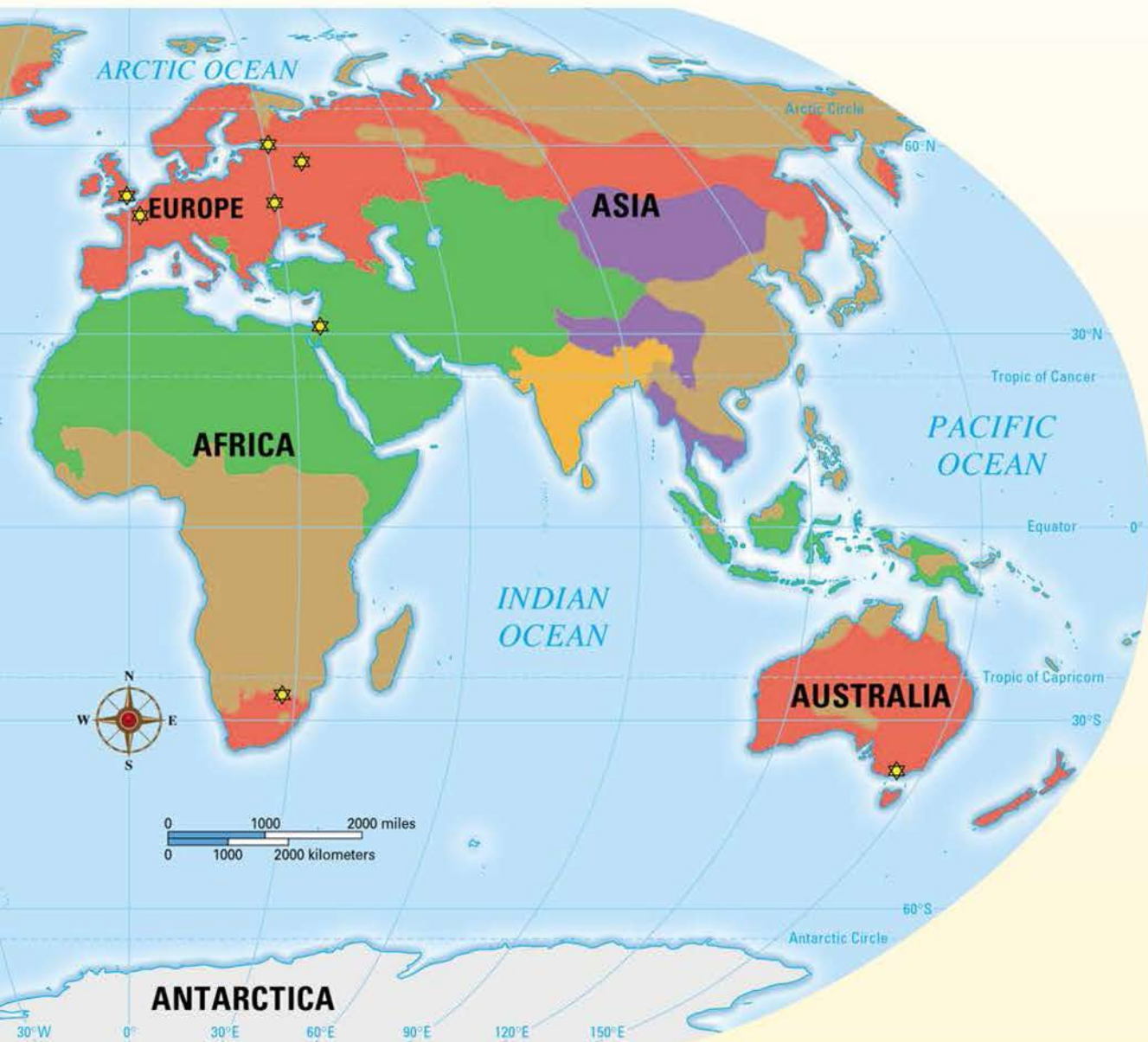


World Population's Religious Affiliations

World population: 6.2 billion (estimated 2002 figure)



Source: World Almanac 2003



Buddhism

Buddhism is named for its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (sihd•DAHR•tuh GOW•tuh•muh), who came to be known as the Buddha, or “enlightened one.” According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha was born into a noble Indian family. But he gave up his riches to seek enlightenment, or wisdom. After long study and meditation, the Buddha experienced his enlightenment. He believed he knew the true nature of suffering and how to put an end to it. He called this insight into the nature of suffering The Four Noble Truths. The Buddha believed that his followers could achieve enlightenment by following what he called the Noble Eightfold Path. This path involved observing the following: right opinions, right desires, right speech, right action, right job, right effort, right concentration, and right meditation.

Buddhism began in India in the sixth century B.C. After the Buddha’s death, missionaries and traders helped spread the religion to China, Japan, and Korea. Today, the religion has few followers in India. Most Buddhists live in Sri Lanka, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Japan.

▼ Stupa

After his death, the Buddha’s ashes were placed in a series of dome-shaped monuments called stupas. Each stupa was surrounded by a railing and topped with a square structure. The form of these early stupas became the model for Buddhist shrines, like this one in Sri Lanka.



▼ Buddha’s Day

One of the most important festivals in the Buddhist world is Buddha’s Day, which falls in April or May. On this holiday, many Buddhists celebrate the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death. An elephant carries the Buddha’s remains in this Buddha’s Day procession in Thailand.



Learn More About Buddhism

Symbol According to legend, the Buddha was born with images of wheels on his hands and feet. The Buddha's teaching, known as the dharma, was intended to end the cycle of births and deaths. As a result, his teaching came to be symbolized by a wheel. His followers claimed that the "wheel of the dharma" was set in motion when the Buddha gave his first sermon.



▲ Statue of the Buddha

Statues of the Buddha, like this one in India, often show the religion's founder in a thoughtful pose. The statues reflect the Buddha's inner peacefulness and wisdom.

Primary Source

Buddhism has many sacred books. These writings, which were recorded after the Buddha's death, contain his teachings. In the following selection, the Buddha teaches the importance of controlling self and one's own desires.

One who conquers himself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield. Be victorious over yourself and not over others. When you attain victory over yourself, not even the gods can turn it into defeat.

from the *Dhammapada*
Translated by Eknath Easwaran

Chapter Connection For information on Buddhism in ancient China, see Chapter 7.

Christianity

Christianity is a monotheistic religion, which means that its followers believe in one God. The religion is based on the life and teachings of Jesus, as described in the Bible's New Testament. Christians regard Jesus as the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected, or raised to heavenly life. Early followers claimed that the resurrection proved that Jesus was the man who had come to save all of humankind. After Jesus' death around A.D. 29, his followers began to spread Christian beliefs. They preached about Jesus' life and teachings. For about 2,000 years, the religion continued to expand.

Today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world. Its nearly 2 billion followers are found all over the globe. Most Christians, however, live in North and South America, Europe, and Africa.



◀ Jesus

This mosaic in the Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, in Istanbul shows Jesus enthroned in heaven. Images of Jesus often show his head encircled by a halo and his hand raised in a blessing.

Christian Church ▶

Christians gather in churches for public worship. Church services often include a sermon, songs, and prayers. These worshipers have gathered for a Christmas service in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.





▲ Missionaries

Throughout the history of Christianity, missionaries have traveled all over the world in an effort to spread the religion. Today, missionary work often involves teaching or helping others in some way. This missionary is feeding orphans in India.



Learn More About Christianity

Symbol The cross is the primary symbol of Christianity. Jesus died on the cross, and this image appears in many Christian churches and in religious artwork. The cross reminds Christians that Jesus loved humanity and died to save it.



Primary Source

Before Jesus was put to death on the cross, he ate a last supper with his 12 main disciples, or followers. At the supper, Jesus compared the bread they were eating to his body. He compared the wine they drank to his blood. Today, words similar to the following are repeated in the Christian ritual of communion, in which bread and wine are consumed in remembrance of Jesus' death.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant [agreement], which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Matthew 26:26–29

Chapter Connection For information on the spread of Christianity in Europe during the Middle Ages, see Chapter 9.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It developed in India thousands of years ago. The religion developed out of the rituals and philosophy set forth in many ancient sacred texts. Hindus believe that a supreme being, known as Brahman, is the soul of the universe. They also believe that Brahman can be found within every person. Many Hindus worship Brahman in the form of other gods and divine beings. They believe that these gods can grant followers wisdom and goodness and help them overcome obstacles. But, above all, Hindus believe that their faith can liberate their souls from the repeated cycle of life and death. Once free, their souls can achieve a heavenlike state of bliss—the ultimate goal of Hinduism.

Hindus can be found in every part of the world today, including Nepal, Africa, Europe, and North and South America. However, the largest concentration of followers can be found in India, where 82 percent of the population is Hindu.

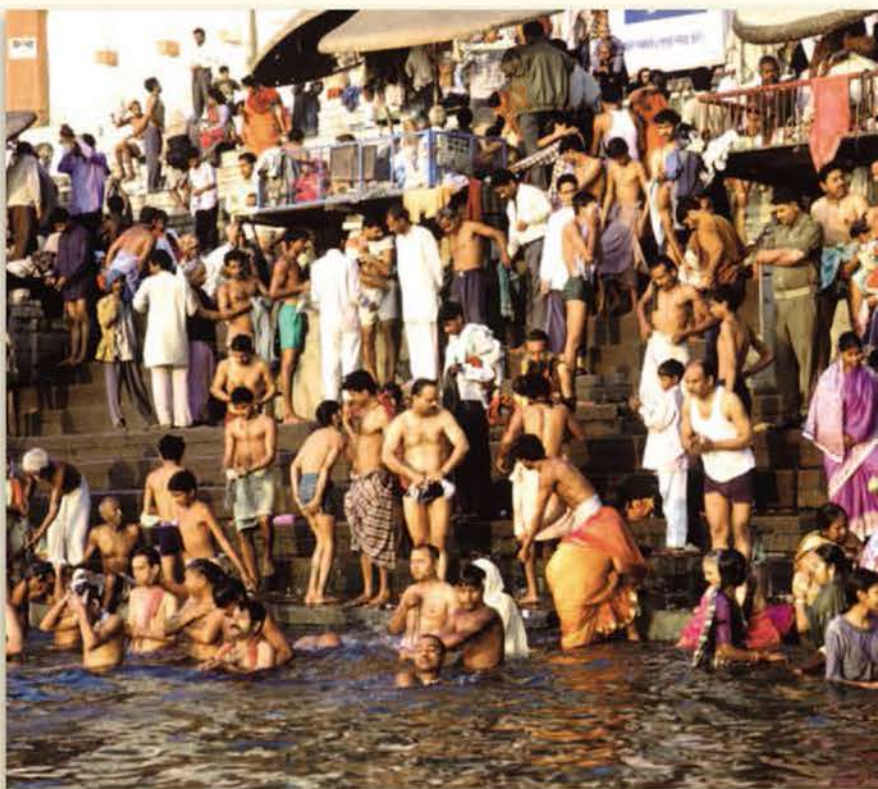


▲ Guru

Hindu teachers are called gurus. Gurus, like the one shown here, help Hindus gain the wisdom they need to free themselves from suffering. Today, many gurus reach their followers through Internet sites that broadcast their sermons and songs.

▼ Ganges River

Hindus believe that the water of the Ganges River is holy. As shown in this photograph, many Hindus travel to the river to bathe and pray. They also keep jars of the river's water in their homes to bless the dead and the dying.



▼ Goddess

When Hindus worship a supreme being in female form, they often refer to the deity as the Goddess. The Goddess has many names and forms but is often called Lakshmi. Shown below, she is the goddess of wealth and good fortune.



Learn More About Hinduism

Symbol The syllable *Om* (or *Aum*) is spoken at the beginning and end of all Hindu prayers. *Om* is the most sacred sound in Hinduism because it is believed to contain all other sounds. The symbol shown here represents the sound.



Primary Source

Sacred Hindu texts known as the Upanishads (oo•PAN•uh•SHADZ) are among the oldest Hindu writings. The following story from one of these philosophical works deals with the nature of Brahman.

Uddalaka commanded Shveta-ketu: Bring me a fig from that tree.

He replied: Here it is, sir.

Split it open.

I have split it, sir.

What do you see in it?

These tiny seeds, sir.

Split one of them open, please.

I have split it, sir.

What do you see in it?

Nothing, sir.

Yet, my dear boy, from a subtle essence [unseen spirit] which one cannot see, this great fig tree has grown. Have faith, my dear, for that subtle essence is the Soul of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is the Soul. *You* are that.

from *The Wisdom of the Forest: Selections from the Hindu Upanishads*
Translated by Geoffrey Parrinder