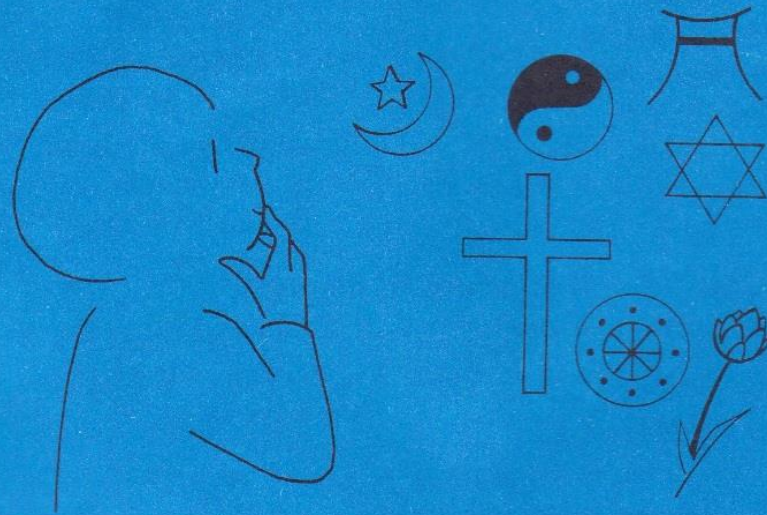


The **ABCs** of
**WORLD
RELIGIONS**



WHAT IS RELIGION?

It's many things, to many people. In general, it means following a set of beliefs or teachings.

Some say of religion:

It is a way to truth.



It gives meaning to our lives.



It's an answer to the unanswered questions.



It's going to services, singing songs and learning to pray.

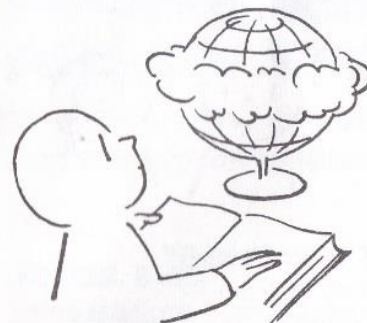


In any case, religion attempts to answer some of these questions:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Why do I exist? | 5. How does life end? |
| 2. What is true and real? | 6. Is there immortality? |
| 3. How did the universe begin? | 7. What is right and wrong? |
| 4. Why do things happen the way they do? | 8. What is the "good life"? |

Important Notice

Please read: The publisher has taken care in the preparation of this publication, but the information it contains does not necessarily describe particular situations you may encounter. You should ask a qualified expert or professional for advice about your particular situation.



WHY LEARN ABOUT RELIGION?

Because religion is part of all cultures around the world and a major part of world history. Learning about religion can help us:

- ① **UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCES AND SEE SIMILARITIES**
between nations and cultures—both political and philosophical.
- ② **APPRECIATE OUR OWN BELIEFS**
by seeing them alongside those of others.
- ③ **IMPROVE RELATIONS**
between religious groups around the world—through a meaningful exchange of ideas.

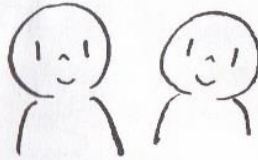
There are hundreds of different religions in the world. In this booklet, we'll look at some of the major world religions:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| • HINDUISM | • SHINTO |
| • BUDDHISM | • JUDAISM |
| • TAOISM | • CHRISTIANITY |
| • CONFUCIANISM | • ISLAM |

Note: Sources vary in classifying world religions. Sikhism, Baha'ism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism are also considered major world religions.

WHERE MOST RELIGIONS ARE SIMILAR

In general, most world religions have the following in common:



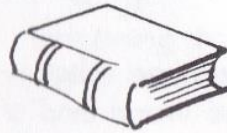
BELIEF IN A "HIGHER POWER"

Most religions worship a power greater than human beings, such as God.



"HOLY WRITINGS"

These may contain history, poetry, problems or a list of rules.



"HOLY PLACES"

These may be the birthplace of a founder, or the scene of some important religious incident. Often, people make pilgrimages to these places.



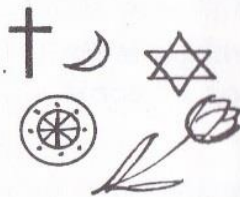
IMPORTANT PEOPLE

These may be founders, prophets, missionaries or other historical figures now worshiped or revered.



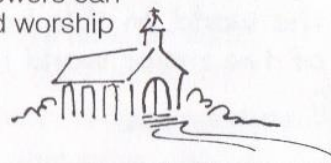
SYMBOLS

These help identify a religion.



PLACES OF WORSHIP

Often, these are places where followers can gather and worship together.



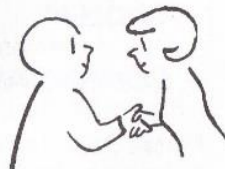
LITURGY OF OBSERVANCES

These may also be called "holy days." They often occur on the same day or season each year.



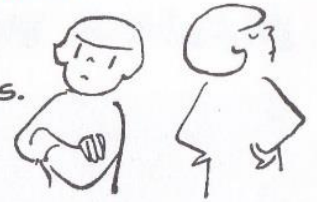
CODE OF ETHICS

These may be instructions or teachings about how to live and how to act toward one another.



WHERE MOST RELIGIONS ARE DIFFERENT

There are many differences among religions. Some major differences include:



SIN OR EVIL

Some religions believe people are basically evil. Others that they are good but corrupted by society's rules. Others that they are part of nature and neither evil nor good, except in the sense that they do not conform to nature.



SALVATION

Some religions are messianic. This means they believe one person, divine or human, will save people from eternal oblivion. Others see their god as too removed to operate this way.



PRIESTHOOD

Some religions believe that a select group of individuals act as official intermediaries between their god and the common person. The "power" or authority given this group is different for each religion. Other religions believe worship is a personal matter so no priest class exists.













PERSONAL GOD

Some religions believe their god can communicate personally with each human being. Others that their god is unreachable, and that people are on their own to find the answers.



AN OVERVIEW OF SOME MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

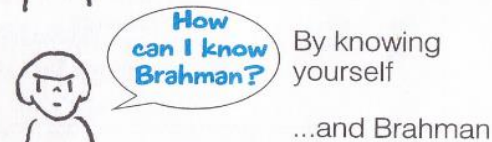
Religion (estimates vary)	Supreme Being(s)	Founder (dates may vary)	Historical Leader(s)	Leadership	Sacred Writing(s)	Holy or Sacred Place(s)	Some Holy Days and/or Festivals	Symbol(s)
CHRISTIANITY About 2 billion	God	Jesus 30 A.D.	John the Baptist 12 Disciples (Apostles)	Varies Priests Ministers Laypeople	Bible Old Testament New Testament	Bethlehem Jerusalem Rome Nazareth	Christmas Easter	Protestant  Catholic and Eastern Orthodox 
ISLAM About 1 billion	God (Allah)	Mohammed 570 A.D.	Mohammed Abraham Moses	None (authority is guided by Islamic law)	Koran (also Quran)	Mecca Jerusalem	Ramadan (Sacred Month)	The crescent (New Moon) 
HINDUISM About 800 million	Brahman (the ultimate reality)	No founder About 3000 B.C.	Mahatma Gandhi	Brahmins (priests) Gurus (spiritual guides/teachers)	Vedas Brahmanas Upanishads Great Epics	Benares Ganges River	The Mela Holi Divali	Lotus blossom 
CONFUCIANISM About 6 million	Confucius Shang-Di ("high god")	Confucius 551 B.C.	Mencius	None	The 4 Books The 5 Classics	Forbidden City Temple of Heaven	Birthday of Confucius	None
BUDDHISM About 350 million	Celestial buddhas	Siddhartha Gautama 563 B.C.	Siddhartha Gautama	Monks Nuns Lamas (teachers)	Tripitaka (3 Baskets): Vinaya Tripitaka Sutta Tripitaka Abidhamma Tripitaka	Sarnath Lumbini Bodh Gaya Kushinigari	Buddha Day	8-spoked wheel 
SHINTO About 4 million	Kami (high or superior beings, or spirits)	No founder About 500 B.C.	Motoori Norinaga	Priests	Nihon Shoki (also Nihongi) Kojiki	Mount Fuji	Bon (Festival of the Dead) New Year's Day Matsuri	Torii  Mirror
TAOISM About 200 million	Jade Emperor Gods and spirits	Lao-Tzu (or Lao-Tse) 604 B.C.	Lao-Tzu Chuang-Tzu	None	Tao Te Ching	Many holy mountains	Cosmic Renewal Birthdays of Gods Festival of Souls Autumn Festival	Yin (female, dark)  Yang (male, light)
JUDAISM About 14 million	God (Yahweh)	Abraham 1300 B.C.	Moses	Rabbis	Torah Talmud	Jerusalem	Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur Passover Hanukkah	Star of David  Tablets of Law  Menorah 

A LOOK AT HINDUISM



4 STAGES IN LIFE:

1. Student
 2. Householder
 3. Retired
 4. Spiritual pilgrimage
- ("Atman" is your inner self—striving to reach Brahman.)



CREATOR="BRAHMA"
SUSTAINER="VISHNU"
DESTROYER="SHIVA"

The world is continually destroyed and recreated—Vishnu is most often worshiped (has elements of a savior).

GOALS:

To escape "Maya"
by union with Brahman by means of...

1. pleasure
2. economic activity and public welfare
3. doing what is ethical and moral
4. aspiring to high goals
5. becoming one with Brahman
6. practicing Ahimsa (nonviolence) to all living creatures.

SOURCES OF WISDOM

4 books:

- (1) VEDAS
Poems and Hymns
- (2) BRAHMANAS
Rules for Worship
- (3) GREAT EPICS
about Heroes and Gods
includes BHAGAVAD GITA
- (4) UPANISHADS
Answers to Questions on Life and Death

HOW DOES ONE BECOME ONE WITH BRAHMAN?

One way is "yoga"

—self-discipline based on self-contemplation and good physical and mental health.

Other ways

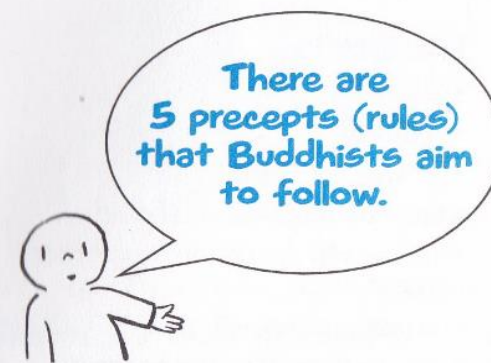
are devotion to Vishnu and selfless action.

DO HINDUS BELIEVE IN REINCARNATION?

Yes—it's called the "Pilgrimage."

The soul (Jiva) passes through various states until it reaches the highest goal of a human being.

A LOOK AT BUDDHISM



1. Kill no living thing.
2. Do not steal.
3. Do not commit adultery.
4. Do not lie.
5. Do not drink intoxicants or take drugs.

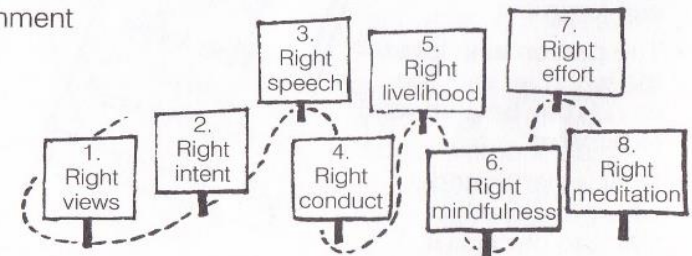
WHO WAS BUDDHA?

("Buddha"=the enlightened one)

As a young prince, Siddhartha Gautama gave up his worldly advantages to achieve spiritual peace. He is said to have meditated under a fig tree (later called the bodhi or bo tree, the tree of wisdom) for many days. Here he resisted evil temptations and became enlightened about the truth ("dharma") of human existence. This enlightenment made him a Buddha.

BUDDHA REVEALED 4 NOBLE TRUTHS

1. Life means suffering.
2. Suffering comes from desire.
3. Suffering can be cured by ending desire.
4. The way to end suffering (reach a state of enlightenment) is by following the Eightfold Path:



SOME OTHER FORMS OF BUDDHISM

(look them up for more information):

"THERAVADA"
Path of self-reliance

"MAHAYANA"
Path of mutual aid

"ZEN BUDDHISM"
Path of truth for yourself

A LOOK AT TAOISM



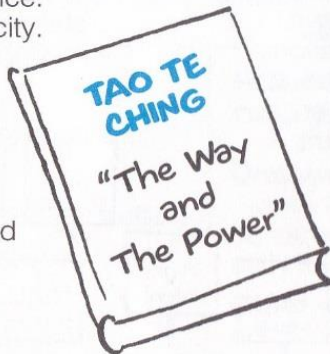
TAOISM IS:

- a source
 - a reality
 - a "way" or "path."
- It teaches that people should:
- move with the rhythm and order in nature
 - adapt and not struggle
 - find truth by listening to their inner nature
 - make their goal eternal harmony.

THE BOOK

The book of Tao was written in 3 days. Some key ideas include:

- Wisdom is trust. Goodness is acceptance. Contentment is simplicity.
- The sage puts self last, and finds self foremost.
- The person who loves the world as self, the world may be entrusted to him/her.
- Duty is performed when you are not trying to perform it.



- Civilization interferes with the ebb and flow of nature.
- There is no greater curse than the lack of contentment.
- Heaven arms with love those it would not see destroyed.
- Goodness comes when rules are forgotten.
- Virtue is never gained by seeking it.

TO THE TAOIST, THERE ARE 3 TREASURES:

① LOVE

Being loving, one can be brave.

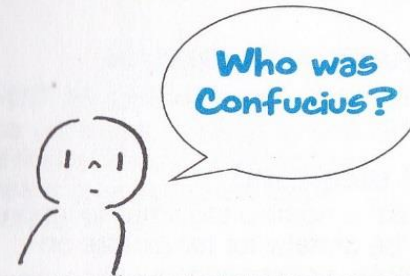
② MODERATION

Being moderate, one can be ample.

③ CONTENTMENT (HUMILITY)

Not venturing to go ahead of the world, one can be chief of all officials.

A LOOK AT CONFUCIANISM



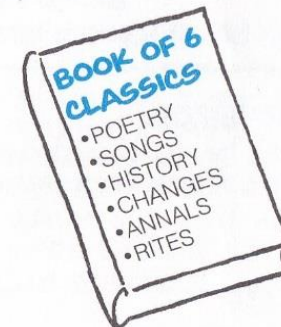
Confucius was a philosopher and teacher who revolted against Taoism. He shaped China's history for 2500 years.

BASIC 5 RELATIONSHIPS

1. Father and son
 2. Husband and wife
 3. Older brother and younger brother
 4. Older friend and younger friend
 5. Emperor and minister
- Each person must play his or her role with good intent in order to have a harmonious society.

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- How can we live in peace and harmony with ourselves?
- What is important? Ethics and the good life, not a hereafter.
- If you make a mistake, admit it and mend your ways.
- What is goodness? In private: courtesy; in public: diligence; in relationships: loyalty.



- Until we know about the living, how are we to know about the dead?
- Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.
- A good person can see a question from all sides—without bias.
- Someday we will have the Great Family or Society!

Righteousness in heart=beauty in character
 Beauty in character=harmony in home
 Harmony in home=order in nation
 Order in nation=peace in world



A LOOK AT SHINTO



PATRIOTISM

and loyalty to homeland are important.

MANY NATURE DEITIES (GODS)

called "kami" are worshiped.

THERE ARE NO IDOLS OR STATUES

—the names of gods are written on slips of paper during worship.

SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

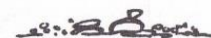
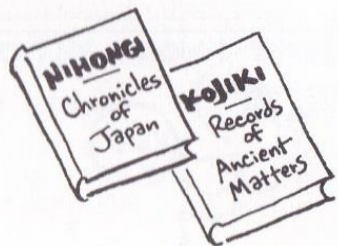
help protect the country.



THE EMPEROR

Historically, he was regarded as the descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu.

BOOKS AND SACRED OBJECTS



Imperial Jewels



Mirror of righteousness and purity



Sword of Wisdom & Justice

LAND AND NATURE

There are many shrines dedicated to nature deities.

DIVINE AND HUMAN

have no dividing line.

IN WORSHIP

there is nothing too small to ignore or be grateful for (emphasis on thanks, not shortcomings).

IN TERMS OF SIN,

people make mistakes but are not full of sin (there is a shared guilt for everyone's shortcomings).

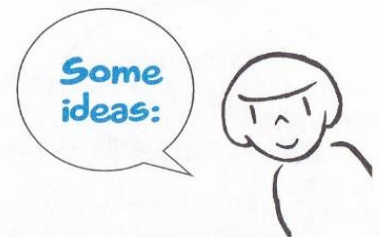
THE BIG QUESTION

is not "What is MY life?" but "What IS life?"

BEAUTY IS IN ALL THINGS

and is to be cultivated in the home.

A LOOK AT JUDAISM



GOD IS ONE

The world was created by one God. All things are designed to have meaning and purpose as part of a divine order.

ON SIN

The failure to do right is a denial of our own nature.

ON CONGREGATIONS

Each congregation is autonomous (self-governing). Justice is more important than ritual.

SABBATH

Light candles on Friday evening. Services are on Saturday.

HISTORICALLY, THERE ARE 3 BRANCHES OF JUDAISM:

1 ORTHODOX

—uses literal interpretation of sacred texts and follows strict rules, such as segregation of men and women in synagogues



2 CONSERVATIVE

—observes traditional Jewish laws, sacred texts and beliefs, but makes allowances to adapt to modern culture, such as driving on the Sabbath to get to a synagogue



3 REFORM

—modifies or abandons certain laws and practices to reflect modern times (including social, political and cultural conditions)



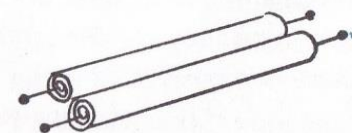
THE 2 SACRED BOOKS ARE:

1 HEBREW BIBLE

(old testament)

2 THE TALMUD

(oral teachings)



A LOOK AT CHRISTIANITY

Who was Jesus?



- Little is known about Jesus' youth. Most believe his was a virgin birth by a woman named Mary.
- Jesus taught and preached for 3 years before he was put to death.
- Jesus had 12 disciples, known as apostles (which means messengers).
- Jesus' ministry, life and mission were proclaimed in the Old Testament (Isaiah).
- After Jesus' death, Christians believe Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to his followers, telling them of the kingdom of God.

SACRED WRITINGS

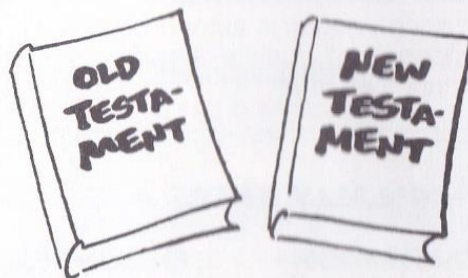
OLD TESTAMENT

Hebrew writings

and

NEW TESTAMENT

Life and teachings of Jesus



THESE WRITINGS TELL US THAT JESUS:

- healed the sick
- forgave sinners and consorted with them
- performed miracles that had hidden meanings
- taught in cities and towns
- was crucified, and was later resurrected from the dead.

THERE ARE MANY DENOMINATIONS (FAITHS)

within Christianity. Many Christians believe:

- No person dies (the body dies, but not the soul).
- All people can be "saved." (Repentance is the basis for transformation.)
- People must love each other under God (self-respect is important).
- God is 3 persons in one: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit. This creates the Holy Trinity.

A LOOK AT ISLAM

Who was Mohammed?



MOHAMMED (570-632 A.D.) WAS THE FOUNDER AND PROPHET OF ISLAM

At about age 40 he fasted and prayed in solitude, contemplating the severity of punishment and judgment of the Judaic and Christian God.

The angel Gabriel appeared to him in a vision on Mt. Hira and asked him to be the Prophet of God.

Mohammed called for social justice and equality.

He preached against the worship of idols, polytheism, immorality and cruelty. In 630 he defeated his oppressors and destroyed all idols in Mecca.

SACRED WRITINGS

THE KORAN

The Koran (also Quran) is interpreted literally by some and allegorically (as stories with moral lessons) by others.



THE 5 PILLARS OF FAITH:

1. Profession of faith (also called witnessing)—"There is no God but God, and Mohammed is the prophet of God" or "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet."
2. Prayer—This is done 5 times a day, facing Mecca.
3. Almsgiving (charity)—Muslims, adherents of Islam, are expected to give a certain percentage of their income to charity.
4. Fasting—This is done during the month of Ramadan, beginning at daybreak and ending at sunset.
5. Pilgrimage—At least once in a lifetime, Muslims travel to Mecca. This is done during the 12th month of the calendar.