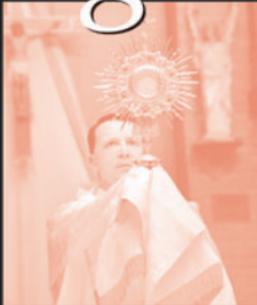
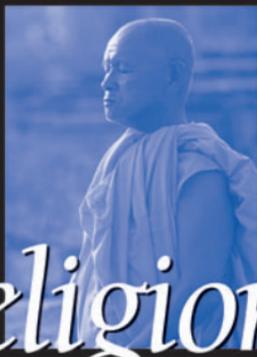


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WORLD

Religions



World Religions

Almanac

World Religions

Almanac VOLUME 1

Michael J. O'Neal and J. Sydney Jones
Neil Schlager and Jayne Weisblatt, Editors

U•X•L

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Reader's Guide

Religion influences the views and actions of many people in the world today in both political and personal ways. In some instances religious fervor compels people to perform selfless acts of compassion, while in others it spurs them to bitter warfare. Religion opens some people to all humanity but restricts others to remain loyal to small groups.

In general, religion can be described as a unified system of thought, feeling, and action that is shared by a group and that gives its members an object of devotion—someone or something sacred to believe in, such as a god or a spiritual concept. Religion also involves a code of behavior or personal moral conduct by which individuals may judge the personal and social consequences of their actions and the actions of others. Most of the time, religion also deals with what might be called the supernatural or the spiritual, about forces and a power beyond the control of humans. In this function, religion attempts to answer questions that science does not touch, such as the meaning of life and what happens after death.

Perhaps one of the most amazing things about religion is that there is no commonly held way of looking at it. Yet most of the

world's population participates in it in one way or another. Though hard to define, religion seems to be a universal experience and need. Of the nearly 6.5 billion people on Earth, only about 16 percent (about 1.1 billion) say they do not believe in a god or do not believe in a specific religion. The rest of the world's population belongs to one of more than twenty different major religions.

Features and Format

World Religions: Almanac covers the history, traditions, and worldviews of dominant and less prominent religions and their sects and offshoots. This title examines the development of religions throughout history and into modern times: their philosophies and practices, sacred texts and teachings, effects on everyday life, influences on society and culture, and more.

The two-volume set features eighteen chapters on today's prominent world religions and also explores ancient beliefs, such as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia; smaller movements like that of neo-paganism and Bahá'í; and philosophies, including those of ancient Greece and Rome, agnosticism, and atheism. In addition,

an introductory chapter, “What Is Religion?,” explores the concept of religion in more depth. Numerous black-and-white images illustrate the text, while sidebars highlight interesting people and fascinating facts connected with the world’s religions. The title includes a glossary, a timeline, research and activity ideas, sources for further reading, and a subject index.

World Religions Reference Library

World Religions: Almanac is only one component of the three-part World Religions Reference Library. The set also includes a two-volume set of biographies and one volume of primary source documents:

- *World Religions: Biographies* (two volumes) presents the biographies of fifty men and women who have played a critical role in the world’s religions throughout history. Among those profiled are Abraham, whose influence is seen in three of the modern world’s most influential religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Muhammad, considered the final and most important prophet by Muslims; and Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha. Modern figures include the Hindu teacher Swami Vivekananda and Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of the Bahá’í faith. Women who made significant impacts on religion are also featured, including Mother Maria Skobtsova, an Orthodox Christian nun who worked to save many during the Holocaust.
- *World Religions: Primary Sources* (one volume) offers eighteen excerpted writings, speeches, and sacred texts from across the religious spectrum. The selections are grouped into three thematic chapters:

Creation Stories and Foundation Myths; Characteristics of the Divine; and Religion as a Guide to Living. The first explores the creation stories of religions, such as those relayed in Islam’s Qur’an, and foundational myths, such as the one told in *Black Elk Speaks*, that provide a unifying cultural basis for many people. The second chapter, Characteristics of the Divine, explores the aspects and personalities of God or the gods as revealed through religious documents such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Swami Vivekananda’s “Paper on Hinduism.” The final chapter examines how religion provides guidelines that people can use in their everyday lives. These include selections from the Christian Bible; the Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism; and Emma Goldman’s essay “The Philosophy of Atheism.”

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Comments and Suggestions

We welcome your comments on *World Religions: Almanac* and suggestions for other topics in history to consider. Please write to Editors, *World Religions: Almanac* U•X•L, Thomson Gale, 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48331-3535; call toll-free 800-877-4253; send faxes to 248-699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.gale.com>.

Timeline of Events

- 10,000–400 BCE** The span of the Jomon period in Japan, during which Shinto first emerged.
- 3500–2000 BCE** Duration of religion in ancient Sumer.
- 3110 BCE–550 CE** Duration of religion in ancient Egypt.
- 3102 BCE** Emergence of Hinduism.
- 1700 BCE** The Babylonians devise a new creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*.
- c. 1353–34 BCE** The pharaoh Akhenaten rules Egypt and enforces the worship of a single god, Aten. All evidence of his reign is wiped out after his death.
- Tenth century BCE** The Jewish Temple of Solomon is constructed in Jerusalem.
- Seventh century BCE** Beginning of the Milesian School of philosophy in ancient Greece.
- 600 BCE** Official formalization of the Rig Veda, one of Hinduism's most sacred texts.
- 586 BCE** The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroys the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and drives the Jews into exile (the Babylonian exile).
- 563 BCE** Siddhartha Gautama, who will become the Buddha, is born in present-day Nepal.
- c. 551–479 BCE** Life span of the scholar Kongzi, who is known in the West by his Latinized name, Confucius.

- c. 540–c. 470 BCE Life span of Mahavira, considered the main founder of Jainism.
- 539 BCE Mesopotamian religion ends when Babylonia accepts Cyrus of Persia as king.
- 515 BCE The Second Jewish Temple is built in Jerusalem.
- 483 BCE Death of the Buddha.
- c. 470–399 BCE Life span of the Greek philosopher Socrates.
- c. 428–348 BCE Life span of the Greek philosopher Plato.
- 384–322 BCE Life span of the Greek philosopher Aristotle.
- c. Third century BCE Period in which the major text of Daoism, the Dao De Jing, is likely written.
- c. 273–c. 232 BCE The emperor Ashoka of Maurya, in present-day India, begins to spread Buddhism beyond the borders of India.
- c. 6 BCE Jesus of Nazareth, also known as Jesus Christ, is born.
- c. 30 CE Jesus Christ is put to death by crucifixion by Roman authorities in Jerusalem.
- 70 CE Roman troops crush the Great Revolt by occupying Jerusalem, massacring Jews, and destroying the Second Temple.
- 142 Revelations given to the holy man Zhang Daoling (also spelled Chang Tao-ling), who becomes the first of the great Celestial Masters in Daoism.
- 224–651 During the Sassanid Dynasty, Zoroastrianism spreads aggressively throughout the Persian Empire.
- 313 The Roman emperor Constantine converts to Christianity.
- 380 The emperor Theodosius I declares Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.
- 610 According to Islamic belief, the prophet Muhammad begins receiving revelations and prophecies from the archangel Jabra'il (Gabriel).
- 632 The death of Muhammad marks the beginning of a long period of Islamic civil war and separation of Islam into Sunni and Shiite sects.

- 1054** The Christian church is formally divided into two distinct branches: the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- 1095–1291** The duration of the Crusades, a series of military campaigns in which European Christians attempt to take control of the Holy Land from Muslims.
- 1391–1474** Life span of Gedun Drub, considered the first dalai lama in Tibetan history.
- 1469–1538** Life span of Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism.
- 1492** Jews are expelled from Spain.
- 1517** The German Augustinian monk Martin Luther launches the Protestant Reformation, which divides Christianity into two main denominations, or branches: Catholicism and Protestantism.
- 1817–92** Life span of Mirza Husayn ʿAli Nuri, later known as Baháʿu'lláh, who was the founder of the Bahá'í faith.
- 1844** The German philosopher Karl Marx makes his famous statement that religion is “the opium of the people.”
- 1867** Beginning of the Meiji Restoration in Japan, during which Shinto is made the official state religion.
- 1870** The British scientist Thomas Henry Huxley coins the term *agnosticism* to describe his own skepticism (doubt) regarding the existence of God.
- 1893** The paper “What Is Hinduism?” by Swami Vivekananda, presented at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, exposes many Westerners to Hinduism for the first time.
- 1933–45** Some six million European Jews are killed during the Holocaust.
- 1948** The Jewish nation of Israel is established in Palestine.
- 1972** The neo-pagan Norse religion of Asatru is officially recognized as a religion by the government of Iceland.
- 1974** A number of Wiccans gather in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where they draft a statement containing the principles of Wiccan belief.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 1978–2005** Reign of Poland's John Paul II as pope of the Roman Catholic Church, the first non-Italian pope since the sixteenth century.
- 1989** The Dalai Lama wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on behalf of his homeland, Tibet, which has been under Chinese control since 1950.
- 2005** Benedict XVI is elected the 265th pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

Words To Know

A

acupuncture: Traditional Chinese medical treatment that uses needles inserted into the body at specific locations to stimulate the body's balanced flow of energy.

adur aduran: The “fire of fires” that burns in Zoroastrian temples.

agnosticism: The view that the existence or nonexistence of God is unknown and is probably unknowable.

ahimsa: The principle of nonviolence, or not doing harm to any living creature.

Ahura Mazda: The supreme God of Zoroastrianism.

Akaranga Sutra: One of the sacred texts of Jainism, which contains the teachings of Mahavira.

Akhand Paath: Any occasion, such as a marriage or a death, when the Granth Sahib is read in its entirety.

alchemy: An ancient science that aimed to transform substances of little value into those of greater value, such as lead into gold.

Allah: The name of God in Islam, derived from the Arabic word *al-ilah*, meaning “the One True God.”

Amaterasu: The Sun-goddess.

Amesha Spentas: The “Bounteous Immortals,” aspects, or sides, of Ahura Mazda.

amrit: A solution of water and sugar, used in the ceremony when Sikhs are initiated into the faith.

- Amrit Sanskar:** The initiation ceremony for young Sikhs.
- Anand Karaj:** The Sikh wedding ceremony.
- animism:** The worship of trees, rocks, mountains, and such, which are believed to have supernatural power.
- anthropomorphism:** Attributing human shape or form to nonhuman things, such as the gods.
- apathia:** Stoic belief that happiness comes from freedom from internal turmoil.
- apeiron:** Anaximander's term for the first principle, an undefined and unlimited substance.
- archē:** The beginning or ultimate principle; the stuff of all matter, or the building block of creation.
- arihant:** An enlightened person.
- Ark of the Covenant:** A cabinet in which the Ten Commandments were kept in the First Temple of Jerusalem.
- artha:** Prosperity and success in material affairs.
- Asatru:** A neo-pagan religion based on worship of the Norse (Scandinavian) gods.
- ascetic:** A person who practices rigid self-denial, giving up all comforts and pleasures, as an act of religious devotion. Jain monks and nuns are ascetics.
- asha:** Righteousness that derives from natural law.
- Ashkenazic:** Term used to refer to Jews of France, Germany, and Eastern Europe.
- astrology:** The study of the movement of the planets and stars in relation to one another in order to predict future events.
- ataraxia:** Serenity, tranquility, or peace of mind.
- atheism:** A disbelief in the existence of God or a belief that there is no God.
- atomism:** The belief that matter is composed of simple, indivisible, physical particles that are too tiny to be observed by human beings.
- atonement:** In Christianity, the sacrifice and death of Jesus to redeem humankind from its sins.
- aum:** Often spelled Om, the sacred syllable and symbol of Hinduism; a symbol of the unknowable nature of Brahma.
- Avesta:** The chief sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism.

B

baptism: A religious ceremony in which a person is dipped in or sprinkled with water as a sign of being cleansed of sin.

bar mitzvah: The Jewish coming-of-age ceremony for boys.

bat mitzvah: The Jewish coming-of-age ceremony for girls.

belief: A conviction of the truth of a proposition either by close examination or trust.

Beltane (Beltaine): Neo-pagan holiday on April 30.

benevolence: The tendency to do good and to be kind to others.

Bhagavad Gita: A Sanskrit poem regarded as a Hindu scripture; part of the epic *Mahabharata*, which means “Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty”; examines the nature of God and how mortals can know him.

bhakti: Devotion.

blasphemy: Disrespectful comments or actions concerning a religion or its God.

bodhisattva: A person who has attained enlightenment but, rather than entering a state of nirvana, chooses to stay behind to help others reach enlightenment.

Bon: An indigenous religion of Tibet.

Brahma: The creator-god.

The Buddha: The title of Siddhartha Gautama after he attained enlightenment.

C

caliph: One of Muhammad’s successors as leader of the faith.

Candomblé: A South American religion with many similarities to Santería, often used synonymously with Santería.

canon: The official, sacred texts of a religion.

caste: Social classes in Hinduism, the dominant religion in India.

Celtic: A term referring to an ethnic group that spread throughout Europe, particularly the British Isles, and is the source of many modern neo-pagan movements.

church: From the Greek, this word refers to the community of all Christians. It is also the place where Christians go to worship.

consciousness: The condition of being aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and existence.

conservative: A movement in modern Judaism that tries to strike a balance between Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

conversion: A change in which a person adopts a new set of religious beliefs.

coven: A group of neo-pagans, such as Wiccans. Alternately referred to as circles, groves, kindreds, garths, hearths, and other terms.

covenant: In religion, a covenant refers to an agreement between God or a messenger of God and his followers.

creed: A statement of belief or basic principles.

crucifixion: The suffering and death by nailing or binding a person to a cross.

cuneiform: Sumerian writing, so-called because of its wedge-shaped marks.

D

daevas: Ancient Persian deities.

Dao: The path or way; the rhythmic balance and natural, flowing patterns of the universe.

de: Political power that is the result of a ruler's virtue and honesty.

deity: A god or goddess.

dharma: Righteousness in one's religious and personal life.

Diaspora: The scattering of the Jews throughout the world.

Digambara: Literally "sky-clad"; one of the two major sects of Jainism.

disciple: A person who accepts and assists in spreading the teachings of a leader. In the Bible, a follower of Jesus.

doctrine: A set of ideas held by a religious group.

druidism: A neo-pagan religion based in the Celtic region of the British Isles.

dynasty: A sequence of rulers from the same family.

E

Eightfold Path: The path of the Buddha's teachings that can lead to the end of suffering.

Ek Onkar: The "True God" of Sikhism.

emanation: That which inevitably flows outward from the transcendental (spiritual, beyond human experience) central principle of reality, "the One," in the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus.

empiricism: Belief that knowledge comes through the senses.

enlightenment: The state of realization and understanding of life, a feeling of unity with all things.

Epicureanism: The philosophy of Epicurus and others that states that the highest good is pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

equinox: Either of two points during the year when the Sun crosses the equator and the hours of day and night are equal. The spring, or vernal, equinox occurs generally on March 21 and the autumn equinox occurs on or about September 23.

Esbat: Wiccan celebration of the full Moon.

ethics: The study of moral values and rules or a guide to such values and rules.

etiquette: Proper behavior; good manners.

Evangelical: Describing a Protestant group that emphasizes the absolute authority of the Bible and forgiveness of sin through belief in Jesus.

excommunicate: To exclude or officially ban a person from a church or other religious community.

F

faith: Belief and trust in God, accompanied by a sense of loyalty to the traditional doctrines, or principles, of religion.

Faravahar: A figure of a bird with its wings spread that is a chief symbol of Zoroastrianism.

filial piety: The respect and devotion a child shows his or her parents.

fitrah: An inborn tendency to seek the creator.

Five Classics: The original texts used by Confucius in his practices and teachings: *Liji*, *Shijing*, *Shujing*, *Chunqui*, and *Yijing*.

Five Pillars: The core of Islamic belief referring to declaring faith, daily prayer, charitable giving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

folk beliefs: The beliefs of the common people.

Folk (*Minzoku*) Shinto: Shinto that emphasizes folk beliefs, or common beliefs, of rural agricultural laborers.

Four Affirmations: A code of conduct by which Shintoists live, including emphases on tradition and family, nature, cleanliness, and worship of the kami.

Four Books: The most prominent of Confucian sacred texts, established by Zhu Xi: the Analects, the Mencius, *Da Xue* (Great Learning), and *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean).

Four Noble Truths: The foundations of the Buddhist religion: that all life is suffering, that desire causes suffering, that suffering can end, and that ending suffering happens by following the path of the Buddha's teachings.

G

Gahambars: Seasonal festivals.

Gathas: A portion of the Zend-Avesta that contains holy songs; believed to be the words of Zarathushtra himself.

God: The supreme or ultimate being or reality; creator of the universe.

Goddess worship: Term that refers generally to any neo-pagan practice that elevates the status of goddesses over that of gods.

Golden Temple: The chief Sikh temple, located in the city of Amritsar in India; more formally, the Sri Harmandir Sahib.

gurdwara: A Sikh temple or place of worship.

guru: A religious teacher.

H

Ha-ne-go-ate-geh: The “Evil-Minded,” the evil spirit of the Iroquois nation.

Ha-wen-ne-yu: The Great Spirit of the Iroquois nation.

hadiths: The sayings of the prophet Muhammad recorded by his followers.

Haj: Pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca.

halal: Permissible activities for Muslims.

Hanukkah: The Jewish Festival of Lights commemorating the rededication of the First Temple.

haram: Prohibited activities for Muslims.

heretic: A person whose beliefs oppose his or her religion's official doctrines, or defining principles.

Ho-no-che-no-keh: The Invisible Agents, or lesser spirits, of the Iroquois.

Holocaust: The systematic slaughter of Jews by the Nazi regime in Germany before and during World War II (1939–45).

householders: Laypeople; Jains who are not monks or nuns.

I

idol: A statue or other image that is worshipped as a god.

Imbolc: Neo-pagan holiday generally held on February 2 to mark the lengthening of the days and the emergence of the world from winter.

Immaculate Conception: The principle of the Roman Catholic Church that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was conceived with a soul free from original sin.

incarnation: In Christianity, the belief that God took on bodily form through Jesus, making Jesus fully human and fully divine.

indigenous: A word that describes a people, culture, or religion that is native to a particular geographical region.

indulgence: In the Roman Catholic Church, the belief that paying money to the Church would allow a person to get into heaven or be forgiven for sins that were not yet committed.

Izanagi: The male figure in the Shinto creation myth.

Izanami: The female figure in the Shinto creation myth.

J

jinja: Shrine.

jinn: Evil spirits that tempt a person away from dedication to Allah.

jinn: Literally, “conquerors”; the great teachers of Jainism who have conquered their earthly passions.

jiva: The soul.

junzi: A gentleman or superior man.

K

Ka'aba: The shrine built by the prophet Abraham in the holy city of Mecca and the focal point of pilgrimages to the city.

kama: Gratification of the senses.

kami: The gods or divinities of Shinto; the life force or spirit associated with places, natural objects, and ancestors.

kami-dana: A “kami shelf” or altar in a private home.

kara: A steel bracelet, worn by Sikhs as a symbol of God.

karma: The result of good or bad actions in this lifetime that can affect this or later lifetimes.

kasha: The white shorts worn by Sikhs as a symbol of purity.

kesh: Uncut hair, a symbol of Sikhism.

kevalnyan: Enlightenment.

Khalsa: The militant “brotherhood” of Sikhism, founded by Guru Gobind Singh.

Khanda: The emblem of Sikhism.

kirpan: A sword or dagger worn by Sikhs as a symbol of their willingness to fight to defend their faith.

Kojiki: The chief text of Shinto, a work that combines history, myth, and folk belief.

kosher: Dietary laws, referred to in Hebrew as *kashrut*.

kungha: The wooden comb used to groom hair, a symbol of Sikhism.

kushti: The sacred cord, or belt, that Zoroastrians wear.

kusti: The “holy path” one has to follow to be a Zoroastrian.

L

laity: Body of worshippers who are not members of the clergy.

li: The rules of behavior a person must follow to reach the Confucian ideal of correct living.

Logos: Word, logic, or defining pattern of the universe, similar to the Dao in Chinese philosophy.

Lughnasadh: Neo-pagan harvest festival on August 1.

M

maat: Divine order and justice; a central concept in the religion of ancient Egypt.

Mabon: Neo-pagan celebration of the autumn equinox; the completion of the harvest season.

Magen David: The so-called Star of David, a symbol of the Jewish faith and nation.

magick: The ability to focus mental and physical energies to affect the natural world or to achieve a goal.

Mahavira: The twenty-fourth tirthankara often regarded as the founder of Jainism.

Mahavira jayanti: Mahavira's birthday, an important holy day for Jains.

mantra: A formula repeated over and over to create a trancelike state.

materialism: A belief that matter and the motion of matter constitute the universe. All phenomena, even those of mind, are the result of material interactions.

matsuri: Festival.

Mecca: A city in present-day Saudi Arabia, the holiest site of Islam, where the religion was founded.

meditation: Quiet reflection on spiritual matters.

menorah: A seven-branched candelabrum; at Hanukkah, a nine-branched candelabrum is used.

Messiah: The expected deliverer and king of the Jews, foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament; used by Christians to refer to Jesus Christ.

metaphysical: Having to do with the philosophical study of the nature of reality and existence.

metaphysics: The branch of philosophy that deals with explanations for the most general questions of being, such as what brought the world into being, and the nature of space, time, God, and the afterlife.

metempsychosis: Transmigration of souls, or the migration of the soul into a different form, animal, or object after death.

mezuzah: A small case containing Torah passages that observant Jews attach to the doorposts of their houses.

midrashim: Stories that expand on incidents in the Hebrew Bible.

Mishnah: The written text of the Talmud.

mitzvot: The laws of Judaism contained in the Torah.

moksha: Salvation; liberation from rebirth.

monastery: A place where religious people such as monks live, away from the world and following strict religious guidelines.

monotheism: Belief in one supreme being.

morality: Following the rules of right behavior and conduct.

Moshiach: The expected Messiah in Jewish belief.

muezzin: The person who issues the call to prayer.

murti: Image of a god.

Muslim: A follower of Islam, from the Arabic phrase *bianna musliman*, meaning “submitted ourselves to God.”

myth: A legendary story, often with no basis in historical fact, that frequently tells of the actions of deities and helps to explain some naturally occurring event or some supernatural occurrence.

mythology: The collected stories of a culture or religion, especially those dealing with the origins, heroes, gods, and beliefs of a group of people.

N

Naam Karam: The naming ceremony for children.

namaskar: The basic prayer of Jainism, recited each morning and at night before bedtime.

Neo-paganism: A term referring to modern religions based on ancient pagan religions.

nirvana: The end of suffering, beyond time and space; the goal of all Buddhists.

nivritti: People who choose to withdraw from the world to lead a life of renunciation and contemplation.

norito: Prayers to the kami.



Offering of Eightfold Puja: An important Jain temple ritual in which the worshipper makes eight offerings to the tirthankara.

Olódùmarè: The name of the supreme god in Santería.

Om: Often spelled Aum; the sacred syllable and symbol of Jainism (and Hinduism), used for purposes of meditation.

Oral Torah: Interpretations of the Torah and ways to apply their laws.

orders: Religious communities.

Original Sin: The sin that fell upon humankind when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; this act, in turn, led to the separation of humans from God.

orishas: Name given to the lesser gods of Santería.

orthodox: The name of one of the sects of Judaism, generally referring to traditional Jews who are conservative in their outlook.

Oshogatsu: The Shinto new year.

Ostara: Neo-pagan holiday held at the time of the spring equinox.



pagan: Pre-Christian or non-Christian; also referring to those who worship many gods.

pantheon: The class or collection of all gods and goddesses in a system of belief.

Parshva: The twenty-third tirthankara, who lived about 250 years before Mahavira.

Parsis (Parsees): Zoroastrians who live in India.

Paryushana: An eight-day festival, the most important holy observance for Jains during the year.

Pesach: The feast of Passover, commemorating the flight of the Jews from Egypt.

philosophical Daoism: A form of Daoism by which followers seek knowledge and wisdom about the unity of everything in existence and how to become closer to it.

philosophy: The study of morals and reality by logical reasoning to gain a greater understanding of the world.

polytheism: A religion worshipping many gods.

pravritti: People who choose to live in the world rather than withdraw from it.

prophecy: Prediction of future events.

prophet: A person chosen to serve as God's messenger.

pu: Uncarved or unformed; the state of simplicity to which Daoists try to return.

puja: Worship.

purusharthas: The four aims of Hinduism or "the doctrine of the four-fold end of life."

Purva: The original Jain sacred texts, now lost.

pyramid: A stone tomb constructed to house a deceased pharaoh of Egypt.



qi: The breath of life or vital energy that flows through the body and the earth.

Qur'an: The sacred scriptures of Islam; contains the revelations given to the prophet Muhammad revealed to him beginning in 610.



ra'kah: A unit of prayer.

rationalism: Belief that knowledge can come exclusively from the mind.

reform: One of the sects of Judaism, generally used to refer to the less traditional branch of the faith.

Regla de Ocha: The formal name for the Santería religion.

Rehit Maryada: The Sikh code of ethical conduct.

religious Daoism: A form of Daoism that recognizes gods, ancestor spirits, and life after death.

ren: Empathy, the ability to feel for and sympathize with others; the highest Confucian ideal.

Resurrection: The rising of Jesus Christ from the dead three days after his Crucifixion, or death on a cross.

Rig Veda: The central scripture of Hinduism, a collection of inspired hymns and songs.

Rosh Hoshanah: The Jewish “New Year.”

S

Sabbat: Holidays practiced by Wiccans throughout the year, including the summer and winter solstices, the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and four additional holidays between these four.

sacrament: A sacred rite, or ceremony.

sadhana: Ascetic person.

saint: A deceased person who has been recognized for living a virtuous and holy life.

salat: Daily prayer.

salvation: The deliverance of human beings from sin through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross.

Samhain (Samhuinn): Neo-pagan holiday celebrated on October 31.

samsara: The ongoing cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

Samyak charitra: Right conduct; one of the Three Jewels of Jain ethical conduct.

Samyak darshana: Right faith, or right perception; one of the Three Jewels of Jain ethical conduct.

Samyak jnana: Right knowledge; one of the Three Jewels of Jain ethical conduct.

Sanskrit: An ancient Indo-European language that is the language of Hinduism, as well as of much classical Indian literature.

Santería: The “way of the saints”; an African-based religion practiced primarily in Cuba and other Central and South American countries.

Santero: A practitioner of Santería.

saum: Fasting.

sect: A small religious group that has branched off from a larger established religion.

Sect (Kyoha) Shinto: Shinto as it is practiced by a number of sects, or groups, formed primarily in the nineteenth century.

secular: Worldly things, of the physical world, as opposed to religious and spiritual.

- Sedreh-pushî:** The Zoroastrian initiation rite.
- Sephardic:** Term used to refer to Jews of North Africa, the Middle East, Spain, and Portugal.
- Shahadah:** The Islamic declaration of faith. It consists of the words “*Ashhadu an la ilaha ill Allah wa ashabadu ann Muhammadar Rasulullah,*” or “I declare there is no god except God, and I declare that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”
- shaman:** In indigenous tribes, an intermediary between the gods and the tribal members; also one who controls various spiritual forces, can look into the future, and can cure the ill with magic.
- shamanism:** A term used generally to refer to indigenous religions that believe in an unseen spirit world that influences human affairs.
- shari’ah:** Islamic law.
- Shi’ite:** One of the main sects of Islam; from the phrase *Shi’at Ali*, or the party of ‘Ali.
- Shinbutsu bunri:** The separation of Shinto and Buddhism when Shinto was declared the official state religion.
- Shinbutsu shugo:** The combination of Shinto and Buddhism.
- Shinto:** Literally, “the way of the gods” or “the way of the kami.”
- Shiva:** The destroyer god, embodying the erotic and sexual.
- Shivaism:** A major sect of Hinduism, which sees Shiva (“the Destroyer”) as the central god.
- Shrine (Jinja) Shinto:** The traditional, mainstream practice of Shinto, with emphasis on the local shrine.
- skepticism:** Doubt or disbelief toward a particular proposition or object.
- Skepticism:** A philosophical system that doubted the possibility of ever discovering real truth through the senses.
- Socratic:** Having to do with the philosopher Socrates and his method of asking questions of students to develop an idea.
- solstice:** The points in the year when the day is longest (the summer solstice, generally on June 21) and the shortest (the winter solstice, generally on December 21).
- Sophists:** A group of traveling teachers in ancient Greece who doubted the possibility of knowing all the truth through the physical senses.
- State Shinto:** Shinto as it was practiced after it was declared the official state religion in the late nineteenth century until 1945.

Stoicism: The philosophical system that holds that people should pursue the knowledge of human and divine things through the use of logical systems. It also says that humans may not be able to control natural events, but that they can control the way they react to them.

stupas: Originally a mound marking the spot where the Buddha's ashes were buried. Rock pillars carved with the words of the Buddha are also sometimes called stupas.

Sufism: A trend in or way of practicing Islam; characterized by an ecstatic, trancelike mysticism.

Sunnah: The example of the prophet Muhammad, containing the *hadiths*, or sayings; provides guidance to everyday questions of faith and morality.

Sunni: The main sect of Islam.

supernatural: That which is beyond the observable world, including things relating to God or spirits.

supreme being: The central God responsible for creating the cosmos.

sura: Any chapter in the Qur'an.

Susano-o: The Shinto god of violence and the ruler of the oceans.

Svetambara: Literally, "white-clad"; one of the two main sects of Jainism.

swastika: A pictorial character that symbolizes the eternal nature of Brahma because it points in all directions; also used as the official emblem of the Nazi Party during World War II (1939–45).

T

takhts: Seats of spiritual authority in Sikhism. The "Five Takhts" are gurdwaras located in India.

Talmud: Traditions that explain and interpret the Torah.

Tanakh: The chief Jewish scripture; the Hebrew Bible.

tawba: Repentance.

theism: Belief in the existence of gods or God.

theocracy: A form of government in which God or some supreme deity is the ruler. God's laws are then interpreted by a divine king or by a priest class.

theology: The study of God and of religions truths.

Three Jewels: The Jain code of ethical conduct, consisting of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct.

Tian: Heaven, or the principle of ordering the universe.

Tipitaka: The Buddhist sacred texts accepted by all branches of Buddhism.

tirthankara: Literally, “makers of the ford,”; those souls who have attained enlightenment and have been freed from the cycle of death and rebirth; the twenty-four leaders of Jainism.

Torah: The first five books of the Tanakh: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

tori: The gate that marks the entrance to a shrine. Its shape is regarded as a symbol of Shinto.

totem: Some sort of object or, perhaps, animal that assumes a spiritual symbolism for a clan or tribe.

transcendent: Going beyond the ordinary, beyond the universe and time, into spiritual dimensions.

Trinity: In Christianity, the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three divine persons in one God.

Tsukiyomi: The Shinto moon-god and the ruler of night.

U

ujiko: A “named child” whose name is entered at birth at the local Shinto shrine.

Upanishads: The core of Hindu philosophy; collections of texts, originally part of the Vedas, that explain such core Hindu beliefs as karma, reincarnation, nirvana, the soul, and Brahman.

urvan: The soul.

V

Vaishnavism: A major sect of Hinduism, which sees Vishnu (“the Preserver”) as the central god.

Vedas: The chief sacred scriptures of Hinduism; knowledge, wisdom, or vision.

Virgin Birth: The Christian belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and born of a virgin mother.

Vishnu: Also called Krishna; the preserver-god.

Vodou: An African-based religion practiced primarily in Haiti and in other Central and South American countries.

Vodouisant: An uninitiated practitioner of Vodou.

W

Wakan: The incomprehensibility of life and death for the Sioux.

Wakan tanka: The world's motivating force for the Sioux.

wen: The arts of music, poetry, and painting.

Wicca: The name of a neo-pagan religion that generally worships the God and the Goddess.

wu wei: Nonaction, or deliberate and thoughtful action that follows the Dao.

Y

Yahweh: One of the names for God in the Tanakh.

yazata: Guardian angel.

Yin and yang: Literally, “shady” and “sunny”; terms referring to how the universe is composed of opposing but complementary forces.

Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement.

Z

zakat: Annual charitable giving.

ziggurat: A stepped foundation or structure that held a shrine or temple in the Mesopotamian religion.

Zionism: A movement that began in the nineteenth century to find a permanent home for Jews.

Research and Activity Ideas

The following research and activity ideas are intended to offer suggestions for complementing social studies and history curricula; to trigger additional ideas for enhancing learning; and to provide cross-disciplinary projects for library and classroom use.

Build a Model: Build a scale model of the city of Jerusalem that shows some of the major sites in three of the world's biggest religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The map should include the Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall), important to Jews; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, important to Christians; and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, important to Muslims. Be prepared to explain to your classmates the importance of each site and the date on which it was constructed.

Maps: India is the birthplace of several major religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jainism. Also, Islam and Christianity, while they did not originate in India, have substantial followings in the country today. Draw a map of India that traces the origins of the four religions native to India and shows how they developed. In addition, note the number of followers of each religion in India today.

Depictions in Art: Most of the major figures in religious history have been featured in paintings and sculptures. Write a report in which you discuss how artists have treated key people throughout history. For instance, in Buddhism, artists have followed very specific rules for the depiction of the Buddha. Explain what these rules are and print out examples from the Internet or make copies from a book. In Islam, some Muslims believe that depictions of the prophet Muhammad are forbidden, while others believe that positive depictions are allowed. Explain the two sides of this argument and show an example of a visual depiction of Muhammad.

Politics: Religion has mixed with politics in many different ways throughout history. There have been governments in which religious leaders had supreme authority, such as the Islamic leaders in Afghanistan in the 1990s. And there have been others in which religion was discouraged or even forbidden, such as in North Korea. In other countries, religion has changed over time. In Japan, for instance, Shintoism was once the state religion. However, since World War II it has lost its religious status but is still practiced in daily rituals and holidays. Choose a country and research how religion in that country has influenced politics during the country's history. Write a report that explains how the relationship between politics and religion in the country has changed over time.

Book Report: Nearly every major religion has key texts associated with it. Christianity has the Bible, Islam has the Qur'an, Hinduism has the Vedas, and so on. Go to the library and check out a copy of a sacred text from a religion other than your own. Write a report that you can share with your classmates. What did you learn about the religion from the sacred text? Was the text difficult to read or understand?

Religions on the World Wide Web: The Internet contains many sites devoted to various religions. Conduct Internet research on a religion other than your own, and write a student guide to resources for that religion that can be found on the Web. For example, you might focus on a single religion, such as Daoism (also spelled Taoism). Or you might try to find sites that feature aspects of many different religions. For instance, you might conduct a search on religious literature. Write a Web guide for your classmates that catalogs the literature sites that you find.

Historical Religions: Some religions existed only in the past and are no longer followed. For instance, the religions of ancient Greece and Rome are still studied today for their historical and cultural interest. However, those religions have no followers today. In the same way, the religion of the ancient Egyptians is no longer alive. Egyptians today instead follow Islam or Christianity, or they are atheist or agnostic. Choose an ancient religion and write a report in which you explain when the religion died and what replaced it.

War and Peace: Followers of different religions have differing attitudes toward warfare. For instance, Islam has the concept of *jihad*, which is sometimes translated in English as "holy war." Throughout history, some Muslims have used this concept to attack other Muslims or

non-Muslims in the name of Islam. Christians have likewise sometimes used violent means to further their religion; during the Crusades, for example, Christians conducted military campaigns against Muslims in an attempt to take control of the so-called Holy Land, the region of Palestine and modern-day Israel. And Sikhs are required to carry a ceremonial sword at all times, as a reminder to fight against injustice and oppression. Jainism, on the other hand, forbids its followers to harm another living creature, even a bug. Write a report in which you compare and contrast the views on war and peace in two different religions.

Biographies: Studying the lives of important religious figures can be an excellent way of learning about different religions. Choose two religious figures, one from the past and one from the present. Write a report in which you discuss their lives. How are their religious beliefs seen in their actions? Include a photo or drawing of each figure. Figures from the past might include Zarathushtra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, or the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Modern figures might include Black Elk, the Native American who wrote about his life as a member of the Lakota Sioux tribe, or Malidoma Somé, who has written about his African religious heritage.

What Is Religion?

One of the most interesting aspects of religion is that nobody agrees about its meaning. In fact, people cannot even agree on the origin of the word *religion*. There is agreement that it comes from the Latin word *religio*, but there is some confusion about the origin of that word. Some say it comes from the Latin verb *relegare*, which means to “read again” or “go over again,” as in the repetition of scripture or holy writing. Others say the root is *religare*, which can mean “to reconnect,” but can also mean “to bind or fasten.” In this last interpretation, religion serves the state and society by binding its believers to social rules and norms.

Definitions of religion vary. Some are extremely broad, such as that of the American religious scholar Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who called religion anything that deals with “ultimate concern.” Some definitions are very narrow, such as those that claim religion is only a belief in God, or Allah, or the Buddha, or some other divine or spiritual being. Definitions can be so broad as to include even such “nonreligious” belief systems as communism (a political theory that people should live and govern communally, or as a group) and atheism (the belief that there is no God) or so narrow that they confine themselves to only one organized form of religion and leave out all other forms.

Even though people might disagree about what religion is, they show some agreement on what religion does and how it does it. In general, religion can be described as a unified system of thoughts, feelings, and actions that is shared by a group and that gives its members an object (or objects) of devotion, someone or something sacred to believe in, such as a god or a spiritual concept. Religion also involves a code of behavior or personal moral conduct by which individuals may judge the personal and social consequences of their actions and the actions of others. Most of the time, religion also deals with what might be called the supernatural or the spiritual, about forces and powers beyond the

WORDS TO KNOW

deity: A god or goddess.

monotheism: A religion having one God.

myth: A legendary story, often with no basis in historical fact, that frequently tells of the actions of deities and helps to explain some naturally occurring event or some supernatural occurrence.

pagan: Pre-Christian or non-Christian; also referring to those who worship many gods.

pantheon: The class or collection of all gods and goddesses in a system of belief.

polytheism: A religion worshipping many gods.

shaman: In indigenous tribes, an intermediary between the gods and the tribal members; also one who controls various spiritual forces, can look into the future, and can cure the ill with magic.

supreme being: The central God responsible for creating the cosmos.

theology: The study of God and of religious truths.

totem: Some sort of object or animal that assumes a spiritual symbolism for a clan or tribe.

control of humans. In this latter area, religion attempts to answer questions that science does not address, such as the meaning of life and what happens after death.

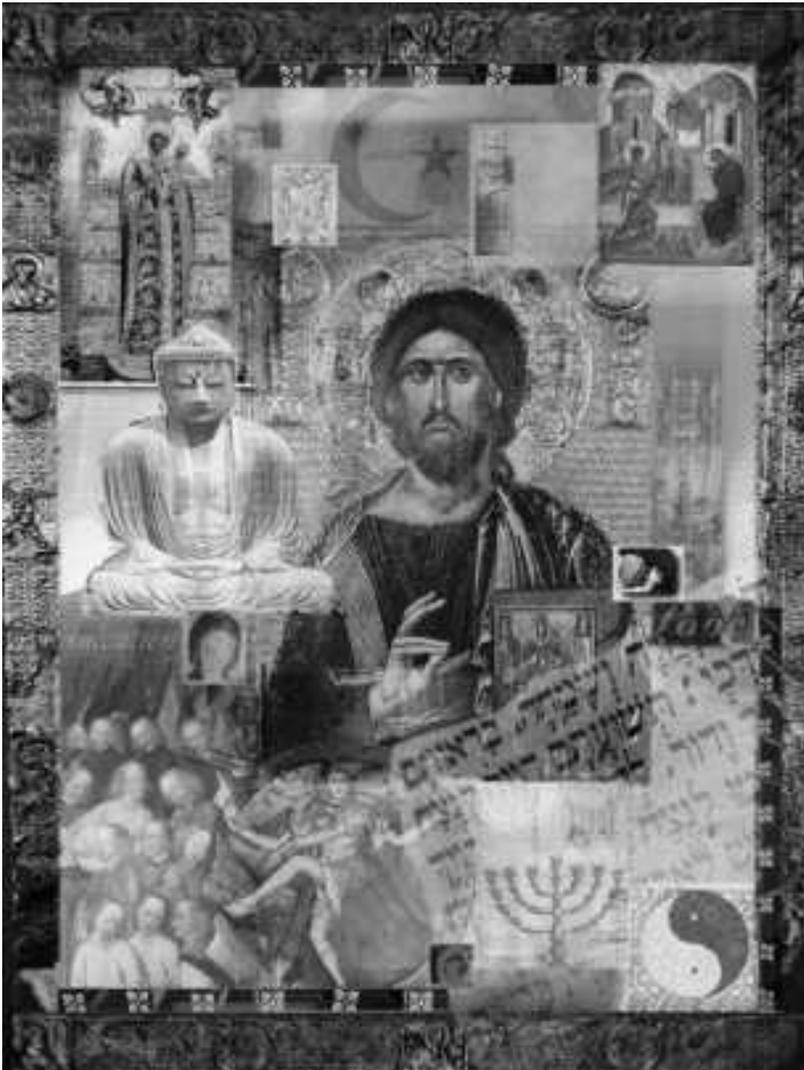
In addition, religion deals in one form or another with salvation. This can include saving the souls of humans either in a literal fashion, with a heaven after death as in Christianity, or in a more symbolic sense, as in reaching an end to suffering such as *nirvana*, as in some Eastern religions, including Buddhism. Furthermore, religion usually does its work through some form of organization and worship, as well as through sacred rites or rituals, sacred books, a clergy or priesthood that administers the religion, and places, symbols, and days that are sacred to the believers.

Even though there is no commonly held way of looking at religion, most of the world's population participates in a form in one way or another. Though hard to define, religion seems to be a universal experience and need. Of the nearly 6.5 billion people on Earth, only about 16 percent (about 1.1 billion) say they do not believe in a god or do not believe in a specific religion. The rest of the world's population, some 5.4 billion people, belongs to one of more than twenty different major religions. The world's major religions range in size from Christianity, with 2.1 billion members, to Rastafarianism and Scientology, with about 1.5 million members each.

What Is Religion?

Religion addresses spiritual matters and often provides guidelines for living that people can follow in their daily lives. About 5.1 billion people, or most of the world's population, identify with a religion.

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Origins of religion

There are essentially two different theories on the origins of religion. One is called the faith-based theory. It assumes that religions are the result of divine messages from one or more gods, or from prophets (messengers) of such a supreme being or universal consciousness or awareness. Believers accept that their religion began as a direct or indirect revelation from a deity, or god, or the cosmos. Orthodox Christianity, the set of beliefs and rituals followed by most Christians, says that Jesus Christ

What Is Religion?

(c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE) was both the son of God and God himself. Jesus, a man, had the authority of God within him and gave voice to God through his words. Christianity, like other organized religions, has at its center rules and doctrines believed to be supernaturally inspired. This means that these rules and doctrines are based on beliefs about what is beyond the observable world. Some deal strictly with spiritual matters, but often provide rules and guidelines for behavior meant to be followed here on Earth, such as the Ten Commandments. The Commandments provide ten rules that followers of both the Jewish and Christian faiths are told to follow.

A role similar to that of Jesus is taken by Muhammad (c. 570–632) in Islam. Muhammad is considered the true prophet and messenger of God to whom the Angel Jabraʿil (Gabriel) communicated God's will. Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) was the messenger for the Bahá'í faith, as was Moses (c. thirteenth century BCE) for Judaism. Even in natural religions, which grow out of human questions about the universe and the way it works rather than divine messages, the truths that are found and developed are considered universal and eternally present. These include philosophy-like religions such as Buddhism, developed by the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama [563–483 BCE]). In the faith-based theory, humanity discovers a spirituality that already exists.

In the second theory on the origins of religion, anthropologists (scientists who study human societies and human origins) take a different view. They suggest that humankind created spirituality in response to either a biological or a cultural need. Those who support the idea of a biological origin for religion believe that religion emerged from the human brain's ability to think about the process of existence. In other words, it was the result of humankind's becoming self-aware, being able to see far enough into the future to realize that they would eventually die. Religion, in this view, is a reaction to death and a search for a way to avoid it, or, failing that, a chance to go on to a better place. Anthropologists who support a cultural origin for religion note that all religions are associated with either a code of behavior or a set of rituals or both. Ritual is a coded form of behavior that has special meaning for members of the culture in which it originates.

Whether or not these theories about the origins of religion are true, evidence suggests that the practice of religion is very ancient. Prehistoric archaeologists, anthropologists who focus their studies on the remains and culture of prehistoric humans and their ancestors, have uncovered evidence

of burial rituals dating to about 13,000 BCE. In France and Germany, paleontologists have found burials by Neanderthals, a subspecies of modern humans who no longer exist. Paleontologists study life from past geological periods through fossil remains. These Neanderthals carefully laid their dead in prepared graves, along with tools and weapons. The care with which the Neanderthals prepared their dead suggests that they believed in some form of an afterlife, a step that implies some kind of religion. A famous painting known as “the sorcerer,” found on the wall of a cave called Trois Frères in France and dating about 18,000 years ago, shows a figure of a bearded being that is half man, half animal. Most anthropologists believe that this figure is a tribal shaman (an intermediary between the gods and tribal members), but he may also represent an early deity.

Anthropologists believe that early religion may have developed in part out of human beings’ attempts to control uncontrollable parts of their environment, such as weather, pregnancy and birth, and success in hunting. Scientists recognize two different ways that humans try to do this: manipulation, through magic, and supplication, through religion. Magic tries to make the environment directly subject to human will through rituals. An example might be drawing pictures of large numbers of animals on cave walls in hopes of assuring success in hunting. Hundreds of such paintings have been found all around the world. Religion, on the other hand, tries to control the environment by appealing to a higher power, gods and goddesses. “The sorcerer,” for instance, may represent a god who ruled the hunt, because he is shown with deer and bison.

Special deities began to develop in three particular classes: from nature, from ancestors, and as guards or protectors. The most common deities represented natural forces, such as the sun, moon, seasons, rivers, and fertility. Any force that could either benefit or harm humans was given spirit form so that humankind could pray to it and ask for special favors. The second form of deity to develop

Distinguishing Time

The abbreviations BC and AD are Christian in origin and refer to a calendar based on the life of Jesus Christ. When a date is given as BC, it means the year occurred “before Christ.” When the date is given as AD, it means an event happened “in the year of Our Lord” (*anno domini*, in Latin), again referring to Christ. These dates did not come into common use until centuries after the life of Jesus, so they do not correspond exactly to the dates historians now assign to his birth and death.

In the twenty-first century, dates are most often given as BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (of the Common Era). This change takes the overt reference to Jesus Christ out of the calendar, without requiring a new calendar to date historical events.

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Many people show respect, or veneration, to their relatives through ancestor shrines and other measures. Praying to ancestor spirits for help or protection reassures many that there is something more beyond the physical life.

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was based on the spirit of the ancestor, either an actual human ancestor, as with the Chinese, or an animal totem or object that unified a clan. A totem is an object, or perhaps an animal, that assumes a spiritual symbolism for a clan or tribe. Even on a small scale, ancestor worship was a logical extension of the summoning of deities and spirits to help living humans control their environment. This belief not only reassured the living, but also gave them hope that someone they knew was waiting for them after death. The third type of deity was one that could provide some specific service or protection, such as the goddess of the home or the god of war.

Over time one god in this group of competing deities usually assumed more power than the rest. Sometimes this may have been because competing gods represented different cities or communities. When a city conquered one of its neighbors, its god was believed to have conquered the defeated city's god. Something like

this may have happened in ancient Egypt, where several different gods and goddesses occasionally had similar or complementary responsibilities. In some cases, such beliefs led to the concept of a supreme god or deity responsible for all creation. The hierarchy of the gods became organized and so, too, did religion itself. Shamans began to form a distinct class in the clan and tribe. These men and women became the first clergy, or priesthood, and were believed to have magical powers and to have the ability to cure illness, which was thought to be caused by spirits, or supernatural beings. This class of shamans began to organize the belief system and to create certain traditions and rituals, such as the sacrificing of animals to different gods.

Early religious practices It appears from archaeological evidence that one of the earliest organized religions may have been the worship of the Mother Goddess. Archeological evidence of Mother Goddess worship exists in several different ancient cultures, including Çatalhöyük in modern Turkey (c. 6,000 BCE), Carchemish in ancient Iraq (c. 2,000 BCE,

and Knossos in ancient Crete (c. 1500 BCE). One early example that may indicate an early fertility goddess is the 25,000-year-old Venus of Willendorf, a small limestone statue discovered in Austria in 1908. In these cultures it is believed that the Mother Goddess was worshipped for her role in promoting the fertility of both the land and the people. Over time, the Mother Goddess was largely displaced by patriarchal, or male-dominated, pantheons, perhaps as a result of a better understanding of man's part in reproduction.

The ancient Minoan civilization has left a graphic and very beautiful record of its female goddess in wall paintings in archaeological ruins found on the island of Crete. The Mother Goddess was not only important in prehistoric Europe, but has been found in the traditions of ancient Canaan, Sumeria, Egypt and other African countries, India, native North America, western Europe, and Australia. These fertility-worshipping religions slowly gave way to more male-oriented belief systems. In Europe, invasions from the east in the fourth and third millennia BCE by warrior tribes from Central Asia introduced religions based on patriarchal beliefs.

With the development and spread of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the earlier pagan religions and their goddess worship were replaced with religions dominated by males. Nevertheless, at the time of Jesus's birth, the worship of goddesses such as Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite, and Cybele (also known as the Great Mother) was widespread throughout Italy, Greece, and the Middle East. Some historians of religion believe that the great admiration and respect held for Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, especially in the Roman Catholic faith, may be a holdover of this earlier form of goddess worship.

By the time the first civilizations sprang up in what is now Iraq, around 3,000 BCE, religion had become a very involved process. Ancient Sumerians, people who lived in what is now the south of Iraq about 5,000 years ago, had a complex pantheon, with many gods and goddesses. Stories of the adventures of these gods and goddesses, and the relations of human beings with them, had already been collected into epics. The most famous of these epics is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the story of a human hero's search for immortality and the way in which the gods and goddesses foil his quest. Although the story survives only as fragments, there is enough of it to show how these ancient people viewed their religion, the universe they lived in, and their place in that universe.



The Venus of Willendorf statue was discovered in 1908, but was created between c. 28,000–25,000 BCE, most likely as a representation of an early fertility goddess.

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Modern religions

Over the course of thousands of years, tribal totems, ancestor worship, and belief in guardian and protective gods led to increasingly complex belief systems. Myths, or stories about the creation of the world and tales of individual gods and goddesses, became a fundamental part of religion, as did certain rituals and rules of behavior, or things to do and things to avoid doing. The earliest historical religions, ones for which a written record exists, arose along the Nile River in Egypt and in the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia. An ancient form of Hinduism also emerged about the same time in what is now known as India. Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions were polytheistic, meaning they recognized more than one god. (Hinduism has many deities as well, but they are all understood as different aspects of one supreme being.) Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions influenced Judaism, which was one of the first monotheistic (having

one God) religions. Judaism stretches back as far as 2000 BCE.

In Asia, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism rose to prominence beginning in about the sixth century BCE. All three are philosophies that do not worship a god. They are pantheistic, meaning they see all the universe or enlightenment as godlike. In the West, Greek and Roman religions, with enormous numbers of gods and goddesses, were dominant until Christianity replaced them in about the fourth century CE. Islam, closely related to both Christianity and Judaism, is one of the most recent major organized religions. It began in the seventh century CE. It has spread rapidly and widely from its Arabian base to include 1.3 billion believers around the globe, making it the world's second-largest religion in the early twenty-first century.

Some scholars list ten to fifteen major religions. These include the five largest religions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, as well as smaller but well-established organized religions such as Bahá'í, Confucianism, Daoism, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. Sometimes the indigenous (native) religions of the

Americas, Africa, and Oceania are added to these, as well as more recent forms, such as neo-paganism, which worships ancient Norse, Celtic, Egyptian, and other pagan (pre-Christian) gods.

God has many names As different religions developed over time and geographic regions, they all established one or more gods that the faithful could call upon and worship. The names of these gods differed across religions, although many shared similar characteristics. This is true in the monotheistic faiths that consider Abraham as a founder of their religion. These are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Jewish name for God is Yahweh, or YHWH. Another common variation on the name is Jehovah. Christianity refers to God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This refers to the Christian Trinity, in which God is believed to exist as Himself, within Jesus Christ, the son of God, and as a purely physical representation in the Holy Spirit. Islam refers to God as Allah. Muslims, the followers of Islam, have ninety-nine different variations of God's name. The religion of Bahá'í grew out of Islam and came to call Baha (glory or splendor) its God. Zoroastrianism calls upon Ahura Mazda ("Lord Wisdom") as its God.

Hinduism recognizes one supreme being, Brahma, but Brahma can manifest, or take form, in many different shapes. This includes taking shape as other gods or goddesses. Hinduism is not, however, considered a polytheistic religion (believing in more than one god) because all the Hindu deities are seen as forms of Brahma. Sikhism, which was founded in the same region as Hinduism, also has many different names for God. The main Sikh name for God is *Sat Nam*, or "true name." In contrast, Jainism does not worship one god. Jains believe that those who are truly faithful can become individual gods when they end the cycle of death and rebirth by reaching perfection.

Other religions, including Shinto, Mahayana Buddhism, and religious Daoism, have even more names for the divine. Shinto *kami*, or nature spirits, may have individual names or be simply referred to as kami. Mahayana Buddhists recognize enlightened beings, such as the Buddha, and *bodhisattvas*, those who have become enlightened but remained outside their reward to help others, as godlike. Similarly, religious Daoism has many gods, including the popular Eight Immortals, who take on a role like that of the Buddhist bodhisattvas and help people find perfection in the Dao. Most major world religions have a central figure or concept that they turn to when seeking to approach the divine and the all-powerful.

Religion or Cult?

In the modern world there is much discussion of the danger of cults. People think of doomsday cults that keep members half-imprisoned and use mental pressure to ensure conformity. However, some say that one person's religion is simply another person's cult and that all the great world religions started out as cults.

There are ways of telling the difference between an established religion and a cult. Cults enforce obedience and discourage independent thought. True religions, in contrast, leave room for individual interpretations. Cults also attempt to cut believers off from their former life, including family and friends not involved in the cult, while religions generally embrace families as the cornerstone of society. At times, cults may also use physical threats to deal with their critics, while religions usually attempt to deal with such critics in a respectful manner. Size and age also have something to do with cult status. Usually cults are newly formed and small.

Despite the modern negative sense that the word *cult* has, its historical use was positive, or at least neutral. On the positive side, cult means a group that pays particular homage or worship to one thing or person. For example, the cult of Mary honors the mother of Jesus. A more neutral meaning is a small, recently created, religious organization that is often headed by a single charismatic (strong and appealing) leader. A cult may also be a spiritually inventive group, one that might challenge other larger and more dominating ones. A cult in this sense may simply be a new religious movement on its way to becoming a true religion. That was the situation with Christianity at its beginning as a breakaway sect of Judaism. The negative meaning of cult, involved with brainwashing its followers and abusing members, comes only from the second half of the twentieth century. So negative has the term become that the news organization Associated Press decided in 1998 to stop using *cult* to talk about a small religious group that is an offshoot of a larger one. Instead, they use the word *sect*.

Common characteristics of religions

Religions all share certain common traits. These include, but are not limited to: (1) the tradition and maintenance of the belief system; (2) the use of myth and symbol; (3) a concept of salvation; (4) sacred places and objects; (5) sacred actions or rituals; (6) sacred writings; (7) the sacred community and place of worship; (8) the sacred experience; (9) codes of ethical behavior; (10) a priesthood or clergy to lead the believers; (11) usually a god, goddess, or group of deities to which believers pray and worship; and (12) often a leader or founder who gains almost godlike status.

The similarity of such characteristics in most religions can be seen by comparing two religions, Christianity and Buddhism. Both use myth and symbol to describe the miraculous origins of their founders. One of

Christianity's favorite stories centers on the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus to a young virgin. Likewise, the Buddha is said to have been conceived in a dream his mother had involving an elephant carrying a lotus. Following his baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the desert resisting temptation from demons. The Buddha also struggled with demons and temptation before finally achieving enlightenment.

The Christian concept of salvation is rooted in the Redemption, or the forgiving of sins that the sacrificial death of Christ brought about, and in the form of an afterlife in heaven. In Buddhism, such salvation is the attainment of nirvana, a state free of wrong desires. Sacred places, objects, and rituals are basic to both religions. Pilgrimages to Rome or to Jerusalem are common for Christians, as are such trips to the Buddha's birthplace in Lumbini, Nepal, or to other sites in India for devout Buddhists. Sacred objects include the bread and wine of the Christian communion and the prayer wheel, a form of meditation for Buddhists, especially in Tibetan Buddhism.

Christianity and Buddhism also share the concepts of a body of sacred scripture, rituals, and forms of meditation that separate believers from nonbelievers. The primary ritual for Christians is Communion, the symbolic meal that reenacts Jesus's last supper on Earth, while for Buddhists meditation is a major form of prayer. Sacred writings include the Bible for Christians and the Tipitaka for Buddhists. For both religions, a distinct community of believers is basic. In Christianity this community is called the church, the body of the faithful. In Buddhism the *sangha* is the community of like-minded individuals who are also pursuing truth and spiritual rebirth. Christians worship in churches, Buddhists in temples. For Christians the sacred experience is the acceptance of Jesus as Lord, the son of God, at the same time both human and divine. For Buddhists, it is the desire to begin the journey and the ultimate end of the journey, enlightenment.

Both religions also share the concepts of moral codes that govern human behavior, an organized priesthood, roots in historic personalities, and reverence of divine or semi-divine founders. Christianity inherited the Ten Commandments, rules that guide human behavior, from Judaism, and added to them the stories and teachings of Jesus. Buddhism has the Five Precepts and the Eightfold Path for moral living. Priests, ministers, and other clergy lead the faithful in Christianity, while monks and nuns do much the same in Buddhism. Christians worship God the Father. Buddhism, though it has no supreme being, has

many deities in the Mahayana branch and also reveres the state of enlightenment, or Buddhahood, as godlike and at one with the universe. Jesus of Nazareth was the founder of Christianity, while Siddhartha Gautama, who was known by the title of the Buddha or Enlightened One, was the founder of Buddhism. Christians acknowledge Jesus as the divine Son of God, and the Buddha, though he firmly denied being divine during his lifetime, has become godlike to many of his followers.

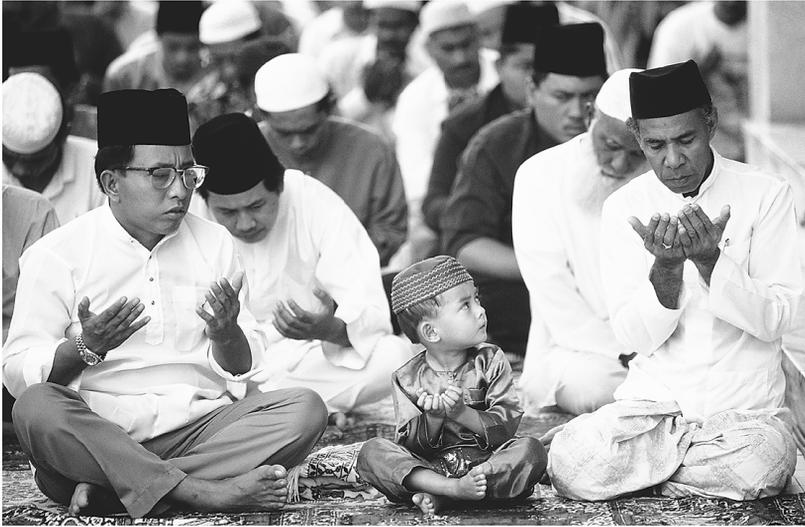
Such a brief comparison can be made for most major religions. Similar characteristics run through them all and separate them from philosophical or purely ethical systems.

The need for religion

One major theory about the human need for religion is that it grew both out of human curiosity about the big questions of life and death and out of the fear of uncontrollable forces. Eventually, religion transformed this human curiosity and fear into hope. Such hope involved several aspects: a desire for immortality or life after death, for a kind creator who would watch out for humanity, and for an ultimate meaning to life.

There are several other theories as to why religion is such a universal concern. Humans are social animals, and religion in practice brings people together. In fact, for many modern people who profess a religion, the social element may be even stronger than the spiritual element. Many attend religious services for the sense of community they might receive from this experience. They take strength in sharing a commonly held belief system with others and also enjoy the weekly, sometimes daily, routine that religious services provide. For many believers, in fact, the simple act of attendance at church or temple and participation in ritual *is* religion, rather than its spiritual element.

There are also scientific approaches. Psychologists, scientists who study the mind, argue that religion answers emotional and psychological needs in humans, such as the fear of death, or a need for a higher spiritual experience than is provided in the everyday world. Religion can thus give meaning and direction to a person's life. Neuroscientists, those who study the brain and the nervous system, think that there is actually a part of the brain that has circuitry for an intense religious experience. In biology, the meme theory says that culture can be passed from generation to generation in the same way that genetic material, such as a gene for red



A young boy looks to his elders as he learns to pray in a mosque. Some scientists use the meme theory to explain religion as a complex of inherited traits handed down from one generation to another. © MICHAEL S. YAMASHITA/CORBIS-BETTMANN.

hair, is transmitted. Some scientists say that religion is actually a complex of memes, or inherited cultural traits, that is handed down from one generation to the next.

Religion, whatever its origins or its reasons for being, is a universal fact of life. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the rise of scientific and political theories (such as communism) that threatened the role of religion in daily life. However, religion has endured in all its various shapes. In the twenty-first century, religion is playing a more important role in world affairs than ever before.

Religion or myth

Myth is often at the service of early religion. According to the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, *myth* is “a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation.” Myths may or may not be factual, but they are always important to religion.

Myths often deal with gods and goddesses and attempt to explain a natural phenomenon or event, or even a way of looking at the world. Primitive cultures all over the world, for example, have some form of creation myth, such as how the world was created, or who put the sun and stars in place. Such stories can be very important for a society, because they give people a sense of how the universe works and what their place is in it.

What Is Religion?

Myth is not the same as religion, although it can be an important part of it. Some Christians believe the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a myth: a story that aims to show how humans can be freed of their sins and brought into a heavenly afterlife. They believe that the Resurrection was not meant to be taken literally; instead, they see it as a symbol for finding new life or a new way of relating to the world when one believes in Jesus's teachings. For other Christians, however, such Biblical stories are literal truth. They believe that Jesus died on the Cross and three days later he rose from the dead and spoke to his followers again before going to heaven. Both interpretations are possible, depending on how one approaches the reading of holy texts. One person's myth can become another's historical fact.

Religion and science

Science and religion are two ways of examining the world. The scientific method limits its examination to questions dealing with objective interaction with the world. It uses experiments and the process of trial and error to arrive at conclusions about the world. It tries not to make assumptions without a body of facts and evidence to support the assumptions. Science, in its many forms, can deal with many different types of questions, ranging from what makes people behave the way they do to what a distant star is made of.

Science, however, does not deal directly with questions of morality, such as how one should lead a good life or the nature of good and evil. Science can tell the reason for death, but not what happens after death. Religion, on the other hand, deals with what it calls absolute and eternal truth, and does so by generalization and by a leap of faith. This leap of faith, a belief in the unprovable, is perhaps the biggest distinction between science and religion.

Modern science has its roots in the Christian traditions of western Europe. For hundreds of years many of the truths of religions such as Christianity were largely accepted without question. By the mid-eighteenth century in Europe and America, however, critics had begun to question many of the biblical truths that were being interpreted, even by the faithful, as myths and fictions that were important on a symbolic or poetic level, rather than as historical fact. For example, early scientists and religious critics began questioning stories such as the Biblical account of the creation of the world. In 1650 an Irish bishop named James Ussher claimed that, based on the account in Genesis,

Earth was created on October 23, 4004 BCE. By the nineteenth century, geology (the study of rocks and natural structures) had developed enough to show that Earth was much older than the biblical creation story suggested. In 1859 naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882) published his influential work *On the Origin of Species*, which suggested that random acts, which he called natural selection, and not divine planning produced the many species on Earth. Darwin's second work, *The Descent of Man* (1871) took this idea a step further, applying it specifically to humankind. This was seen as an assault on the Bible's teachings that God created man in His image. So furious were the debates raised by these books that, by the end of the nineteenth century the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) could declare, "God is dead."

Nietzsche's declaration was premature; he was also speaking primarily of the West, Europe and the United States. In the twenty-first century, a large debate between science and religion, at least in the United States, continues to rage over evolution. Evolution is taught in schools, but many Christians believe that their belief should also be taught to students in science classes alongside evolution. Some Christians now argue for an intelligent design theory, with God as the designer and evolution the mechanism with which the design is carried out. The debate over whether intelligent design should be taught in science classes is one that many schools throughout the United States are dealing with in the early twenty-first century.

Despite such conflicts, however, there is no reason that both forms of thought, religious and scientific, cannot coexist. Science makes no claims to first causes. In their theories of the

Sacred Days: Christmas

A religion often has as its sacred day the birth date or death date of its founder. December 25 is the day set aside for honoring the birth of Jesus in many, but not all, Christian traditions. The holiday is celebrated by many Christians as well as some non-Christians. But December 25 probably was not the actual birthdate of Jesus. Scriptural evidence suggests that Jesus was probably born in the spring or summer; that was the time the shepherds that Luke reports visiting the newborn Jesus would have been in the fields, watching over the young lambs. December 25, however, was a powerful day to incorporate into the new Christian religion. It had been, from earliest pagan times, a time of celebration, since it falls close to the winter solstice, the shortest day in the year. For the ancients, this was a turning point in the year, signaling the lengthening of days and the return of the sun. Prehistoric tribes and clans throughout Europe constructed sophisticated and enormous rock timepieces in the landscape, such as Stonehenge in England, to measure the fall of light at the winter and summer solstices.

In many cultures this all-important seasonal change has been a major festival day. In ancient Egypt the god Osiris was supposedly buried on the solstice. In ancient Greece it was called Lenaea and sacrifices were made, while in ancient Rome the Saturnalia was a week-long celebration that managed to blend all manner of earlier pagan celebrations from across Europe into one. Judaism has the eight-day festival Hanukkah, and Zoroastrianism gave modern Iran *Shabe-Yalda*, which celebrates the rebirth of the Sun. The concept of the rebirth of light or the coming of longer days and the Sun was a powerful symbol. The appropriation of the winter solstice for the Christian celebration of Christmas was a valuable development in the spreading of that religion.

development of the universe scientists do not say how the universe and everything in it was initially created. Such separate spheres of thought leave room for both systems to exist.

The value of religion

Religion continues to be a vital force because it has value for people. For many, the value comes in the experience of something beyond the boundaries of day-to-day life. The religious experience is for them a valuable product of faith, linking them to a bigger universe and giving them hope of eternal life. Others find in their religion an opportunity for intellectual analysis of doctrines and teachings, while for others the value of religion comes in its teachings about leading a moral and ethical life.

Most religions teach some form of moderation, and this in turn puts limits on believers and makes society more stable. Part of this social control comes from the figures of authority in provided by each religion. Still others find comfort in the traditions of their religion, including architecture and music. In practical terms, religions have at times been responsible for founding educational institutions, hospitals, and charities, forming the backbone of social welfare networks throughout the world.

Religion also plays a large part in regulating acceptable moral behavior, and in implanting a sense of ethics, or proper behavior, and justice not only in the followers of that particular religion, but also in society as a whole. In fact, many observers divide a religion into two categories: its ethical teachings and its spiritual teachings. Examples abound for the moral teachings of religions. In the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which have a common source in the Prophet Abraham, there are similar codes of ethical behavior contained in basic rules, such as the Ten Commandments. Religions with their origins in Asia also have codes of moral behavior and right living, as seen in Buddhism's Five Precepts and Eightfold Path.

In addition to instructions for proper living, religions have also been responsible, in part, for the rule of law in society. Religious law was one of the early inspirations for secular or nonreligious legal codes. The Code of Hammurabi, the eighteenth-century BCE Babylonian code of law, takes as its inspiration the gods who put Hammurabi in power. In some cultures, the secular legal system is still highly influenced by religious law. This is true in some Islamic states, where religious law, *sharia*, is practiced. Additionally, some religious historians believe that the development of

monotheistic religions led to the creation of strong, centralized nation states, ruled first by kings, and later by elected officials. Thus, religion has had a major influence not only on the moral and ethical codes of societies, but also on their legal and governmental structures.

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Agnosticism and Atheism

Agnosticism and atheism are not like other formal systems of belief. Most prominent religions have a membership or body of believers, a set group of texts that state the beliefs and principles of the religion, and clergy or officials to perform the rituals and hold worship services. Atheism and agnosticism have none of these things. They deal with doubt or disbelief in the concept of God, a supreme being that created the universe and all that is in it.

While they are often grouped together, agnosticism and atheism are, in fact, two different concepts. Atheism is the belief that there is no God. Though the term *atheism* actually originated in the sixteenth century, atheistic beliefs can be traced back to the sixth century BCE in China, India, and Greece. In contrast, agnosticism is much newer. It came into being in the nineteenth century during the debates over the scientific theories of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1809–1892). (Evolution is a scientific theory in which species gradually change through a process called natural selection, so that descendants are different from their ancestors.) Agnosticism states that humans cannot know if there is a God. Such knowledge probably cannot be achieved. So, where atheists claim that there is no God, agnostics say that there is not enough evidence to know if there is a God or not.

Even though atheists and agnostics do not believe in a creator-god, they might otherwise be very religious. In faiths such as Buddhism and Daoism, for example, the personal creator-god or supreme being is replaced with a concept of universal cosmic rule that determines and orders the universe. Even in some forms of Christianity, with its strong sense of monotheism, or one supreme God, both atheists and agnostics have found a home. For example, Unitarianism Universalism is a liberal Christian denomination, or group, that does not require its followers to adhere to specific beliefs, including a belief in God. Its members seek spiritual growth and a sense of community. Humanistic Judaism and

WORDS TO KNOW

agnosticism: The view that the existence or nonexistence of God is unknown and is probably unknowable.

atheism: A disbelief in the existence of God or a belief that there is no God.

belief: A conviction of the truth of a proposition either by close examination or trust.

faith: Belief and trust in God, accompanied by a sense of loyalty to the traditional doctrines, or principles, of religion.

God: The supreme or ultimate being or reality; creator of the universe.

materialism: A belief that matter and the motion of matter constitute the universe. All

phenomena, even those of mind, are the result of material interactions.

philosophy: The search to understand the basic values and reality of existence through logical reasoning.

secular: Worldly things, of the physical world, as opposed to religious and spiritual.

skepticism: Doubt or disbelief towards a particular proposition or object.

theism: Belief in the existence of gods or God.

transcendent: Going beyond the ordinary, beyond the universe and time, into spiritual dimensions.

Reconstructionist Judaism are movements within the Jewish faith that do not require a belief in God. Instead, they are movements that emphasize Jewish culture, history, and identity.

Some atheists and agnostics, just like Christians, Jews, Muslims, and members of other organized religions, feel a personal need for fellowship in a community of like-minded people. They enjoy the sense of togetherness in gathering with others at church services. They find strength and support in such a community. They enjoy the act of singing together in hymns or of acting out deeply held ideas in ceremonies and rituals. While these approaches may appeal to some atheists and agnostics, however, many also reject organized religion and do not participate in such things.

It is difficult to come up with an accurate number of atheists and agnostics, either worldwide or country-by-country. Both agnostics and atheists are often vague about their personal beliefs. Since most atheists and agnostics are not part of any defined organization, information about their numbers comes only from census records. These records are not collected often and can be confusing regarding religious beliefs. Many people, when responding to the census, do not know how to list themselves. When atheists and agnostics are combined with others in a

group referred to on surveys and in the census as “nonreligious,” however, their numbers are shown to be quite large. One estimate from 1993 put the number at 1.2 billion worldwide, ranking nonreligious as the third largest “religion” in the world after Christianity and Islam.

A 2005 estimate put the number of atheists, agnostics, and other people who do not believe in a god, into a smaller group than the census category of “nonreligious” at between 500 million and 750 million. The number of professed atheists and agnostics alone is much smaller. Worldwide, the number of atheists is estimated at between 200 and 240 million. Many of these are in China and the former Soviet Union, where religion, under communism, was discouraged. (Communism is an economic and political philosophy that tries to establish a society without rich or poor people in which all property is communally owned.) At the same time, it is also unclear whether such numbers include Daoists and Buddhists, who could very well be atheist and religious at the same time. As a result, it is not possible to obtain an accurate worldwide number of atheists and agnostics.

If general nonbelievers are added to the figures for atheists and agnostics (those who do not follow any faith), the numbers double or triple. Some countries, such as Japan, report two-thirds of their population in the category of nonbelievers. In the Western world the largest numbers of atheists are found in Europe, with about 41 million. Sweden, followed closely by Denmark and Norway, has between 40 and 80 percent of its population in the nonbeliever category. In the United States, where 13 percent represent themselves as nonreligious, only about 0.5 percent label themselves agnostic. Even fewer call themselves atheists.

History and development

Atheism and agnosticism are beliefs that are found around the world. Atheism may have had its historical beginnings in the Hindu religion of India. As early as 900 BCE the sacred texts known as the Vedas described a number of different gods who actually compete for supremacy (greatest power or authority), each having a different power and function. George Alfred James, writing in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, describes a concept called “religious atheism,” which is a rejection of the belief in a single supreme God, but not of the belief in religion. Religious atheists believe in an impersonal source that orders the universe. In the Hindu tradition this impersonal cosmic reality or oneness is called *brahman*.

About Agnosticism and Atheism

- **Belief.** Agnostics and atheists both express doubt or skepticism about the existence of God. While agnostics say people cannot know if there is a God or not, atheists either disbelieve in God or reject the existence of God.
- **Followers.** Exact numbers are difficult to estimate. Agnostics and atheists, when grouped together with other so-called nonreligious people, comprise the third largest group in the world dealing with religious matters. With 1.2 billion who share similar doubts, agnostics and atheists rank after Christianity and Islam in number. Estimates for atheists and agnostics alone, however, are between 500 and 750 million worldwide.

Texts dated to the seventh century BCE describe brahman in ways that make it clear that brahman is not a god. Instead, it is a characteristic of the universe, like gravity, or “the Force” in the *Star Wars* movies.

Religious atheism This same trend can be seen in China. During the Shang Dynasty (a period when the country was ruled by members of a single family, from about 1750 to 1100 BCE), the supreme god was known as Shangdi, “The King Above,” the organizer of human society. By the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty in 1100 BCE, belief in a more impersonal cosmic concept was taking hold. *Tian*, or Heaven, was assuming equal status with Shangdi. Ultimately, Tian took hold in Chinese philosophy as the ordering principle of the universe, while Shangdi became a supreme ruler and creator of the universe. Tian helped to not only determine humanity’s affairs, but also to set up a moral order and authority. It is this concept of Tian that led to *dao*, or

“the way.” According to Chinese philosophers, this concept, unseen and unknowable, governs the world. Philosophers are those who seek moral and spiritual truths about the world and existence. All things originate from and return to Tian. Dao is the central concept of the religion of Daoism.

Confucianism, too, is a religion that does not rely on belief in a supreme being. Confucian thought teaches obedience to the way of Tian. A just society will be formed by following the universal rules of conduct and duty. Those rules are learned from the examples of wise kings of the distant past, from tradition, and from the moral order of Tian. Since the concept of a single supreme being did not appear in China until the arrival of Christian missionaries in the sixteenth century, early Chinese thought does not really qualify as atheism. Missionaries are people who try to convert, or change, the beliefs of others to their religion. Although Confucian thought does not directly reject one God, it does lead towards the concept of atheism.

In ancient India various religious sects (groups) appeared which did not rely on the belief in a single supreme god. Some historians describe these sects as atheistic. Unlike atheism, however, they include beliefs about the order of the universe and way of living. Jainism, Carvaka, and Buddhism all reject the rituals of Hinduism. Jainism and Buddhism contain some supernatural elements, but Buddhism in particular rejects the necessity of a single supreme God. The Buddha, who was born Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE), in particular spoke forcefully about followers trusting in themselves and not seeking salvation from a god or gods. For both Jains and Buddhists, *nirvana* (a release from rebirth or from suffering) and enlightenment (realizing the true nature of reality and how to end suffering) are central concepts. For these believers, the state of nirvana will connect them to the universal order.

Carvaka is also a product of sixth century BCE Indian philosophers. It differs from Jainism and Buddhism because its atheism is built on a materialist belief system, the concept that the universe consists only of matter and that spiritual things or events are actually the results of matter interacting with itself. The Carvaka sect felt that those who had written the Vedas were misguided, that the physical world alone is real, and that heaven means earthly happiness. For followers of the Carvaka doctrine, or set of beliefs, the idea of soul, which is central to most Western systems of belief, is wrong. Though an organized religion, the Carvaka sect comes close to the modern sense of atheism.

Development in the West In the East (the countries of China, Japan, India, and others in Southeast Asia), early atheistic thought was actually religious atheism. In the West, however, such thought came from outside of religion and was secular (worldly or nonreligious) in nature. The ancient Greeks worshipped a number of gods, with Zeus the leader among them. He was not a creator-god, but he did uphold the moral order, or the right and proper way of existence. The Greek pantheon, the set of all their gods and goddesses, was attacked as early as the sixth century BCE by the Greek philosopher Xenophanes (570–475 BCE). He thought that a group of hard-drinking and loose-living deities like the Greek gods were hardly god-like in their behavior. Xenophanes, however, was no atheist. He suggested instead that one god was directly connected to the world. His criticism of the Greek pantheon was important, though, because it showed that humans could question the existence of gods.



The Greek philosopher Democritus suggested that all matter in the universe was made of an eternal element he called an atom. Because atoms were eternal, Democritus reasoned, there was no need for a creator-god. © BETTMANN/CORBIS.

The ancient Greek philosophy of atomism made a more consistent argument against the need for God or gods. Atomists, like the Indian materialists, looked for a material explanation for the existence of the universe. Democritus (c. 460–370 BCE) suggested that all matter in the universe was made of eternal elements he called “atoms.” If atoms were eternal, Democritus reasoned, then the universe had always existed and would always continue to exist, and, as a result, there was no need for a creator. Another early Greek philosopher, Anaxagoras (c. 500–c. 428 BCE), was exiled from the Greek city of Athens for stating that the stars, planets, and the sun were material objects and not heavenly bodies, or god-like spirits to be worshipped. Another thinker, Protagoras (c. 485–420 BCE), was banned from Athens for saying that he had no way to know if gods existed or not, which is the central idea of agnosticism.

Ancient Greece also provides an example of a movement that could be consistent with modern atheism. The Epicureans, or followers of the philosopher Epicurus (c. 340–c. 270 BCE), believed in a material universe, like the Atomists. They rejected the idea of divine wrath (anger) and retribution (punishment), refusing to believe that gods took vengeance on individuals who made them angry. Epicureans took great care, however, to avoid denying the existence of gods. Instead, Epicurus taught that the gods were physical beings, unconcerned with the lives of ordinary humans.

Belief in the gods was a requirement in many ancient societies, including Athens and Rome. The gods gave the state rulers their legitimacy (legal right to rule). Atheism was a charge brought against any person who differed from the beliefs of the state religions of Greece and Rome. The famous philosopher Socrates (c. 470–399 BCE) was tried and executed in Athens for being “atheos.” However, Socrates was not an atheist. He believed in certain gods, just not the right ones to save him from such a charge. Early Christians and pagans (followers of the Greek and Roman state religions) also accused each other of being atheists because they each believed the other had denied the existence of their gods.

The Western concept of monotheism (belief in one God) began with Judaism. While earlier cultures, including ancient Egypt, had concepts that shared characteristics with monotheism, Judaism was the first major religion in which monotheism was central to belief. Christianity inherited its monotheism from Judaism. With the rediscovery of works by the ancient Greek philosophers, however, Christian thinkers began wrestling with the problem of how to reconcile (bring together) pagan Greek and Christian views of the universe. Christian scholars, from Augustine of Hippo (384–430 CE) to Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) to Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), tried to find ways of making Greek thinking and Christian religious ideas work together. These thinkers attempted to prove the existence of God through logical arguments. For some of them, the existence of the universe and of life in it were proof of God’s existence. Others believed that religious experience is so widespread that there must be a God to inspire it.

The Reformation and Age of Enlightenment Many of these arguments, however, were forgotten during the Reformation, a revolt in Europe against traditional Catholic teachings that began in the early 1500s and continued for a century and a half. Before about 1521 the Catholic Church was a dominant force in the West, both religiously and politically. The popes were not only the leaders of the Catholic Church, but rulers of a large portion of central Italy. As the Church became more and more concerned with politics, its spiritual reputation suffered in many places. During the Reformation this led to widespread criticism of both the Catholic Church and the Protestant sects that broke away from it. Though this period focused on politics more than on religious ideas, such as the existence or nonexistence of God, the Reformation paved the way for later criticisms of religion. The scientific discoveries of the Age of Enlightenment, an intellectual movement in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that emphasized reason and logic, reinforced the questioning of Church policy, both Catholic and Protestant.

During the seventeenth century, when philosophers began observing and classifying natural phenomena, they looked for secular explanations for what they saw rather than religious ones. These early scientists discovered that the universe appeared to follow rules that could be described using logic and mathematics. They noted that these rules did not match what the Church said about the Universe. The criticisms of these philosophers, however, centered on the power and abuses of the

Church, and not on the existence or nonexistence of God. Despite this fact, the French term *athéisme* came into use in the late sixteenth century as both an accusation and a description of scientists and other free thinkers who questioned established religion. In this sense, atheism does not refer to someone who denies the existence of God but to someone who is godless, in the sense of being without morals or honor. This very negative meaning of atheism has carried forward into the twenty-first century.

One seventeenth century scientist whose work found rational explanations for what was once attributed to God is Isaac Newton. English scientist and physicist Isaac Newton (1642–1727) revolutionized thought about the physical world with his law of gravitation, which described the movement of the planets, comets, and other bodies in space. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon de Laplace (1749–1827) verified Newton’s theory of gravitation and the movements of the planets as well as the rhythm of the ocean’s tides. The discoveries of Newton and Laplace provided an alternative explanation for the existence and behavior of the universe that did not rely on God as its designer.

During the Age of Enlightenment reason and logic were often ranked above faith. One of France’s most famous advocates of Enlightenment thought, Denis Diderot (1713–1784), was accused of atheism for his challenges to religion through his belief in materialism (the theory that physical matter is all that exists and everything can be explained through it). He explained this belief in his 1746 work, *Pensées philosophiques* (“Philosophical Thoughts”).

Philosophers during the Enlightenment also supported the idea of a material universe, rather than one created and directed by an all-powerful God. Philosophers are those we seek to use logical reasoning to understand reality. In his work, *The System of Nature*, Paul Henri d’Holbach (1723–1789), openly denied the existence of God. Other philosophers also questioned God’s existence, including David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, attacked the idea that order and the supposed perfection of the world was proof of the existence of a creator-God. Hume noted, in part, that if a well-ordered natural world needed a special designer, then God’s mind, which was itself well-ordered, also needed a designer. In that case, who designed the designer? Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, found no adequate arguments for the existence of God. For Kant, however, this did not prove that God did not exist. Kant believed that the

Agnosticism and Atheism



A page from an illuminated manuscript details a fool denying the existence of God, circa 1350. Early thinkers who questioned the existence of God or otherwise criticized religion were often called fools or heretics. THE ART ARCHIVE/ BIBLIOTECA DEL STUDIO TEOLOGICO ACCADEMICO BRESSANONE/DAGLI ORTI.

existence of God could neither be explained nor totally denied by scientific examination or rational thought.

The Nineteenth century to the present In the nineteenth century the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) argued that the concept of God is simply the projection of the highest ideals and standards that people can imagine. As such, God was not a subject for theology (religious study), but for anthropology (the study of human beings and their cultures). His work *The Essence of Christianity* influenced an entire generation of German thinkers, including Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx was the founder of Marxism, an economic system that views history as an ongoing struggle between the oppressed workers, or proletariat class, and the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie, or capitalists. Marx thought that the proletariat would rise against the owners and create a workers' state and a classless society. For Marx, the concept of God and religion was just another way the ruling class had of keeping the proletariat under control.

For philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), God was also a human invention. However, for him God was the tool of the weak who wanted to keep the vital and strong in check. Nietzsche believed

in the heroic “superman,” a modern person who would reject all middle class values, including religion. This superman would create new values and a new moral order. Nietzsche wrote in *Thus Spake [Spoke] Zarathustra*, “God is dead.” By this he meant that the concept of God and religion had ceased to have an impact on the lives of humans.

Science advanced along many lines during the nineteenth century. British scientist Charles Darwin’s work in evolution questioned the very nature of the biblical account of Genesis, which states that God created the world in six days. Many Christians also believed, as stated by Irish bishop, John Ussher (1581–1656), that the Creation described in Genesis occurred in 4004 BCE. Discoveries in geology (the study of Earth’s history and its composition) pushed the age of Earth back millions of years, further challenging Christian concepts of Creation. Such discoveries served to make more and more people openly doubt the existence of God or even the need for God.

To describe the doubts of this expanding group of people, British scientist Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) coined the term *agnosticism*. This view says that people do not have enough information or evidence to say that God exists or does not exist. Such a doubt-filled view of theism (belief in God) was as old as atheism. Yet it was not given an official name until 1870, when Huxley invented it to describe his own doubt about the existence of God. Huxley was a believer in Darwin’s theory of natural selection, which states that life becomes increasingly more complex over time randomly (by chance), not because of divine intervention from a supreme being, and that stronger types adapted and survived. A great advocate for science, Huxley was a powerful speaker and writer. His new term quickly became part of the language of religious discussion.

During the twentieth century organized religion in the West began responding to attacks on theism. Scholars found new ways to discuss the existence of God when science proved unable to resolve the question. Some of these arguments question the truth of science, proposing alternate theories about how life has evolved. The theory of intelligent design states that life is too complex to be a result of the random processes of natural selection, and that there has to be a first cause, or designer, to provide the engine that drives evolution. There are also theologians, people who study religious theory, in Protestant Christian thought who have broadened the concept of God from that of a personal human-like deity to more of a universal power, flow, and order. This is a concept also found in Eastern religions, such as Daoism. The theologian Paul Tillich

Thomas Henry Huxley

Thomas Henry Huxley was a renowned nineteenth-century scientist and writer who has been credited with advances in cellular biology (the study of the cell, the basic structural unit of living things) and in pioneering evolutionary biology, the study of how living things have evolved from simple to more complex forms. Huxley wrote and spoke widely on scientific subjects. He was also instrumental in transforming science from a hobby for the wealthy, as it had been up to the nineteenth century, into a true profession. Though he was the son of a schoolmaster, Huxley was largely self-educated in science. He became a doctor, earning early acclaim for his discovery in 1845 of a new membrane, or layer, in human hair. After joining the British navy, he served as chief surgeon on the HMS *Rattlesnake* for four years as it mapped regions of Australia. Huxley pursued his own research on these voyages, studying the anatomy, or structure and composition, of sea life.

Elected a member of the Royal Society (an organization sponsored by the British government to promote scientific research) in 1851, Huxley finally found a teaching position in 1854. Despite his early upbringing in the Anglican Church,

Huxley became a skeptic regarding parts of Christianity, including the existence of God. He was a materialist and a supporter of the revolutionary theories of geologist Charles Lyell (1797–1875). Lyell suggested that the geological processes now seen on Earth shaped the planet very slowly over the course of millions of years. So geological change was in opposition to the literal biblical description in Genesis, in which God created the earth and all life on it in six days.

Huxley became a champion of Charles Darwin (1809–1892), who promoted natural selection as the way in which evolution works, both in print and from the speaker's platform. Huxley largely agreed with Darwin's theory that humans developed slowly over millions of years, evolving from simple life forms to increasingly complex ones through processes such as natural selection, in which stronger and better adapted types of life survive. In 1860 Huxley debated evolution with the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873). The debate was covered by newspapers and journals across England and earned Huxley the nickname "Darwin's bulldog." In 1870 Huxley coined the term *agnosticism* to describe his own beliefs about the existence of God.

(1886–1965), for example, moved away from a God-centered Christianity. For Tillich, the concept of God was more abstract. He called God the "ground of being." Tillich suggested that God actually exists within each person. Tillich shocked many in the religious community by claiming that the old formal God did not exist.

Meanwhile, the twentieth century after World War II (1939–45; a war in which the United Kingdom, France, and the United States defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan) brought about state-sponsored atheism by the communist governments of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China. Many people stopped practicing religion or did so only in secret. While religion was not officially forbidden by communist governments, it was heavily controlled because it was seen as a threat to the person in power.

Communists also saw religion as a weakening influence, because it took resources away from the state. Only with the fall of the communist regimes in 1989 and 1990 was open religious practice restored in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Even in the early twenty-first century China continues to discourage religious activity, though Buddhists, Confucians, Daoists, and others are often able to worship quietly without repression from the state.

Agnosticism and atheism have long histories, perhaps as long as organized religions themselves. The concepts and those who hold them have survived for more than two thousand years. As a group they are very difficult to classify because their belief systems range from complete denial of any spiritual reality to a distrust and rejection of organized religion. Agnostics and atheists, however, together are considered a major presence in modern theology.

Basic beliefs

The terms *agnosticism* and *atheism* both come from Greek terms. The Greek prefix *a* means “not” or “without.” Atheism is a compound of *a* and *theos*, or God, and thus means literally without God or not God.

Atheism is divided into several categories. Strong atheists reject the entire concept of theism or of the existence of a God. They do not personally believe in God, and they also believe that those who do are mistaken in their belief. An absence, rather than a rejection, of a belief in a single God (which could include some polytheists and those who have had no exposure to monotheistic beliefs) is called implicit atheism. A conscious rejection of God’s existence is called explicit atheism. Some atheists also call themselves secularists, agnostics, or Bright. Bright is meant to take some of the historical stigma (mark of disgrace) away from being an atheist.

Agnosticism also blends Greek elements to form a new compound word. It mixes *a* with *gnosis* or knowledge, meaning without knowledge. Broadly speaking, the difference between the two concepts is that while atheists claim there is no God, agnostics claim not to be able to make statements one way or the other about the existence of God.

Agnosticism is a form of skepticism, or doubt, towards religious statements about the existence of God. Such questions, they say, are matters of faith rather than reason. Some agnostics leave the question of the existence or nonexistence of God open until further information can be found. Others say that there will never be logical, rational proof available.

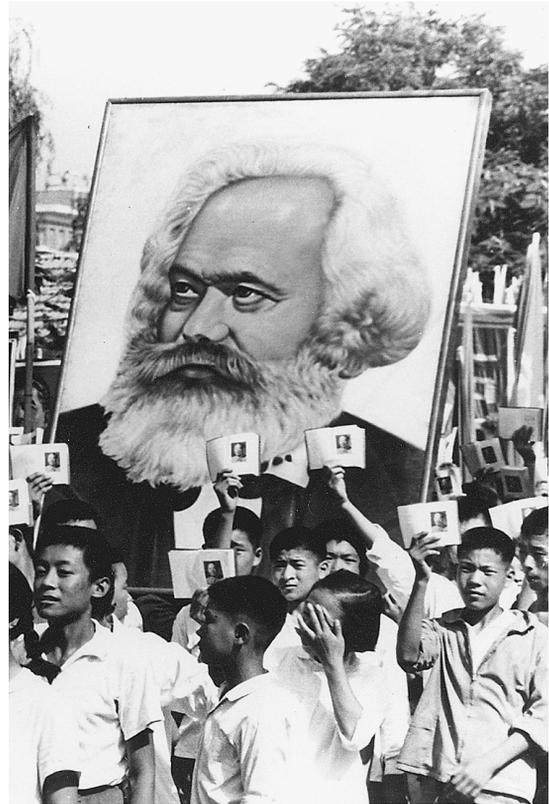
The former belief is sometimes called weak, soft, or open agnosticism, while the latter is called strong, hard, or closed agnosticism. Agnostics base their skepticism about the existence of God on both the principles of logic and what can and cannot be said with language. For agnostics, the limits of language keep people from proving or disproving the existence of God.

A form of argument against the existence of God found in both agnosticism and atheism looks at people's motivation for believing in God. The theories of Ludwig Feuerbach influence this argument, as well as those of Karl Marx and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). This argument claims that humanity has created God because people need such an all-powerful father figure psychologically, or for their own mental well-being. God, for these thinkers, is an authority figure, someone a person can turn to in times of trouble for absolute answers and also for forgiveness of sins or wrongdoings. As such, God becomes a crutch for humans and an obstacle to accepting adult responsibility for one's actions.

Sacred writings

Since agnosticism and atheism are not religions but belief systems, there are no sacred texts. However, certain writings have proved essential to the development of both belief systems. The Dao De Jing, one of the most translated books of world literature and of any religion, is the sacred text of Daoism. Parts of it were written as early as the sixth century BCE. It is one of the earliest coherent statements of a moral earthly order patterned not by an all-powerful God but by a metaphysical (spiritual) principle, the dao, a spiritual field that runs through everything and from which all things originate and return. The dao is the law of nature and not a God or gods. Other sacred texts in Eastern religions contain similar non-god elements.

In the Western tradition, influential titles include *On the Nature of Things*, a work from the first century BCE by the Roman poet and



Communist supporters in China march with a poster of Karl Marx. Marx stated that religion was another way for the ruling class to oppress workers and keep them under control. AP IMAGES.

philosopher Lucretius (c. 100–c. 55 BCE). This work is a defense of materialist Epicurean thought. Though not specifically atheistic, it does question the gods' interest in humans and opened a discussion on the role of gods in humans' lives.

One of the most influential atheist works, *The System of Nature*, by Baron d'Holbach comes from the eighteenth century. His book describes the world in materialistic terms, saying that all that exists is physical matter. For Holbach there was no soul and no God. Atheism was the only honest belief. Though not a scientist himself, Holbach attempted to use the latest scientific findings of his day to support his work. His attack on Christianity was important because it blended the work of many thinkers who had come before him.

The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach wrote several important works questioning the existence and reasons for God. These include *The Essence of Christianity* and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. He argued that religion was, first of all, simply the product of the human desire for immortality or continual life. For Feuerbach, God was an invention of the human mind, a kind of father figure made up to comfort ourselves when we are overwhelmed by our insignificance.

Karl Marx also contributed to the discussion with *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*. From this text comes his most famous statement about religion: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." By this, Marx meant that religion acted like a drug, hiding bitter reality from the mass of workers and keeping them under control. The "opium of the people" is one of Marx's most famous quotes, and one that has been used by agnostics as well as atheists to describe religion and its possible negative effects.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis (a type of therapy used to treat mental disorders), also wrote about the existence of God in *The Future of an Illusion*, among other works. Freud wrote that religion is an illusion, an unreal vision, or perception, that humankind has created to ease the fear of death. In order for a person to be healthy and mature, Freud said, he or she had to be free of such fantasies as religion. Moving his patients toward an acceptance of atheism was an important part of Freud's treatment.

Some basic texts for agnostics include David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, and Thomas Henry Huxley's essay "Agnosticism," which first introduced the term. Two pamphlets by philosopher Bertrand

Darwin's Beliefs

Charles Darwin's work asserts that humans, rather than being made in God's image, as the Bible says, are instead the descendants of other primates (evolutionary relatives of humans, a group that includes apes and monkeys). In his works Darwin implied that all life evolves from simpler forms and thus each form was not created individually by a master designer or supreme being. Though his work has been used as an argument for atheism, Darwin himself was not an atheist. He furthermore claimed that he thought of himself as an agnostic and found nothing inconsistent about believing in God and believing in evolution. In fact, Darwin did not give up Christianity himself until he was forty.

A careful man, Darwin discussed religion very little. His job was science, and his theory of natural selection was controversial enough without discussing it in the context of religion. There are, however, some indications in his writings about his feelings regarding the existence of God. In *The Descent of Man*, for example, he writes:

I am aware that the assumed instinctive belief in God has been used by many

persons as an argument for his existence. The idea of a universal and beneficent Creator does not seem to arise in the mind of man, until he has been elevated by long-continued culture.

Later in the same work Darwin adds:

I am aware that the conclusions arrived at in this work will be denounced by some as highly irreligious; but he who denounces them is bound to show why it is more irreligious to explain the origin of man as a distinct species by descent from some lower form, through the laws of variation and natural selection, than to explain the birth of the individual through the laws of ordinary reproduction. The birth both of the species and of the individual are equally parts of that grand sequence of events, which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance.

Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

Russell (1872–1970): *Why I Am Not a Christian* and *Am I An Atheist or An Agnostic?* are also core texts. Russell thought that religion was just superstition, or blindly accepted belief, and that although there were positive aspects to religion, the negative ones outweighed the good. For him religion made people dependent and stopped the attainment of real knowledge. In *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Russell wrote:

Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. . . . A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after “desire for” the past or a fettering [repressing] of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men.



The influence of atheism and agnosticism on Christianity has resulted in a debate over whether the stories within the Bible are literally true or are a symbolic means of delivering a message. © ROYALTY-FREE/CORBIS.

Because of his fame as a philosopher, Russell's words about religion strongly influenced modern thought.

Although it has nothing explicit, or outright, to say about religion, one other text has become a symbol of atheism and agnosticism: *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, which sets out the theory of natural selection. Darwin's work has been a lightning rod for the debate over the existence or non-existence of God since its publication in 1859. Darwin's theory basically challenged the Creation as described in the Bible. Though many Christians take that biblical description as a symbolic story, Darwin's work continues to cause controversy in religious circles, especially among literal readers of the Bible, or those who believe that the stories within the Bible are factually true.

Influences of agnosticism and atheism

Some Eastern religions created belief systems that do not rely on a personified supreme being, like the monotheistic God of Judaism and Christianity, but on universal concepts like nirvana and the dao. In the Western religious tradition, however, the influence of atheism and agnosticism has been two-fold. First, it has stirred debate within organized religion to revisit the literal reading of the Bible. Christians who read the Bible literally developed the principle of inerrancy, that is, that the Bible contains no errors or mistakes. Other Christian groups, however, chose to read the Bible as a collection of symbolic stories. Since the time of the Enlightenment, this discussion has continued in Christian religious circles. While literal Christians still insist that the Bible is truth word for word, others, both Catholic and Protestant, take such readings as metaphor (a figure of speech to suggest a resemblance between two things) and myth (a legendary story that explains events in the natural world).

Atheism and agnosticism have also helped move people away from organized religions. The secularization of society (making it nonreligious)

has been a trend since the late nineteenth century in the West. As a result, atheists and agnostics argue, there have been many beneficial results. Human beings are forced to take responsibility for everything they do, rather than blaming their actions on an all-powerful God. This in turn empowers them to do more things for themselves. Another positive result of the secularization of society is that, on the whole, religion no longer opposes scientific progress. Science has been freed from restrictions placed on it by religion. In the past, for example, the Catholic Church often rejected scientific advances because the Church thought these advances often conflicted with the idea of a creator-God, who was the source of all life on Earth. As a result of secularization, however, with its research into science, humanity has been greatly aided in areas such as medicine, technology, and electronics.

Religion itself has also benefited from a questioning of the existence of God, some agnostics and atheists claim. Christianity, for example, has become more democratic, ruled by believers, rather than by a hierarchy (chain of command, such as the different levels of leadership in a religion). For those who choose to practice religion, it becomes a personal choice and statement of belief, not a practice forced on them by social pressure. The net effect is to make religion stronger, because its membership is voluntary and more faithful.

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Ancient Religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia

Organized religion had its beginnings in ancient Mesopotamia (in what is now modern Iraq) and in Egypt more than five thousand years ago. The religious systems in these areas blended political with spiritual elements in a type of government known as a theocracy, or rule by divine guidance. In such a government, deities (gods and goddesses) are the supreme religious and civic leaders. Their will is carried out by a priestly class or by a divine king. Mesopotamian theocracies took the form of city-states ruled by patron gods or goddesses. The god's desires and wishes were interpreted by political leaders called *ensi* and by a priestly class. In Egypt religion and the state were also bound together. The national leader, the pharaoh, was considered a living god and was the vital link between humanity and the rest of the gods.

A major difference in outlook, however, marked the two religions. In Mesopotamia the forces of nature were more chaotic, more likely to cause catastrophes, such as disastrous flooding. As a result, the gods were seen as unpredictable beings of extraordinary power who had to be kept content by priests. People were at the mercy of the gods, so the job of humanity was to carry out their wills and make them happy. In Egypt, where nature was less destructive, the gods were seen as kind and generous and generally well-disposed toward humanity. Egyptians believed that their gods had created Egypt as a sort of refuge of good and order in a world filled with chaos and disorder.

Both religions were polytheistic, meaning they recognized many gods. These gods had certain similarities in both traditions. Many gods and goddesses personified elements of nature. In the Mesopotamian pantheon, or collection of gods, the most important were the trio of the sky god, An (or Anu); the god of storm and the earth, Enlil; and the water god, Ea (or Enki). These were followed in importance by a second triad comprised of the moon god, Nanna (or Sin); the sun god, Utu (or Shamash); and the goddess of fertility and war, Inanna

WORDS TO KNOW

anthropomorphism: Attributing human shape or form to nonhuman things, such as the gods.

astrology: The study of the movement of the planets and stars in relation to one another in order to predict future events.

cuneiform: Sumerian writing, so-called because of its wedge-shaped marks.

deity: A god or goddess.

maat: Divine order and justice; a central concept in the religion of ancient Egypt.

monotheism: Belief in one supreme being.

pantheon: A collection of deities.

polytheism: Belief in many gods.

pyramid: A stone tomb constructed to house a deceased pharaoh of Egypt.

theocracy: A form of government in which God or some supreme deity is the ruler. God's laws are then interpreted by a divine king or by a priest class.

ziggurat: A stepped foundation or structure that held a shrine or temple in the Mesopotamian religion.

(also called Ishtar). In the later stages of Mesopotamian civilization the local god Marduk became head of the pantheon.

In Egyptian religion the primary god was Amen (Amon or Amun), king of the gods. Next in importance was Ra (or Re), the sun god. These two were eventually joined in the cult of Amen-Ra. A cult is a religion considered to be outside the mainstream. Then came Osiris, god of the Nile and also god of the kingdom of the dead. His wife, Isis, was the moon goddess and mother of the universe. Their child Horus was god of the sky; Set, their brother, was the god of chaos and of the desert; and Thoth, the god of writing and knowledge. In addition to these was a vast array of other gods and goddesses that sometimes duplicated each other's functions. The current pharaoh, as a living god, worked with all of these deities to create *maat*, or divine order and justice.

These ancient religions affected every aspect of life in the ancient Near East, from spirituality to farming, from medicine to the rule of society. As such, they were not simply a part of a person's life but ordered and shaped that person's life every day. Membership was not a choice as it is in modern religions. Rather, religion was a fact of life for everyone. Each person had favorite gods or goddesses to whom they prayed and sacrificed.

History and development

Mesopotamia, a word made up from two Greek words meaning “between the rivers,” is an ancient name for an area encompassed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It stretches from the Persian Gulf in the south to the mountains of Armenia in the north and covers most of modern-day Iraq. Mesopotamia had a much different climate when it was first settled about eight to ten thousand years ago. At that time it was a land of marshes and grassland rather than desert as it is now. Humans began intensive farming in the area as early as 3,000 BCE. From the earliest times farming depended on irrigation, a way of watering crops that relied on bringing water to the fields through man-made ditches or canals. Anthropologists (scientists who study humans and their relations to various factors) believe that local tribes came together to dig the needed canals. The semi-nomadic (wandering) way of life the tribes followed was altered, and they settled in large communities near the canals. Eventually these communities became the first cities. City-states like Ur and Lagash had become powerful forces in the region by about the middle of the fourth millennium BCE.

Religion in Sumer The first center of civilization was in the south, in what was called Sumer. There, farming villages became a series of a dozen powerful city-states, including Ur, Uruk, Lagash, Umma, Eridu, and Nippur. At times they were in competition with each other, and at other times they banded together to fight common enemies. The earliest written records of the first Sumerian societies also date from about this time (c. 4,000 BCE). It is significant that these records, written in the form of clay tablets, were about the operation of temples. Thus, already by the time of the first real towns and cities in human history, Mesopotamian religion had already become well organized. Various clay tablets have been found with details of the religion, as well as sacred vessels and architectural remains of temples. These all help to give an overview of the religion.

The environment of Mesopotamia largely shaped its religion. Unlike the Nile River in Egypt, which rises and falls slowly on a very predictable schedule, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers could and often did rise quickly and violently, causing disastrous flooding. Because of this, the Mesopotamians felt that nature was dangerous and far beyond the control of mere humans. The earliest Mesopotamian deities thus represented different aspects of nature and were honored in hopes of winning their favor.

For instance, Anu, the god of the sky, might have been worshipped to keep violent storms from damaging the crops. Hursag, the goddess of mountains and foothills, would be invoked by priests to stop an invasion of barbarian tribes. Deities were often represented as human beings and some symbolic natural object. Once given human form, a process called anthropomorphism, the gods were then grouped in families.

Mesopotamian gods were worshipped in temple complexes that formed the center of every city. Built of mud bricks, these tall, conical structures were stepped, or built in receding tiers on platforms of different shapes. These platforms were crowned at the top by a shrine or a temple. The whole complex was called a ziggurat, and averaged about 150 feet (45.7 meters) in height. Ziggurats stretched tower-like toward the sky, forming a bridge between Earth and heaven, like the mountains that were sacred to the Sumerians. Each Mesopotamian city had at least one temple complex, and each complex was dedicated to the worship of a single deity. The temple complex in Ur, for instance, honored the moon god Sin (also called Nanna by the Sumerians). The city of Uruk had both a temple to Inanna and a ziggurat dedicated to Anu. The complexes were managed by specialist priests, who were the only people allowed to worship the deities.

The Akkadians The development of religion in Mesopotamia followed the movement of peoples in the region. Historians say that the Sumerian civilization lasted from about 3500 to about 2000 BCE. Sargon the Great (reigned c. 2334–c. 2279 BCE), the king of Akkad, a territory to the north of Sumer, created the first great empire in Mesopotamia by conquering Sumer. Sargon brought many of his own Akkadian gods into Sumer with his armies. He did not, however, engineer the destruction of the Sumerian gods. Instead, a unique mixture of gods, part Sumerian and part Akkadian, formed a new pantheon.

The Akkadians did, however, make one important change in Sumerian culture. King Sargon and his successors took on tasks formerly divided between two different types of leaders: the *en*, a permanent religious and social administrator, and the *lugal*, a temporary leader in times of war. Strong rulers such as Sargon, however, merged these functions into one, taking power away from the priestly class. Naram-Sin, who ruled from about 2254 to 2218 BCE, took this trend to an extreme and proclaimed himself a living god.

In general the Akkadians incorporated elements of Sumerian religion. The original Sumerian pantheon of gods was never destroyed but instead

was added to and further refined. Through successive rulers, including Hammurabi (1792–1769 BCE) and a host of others, the religious system continued. There may have been new rulers, but the gods were eternal.

The names of the gods changed, however, as did the emphasis of religion. For example, Nanna was the Sumerian god of the moon. In Akkadian, the language of Sargon and his people, Nanna was called Sin or Suen. Inanna, mistress of heaven, became Ishtar in Akkadian. The direction of religion also changed over time. The early Sumerians believed that humanity, after it was created, was given a divine spark by the god Enlil. This not only made people the servants of the gods during their lifetimes, but also assured them an afterlife. The coming to power of the Babylonians in the second millennium BCE changed the emphasis of religion.

The Babylonians The Babylonians carefully preserved the literary and religious heritage passed down from the Sumerians, but their major concern was to integrate their main god, Marduk, into the existing pantheon. For the Sumerians, Enlil had been the protector of kingship; for the Babylonians this was Marduk's task. In order to make Marduk the most important god, the Babylonians devised a new creation myth, the *Enuma Elish* ("The Epic of Creation," literally meaning "then up there").

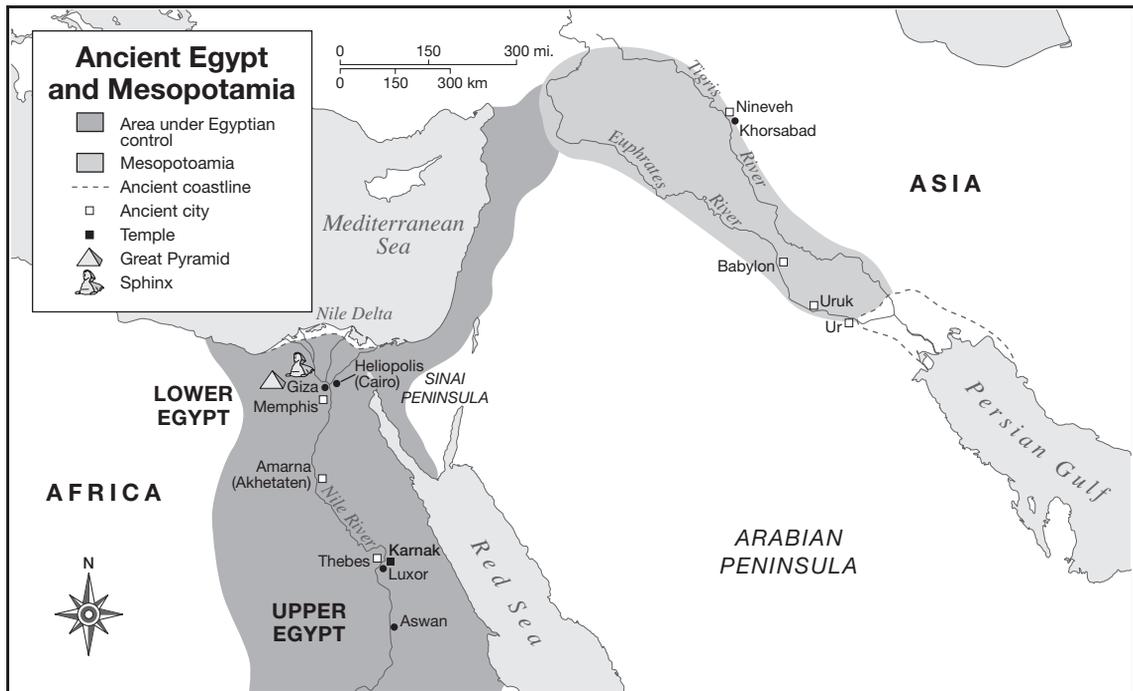
Ritual became more important after the arrival of the Babylonians. Priests increasingly relied on rituals to ward off evil spirits and to foretell future events to ensure the good will of the gods and to protect against demons. Astronomical (relating to the heavens) events took on major importance and astrology, the study of the influence of the stars and planets on human affairs, became nearly a science for the priests. Organized Mesopotamian religion collapsed after Cyrus of Persia, a Zoroastrian, conquered the Babylonian empire in 539 BCE.

History of ancient Egyptian religion The official ancient Egyptian religion lasted from about 3110 BCE to 550 CE. The official beginning of the religion is the date that Menes (c. 2925 BCE), a king of Upper Egypt, is believed to have defeated a king of Lower Egypt and unified the nation. Menes set up a national religion in the process, worshipping the creator god Ptah at his new government center of Memphis. Historians believe that the story of the war between the god Horus and his uncle Set (the result of Set's murder of Horus's father Osiris) reflects the war between Upper and Lower Egypt, with Horus's eventual victory reflecting the unification of the two countries by Menes during his sixty-two year reign.

About the Ancient Religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia

- **Belief.** Mesopotamian religion saw humans as the servants of the gods, who had to be appeased for protection. Egyptians believed that the gods created all humans but were also controlled by the principle of *maat*, or order. Unlike followers of Mesopotamian religion, the Egyptians had a strong belief in the afterlife, which they expressed by building elaborate tombs such as the pyramids.
- **Followers.** Worshipers took their names from the numerous gods and the cults that honored the deities.
- **Name of God.** The major god for much of Mesopotamia was the sky god Enlil; later the worship of Enlil was replaced by the worship of the Babylonian god Marduk. For Egyptians, Amen-Ra was the most powerful deity, chief of the pantheon.
- **Symbols.** Statues of winged bulls were a protective symbol related to the god Sin Mesopotamia, while the ankh, a kind of cross with a loop at the top, was a prominent representation of life in ancient Egypt.
- **Worship.** Priests in both religions made daily offerings in the temples and held annual festivals open to the public. Personal gods were worshipped by people in their homes.
- **Dress.** Priests in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian religions wore no special costumes.
- **Texts.** The Enuma Elish tells the Mesopotamian story of creation and explains how Marduk became the chief of the gods. The Egyptian Book of the Dead was a guide for the dead, setting out magic spells and charms to be used to pass judgment in the afterlife.
- **Sites.** Ancient Nippur was the site of the chief temple to Enlil, while Babylon was the location of Marduk's sanctuary. Thebes and the temple complex of Karnak were home to the worship of Amen-Ra. In the modern world the remains of these early religions can be seen in Egypt's pyramids, tombs for the pharaohs, and in Mesopotamia's ziggurats, temples to the gods.
- **Observances.** The New Year's Festival was a major event in Mesopotamian religion, while Egypt's most important festival was Opet.

Before this time, however, nature gods and animals had been worshipped for at least two millennia among the people who inhabited the Nile Valley. These animal deities later took human form, but their heads were still often depicted as that of an animal. Some gods even became associated with more than one animal. For example, Thoth, the god of the moon and of wisdom and protector of scribes, was depicted by the Egyptian ibis, a wading bird, by a baboon, and by a figure of the moon.



Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

In prehistoric times (before written history) the deities were local. They were worshipped in reed shrines with the local leader or king acting as the intermediary between the gods and the people. A reed is a type of tall, slender grass. The gods were thought to be housed in statues; these statues were purified, fed, and clothed daily, and annual festivals were held. The afterlife was also important for Egyptians from the earliest times, and pharaohs and queens were buried with material to make their lives easier after death. Early gods included Ptah; Anubis, the protector of the tomb; and Nit, the goddess of war.

Different cities in the united nation of Egypt held different creation myths, each centered on its own local creator god. Heliopolis, for instance, was a center near present-day Cairo where Atum was worshipped. Here, it was thought that Atum created himself out of the void, and then either spit or sneezed out Shu, the god of air, and Tefnut, the goddess of moisture. These two in turn gave birth to Geb, the earth god, and Nut, the sky goddess. From them came two pairs of siblings: Osiris and Isis, and Set and Nephtys. Eventually Ra, the sun god, took the place of Atum in the pantheon; later pharaohs, for instance, called themselves “sons of Ra.”

Another creation myth came from the city of Memphis, where Ptah was worshipped for creating the universe out of divine thought. Ultimately, however, the Ra-Atum creation story became the most popular and most widely accepted myth in ancient Egypt.

Religion during the Middle Kingdom During the period of the Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2181 BCE), Egyptian society built the great pyramids at Giza while working as a fully organized theocracy, a government with one god as the supreme leader. This theocracy reflected the role of the pharaoh, a living god whose word was divine law. During the Middle Kingdom (c. 2181–1786 BCE), however, the power of the pharaoh weakened and nobles (lesser royalty) began to take on more individual power. The priestly class also grew much larger. Though the sun god Ra was the official national god and was worshipped at Heliopolis, the cult of Osiris became stronger as the central government went into decline. Osiris was an early fertility god who, when killed by his brother Set and cut into pieces, was put back together again by his wife–sister Isis. He then became god of the underworld. Osiris became identified with the dead pharaoh. His son, Horus, became associated with the living pharaoh. Osiris eventually became a symbol of immortality and resurrection, or returning to life after death, and, as such, symbolized the annual renewal of fertility to the soil by the flooding of the Nile. A lengthy annual festival was held for him to celebrate this rebirth.

The Middle Kingdom came to an end with the Hyksos invasion of Lower Egypt, with the new invaders adapting Egyptian habits and gods. The New Kingdom (c. 1570–1085 BCE) began when Egyptian nobles drove the Hyksos out. During this period the god Amen came to prominence and was worshipped at Karnak, near Thebes. Amen incorporated aspects of earlier gods such as Ptah and Ra, becoming for a time the primary creator-god. The Amen priesthood grew impressively strong not only in religious power but also with political power. When Amen and Ra were combined into the godhead Amen-Ra, the temple at Karnak required the services of more than eighty thousand employees.

A short-lived experiment in state-sponsored monotheism (belief in only one god) occurred during the New Kingdom period. Amenhotep IV, who called himself Akhenaten (reigned 1379–62 BCE), declared that the only god was the one he himself worshipped: Aten, the god of the sun, and the solar disk, the Aten. Akhenaten's experiment in monotheism had the effect of reducing the power of the priestly class

and the nobility and reviving the power of the pharaoh. This experiment ended, however, with Akhenaten's death in 1336 BCE as the old gods were quickly brought back. All traces of Akhenaten were destroyed, from the inscription of his name on temples to his mummy. With the restoration of the old gods, the priests of Karnak and at another holy site, Luxor, regained their power at the expense of the monarchy. At the city of Thebes, the high priest of Amen became the first of a ruling class of high priests, while the pharaoh continued to wield power from a new city center, Tanis, in the Nile Delta.

During the course of the second half of the first millennium BCE the power and prestige of Egypt was reduced. Foreign conquerors inhabited the land, and various cults gained favor and then went out of favor. But Amen and Amen-Ra remained the major cult. The local goddess Neith became more popular and was later incorporated into Greek and Roman pantheons in the figures of Athena and Diana. Even after the introduction of Christianity, the ancient gods continued to be worshipped until about the sixth century CE.

Sects and schisms

Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian deities had cults that were popular in different places and in different times. Of note were two later Mesopotamian deities, Marduk and Ashur. Marduk was the national god of Babylonia, and the Babylonians went to great pains to rewrite the creation myth so that he would be the king of gods, replacing the Mesopotamian god Enlil. Such a replacement lasted for about one thousand years until the Assyrian god Ashur replaced Marduk as the primary god in the pantheon. Ashur was a warlike god and took Ishtar, the goddess of war, as his wife or consort.

The most notable schism in ancient Egyptian religion was launched by Amenhotep IV (c. 1371–c. 1336 BCE), who proclaimed the worship of Aten, the god and disk of the sun. In the fourteenth century BCE Amenhotep IV demanded that the worship of other gods be abandoned and that Aten be served by a cult in which he, himself, was the only priest. To show his dedication to Aten, Amenhotep changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning “He Who Is of Service to Aten.” Atenism, as it is called, was not a natural evolution of ancient Egypt's religious practices. Akhenaten forced it on the people. As a result he faced resistance to this change, especially from the powerful priests of Amen-Ra in the capital of Thebes.



Ancient Egyptian gods were often depicted in human form, although they could appear with the head of an animal. Among the central deities were Horus (left), with the head of a falcon, Osiris, and Isis.

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CORBIS.

Further undermining the power of the traditional priesthood, Akhenaten set up a new capital city, called Akhetaten (modern-day Tell el-Amarna), which he dedicated to the Aten. Artwork from this period shows Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti, or Neferneferuaten, worshipping the Aten, the sun disk. After Akhenaten's death Atenism and Akhetaten were quickly abandoned and the old gods were revived. The new pharaoh, Tutankhamen (reigned 1333–25 BCE), moved the capital back to Thebes and placed the traditional priesthood back in power.

Basic beliefs

For early Mesopotamians the world was divided into heaven (*an*) and earth (*ki*). The earth was flat and floated in a freshwater sea, the *abzu*. By serving the gods and by living a moral (good and honest) life, humankind would be rewarded with long life and many offspring. As for the afterlife, it was believed that a kind of ghost or double survived physical death. When

a person died and his or her body was buried, his or her ghost descended to the underworld to join those already departed. The underworld was ruled by the god Ereshkigal. Later Babylonian religion also assumed that resurrection, or physical life after death, was possible. Babylonians believed in the “waters of life” and called their chief deity, Marduk, the “one who brings the dead to life.” Mostly, however, it appears that Mesopotamians believed that earthly life was all there was, and that death led to disintegration of the body.

Hundreds of gods were involved in Mesopotamian religion. In addition to being connected with some aspect of nature, they also had a responsibility for different spheres of human activity. For example, Shamash, the god of the sun, was also in charge of justice. Successive waves of settlers and conquerors in the region all brought their own gods and goddesses. These were mixed with those already found in Mesopotamia. The Sumerians had their city gods and harvest gods, but nomads who invaded Mesopotamia from the north or the east brought with them water gods and sand gods. People who came from high mountain regions brought gods of thunder and lightning.

The three chief gods in the Sumerian pantheon were An, the sky god, Enlil, the god of weather and storms, and Enki, god of wisdom and the abzu. Other important deities included the mother goddess, Ninhursag; Nanna, god of the moon who helped travelers find their way; Utu, sun god and the watchful eye of justice; and Inanna, the goddess of love and war and the one who guaranteed the kingship. Inanna in particular had a strong and lasting influence on Mesopotamian culture. She was featured in many fertility rites, but was also called upon in time of war. Over the course of time, with movements of new people into the area, the names of the gods changed. For instance, the Sumerian goddess Innana received the Akkadian name of Ishtar, just as Nanna later became Sin and Enki became Ea.

Beliefs in ancient Egypt Egyptians believed that the world was brought into being by Atum or Ra, whose descendants were Osiris, Set, and Isis. These, however, were just a fraction of the gods worshipped by Egyptians. Some estimates put the total number as high as one or two thousand different deities. What began as animal worship led to an immense pantheon. Amen or Amen-Ra became the most powerful of the gods, center of the national cult; the cult of Osiris was second most powerful. The worship of the sun god Ra led to the construction of immense pyramids for the pharaohs, sons of Ra. The pharaoh was considered a living god, appointed by Horus (son and avenger of Osiris).

For ancient Egyptians the gods were subject to the same sense of order and justice, *maat*, that mortals were. The universe had been created through *maat* as a replacement for the chaos that once existed. Interaction with the gods was intended to establish *maat* in society. It was the duty of the pharaoh to interpret the word of the gods in order to establish order and justice.

The ancient Egyptians also strongly believed in an afterlife. Much of their religion's focus was centered on ensuring an afterlife, which contained all of the joys and pleasures of the living world. Egyptians believed in at least three different kinds of souls. When a person died one soul, the *ba*, left the body permanently, while a different kind of soul, the *akb*, remained with the body. The *ka*, a third type of soul, was a spiritual duplicate of the dead person, and left its body to journey to the underworld for judgment. The *ka* had to return to its body periodically during the time it was undergoing judgment. If the body was damaged or decayed during this period, the *ka* might lose its way and be lost, a kind of eternal damnation.

Fertility Myths

Throughout the ancient Near East there were common myths of fertility, or tales of death and rebirth that can be read as a metaphor (or symbol) of the death and rebirth of vegetation during the seasons of the year. In Mesopotamian religion there is the story of Ishtar's hunt for her husband, Tammuz, the god of the seasons and fertility. She descends to the underworld in search of him and returns with him triumphantly to Earth. Tammuz, however, can only spend spring and summer on Earth; the rest of the year he must remain in the underworld. In some traditions, Tammuz is Ishtar's son; in others, he is her lover rather than her husband.

A similar regeneration myth lies at the heart of Egyptian popular religion. Ancient Egyptians believed that Osiris was god of the Nile River and of resurrection and vegetation before he became god of the underworld. Killed by his evil brother Set, god of chaos, his body was chopped into pieces and scattered. His loyal wife, the sky goddess Isis, found the pieces and put his body back together. She made herself pregnant from Osiris's body, and their son Horus revenged Osiris's murder, defeating his uncle Set in epic combat. Horus became the god of a unified Egypt, identified throughout Egyptian history with the divine right of the pharaoh.

Mummification solved the problem of the ka by preserving the body after death, giving the spirit a familiar house to return to. The process of mummification, which could take up to two months to complete, was at first only used for royalty. Later the practice was opened up to include anyone who could afford the specialists and the expensive ingredients required for the process of preservation. By the Middle Kingdom the nobility and even some commoners (non-royalty) were being buried in elaborate tombs and having their bodies embalmed, or preserved.

Egyptians also worried about passing the tests they believed they would face in the afterlife. Elaborate manuals were written as guides to these tests. These included the Book of Amdurat, the Book of Gates, the Book of Caverns, and for those commoners wealthy enough to have a scribe make a copy for them, the Book of the Dead, also called Spells for Going Forth by Day.

The most important trial the spirit faced before being allowed into the afterlife was the Judgment of the Dead. The deceased began by making confessions and acts of atonement, or apology, to the gods. Anubis, the god of embalming, then led the person by the hand to the Hall of Maat. The deceased's heart was weighed on a scale against the feather of truth, a symbol of the goddess Maat. If the heart was lighter than the feather, the deceased was admitted into the

afterlife. If the feather was lighter than the heart, however, the goddess Ammut, Devourer of the Dead, consumed the deceased, destroying the soul forever. If the deceased passed the judgment he or she was led off by Horus to meet with Osiris and enter the Underworld.

Sacred writings

The primary sacred text for the Mesopotamian religion was the long epic poem dealing with creation, the Enuma Elish. The most complete copy that has survived dates from the end of the second millennium BCE and is

thus a rather late addition to the Mesopotamian religion. It is, in effect, an effort by the Babylonians to assert the power of their national god, Marduk. As such, the poem not only relates how Earth was created but also how the gods came to be.

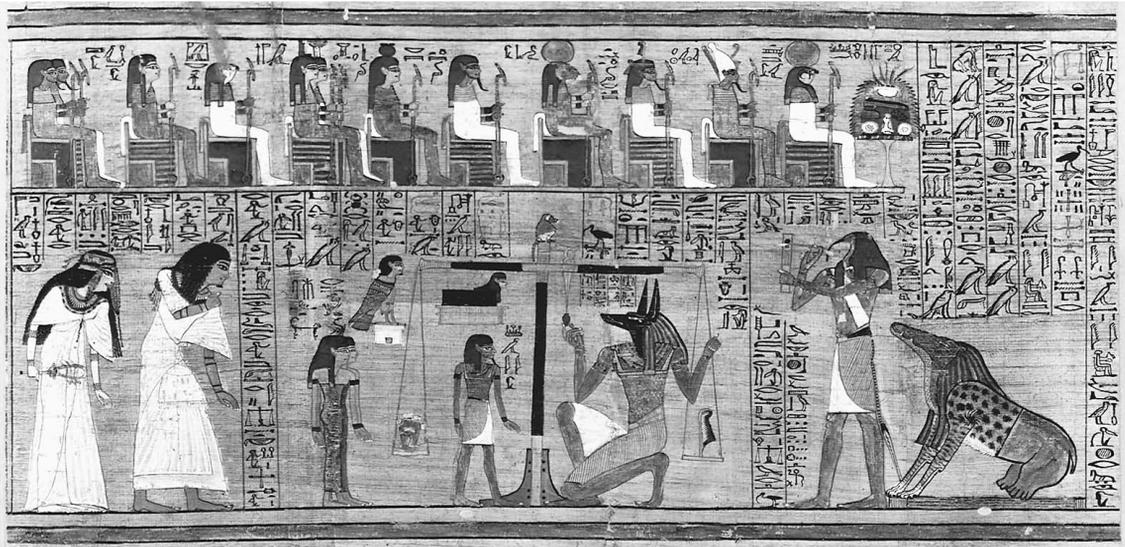
The gods, according to this text, came before the creation of the world. This epic describes the fight between the forces of order, as represented by Marduk and the young gods, and the forces of chaos, as represented by Tiamat, Kingu, and the old gods. According to Leonard William King's translation *The Seven Tables of Creation* (London, UK: Luzac and Co., 1902), it begins:

When in the height heaven was not named,
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,
And the primeval Apsû, who begat [gave birth to] them,
And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both,—
Their waters were mingled together,
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;
When of the gods none had been called into being,
And none bore a name, and no destinies [were ordained];
Then were created the gods in the midst of [heaven] . . .

Other texts important to this early religion include *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. This text tells of the mythical exploits of Gilgamesh, a king of Uruk, from about 2700 BCE and deals with the behavior of the gods towards him. Also important are myths such as the one told in the story “Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld.” In it, Ishtar, the goddess of war, travels down through the seven gates of the Underworld to find Tammuz, the god of the seasons and fertility.

Ancient Egypt's main religious text seems to have been the Book of the Dead. The Book of the Dead is often referred to as the Papyrus of Ani, after the collection of documents in which it was found. Papyrus is an early form of paper made from reeds. The book is a collection of two hundred prayers, spells, and illustrations that provided a guide to the afterlife. The earliest Book of the Dead ever recovered dates from the mid-fifteenth century BCE.

The book was meant to ensure a happy afterlife. The spells included were meant to make the deceased pass various tests to prove his or her innocence of earthly sins, thus avoiding punishment by the gods and gaining access to a happy afterlife. It also included guidelines on how to navigate the dangers of the Underworld, such as being devoured by



The Book of the Dead, sometimes called the Papyrus of Ani, contains detailed instructions on how the deceased ancient Egyptians should act when facing the weighing of the heart against the feather of truth. PUBLIC DOMAIN.

an angry god, to reach the afterlife. One of the most important of these trials occurred at the start of the Judgment of the Dead. In the declaration of innocence prior to the weighing of the heart on the scales of truth the deceased declares that he or she has lived a good life without sin (“The Egyptian Book of the Dead,” chapter 125, TourEgypt.net).

Hail to you, great God, Lord of Justice! I have come to you, my lord, that you may bring me so that I may see your beauty, for I know you and I know your name, and I know the names of the forty-two gods of those who are with you in this Hall of Justice, who live on those who cherish evil and who gulp down their blood on that day of the reckoning of characters in the presence of Wennefer. Behold the double son of the Songstresses; Lord of Truth is your name. Behold I have come to you, I have brought you truth, I have repelled falsehood for you.

I have not done falsehood against men, I have not impoverished my associates, I have done no wrong in the Place of Truth, I have not learnt that which is not, I have done no evil, I have not daily made labor in excess of what was to be done for me, my name has not reached the offices of those who control slaves, I have not deprived the orphan of his property, I have not done what the gods detest, I have not slandered a servant to his master, I have not caused pain, I have not made hungry, I have not made to weep, I have not killed, I have not turned anyone over to a killer, I have not caused anyone’s suffering . . .

The Book of the Dead was found in tombs for commoners as well as royalty. All levels of Egyptian society were concerned about their afterlife and wanted to be prepared to meet it successfully.

Sacred symbols

The winged bull, a blend of sky god and earth god powers, is a strong symbolic representation of the Mesopotamian religion. The winged bull has the head of a man bearing a cap with two (and sometimes three) horns, the body of a bull or lion, and wings like an eagle. The horns on the cap symbolize the bull's godlike nature. Large sculptures of the creatures were found at three sites of ancient Mesopotamia, from a time when Assyria ruled the region (1350–612 BCE). These sites are Khorsabad, Nineveh, and Nimrod. They represent spiritual guardians that repel evil, and they always appear in pairs.

Assyrian kings often had pairs of winged bulls flanking the entrance to their palaces. The sculptures were sometimes accompanied by inscriptions that called upon the winged bulls to deter enemies and protect the king. The Mesopotamian moon god, Sin (also called Nanna), has a lapis lazuli beard and rides a winged bull. Lapis lazuli is a blue semiprecious stone.

A powerful and still popular symbol of ancient Egypt's religion is the *ankh*. The ankh resembles a cross, but has an upside down teardrop shape at its top. In the ancient Egyptian written language of hieroglyphs, the ankh represents life. It is often present in tomb carvings and other artwork. It is associated with magical protection, or *sa*. Even those ancient Egyptians who could not read hieroglyphs knew the ankh symbol.

The ankh may represent the sunrise or rebirth. Many ancient gods carried ankhs and often “blessed” pharaohs with an ankh, symbolizing the act of giving them the breath of life. Among the gods often seen with ankhs are Osiris, Isis, Ra, Hathor, and Anubis. As a result the ankh not only represented worldly life but the afterlife. In fact, the ancient Egyptian term for sarcophagus or coffin was *neb-ankh*, meaning “possessor of life.” The ankh's popularity has reached beyond Egypt's borders and around the world into the twenty-first century. Whether it is the appeal of an ancient symbol for life or an interest in ancient Egypt, the ankh remains a popular decoration.

The remains of civilization The most obvious symbols of both Mesopotamian and ancient Egyptian religions are their architectural remains.



Mesopotamia's ziggurats were large, stepped temples dedicated to a particular god or goddess. They could contain as few as two or as many as seven levels. © NIK WHEELER/CORBIS.

While these are the historical remnants of great civilizations, they have also come to represent all that those civilizations entailed. Many of these ancient artifacts are, in fact, religious in nature. The ziggurat, or stepped temple, of Mesopotamia is an impressive structure dedicated to the worship of the gods. Each level of the ziggurat is smaller than the last, creating multiple terraces that reach up into the heavens. A ziggurat could have as few as two or as many as seven levels. At the top was a temple that could be reached by stairs or ramps. Archaeologists believe that many ziggurats were painted in various colors.

Among the most identifiable symbols of ancient Egypt and its religion are the pyramids. The Great Pyramid and its two smaller neighbors at Giza are the most well-known. Pyramids are tombs built for pharaohs. The pyramid had tall, sloping sides that typically ended in a point. Archaeologists believe this structure was a sym-

bolic representation of the dead pharaoh climbing to the sky to live forever. It also represented the sun. The pharaoh was buried inside the pyramid with all of the items he would need in the afterlife. The tomb was then sealed.

About eighty pyramids have survived to modern times. Not all of these are in the classic shape of the pyramids at Giza. Another well-known pyramid is the step pyramid at Saqqara. The pharaoh Djoser (reigned twenty-seventh century BCE) had this tomb built with several layers, or steps, in its design. The structure of the step pyramid is similar to that of Mesopotamia's ziggurats in this respect.

Worship

Both Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt had a large class of professional priests to care for the gods. The priestly class was very powerful because each religion played a dominant role in its society. Priests and priestesses served as the intermediaries between the common man and the divine. They held the responsibility for keeping the gods happy. Commoners

also gave personal worship to the gods. Religion was such a central part of Mesopotamian and ancient Egyptian life that each day involved some devotion or other action to the gods.

Mesopotamian worship Obedience to the gods was the primary job of humankind in Mesopotamian religion. The legion of gods all had to be cared for. That was the task of the priestly class. Statues to the gods were kept in temples, each of which was devoted to a different deity. The temples employed a vast staff of workers and priests. The temples were not simply religious centers, but also served as storehouses for the surplus harvest. In effect, they were banks of deposit for community wealth. Daily offerings to the deities were made in the temples, and cleaning and purification rituals took place. Offerings were made by royal and commoner alike, and these were taken by the temple personnel.

Each cult or worship of a deity had special festivals. For example, Inanna or Ishtar was, among other things, goddess of fertility and protector of the storehouses. Each year a ritual marriage took place between the goddess and the ruler at the time of harvest. Marduk was the deity at the center for the annual New Year's Festival, held at the spring equinox. At these times, statues of the gods and goddesses were paraded through the streets for all to see. Normally, however, the sacred statues were kept in the temples.

Private individuals often had their own personal gods and had small shrines devoted to them in their homes. There, they would worship their favored god and ask for protection or relief. These private gods were often "fired" if the people felt they were not getting satisfaction and that their offerings were being wasted. They would adopt another personal god in the hopes of getting better results from their prayers.

Early on, the priests in Mesopotamian religion took charge of the temples and storehouses and also of the care of the gods. By the Babylonian period these priests had created elaborate rituals and ceremonies, including offerings and sacrifices. They were responsible for foretelling the future and created more elaborate rituals for such acts of divination, or reading of the signs of the gods. Wind, storms, rain, fire, eclipses of the sun or moon, the appearance of a lion, the shape of a sheep's liver, and the movement of the stars all were signs from the gods according to Mesopotamian religion, and their priests could read such signs. They became experts in what is called extispicy, or the readings of organs of sacrificed animals. Marks on the liver or lungs could provide clues as to what would happen in the future.

Praise to the Gods

Like many modern religions, the religions of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia were highly organized. Certain classes of people were set apart to worship and care for the gods. In ancient Egypt, for instance, there was a large class of priests and priestesses entrusted with caring for the temples. Mesopotamian religion was divided in a similar way. Part of the Mesopotamian priesthood's job included praising the gods in hymns and prayers. The two excerpts here, "The Exaltation of Inana" and "Hymn to Ra," show how differently Mesopotamians and ancient Egyptians viewed their gods. The Mesopotamian goddess Inana (spelled Inana in this translation) is described by her priestess Enheduanna as fierce and capable of much destruction. The royal scribe Nekht associates the Egyptian sun god Ra (also spelled Re) with love and joy.

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The Exaltation of Inana

Lady of all the divine powers, resplendent [dazzling] light, righteous woman clothed in radiance, beloved of An and Ura! Mistress of heaven, with the great pectoral jewels, who loves the good headdress befitting the office of *en* priestess, who has seized all seven of its divine powers! My lady, you are the guardian of the great divine powers! . . . Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the foreign lands. When like Ickur [god of storms] you roar at the earth, no vegetation can stand up to you. As a flood descending upon (?) those foreign lands, powerful one of heaven and earth, you are their Inana.

Raining blazing fire down upon the Land, endowed with divine powers by An, lady who rides upon a beast, whose words are spoken at the holy command of An! The great rites are yours: who can fathom them? Destroyer of

foreign lands, you confer strength on the storm. Beloved of Enlil, you have made awesome terror weight upon the Land. You stand at the service of An's commands. . . .

"The Exaltation of Inana (Inana B): Translation." In Black, J. A., Cunningham, G., Fluckiger-Hawker, E., Robson, E., and Zólyomi, G. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/>), Oxford, England, 1998–.

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Hymn to Ra

Homage to thee, O thou glorious Being, thou who art dowered [with all sovereignty (power)]. O Tem-Heru-Khuti (Tem-Haramkhis), when thou risest in the horizon of heaven a cry of joy goeth forth to thee from all people. O thou beautiful Being, thou dost renew thyself in thy season in the form of the Disk, within thy mother Hathor. Therefore in every place every heart swelleth with joy at thy rising for ever. The regions of the South and the North come to thee with homage [respect, worship], and send forth acclamations [praise] at thy rising on the horizon of heaven, and thou illuminest the Two Lands with rays of turquoise-[coloured] light. . . . O thou god of life, thou lord of love, all men live when thou shinest; thou art crowned king of the gods. The goddess Nut embraceth thee, the goddess Mut enfoldeth thee at all seasons. Those who are in thy following sing unto thee with joy, and they bow down their foreheads to the earth when they meet thee, the lord of heaven, the lord of the earth, the King of Truth, the lord of eternity, the prince of everlastingness, thou sovereign [ruler] of all the gods, thou god of life, thou creator of eternity, thou maker of heaven wherein thou art firmly established.

"Hymn to Ra." *Internet Ancient History Sourcebook*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/ra-ani.html>.

Astrology, or predicting the future from the movement of the stars, also became a central practice of Babylonian religion. The Babylonians were the first to divide the sky into the twelve zones of the zodiac. They followed the movements of planets and stars with great care in an effort to foretell the will of the gods. Priests also made a good living in the sale of magic charms and formulas to drive away evil spirits.

Egyptian worship Egyptians also had cults that worshipped their own particular god or goddess. The priests made daily offerings to their gods through the statues kept in their temples. The gods and goddesses were charged with maintaining justice and order in the world, and were considered too important to be bothered with the everyday problems of common people. Priests made offerings to ensure that the gods fulfilled that function. Commoners had no contact with these gods except when the statues were paraded through the streets on special festivals.

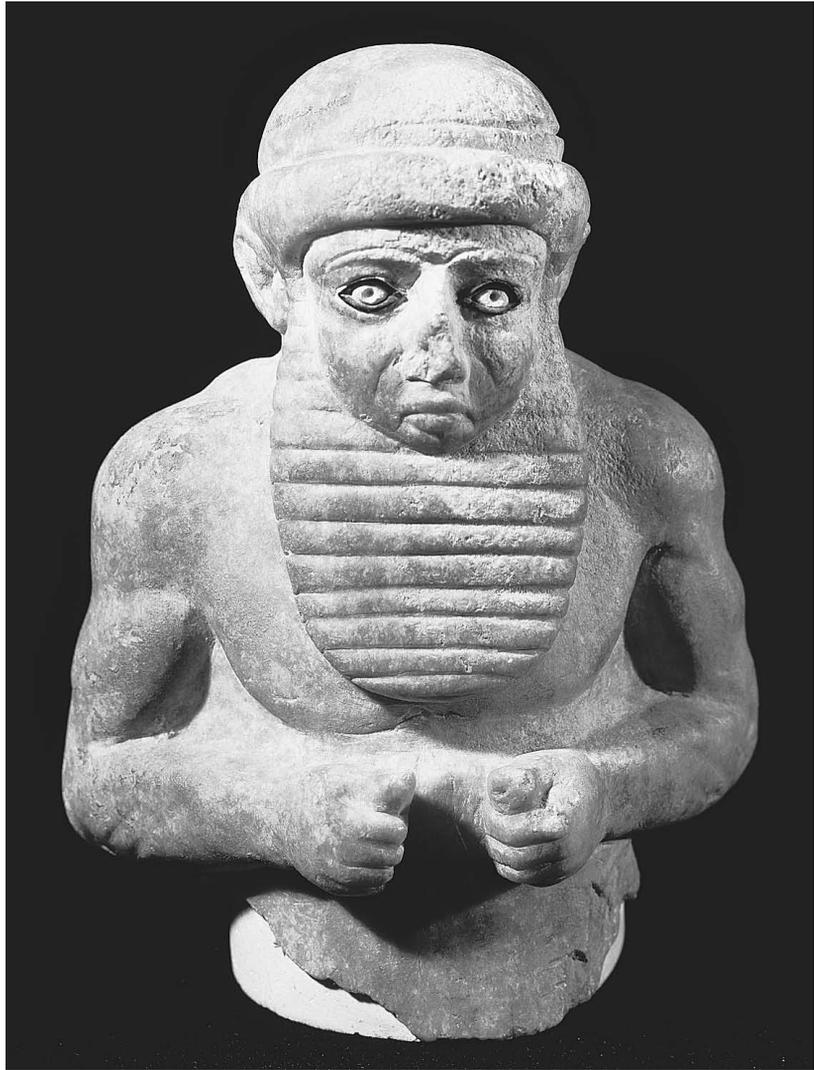
There was no central text to tell people how to live a good life or to explain the doctrines or rules of the religion. Instead, the cult rituals surrounding each god made up Egyptian religion. Temples, called *hwt-ntr* (literally, “houses of god”), were supported by huge estates to help supply offerings for the gods. Strictly speaking, only the pharaoh, himself a god, could talk with the gods. But in practical terms, he appointed priests as his representatives to serve at the various temples. Initially, this priestly class was voluntary and was divided into four groups who served for one month and then returned to private life for three months. There were different levels of priests as well, from high priests down to the lowest class who carried water for drinking and for purification ceremonies.

As the rituals of national cults became more centralized, the priestly class became professional and a powerful force in the country. The image or statue of the god or goddess was the center of cult activity. Once made, the statue acquired a *ka* and a *ba* through a ritual called “opening the mouth.” The *ka* of the god lived in the statue in the same way that the *ka* of a person lived in that person’s body. Possessing these components, the statue came to be possessed with the spirit of the gods.

Daily rituals included clothing and cleaning the statues and offering food to the gods. Other rituals took place periodically to protect the statues. Hymns were sung and prayers spoken. Festivals were held throughout the year, at which times the public could approach the gods. During the rest of the year the common people could go to a small chapel built at

Ancient Religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia

Priests in the Mesopotamian religion were in charge of temples and of taking care of the gods. They would oversee sometimes elaborate rituals and were called upon to foretell the future. © GIANNI DAGLI ORTI/CORBIS.



the rear of temples, the “chapel of the hearing ear,” to ask for advice and to pray to the gods.

Observances and pilgrimages

Religious celebrations in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt combined public displays with private rituals. Many occasions had components of both. All displays were meant to affirm the greatness of the gods and usually the legitimacy of the ruler as well. In both cultures the ruler was closely associated with the gods. This was intended to justify

the ruler's leadership and discourage others from seeking power. Festivals and pilgrimages also offered the public a chance to seek favor from the gods and celebrate their devotion.

Mesopotamia Major festivals in Mesopotamian religion included the New Year's Festival and the Sacred Marriage. The New Year's Festival was held at the spring equinox, or the start of spring. This festival celebrated the rebirth of the year. In later religious practice, this holiday was associated with the god Marduk's main festival, called Akitu. It lasted for eleven days and involved ceremonies of purification and a ceremonial reenactment of the battle between Marduk and the forces of chaos. Prayers and offerings of food and wine were made to the gods during the first three days. The fourth day was a high point of the festivities. Then the *Enuma Elish*, "The Epic of Creation," was read or performed as a play for the public. This work celebrates the god Marduk. The next day, the people purified themselves, by bathing their sins away in water.

The king also participated in these festivities, but he did so in the temples. There, to show his loyalty to Marduk, the king was slapped in the face by the priests and made to promise to the statue of Marduk that he had committed no sins in the previous year. A priest would then slap the king's face again, hard enough to bring tears. Tears showed that Marduk was pleased with the king. A bull was sacrificed, or killed, that evening. Not all the rituals have been recorded, but it seems there was also a parade through the streets of the city with the king holding the hand of the statue of Marduk.

Some historians suggest that the New Year's celebration and the Sacred Marriage were combined. The Sacred Marriage brought together the king and the goddess Innana, likely represented by a priestess. The ritual recognized the divine authority of the king to rule by "marrying" him to Innana. It also promoted the king's fertility through the symbolic consummation of marriage with the goddess.

Pilgrimage sites for Mesopotamians are not recorded. Historians suspect that the Nanna Ziggurat, a great temple complex at Ur to the moon god, was a major center for travelers who devoted that god. Similarly, the Inanna or Ishtar Ziggurat at Uruk may have been a pilgrimage site for that important goddess.

Egypt One of the most important festivals in ancient Egypt was Opet. It took place yearly at the temple of Luxor in Thebes. The festival brought

Preserving the Dead

The process called mummification helped preserve the bodies of ancient Egyptians, making them suitable for the afterlife. Moisture is needed for the decay of a human or animal body. In ancient Egypt, a very arid or dry land, the mummification process was accomplished by making the dead body very dry. The first mummies found date from about 2900 BCE, and the process improved slowly over time.

The basic technique of mummification involves taking all the organs out of the body and then treating the inside cavity or space with a mixture of drying chemicals. This mixture, natron, is made up of four salts: sodium carbonate, sodium bicarbonate, sodium chloride, and sodium sulfate. Sodium carbonate works as a drying agent, drawing the water out of the body. At the same time the bicarbonate creates a hostile environment for bacteria, the tiny organisms that cause decay.

After seventy days of being preserved in this large salty mixture (modern researchers think that up to six hundred pounds of natron might have been necessary to cover a body), the body would be completely dried out, losing about two-thirds of its weight. The natron was then cleaned out, and the empty cavity was rubbed with palm wine and packed with spices and packets of wood shavings. The outside of the body was also rubbed with a mixture of five oils, and then wrapped in bandages. Many of the organs were stored in jars and were buried with the mummy.

Mummies were buried in tombs or pyramids. At first, mummification was so expensive that only the kings and their families could afford it. Later in the history of ancient Egypt, more commoners were mummified as well. Even favored household or symbolic animals, such as cats or ibises, were mummified, so that the dead person would have companionship in the afterlife.

together the human and divine aspects of the pharaoh. In the earliest days of its celebrations, the festival lasted for eleven days. Many years later, however, it had grown to twenty-seven days. During the festival thousands of loaves of bread, cakes, and jars of beer were distributed to the public. Images of the royal family and gods were paraded, at first by foot and later by barge (boat), from the temple at Karnak to Luxor. Along the way, people asked favors of the gods through the statues. The pharaoh would merge his ka with the divine behind closed doors at the temple in Luxor. He would then emerge into public to cheers from the crowd, for whom it was now reaffirmed that the pharaoh was a living god. The rituals of Opet were quite different from the Sacred Marriage of Mesopotamia, but the purpose behind them was the same: to confirm the authority of the ruler.

Eight months after the Feast of Opet came the second major Egyptian festival, the Feast of the Valley. This was an opportunity for Egyptians to reconnect with those who had died. The image of Amen was brought out of the temple at Karnak into public view and was taken by barge across the Nile to visit temples in the west. Even though this was a serious occasion, music and dancing accompanied the procession of Amen on the royal barge. Amen would be taken into the major temples and also to a necropolis, a large graveyard to honor the dead. The Egyptians ate and drank large amounts during the Feast of the Valley, believing this brought them closer to their dead relatives and loved ones. Visits to important temples, such as those at Luxor and Karnak, were also important pilgrimages.

Abydos is an ancient holy place in Egypt. It was believed that the god Osiris's head was sent to Abydos after he was assassinated and dismembered by his brother Set. Pilgrims began to

come to Abydos to pay tribute to Osiris. Parts of the story of his death at the hands of his brother, his wife Isis's search for his remains, and his return to life were played out in public during the Festival of Osiris. Others were replayed by priests behind the closed doors of the temple. Common pilgrims made small offerings of statuettes or chapels. Pharaohs, such as Seti I (reigned 1318–04 BCE), built temples.

Everyday living

Religion affected every aspect of daily life in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. All important activities and occasions were presented to the priests to see if the time was right and if the gods were in favor of their happening. People in both cultures often engaged in some form of daily prayer and marked important stages in life, including birth, marriage, and death, with rituals of passage. Religion even affected the legal system.

Daily life in Mesopotamia In ancient Mesopotamia the growth of the first cities was directly related to the development of Mesopotamian religion. The temple complex serving a specific deity was located at the center of the urban area. The ziggurats became not only religious centers but also warehouses, where the year's grain crop was stored. Because they were visible for miles around, they were a continual reminder to the ancient Mesopotamians of the power of the gods.

The city wall protected the temple, the royal buildings, and the houses of the common citizens from invasion by enemies. Outside the walls lay the houses and farms of those who worked the land and who kept the city running. There was also usually a wharf, or waterfront. Most of the large Mesopotamian cities were built along the great rivers of the region, the Tigris or the Euphrates.

Ancient Mesopotamia was basically a two-class society, consisting of the property owners and the vast majority of the population, who did not own property. Life was hard for most people, who survived on a subsistence (basic survival) income and had few luxuries to enjoy. The homes of poor farmers and laborers were very simple by comparison to those of wealthy property owners. These were simple one-story buildings with one or two rooms. Mud brick was the usual building material. Little is known about what kind of furniture homes might have, but in the homes of rich and poor alike were shrines to their favored deities. The people said daily prayers to these deities, asking for assistance in their lives, for a good crop or good health.

The many festivals and feast days of the religious calendar provided these people with release from their daily routine. The Mesopotamian calendar was based on the phases of the Moon, or the lunar month, and had twenty-nine or thirty days. Of these, six were regular holidays. There were also annual festivals. Other times of feasting and celebration came when the king led a victorious military campaign against enemy armies, and booty, or property taken from the conquered people, was shared with the citizens. At times such as these, the usual diet (barley, made into bread and beer) was enlivened with the addition of meats such as beef and mutton.

Recreation and sport also figured into these festival times, with celebrations of boxing, wrestling, dancing, and music. Hunting was also considered a religious matter, especially for the royalty and the wealthy. For them the hunt became a symbol of the battle of good over evil. When the king killed a lion, for example, he was not only showing his skill and bravery, but also his closeness to the gods who protected him in the hunt.

Mesopotamian rites of passage The major rites of passage for ancient Mesopotamians were the same as those for people in many other cultures: birth, marriage, and death. Families were nuclear, that is, they consisted of a father, mother, and children. The father was accepted as head of the household. Birth was an occasion for much religious care. Women giving birth wore special ornaments to scare off the female demon Lamashtu, who was said to kill or kidnap children. The moon god, Nanna, was called upon to help the woman in labor. The earliest lullabies, or soothing songs sung to babies, were adapted from incantations, or sung prayers, to protect the infant.

The next major rite of passage, marriage, was both a religious and a legal matter. Law codes that survive show that marriage was celebrated in a ceremony that had five parts:

1. the engagement, in which parents agreed to the future marriage;
2. payments by both families of a dowry to the bride and a payment to the groom (the bride-price);
3. the wedding ceremony itself, which could last several days with feasting;
4. the arrival of the bride in her father-in-law's house, where the couple would at first live; and
5. the consummation of the marriage (sexual intercourse).

The Gods

There were hundreds of gods in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian pantheons. The gods controlled all aspects of life, especially nature, which could often be cruel. Particular gods protected various city-states in Mesopotamia, and large temples were built in their honor at the city center. Sin's main temple, for instance, was in the city of Ur. Smaller temples were available throughout city-states for people to make personal offerings to the gods.

Egypt also favored different gods. Worship of Amen-Ra was primarily centered around Thebes. Isis was popular at Philae. Individuals, too, chose personal gods from among the many hundreds to worship. Even pharaohs would differ about which god they preferred.

Gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon

Anu: The sky god. He is sometimes called the King of the Gods. At the beginning of time, Earth was separated from heaven, and heaven became Anu's home. He can be sent to Earth to avenge the gods.

Ea: The fun-loving god of fresh waters, wisdom, and magic. Ea is also named Enki. In a Babylonian myth similar to that of the Judeo-Christian story of Noah's Ark, Ea reveals to Utnapishtim that Enlil intends to destroy mankind in a flood.

Enlil: The god of air, wind, and storms. Enlil is one of the most important Mesopotamian gods. He guards the Tablets of Destiny, on which the fate of everything on Earth is written.

Ishtar: The goddess of love and war. She is also known as Inanna. Ishtar journeyed to the Underworld to retrieve her love, Tammuz. She is often described as very violent and is depicted holding several weapons and standing on a lion.

Marduk: The god of Babylon who later came to be the supreme god. Marduk fought an

army of demons led by the goddess Tiamat. The New Year's festival celebrates the king's fitness to rule through a ceremony in which he bows to a statue of Marduk.

Sin: The moon god. He is also known as Nanna. He is lord of the calendar and oversees the seasons. Sin wears a beard of the blue stone lapis lazuli and rides a winged bull.

Gods of the Egyptian pantheon

Amen: Called the King of Gods. Amen, also spelled Amon or Amun, was often combined with Ra, or Re. Amen-Ra was an even more powerful god.

Anubis: The god of embalming, or of preserving the bodies of the dead. Anubis is depicted as a jackal or as a man with the head of a jackal.

Horus: The god of the sky. Horus is the child of Osiris and Isis. After Set killed Osiris, Horus fought Set for the rule of Egypt. He is represented by the image of a hawk or as a man with a hawk's head. The pharaoh was considered to be the living Horus.

Isis: A protective goddess. Isis was important to Egyptians as the mother of the living Horus.

Maat: The goddess of truth and justice. She oversees harmony and justice. Her symbol is the feather, which she is often shown wearing on her head.

Osiris: The god of the dead and of resurrection, he is also the ruler of the Underworld. Osiris is married to Isis and is the father of Horus. He is shown as a mummified man, all in white.

Ra: The sun god. Ra, or Re, is one of the most important Egyptian gods. He is shown as a man with a hawk's head, wearing a headdress with a sun disk.

Divorce was allowed, but usually only when requested by the man. In this case the woman's property had to be returned to the bride's family. Little is known about the actual ceremony of the wedding, but some archaeologists assume there was a strong religious component to it, with Inanna, goddess of fertility, the primary deity worshipped.

Death was the final rite of passage for ancient Mesopotamians, who believed that the gods had decreed the end to a person's life. After death, the corpse was washed and perfumed, then placed in a coffin. For poorer families, these coffins would be of simple wood or the body would be wrapped in a reed mat. More wealthy families used elaborate stone coffins. Personal items such as jewelry and weapons were buried with the dead. Wealthy families had tombs with household furnishings placed in them. The rich also had professional mourners, or those who cried and recited sad songs, or laments, at the burial.

After the funeral, the eldest son was responsible for giving regular funeral offerings to the deceased relative. During the month of August there was an extended period of celebration for the dead. At such occasions, food and drink was put at the place of burial for the ghosts of those dead people. Several times each year it was believed that the ghosts of the dead could leave the underworld and return to the land of the living above ground. Life in the underworld resembled life among the living, especially in its complex organization. A king, Nergal, and a queen, Ereshkigal, ruled there, and many smaller nobles were part of the power structure.

Daily life in ancient Egypt In Egyptian civilization, religion encompassed the full range of human activity. Law, ethics, medicine, philosophy, science, and the state were all combined in religion. In ancient Egypt it was virtually impossible to live a nonreligious, or secular, life, for religion was the very foundation of all ancient Egyptian ideas and actions. The everyday life of ancient Egyptians resembled that of the Mesopotamians. There was a strong two-class system of wealthy people, who owned property, and poor people, who did not.

But Egypt also had the beginnings of what in modern times is called a middle class. This is a class of society that is not wealthy, but also is not poor. This class in Egypt developed around people who held particular jobs. An artisan, or skilled worker, class helped to build and decorate the pyramids and royal or noble tombs. These workers were considered middle class.

Egyptian rites of passage Home life was important for the Egyptians. Children were seen as a blessing from the gods. Thus the first rite of passage, birth, was very important to the ancient Egyptians. If a couple did not have children, they made offerings of food and wine to their special deity, asking for the gift of fertility. After birth, the same deity was invoked to protect the infant from evil spirits. Young boys learned their father's trade or skill, and young girls were trained for household duties by their mothers. If a family could afford it, the son was sent to school at about age seven, where he would become a scribe, learning religion, reading, and writing.

Marriage, the second major rite of passage, happened at an early age for peasant (poor farming) girls. They were usually married at about age twelve. Girls from wealthier families would marry in their mid-teens, as would most boys, both wealthy and poor. The engagement, bride-price (a gift presented to the family of the bride), and dowry (another gift, given to the bride herself, usually by her father or another member of her family) were also important in Egyptian society. The wedding ceremony could last several days, with feasting and prayers offered to various deities for a long and fruitful marriage. Divorce was possible, but not common. Barley was the staple in Egypt, as it was in Mesopotamia, and bread and beer were both common. Religion played a major part in the agricultural year, with the pharaoh himself, the embodiment of Amen, going to the fields at the time of planting to ensure a good harvest of grain.

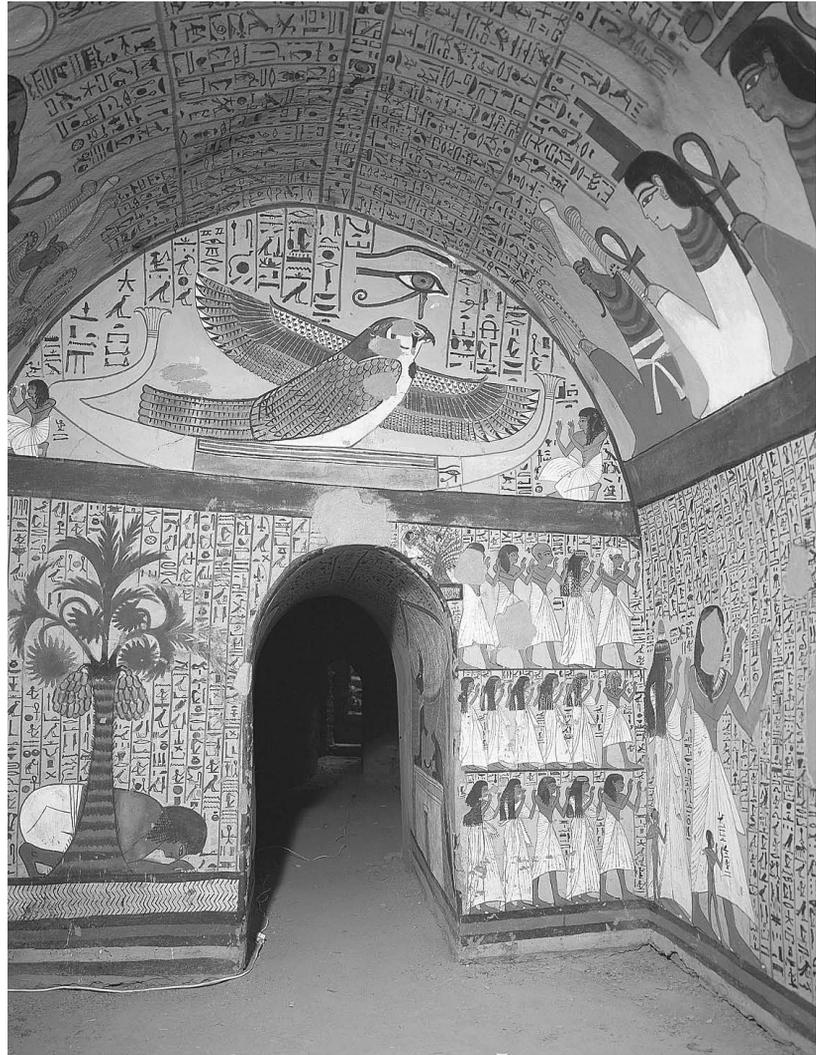
Death was an immensely important religious event for the Egyptians. Mummification was, for the royalty and the wealthy (and later for the artisan class as well), the first stage in the funeral rites. Mummies were placed in tombs or pyramids with numerous personal items the deceased would need in the afterlife. These included everything from jewelry to weapons, furniture, and even (for the wealthy) their slaves.

The daily routine of work for the majority of ancient Egyptians was broken up throughout the year by a variety of religious observances. For some workers almost one-third of the year was set aside for religious observances and celebrations. The tomb makers' eight-day work week, for example, had a two- or three-day weekend. Put together, these weekend days of rest accounted for about sixty days a year.

There were another sixty-five days of religious festivals, from full moon days to the celebration of the flooding of the Nile River, to such major festivals as the Feast of Opet. These occasions were opportunities not just for prayer at one's home shrine or at the temple, but also for

Ancient Religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia

Egyptian tombs for the pharaohs and nobility were elaborately decorated with scenes from the life of the deceased, as well as from the Book of the Dead. Tombs such as this one in Luxor were well-stocked with items for the afterlife. © GIANNI DAGLI ORTI/CORBIS.



the enjoyment of games such as boxing and chariot races. Other games that may have had a religious significance include a form of hockey and another resembling handball. Festivals were also times for dramatic public readings of legends and prayers, as well as for dancing and singing.

Influences of the ancient religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia

Both ancient Mesopotamia's and ancient Egypt's religions had influences that have long outlasted the worship of their gods. Religion played a role in the rise of the Mesopotamian city-state, and the religion's reliance

on the stars to foretell events led to important developments in mathematics. From ancient Egypt, knowledge of anatomy and medicine greatly expanded thanks to the practice of mummification and the use of herbs to treat illnesses. These contributions have greatly aided later societies.

Mesopotamian influences Mesopotamian religion was one of the earliest organized religious systems. It had a formal structure, hierarchy (chain of command), and rituals for worship. It influenced all later religious tradition, not only with its gods (some of whom, such as Inanna, were adapted into later religious traditions), but also with its central myths. During the Babylonian period the state cult of Marduk was an important early step toward the nationalistic monotheism later developed by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although Marduk was only the foremost among a pantheon of other gods, his elevation to national god was a beginning in a gradual process toward modern national religions.

Other influences to come from Mesopotamian religions include advances in mathematics. Mathematics was often at the service of religion, in part because it was used to keep track of items stored at temples. The first written representation of numbers occurs in ancient Mesopotamia. Before about 3,000 BCE numbers were recorded using tokens that symbolized the items counted. But after 3,000 BCE these tokens were replaced by marks representing quantities. By 2,000 BCE the Sumerians had developed a complete system of mathematics. Similar wedge-shaped marks, called *cuneiform* by archaeologists and historians, formed the basis of the Sumerian system of writing, which remained in use for thousands of years.

Thousands of mathematical and economic tablets have been recovered from this time period. There are multiplication tables, tables of squares, square roots, and other mathematical figurings. There are also lists of problems for teachers to set and solutions given by students. The Mesopotamians used algebraic equations to solve quadratic problems, or those involving two unknown quantities. These problems usually involved finding lengths, widths, or diagonals of rectangles.

In Babylonian times, astrology, or the study of how the planets affect human lives, became an important part of religion. The movements of the planets had to be charted, and for this mathematical calculations were a vital tool. The observation of the stars and planets likewise led to the modern science of astronomy.

Ancient Egyptian influences Egyptian religion passed on many of its deities to other religions. For example, Isis, in her aspect as the mother of Horus, also influenced the later Christian cult of the Virgin Mary. Like the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians also passed on additional products of their religion in the form of mathematics and medicine. For example, their numbering system was based on the number ten, as in the modern decimal system. The Egyptian calendar, based on the appearance of the star Sirius, held 365 days and was divided into twelve months of thirty days each. The remaining five days were given to festivals.

Herbs were in common usage for illness, as were magic potions and prayers. The Egyptians had a large number of recipes of herbs and other materials for different kinds of illness. Yeast, for example, was recognized for its healing qualities and was applied to leg ulcers (inflammations) and swellings. Yeast was also taken internally for stomach disorders and was believed to be an effective cure for ulcers.

The Egyptians were the first to use and record advanced medical practices. The Egyptians gathered their knowledge into large volumes, which were later adopted by the Greeks. An ancient medical text written by an Egyptian of Greek ancestry, named Hermes, survives in six books. The first of these six books was directly related to anatomy. The rest served as a book of herb and mineral recipes for various ailments or illnesses.

Egyptian architecture and building techniques have also been very influential. The pyramidal shape has been adopted by modern architects, including the Egyptian-inspired entrance to the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Egyptians, like Mesopotamians, made use of canals for irrigation and became dam builders in order to control some of the unwanted flooding of the Nile River. Both of these influenced modern engineering. Art was also influenced through colorful and often realistic tomb decorations. This was especially true during the rule of Akhenaten when a style called Amarna Art was popular. The art during this period was surprisingly modern; it had a very natural look instead of the stiff poses usually found in royal paintings.

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Bahá'í

The Bahá'í (pronounced bah-HIGH) faith is one of the world's youngest religions. It began in mid-nineteenth-century Persia (modern-day Iran). Its founder, Mirza Husayn 'Alí Nuri (1817–1892), took the name Bahá'u'lláh (“Glory of God” in Arabic) and declared that he was a prophet, God’s chosen messenger. Bahá'u'lláh’s writings and teachings form the basis of the Bahá'í religion. The central belief of the Bahá'í faith is the oneness of all divinity, meaning that all faiths contain visions of the ultimate truth. Bahá'ís, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, also believe in the unity of all humankind. There is only one human race, and all humans should be treated equally.

There are more than seven million Bahá'ís worldwide. Followers can be found in 247 countries and include more than two thousand ethnic, tribal, and racial groups. While the United States and Europe were among the first areas outside the Middle East to have Bahá'í congregations (worshippers), the fastest growth in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been in Asia and Africa. By 2002 there were 3.6 million Bahá'ís in Asia and 1.8 million in Africa, with about 150,000 members of the faith in the United States, 15,000 in Canada, and 130,000 in Europe.

History and development

The Bahá'í religion developed over a period known as the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith, which lasted from 1844 to 1921. The Bahá'í religion emerged from an earlier faith, Babi (pronounced BAH-bee), a Muslim sect. (A sect is a small religious group that has branched off from a larger established religion.) The Babi sect was founded in Persia by Sayyid Ali Muhammad of Shiraz (1819–1850). In 1844 Ali Muhammad, a twenty-five-year-old merchant, proclaimed himself a messenger of God, taking the title the *Bab*, or “Gate” in Arabic. He considered himself

WORDS TO KNOW

blasphemy: Disrespectful comments or actions concerning a religion or its God.

covenant: In religion, a covenant refers to an agreement between God or a messenger of God and His followers.

excommunicate: To exclude or officially ban a person from a church or other religious community.

heretic: A person whose beliefs oppose his or

her religion's official doctrines, or defining principles.

orders: Religious communities.

prophet: A person chosen to serve as God's messenger.

sacrament: A religious ritual that conveys spiritual blessing.

sect: A small religious group that has branched off from a larger established religion.

a gateway through which God could communicate divine truth. The Bab called for spiritual and moral reform, the equality of women, and help for the poor. His message was a powerful force in nineteenth-century Persia, which was torn between the competing influences of the Russian and British empires. In his most important work, *Bayan*, or Declaration, the Bab explained that he was only the first of two of God's messengers. The second prophet would bring a new age of peace and justice to the world.

The Bab gathered eighteen disciples, or followers, making nineteen believers in all. This became a sacred number to the Babi and, later, for the Bahá'í faith. The Bab's message of love and compassion soon gained many other followers. A popular belief spread that the Bab was the *Qá'im*, a Messiah-like figure important in the tradition of the Shiite Islam practiced in Persia. (A messiah is a messenger from God.) Persian leaders began to worry that the Bab was gaining too much power and might lead a rebellion. Because of such suspicion the Bab spent much of the last years of his life either under house arrest or in prison. In 1848 revolts led by the Babi broke out and over the next three years they were brutally suppressed. The Bab was executed by firing squad in 1850. According to legend, the first round of shots left him unmarked and only cut the ropes that bound him. It took a second round to kill him. His remains were later transferred to the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.

The rise of Bahá'u'lláh Two early followers of the Bab were Mirza Husayn 'Alí Nuri, son of a well-respected nobleman who held a position at the court of the king of Persia, and his half-brother Mirza Yahya (1830–1912), better known as Subh-i Azal. By 1845 Mirza Husayn, known for his charitable good works, had given up his social standing, assumed the name of Bahá'u'lláh, and joined the Babi religion. One of the movement's most influential speakers, Bahá'u'lláh soon fell under suspicion.

Following the execution of the Bab in 1850, several Babis, working independently of the rest of the followers, tried to assassinate the king of Persia. The government responded with the massacre of thousands of Babis. Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in a dungeon in Tehran known as the Black Pit. There he received a vision from a Maiden from God, who told him that he was the prophet of whom the Bab had spoken. He kept this to himself after his release several months later and went into exile, along with other Babis, to Baghdad, in present-day Iraq.

Although Bahá'u'lláh knew that he was the one the Bab had said would come, he did not speak of his visitation and the leadership of the Babi religion passed to his half-brother, Subh-i Azal. The Bab's will had recognized Subh-i Azal as his successor, but in Baghdad Subh-i Azal remained hidden in his house, allowing Bahá'u'lláh to make most of the public appearances to the Babi. Tensions grew between the two brothers when new followers to the religion and those visiting Baghdad recognized Bahá'u'lláh, not Subh-i Azal, as their spiritual leader. In order to avoid conflict, Bahá'u'lláh went into isolation in the mountains of Kurdistan far to the north of Baghdad. He stayed there for two years, coming into contact with members of Sufi orders, a mystical Muslim sect. He became known as a wise man of the mountains and wrote one of his first books, *Four Valleys*, during this time.

When Bahá'u'lláh returned to Baghdad he discovered that twenty-five people had already claimed to be the messenger from God that the Bab had predicted and that Subh-i Azal had had several of his opponents killed. Bahá'u'lláh spent the next seven years in Baghdad and his fame began to spread. He continued writing about his spiritual discoveries. Some of the most important of these texts were the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, or *The Book of Certitude* (freedom from doubt), and *Kalimat-i-Maknunih*, or *The Hidden Words*. With *Kitab-i-Iqan* completed in 1862, Bahá'u'lláh finished the Bab's *Bayan*, which had been left incomplete, with only eleven of its proposed nineteen chapters written. In completing the Bab's work, Bahá'u'lláh was also claiming leadership of the Babis.



There are more than seven million followers of Bahá'í around the world. The religion's largest growth in the twenty-first century is in Africa and Asia. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

In an attempt to strengthen his position as leader, Subh-i Azal also claimed to have completed the Bab's work. Relations between the two brothers worsened as support of Bahá'u'lláh increased in Baghdad and in his native country, Persia. Persian leaders once again grew concerned about Bahá'u'lláh's growing influence. They persuaded the Ottoman government, which controlled Baghdad and much of what is now Turkey, to banish the holy man from Baghdad, where he had attracted so many followers. In 1863, before his exile from Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh told a small group of followers about his visitation eleven years earlier, announcing for the first time that he was the long-awaited messenger of God. This declaration took place in the Garden of Ridvan, near Baghdad, and was later celebrated in one of Bahá'í's main holy days, the Festival of Ridvan.

The Bahá'í religion is born Bahá'u'lláh, along with his family and a small group of followers, traveled to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey) and then on to Adrianople (modern-day Edirne, Turkey), where he publicly declared, in 1866, that he was the messenger of God and a prophet, as Muhammad and Jesus had been before him. He wrote official letters to world political and religious leaders, such as Pope Pius IX (1792–1878) and Queen Victoria of England (1819–1901), announcing his presence. This led to a complete break with the Babis and Subh-i Azal, who also proclaimed himself the messenger of God about whom the Bab had spoken. Not long after, Bahá'u'lláh was poisoned. Though he survived the attempt on his life, the poison left a tremor, or shaking, in his hand until his death. Suspicion fell on his half-brother, Subh-i Azal. The year 1866 saw the final split between followers of the two men. Those who sided with Bahá'u'lláh called themselves Bahá'ís, while followers of Subh-i Azal first referred to themselves as Azalis, then Bayanis. The Bahá'ís went on to become the thirteenth-largest religion in the world. In the early twenty-first century the Bayanis had only a few thousand believers, mainly in Iran.

In 1868 Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and followers were transported by the Ottoman government that controlled Edirne to the prison city of Acre in Palestine, now Akko, Israel. Bahá'u'lláh remained in prison for nine years, writing *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, or the Book of Laws, the most holy book of Bahá'ís. With the death of the old Ottoman sultan, or leader, Bahá'u'lláh was finally released from prison in 1877. He settled in nearby Bahji. He lived out the rest of his life there, continuing his writing and teaching. Bahá'u'lláh died of a fever in 1892.

Bahá'u'lláh's successors Bahá'u'lláh left a will and testament that named his son, Abdu'l-Baha (“Servant of Baha” in Arabic; 1844–1921), as his successor. Another son, Muhammad ‘Ali, claimed that the will was a fake, and that he was the next rightful leader of the Bahá'ís. Muhammad ‘Ali even took his claims to the Ottoman authorities. Abdu'l-Baha eventually excommunicated his brother, officially banning him from membership in the faith.

In 1908 a group of rebels known as the Young Turks led an uprising against the Ottoman Empire. After the successful rebellion, political prisoners were freed, and Abdu'l-Baha was permitted to travel to other countries to spread the word of Bahá'í. In 1910 he set out on a three-year tour that included Egypt, the United States, and Europe.

During his visit to the United States, the foundation stone for a Bahá'í house of worship was laid in Wilmette, Illinois. This was the first place of Bahá'í worship in the Western world. The Bahá'í faith had, in fact, begun in the United States as early as 1894, when a Lebanese immigrant, Ibrahim George Kheiralla (1849–1929), converted a group of Americans. Under Abdu'l-Baha, the Bahá'í faith became an international religion.

Abdu'l-Baha wrote many books and spoke widely. However, he was never considered a prophet, as was his father. Rather, he served as an interpreter of the words of Bahá'u'lláh. In 1920 Abdu'l-Baha was knighted, or granted a rank of honor, in Great Britain for his humanitarian work during World War I (1914–18; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their allies). Abdu'l-Baha died in 1921 and was buried in the Shrine of Bab on Mount Carmel, in Haifa, the city in modern-day Israel that has become the international center for the Bahá'í faith. In his will Abdu'l-Baha appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897–1957), as Guardian, or leader, of the Bahá'í religion.

Heroic Age ends Abdu'l-Baha's death marked the end of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi, who was educated at Oxford University in England, carried on the work of the earlier leaders. He focused his efforts on the organization and administration of the religion. He also worked to establish an international structure to support and connect Bahá'ís around the world through a network of local and national spiritual assemblies. Although Shoghi Effendi died suddenly in 1957, a governing body called the Universal House of Justice, was established according to his directions in Haifa in 1963. The Universal House of Justice is the supreme ruling body of the Bahá'í faith worldwide. Its nine members are elected every five years by representatives of the National Spiritual Assemblies.

In addition to establishing the administrative system of the Bahá'í faith, Shoghi Effendi also translated many of the writings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, and Abdu'l-Baha and helped to spread the religion around the world. When he became the Guardian in 1921, there were 100,000 members worldwide. At the time of his death in 1957, there were 400,000 members. In addition, he wrote *God Passes By*, which tells the story of the first century of the Bahá'í faith. His death caused a crisis in leadership, as the role of Guardian was meant to be a hereditary

About Bahá'í

- **Belief.** Bahá'ís believe in the oneness of all things: one world, one human race, one religion.
- **Followers.** Bahá'í is the thirteenth-largest world religion, with 7.5 million followers in 247 countries.
- **Name of God.** *Baha*, the Persian word meaning “glory” or “splendor,” is sometimes used to refer to God. More common usage is simply God. For Bahá'ís, all gods are merely various perceptions, or views, of the one God.
- **Symbols.** The nine-pointed star is the primary symbol of the Bahá'í faith.
- **Worship.** There is no clergy in the Bahá'í faith. Services are held at the first of the month in homes or simple buildings and in Houses of Worship around the world.
- **Dress.** Bahá'ís have no official dress.
- **Texts.** *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the Book of Laws, written by the founder, Bahá'u'lláh, is the primary text for the religion.
- **Sites.** The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Israel is considered the holiest site for Bahá'ís.
- **Observances.** The most important holy period for Bahá'ís is the Festival of Ridvan, held from April 21 and 29 through May 2. *Naw-Ruz*, or New Year's Day, on March 21, is also an important holy day.
- **Phrases.** “Baha” is sometimes used by members to address one another.

one, passed on from one family member to another. But Shoghi Effendi had no children, and most of his immediate family had rebelled against his authority and had been excommunicated. Power thus passed for several years to a group of fifty-two people who had been selected to protect the Bahá'í religion, called Hands of the Cause of God.

Bahá'ís have faced persecution for their beliefs. Persecution is to mistreat others because of different beliefs or other characteristics. The Bahá'í faith grew out of a region dominated by Islam. For Muslims, the prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632) was the last of God's messengers. Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be a prophet is blasphemous, or an insult to the Muslim faith. Bahá'í persecution has been particularly harsh in Iran. In 1978 a Muslim government was established in Iran and hundreds of Bahá'ís were killed, while hundreds more were imprisoned. Although Bahá'ís respect all religions and their holy books, they have faced repression, imprisonment, and even death for professing their own faith.

Sects and schisms

The Bahá'í faith is itself the result of a schism, or separation, from the Babis, and that faith was itself an Islamic sect. Since the religion was established there have been several disputes over leadership. The first of these disputes occurred after the death of Bahá'u'lláh, who had established the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. This Covenant was a promise to his followers guaranteeing the unbroken continuation of the Bahá'í faith by creating a clear transfer of leadership from one generation to another.

At his death Bahá'u'lláh named his eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha, the next leader of the Bahá'í community, or the Center of the Covenant. But another son from a second marriage, Muhammad 'Ali, tried to claim leadership of the Bahá'í. He established a competing sect, the Unitarian Bahá'ís, though it attracted few followers. Finally, Abdu'l-Baha excommunicated his brother and most of the family from Bahá'u'lláh's second and third marriages from the religion, calling them Covenant breakers, or heretics, people whose opinions oppose the religion's defining principles. The term Covenant breaker has been used ever since to excommunicate those who have opposed the leadership of the Bahá'í faith.

Abdu'l-Baha, in turn, established a continuation of the original Covenant with the creation of a Guardian, who serves as the hereditary leader of the religion, passing control from generation to generation. Abdu'l-Baha named his grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, as his successor. Although he was young when he was named the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi was generally accepted by the faithful. His marriage to a Westerner, Mary Maxwell, a Bahá'í from the United States, and his growing international focus led to complaints from his immediate family, many of whom began disobeying him and marrying Covenant breakers. This did not result in the creation of more sects, but it did force Shoghi Effendi to excommunicate several family members.

With the death of Shoghi Effendi, the hereditary office of Guardian came to an end. Leadership was supposed to be passed to the oldest son, but Shoghi Effendi had no children, and other members of the family had already been excommunicated as Covenant breakers. For a time control fell to a small body of advisers, the Hands of the Cause of God, until the Universal House of Justice was established in 1963. In 1960 one of the members of the Hands of the Cause of God, Mason Remey, claimed that he was the Second Guardian because Shoghi Effendi had named him president of the International Bahá'í Council, a forerunner to the Universal House of Justice. He formed the Orthodox Bahá'í sect.

Although he was expelled from the mainstream religion, Remey managed to attract followers to his cause. By 2005 the Orthodox Bahá'í had established seventy-two local chapters. This sect, in turn, suffered several schisms, but most of those breakaway groups were short-lived.

Later disagreements in the Bahá'í faith have been mainly between the more liberal members of the religion in the United States, New Zealand, and Canada and the conservative national offices. A great deal of criticism has focused on the difference between the Bahá'ís' stated belief in the equality of the sexes, while only allowing men to serve in the Universal House of Justice. Another point of criticism has been the requirement that a Bahá'í who wishes to publish something about the faith must first have the material reviewed by a Bahá'í committee. Much of this discussion and argument has been carried out publicly on the Internet, leading to the excommunication of some and the resignation of others from the religion. One result of this controversy was the creation, in 2004, of another sect, the Reform Bahá'í faith, by Frederick Glaysher.

Basic beliefs

The central belief of Bahá'ís is oneness. There is one God, all messengers of God and prophets have brought one message, and humankind is also united as one race. To Bahá'ís, all religions are really just one religion, which is evolving and changing over time. It is therefore necessary that prophets and messengers from the one God appear from time to time to bring updated messages to humans. Each messenger or prophet is merely a new representative of the one eternal religion. Bahá'ís see themselves within this cycle of continual change and evolution and recognize Bahá'u'lláh as one messenger among many that have come before, including Moses, the Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad. According to the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, another new messenger will reveal a better way to live a spiritual life, but this will not take place “before a thousand years.” This sense of continual transformation is a key element to the Bahá'í faith and one that is unique to the religion.

Spiritual growth and social conscience Bahá'ís believe that the purpose of human life is to know God and to develop one's spiritual foundation in order to better advance civilization and bring about world peace. Concepts such as heaven and hell are, for Bahá'ís, only a matter of distance from God. When a person dies, his or her soul works through spiritual

The Bahá'í Calendar

The Bahá'í calendar consists of nineteen months, and each month is nineteen days long. Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth month, an additional four days (five days in leap years) are inserted to create a year of 365 days (or 366 days in leap years), the usual solar-calendar length. The Bahá'í new year begins on March 21, which is the first day of spring. The nineteen months have Arabic names given for an attribute of God, such as Knowledge, Power, Dominion, and Grandeur. Though the Bahá'í calendar maintains a seven-day week, each month consists of only about two-and-a-half weeks. Saturday is the first day of the Bahá'í week. Its translated Arab name is Glory. The rest of the days of the week, in order, are Beauty, Perfection, Grace, Justice, Majesty, and Independence. Each day of the week begins at sundown and lasts until sundown of the next day, rather than midnight, as in the Western tradition.

The calendar was created in 1844. March 21, 1844, marked the beginning of the Bahá'í Era, or *BE*. Thus, 1 *BE* lasted from March 21, 1844, to March 20, 1845. For the Bahá'ís, the year 2000 was partly 155 *BE* and partly 156 *BE*.

levels to get nearer to an understanding of God. Although a person can never completely understand God, he or she can understand parts of the concept of a divine being through such divine qualities as wisdom and compassion. Education is thus extremely important for Bahá'ís, as it teaches these qualities.

Education is emphasized not just for the study of the Bahá'í faith but also for general knowledge. In fact, Bahá'ís believe that education should be required for all young people. They believe that there should be harmony between religion and science. They see no contradiction between reason and faith. Finally, Bahá'ís believe that it is the responsibility of each individual to seek the truth.

The belief in the oneness of religions leads to tolerance of other faiths. Bahá'í teaches that all forms of prejudice, such as those based on religion, gender, class, and national origin, should be abandoned. Prejudice is an opinion or judgment made without informed knowledge, often resulting in hostility towards a person or group. As an example of how this belief was put into action, in 1915 Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, advised members of the Bahá'í faith in the United States to arrange interracial or multi-

ethnic marriages (marriages between people of different races and ethnic groups) to further this goal of the abandonment of prejudice. Bahá'ís promote the adoption of an international language to encourage the unity of all humankind, and they have become active members of the United Nations since its founding in 1945. The United Nations is an international organization formed to help nations resolve their differences peacefully.

As part of their belief in creating a global community, Bahá'ís also work with nongovernmental groups around the world for women's rights, education, and the environment. They sponsor after-school projects, the building of orphanages and health clinics in rural areas, the

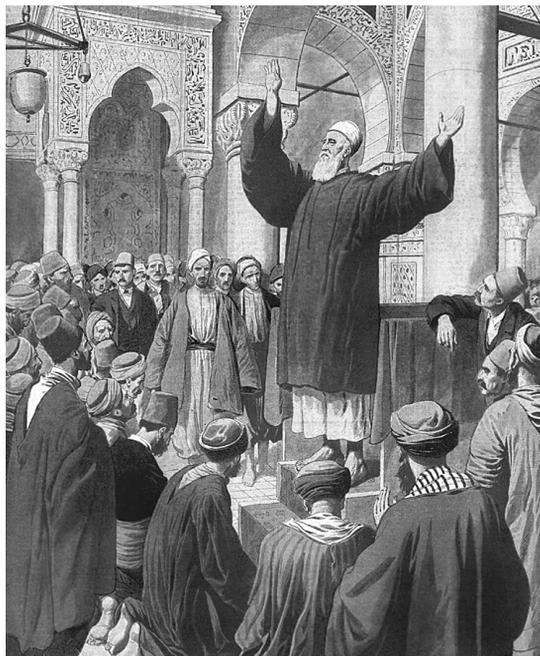
establishment of vocational programs, classes in health care, and tree-planting programs for the benefit of society.

Leadership and rituals Bahá'u'lláh did not trust ritual worship or a controlling clergy or priesthood. Thus, in the Bahá'í faith, there is no regular church service and no permanent clergy. Likewise, there are no initiation rituals to the Bahá'í faith and no sacraments, ceremonies that convey spiritual blessing.

The community is open to all who want to participate, but members have certain duties that must be performed. These include daily prayer, avoidance of drugs and alcohol, and the practice of monogamy, or having only one marriage partner. Parents must grant permission for a marriage before it can take place. Bahá'ís are expected to make financial contributions to the religion, but the amount is private and left up to each member. In addition, all healthy members between the ages of fifteen and seventy are expected to fast from sunrise to sunset for the nineteen days between March 2 and March 20 that precede the new year, which begins on the first day of spring.

Sacred writings

The central book of the Bahá'í faith is the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, or the Book of Laws. Written in 1873 by Bahá'u'lláh, it is also called the mother book of Bahá'í teachings. The book established the laws of the religion, such as the requirement of daily prayer, the lack of clergy, and dietary rules. It also discusses the administration of the religion and deals with ethical questions and prophecies, or predictions of the future. In this book Bahá'u'lláh describes the process of continual growth and evolution in religion. Each age needs a new message; even Bahá'u'lláh himself was to be followed by another of God's messengers in one thousand years. Earlier works from Bahá'u'lláh include the *Kitab-i-Iqan* (Book of Certitude), written in both Arabic and Persian in 1862, and, according to tradition, in only two days and nights. In this book Bahá'u'lláh continues the work of the Bab, explaining the continual unfolding of the religion and stating that all religions are related to one another.



Under the leadership of Abdu'l-Baha, Bahá'í gained many new followers, particularly in the West. After his death he was buried in the Shrine of the Bab. © MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY/THE IMAGE WORKS.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote three more mystical works that are composed in short verses and provide spiritual truth. These include *Kalimat-i-Maknunih*, or *The Hidden Words*; *Haft-Vadi*, or *Seven Valleys*; and *Chihar-Vadi*, or *Four Valleys*. In *The Hidden Words* Bahá'u'lláh compresses the basics of spiritual knowledge into short passages or prayers, seventy-one in Arabic and eighty-two in Persian. Bahá'u'lláh wrote many more books and letters, and also spoke publicly on the faith's principles and ideas.

Sacred symbols

Three symbols are typically associated with the Bahá'í faith. The primary symbol is the nine-pointed star. The importance of that number to the religion is partly due to the tradition in Arabic of attaching numerical values to words. The number value for *Baha* (Glory) is nine. There are also nine openings in the human body. (Nineteen is another sacred number for Bahá'ís, representing the number of original disciples of the Bab plus the Bab himself).

A second major symbol is an Arabic inscription, “*Ya Baha'ul Abha*,” meaning “O Glory of the Most Glorious.” This symbol is referred to as the Greatest Name and was created by a Bahá'í calligrapher, or letter designer. The nine-pointed star often has this inscription in its center. The third major Bahá'í symbol is the ringstone symbol, etched on rings worn by Bahá'ís. Designed by Abdu'l-Baha, it features two stars, between which is a stylized version of the Persian word *Baha*.

Worship

Bahá'í has no permanent clergy or priesthood. Monasticism, or separation from the world, is forbidden. There are seven Houses of Worship, or *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*, around the globe. Bahá'ís also gather in private homes or modest facilities for their services, which include the study of texts, prayer, and the recitation of passages from sacred works. Bahá'ís see no distinction between daily life and their religion, and part of their spirituality is performing useful work in the world.

The seven Houses of Worship are large and symbolic structures, each nine-sided and topped by a dome. Local materials and individual inspiration have determined each structure's appearance, from the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, Illinois (near Chicago), which is made of cast

concrete and is of classic proportions, to the temple near New Delhi, India, completed in 1986, which resembles a lotus flower. This Indian House of Worship has attracted more than fifty million visitors since its completion, making it one of the most visited buildings in the world. Other Houses of Worship are located in Kampala, Uganda; Sydney, Australia; Frankfurt, Germany; Panama City, Panama; and Apia, Samoa. Around the world 120 sites have been identified as locations for future Houses of Worship.

Bahá'í Houses of Worship are open to all people and generally have a very plain interior so as not to distract from the worship of God. There are no statues, religious pictures, or stained glass. No sermons are allowed, and ordinary members of the community read from sacred texts. Prayers from many of the world's religions are also recited, some put to music. Worshipers sit in rows of chairs or stand at various times during these informal services. Members are free to kneel or stand for prayers, as they wish.

Observances and pilgrimages

Bahá'ís observe eleven holy days during the year. The primary holy festival for Bahá'ís is the Festival of Ridvan, celebrated on three days: April 21, the First Day of Ridvan; April 29, the Ninth Day of Ridvan; and May 2, the Twelfth Day of Ridvan. This festival celebrates the historical event when Bahá'u'lláh told his followers that he was the messenger of God predicted by the Bab. This is the holiest and most significant of all Bahá'í holidays. On these days, Bahá'ís gather at community centers or at homes to read from Bahá'í religious texts, eat together, and enjoy the companionship of one another. During Ridvan they also elect new leaders. If possible, Bahá'ís do not work on these holy days.

Another important festival is Naw-Ruz, or the Bahá'í New Year (also the Persian New Year), which takes place on March 21, the



The Shrine of the Bab in Haifa, Israel, houses the remains of the Bab, founder of the Babi faith. Bahá'í emerged from the Babi, as Bahá'u'lláh identified himself as the second messenger of God foretold by the Bab. AP IMAGES.

first day of spring. Before this holy day, Bahá'ís fast, going without food or drink from sunrise to sunset for nineteen days. The celebration of Naw-Ruz includes feasting and praying, and there is no work on that day. In addition, at the beginning of each Bahá'í month is the Nineteen-Day Feast Bahá'í. The meetings that happen on these days are divided into three parts: The first part is dedicated to prayers and the reading of religious texts. The second part is an administrative session when reports are given about local Bahá'í activities and community issues are discussed. During these administrative sessions all members of the community are encouraged to talk and share their concerns. The third part of these monthly meetings is the meal shared by all community members. Food served is as varied as the congregations themselves, representing 247 countries worldwide. Such meetings take place in individual homes or in community centers when available.

The Bahá'í year includes seven holidays. The Declaration of the Bab, marking the date when the Bab announced the coming arrival of a new messenger from God, is held on May 23 and is a day free from work. May 29 is the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, marking the death of the founder of the Bahá'í faith. The death of the Bab, called the Martyrdom of the Bab, is celebrated on July 9 and is another day of rest. The birthdays of both the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh, on October 20 and November 12, respectively, are days of rest as well.

The Day of the Covenant, on November 26, marks Bahá'u'lláh's promise that Bahá'í would be a permanent religion. The Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha, the day on which he died, is November 28. Both the Day of the Covenant and the Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha are working days for the faithful. Members are still required to come together in prayer and recitation of passages from sacred works, as is done on other holy days.

Pilgrimage destinations for Bahá'ís are primarily located in the Middle East. The holiest shrine for believers is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, located in Bahji, just north of Akko, Israel. It was there that Bahá'u'lláh died, on May 29, 1892. The Shrine of the Bab, located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, is the second-most-important shrine and landmark of Bahá'ís. Abdu'l-Baha is buried in the same shrine. Other popular places for Bahá'ís to visit include the Mansion of Bahji, where Bahá'u'lláh lived for a time.

Everyday living

The everyday lives of members of the Bahá'í faith are determined by the laws and rules established in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* of Bahá'u'lláh. These laws include dietary rules (no alcohol or drugs are allowed unless prescribed by a physician, and tobacco use is discouraged). They cover the giving of money to the religion (a one-time 19 percent wealth tax is required, along with regular voluntary contributions) and rules about marriage and family. Marriage is only between men and women and with the consent of parents. Marriage between faiths is allowed, and marriage between different races is encouraged. Divorce is discouraged. Family life is considered the foundation of society. Education is important, and parents are required to provide for the education of their children. If finances are tight and only one child can be educated, it is recommended that a daughter be selected instead of a son, as she becomes the first person to educate her children, the next generation.

Bahá'ís are also required to pray and meditate daily. They are free to create their own prayers or use any of the ones created by the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, or Abdu'l-Baha. The one requirement of this daily prayer is that the faithful choose one of three Obligatory Prayers: the Long Obligatory Prayer, the Medium Obligatory Prayer, or the Short Obligatory Prayer. Such prayers can be spoken in a normal voice, chanted, or sung. The Short Obligatory Prayer states: "I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-subsisting."

This prayer is to be said once every twenty-four hours, at noon. The Medium Obligatory Prayer and Long Obligatory Prayer have the same core message, but with more elaboration and explanation. The medium is repeated in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, while the long is recited once a day, at any time. The faithful are required to wash their faces and hands before and sometimes during the saying of such prayers. Followers of the Bahá'í faith are also expected to read from religious texts and meditate, or deeply think, on the message they learn twice each day. Such meditation is hoped to clear the mind and spirit of daily concerns and allow the faithful to look at their own spirit more closely.

Bahá'ís do not distinguish between their everyday life and their faith. For them, what they do in the world is an expression of their belief, and it

Bahá'í

Bahá'ís sponsor many social projects, such as this advanced computer course offered at the Bahá'í Center in The Gambia. Such efforts support the Bahá'í belief in a global community. The nine-pointed star is displayed on the wall.

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is required that members do good work in the world. There is no particular uniform or style of dress for Bahá'ís.

Bahá'í's influences

The Bahá'í belief in a united world ruled by peace has inspired members to become deeply involved in the United Nations (UN). Through the Bahá'í agency known as the International Community, Bahá'ís have achieved consultative status with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and with the World Health Organization (WHO), among other organizations. While many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including other major religions, have achieved such consultative status, none have been so long or deeply involved in United Nations activities as Bahá'í. A nongovernmental organization is a privately run organization, not associated with a government. Such organizations often work in areas of economic development, the environment, and social issues.

Bahá'u'lláh himself, well over a century ago, called for just such a system of international governance. He envisioned a form of world government based on the principle of collective security that would encompass all the nations of the world and lay the foundations for a lasting and universal peace. The United Nations was formed as an organization where

problems could be peacefully resolved so that wars such as those of World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1938–45) could be avoided. Bahá'í representatives were present at the founding of the United Nations in 1945. Two years later the Bahá'í communities of the United States and Canada were recognized by the United Nations Department of Public Information, and in 1948 the Bahá'í International Community was recognized as an international NGO. In 1967 Bahá'ís established a permanent office at the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

Among other joint UN projects, the Bahá'í International Community has worked with the United Nations Development Fund for Women to increase awareness of women's issues around the world. Bahá'ís are also involved with nongovernmental organizations engaged in peace-building activities, women's and human rights, education, health, and sustainable development (creating economic development without hurting the environment). Other efforts include helping to bring literacy to all populations, educating people about proper nutrition, and assisting with farming techniques. Bahá'ís are involved, for example, in hands-on projects planting trees in barren parts of Africa, in educating African farmers about proper agricultural techniques, and in providing health care workshops and vocational training to Indian women. By 2002 Bahá'ís operated more than 1,300 local development projects, from Mongolia to South America, and Africa to Australia. Such projects are a way to put the Bahá'í faith into action. For Bahá'ís, social action is a spiritual activity.

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Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion based on the teachings of its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE). The Buddha, or the “enlightened one” as he came to be known, taught that a person could escape the pain and suffering of life by eliminating desire. The way of living he established is also considered to be a philosophy, or a set of ideas through which to gain a better understanding of values and reality.

The Buddha searched for six years to learn the meaning of life, and he gained many followers in his lifetime. Since his death, dozens of different sects, or subgroups, have formed in Buddhism. The religion has spread from its native India to the rest of the Far East and to the West (the countries in Europe and the Americas). The great majority of its followers are in Asia. Estimates suggest that there are about 350 million Buddhists worldwide, or about six percent of the world’s total population. It is the fourth-largest world religion, behind Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Countries with large Buddhist populations include Thailand with 95 percent, Cambodia at 90 percent, Tibet with 65 percent, and Japan with 50 percent. Eight percent of China’s population follows Buddhism, as does 0.7 percent of India’s population. Buddhist followers in the United States comprise 1 percent of the population and 0.5 percent in the United Kingdom. Less than one percent of populations in Africa follow Buddhism.

History and development

The early history of Buddhism is bound up with the life of its founder, Siddhartha Gautama. That Siddhartha Gautama was an actual historical figure is generally accepted. He was born into a noble family at Lumbini, a site in the southwest of modern Nepal. His mother’s name was Maha Maya. His father, Suddhodana, ruled over a small village and was part of the ruling Sakya clan. Most of what is known of the Buddha comes from later accounts rather than contemporary historical records made during

his lifetime. In 1996, however, a team of archaeologists (scientists who study the remains of past human civilization) discovered a marker honoring the Buddha's birthplace set by the emperor Ashoka in 250 BCE.

Siddhartha journeys to enlightenment According to Buddhist legend, the Buddha's birth was no ordinary event: The story, which is similar to the story of the conception of Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE) in Christian tradition, says that Siddhartha was conceived in a dream involving a white elephant carrying a lotus flower. This dream was interpreted as meaning that Maha's son would become either a great ruler or a spiritual leader. The child was named Siddhartha, meaning "one who has realized his goal." This name was combined with the family name, Gautama, and the clan name, Sakyamuni.

A week after his birth, Siddhartha's mother died. He was raised by his aunt and heavily protected by his father, who promised himself that his son would neither witness nor experience further unhappiness in his life. Thus, Siddhartha grew up on the family estate, well educated and prosperous but ignorant of the usual sorrows of life. At age seventeen, he married his cousin Yashodora, and they had a son, Rahula.

Siddhartha, however, grew restless with his comfortable life. Despite his father's efforts at shielding him from the realities of the world, he experienced four events that helped him understand the truth about the way the world works. Traveling through the town, he saw an old man, then a sick man, and then a dead man. These sights pained him and let him know that life was hard and full of suffering. His fourth encounter was with a beggar monk, a spiritual person who had given up all material goods. This man told Siddhartha that the way to deal with such sorrow and suffering is to become a beggar monk himself. So great was Siddhartha's sadness and feeling of emptiness that he decided to leave his family and wealth behind and search for enlightenment, or understanding the true nature of life and how to end its suffering.

For the next six years Siddhartha sought out the teachings of the Brahmans, the priesthood of Hinduism. He began to live the life of a monk, sleeping on the ground at night. He practiced meditation (seeking spiritual truth inside oneself through quiet and stillness) and fasted, going without food for long periods of time. None of this, however, helped him escape his sorrow. Finally, he decided that this extreme self-denial and discomfort might not be the way to enlightenment just as his earlier life of luxury had not been. He instead developed the "middle way,"

WORDS TO KNOW

bodhisattva: A person who has attained enlightenment but, rather than entering a state of nirvana, chooses to stay behind to help others reach enlightenment.

buddha: A spiritual leader who has reached full enlightenment.

The Buddha: The title of Siddhartha Gautama after he attained enlightenment.

dharma: The collection of moral laws that govern the universe.

Eightfold Path: The path of the Buddha's teachings that can lead to the end of suffering.

enlightenment: The state of realization and understanding of life, a feeling of unity with all things.

Four Noble Truths: The foundations of the Buddhist religion: that all life is suffering, that desire causes suffering, that suffering can end, and

that ending suffering happens by following the path of the Buddha's teachings.

karma: The result of good or bad actions in this lifetime that can affect this or later lifetimes.

laity: Body of worshippers, as distinct from clergy such as monks and nuns.

monastery: A place where religious people such as monks live, away from the world and following strict religious guidelines.

nirvana: The end of suffering, beyond time and space; the goal of all Buddhists.

stupas: Originally a mound marking the spot where the Buddha's ashes were buried. Rock pillars carved with the words of the Buddha are also sometimes called stupas.

Tipitaka: The Buddhist sacred texts accepted by all branches of Buddhism.

avoiding extremes. By rejecting both extreme pleasure and extreme pain, he believed he might find true enlightenment.

One day Siddhartha seated himself under a banyan, or fig, tree. It is now called a Bo tree, short for *bodhi* (wisdom and enlightenment), for it was there that Siddhartha, after six years of searching, finally found enlightenment. According to legend, Siddhartha sat under the tree for seven weeks. Although he was tempted by the devil Mara he overcame the temptations and arrived at complete enlightenment. After this, he was called the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Sometimes he is also referred to as Sakyamuni Buddha, referring to his clan name, to differentiate him from earlier and later buddhas, or great spiritual teachers.

The Buddha's teachings The Buddha came to understand that all of life is suffering and that suffering was caused by desire. By ending desire, one could end the cycle of suffering and achieve *nirvana*, the end of suffering.

The way to achieve this was not through extreme denial or extreme indulgence, but by following a path of moderation, the middle way.

The Buddha decided to help others reach such awakening. He set out into the world of northern India to preach his message of the middle way. So powerful was his message of inner peace and harmony that in eight months the Buddha had won over twenty thousand followers. For the next forty-five years the Buddha and his growing group of disciples, or close followers, spread his message that suffering in life could be eliminated by following his teachings.

The core beliefs of Buddhism were developed by the Buddha largely in reaction to the dominant religious culture of the day, Hinduism, and to changing conditions in India. During the Buddha's lifetime old tribal societies were breaking up and being replaced by new urban civilizations. The Buddha was one of several new thinkers who responded to this upheaval with a new approach. He preached a religion without authority, without ritual or examination of the meaning of life, without tradition, without a creator-god, and without mystery and spiritualism. Instead, he set out a step-by-step approach to leaving one's feelings of sorrow and emptiness behind, called the Eightfold Path.

Buddhism formalizes as a religion After the Buddha's death his followers began to establish a formal structure for Buddhism. The Buddha did not leave any formal records of his teachings or appoint levels of leadership to his followers. As a result, there was the possibility that those who took up the Buddha's teachings after his death could reinterpret his message. Soon after his death in the fifth century BCE, a council was called to establish a commonly agreed-upon version of the Buddha's teachings and his rules for monks. Those teachings and rules voted on by the monks became the basis for the central Buddhist text, the Pali Canon, which was originally written on palm leaves.

Differences soon emerged, however, between a group of more traditional believers, called the School of the Elders, and another, less traditional group. The School of the Elders focused on the personal pursuit of enlightenment. The other group believed in helping everyone to achieve enlightenment. This central difference ultimately led to a split between Buddhist followers. The more traditional group became known as Theravada, or "way of the elders." The other group became the Mahayana, or "majority." These divisions have remained throughout the history of Buddhism.

About Buddhism

- **Belief.** Buddhists believe that suffering is the central human condition and is caused by desire. *Nirvana*, or the end of suffering, can be reached by following a right course of action and thought in life. Buddhism's founder, Siddhartha Gautama (also known as the Buddha), describes these in his teachings.
- **Followers.** Buddhism is the fourth largest world religion with 3.5 million believers worldwide, most of whom are in Asia.
- **Name of God.** The Buddha did not suggest that a god was responsible for the creation of the universe or of humanity. In later years, schools such as Mahayana Buddhism elevated the Buddha to a godlike status. In some instances, the word "buddha" is used in a similar way to "god."
- **Symbols.** The Buddhist International Flag represents Buddhist ideals of compassion, the middle path, blessings, purity and liberation, and wisdom. Other major symbols include the *dharmachakra*, or dharma wheel, and the bodhi tree.
- **Worship.** Buddhists worship at temples, stupas (rock pillars), Buddhist centers, or in their own homes at small shrines. They may worship in a group or on their own.
- **Dress.** Buddhist laypeople do not wear special clothing, though shoes are normally removed in temples and teaching halls. Yellow robes are standard attire for monks. A heavier deep-red robe is also worn by modern monks, especially in Tibet.
- **Texts.** The primary text for all schools of Buddhism is the Pali Canon, also called the Tipitaka. It contains rules for monastic living, teachings of the Buddha, and explanations of philosophical questions. Another popular Buddhist text is the Dhammapada, a collection of the Buddha's sayings.
- **Sites.** Lumbini, Nepal, is the birthplace of the Buddha and is one of the four most important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists. Other sites include Bodh Gaya, the place where he attained enlightenment; Sarnath, where he delivered his first sermon on how to avoid suffering; and Kusinagara, where he escaped from this life into nirvana.
- **Observances.** Wesak is the most important holy day for Buddhists. Held on the full moon in May, it celebrates the Buddha's birth.
- **Phrases.** *Om mani padme hum* is a mantra, or chant, prevalent in Buddhism, meaning "Hail the jewel in the lotus." It refers to the symbology surrounding the Buddha's miraculous birth.

Spreads throughout Asia The spread of Buddhism was enhanced by the work of the emperor Ashoka (also called Asoka) of Maurya, in present-day India, who ruled from c. 273 to c. 232 BCE. Ashoka converted to Buddhism after a bloody struggle to gain power. Thereafter, this powerful emperor decided to devote himself to peace. He had thousands of

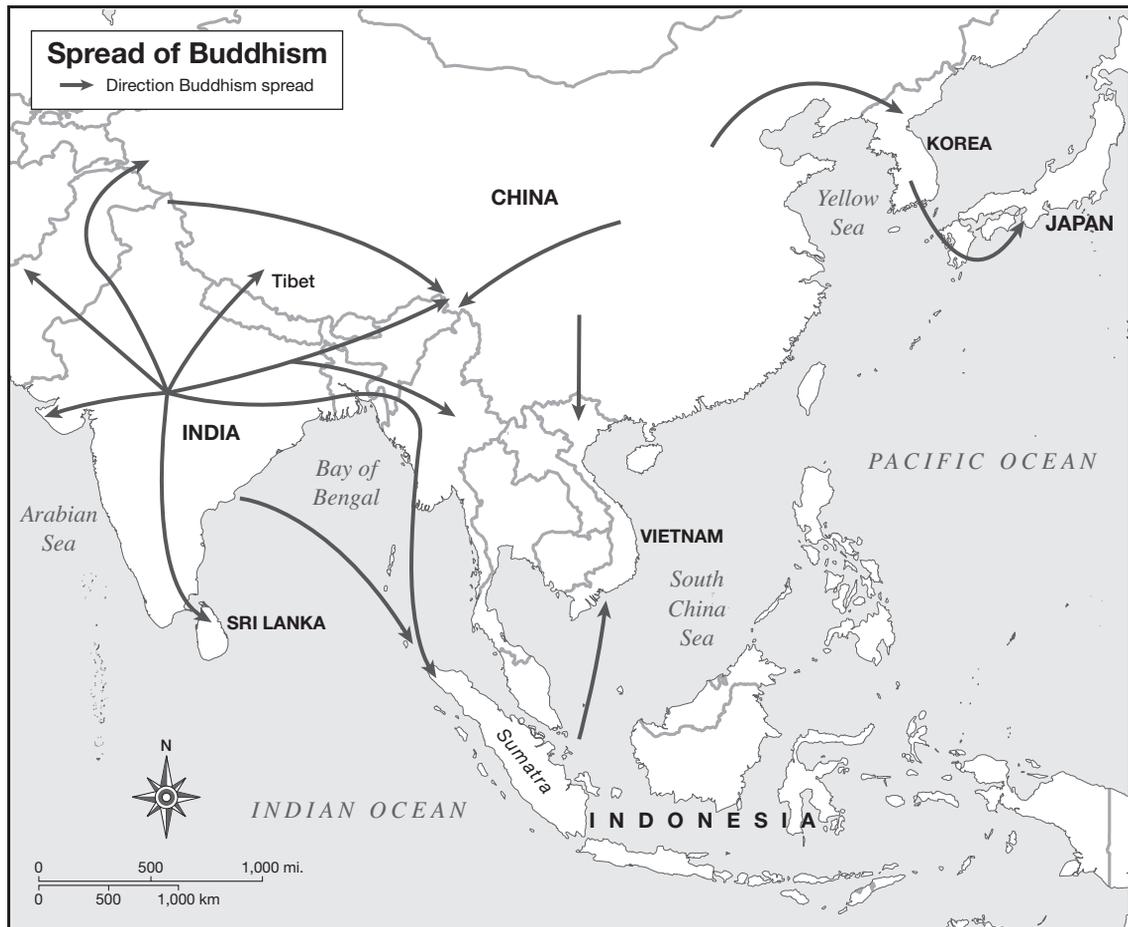
rock pillars, or *stupas*, erected with the words of the Buddha inscribed on them, calling for respect for all life. Ashoka organized missionaries, people who dedicated themselves to preaching the truths of their religion to others, to spread Buddhism beyond the borders of India. Some of these missionaries reached as far as Egypt and Greece.

Ashoka's son is thought to have brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka, and there the Theravada tradition has remained dominant ever since. The religion continued to spread throughout Asia, establishing strong footholds in China, Cambodia, Thailand, and Korea. China was first exposed to Buddhism in about 150 CE by missionaries from India. By the sixth century the religion had already gained two million followers. Buddhism spread to Japan in the thirteenth century CE, where it split into two major schools, Zen and Nichiren.

At about this time Buddhism also spread to Tibet, a region in the Himalayan mountains that is now part of China. It came to Tibet with Guru Rinpoche, the Indian master of what is known as Vajrayana, or Tantra, Buddhism. This is a form of Mahayana Buddhism that employs techniques, including meditation and chanting and other methods, to speed up the way to enlightenment. By the sixteenth century Vajrayana had become the dominant branch of Buddhism in Tibet under its leader, the Dalai Lama. Until the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1949, the dalai lama was both the spiritual and political leader of Tibet. The fourteenth dalai lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was born in 1935 and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

Meanwhile, in India, the religion gradually declined in popularity, with the majority of Indians continuing to follow Hindu traditions. After the death of Ashoka, a new dynasty called the Sunga (185–73 BCE) came to power. The Sunga dynasty persecuted (mistreated) Buddhists, killing monks and destroying their monasteries. Despite this treatment, the religion flourished and reached its greatest numbers in India by the fifth century CE. Afterward, however, Buddhism declined in the Buddha's native land. Following the Muslim invasion of India in the twelfth century, Buddhism in India virtually came to an end. By the late twentieth century less than 1 percent of Indians were Buddhists.

Buddhism becomes known in the West It was not until the nineteenth century that Buddhism became well-known and understood in the West. Philosophers (people who study questions of moral behavior and the meaning of life), such as the German Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), helped to bring the religion before the public. Schopenhauer's



Buddhism spread in many directions after its founding in India, going north, south, and east to other parts of Asia before eventually reaching the West. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

writings popularized the Buddhist idea of ending desire as a cure for emotional pain. Buddhism took root in small communities in England and also spread to the United States, where the arrival of Chinese laborers helped to popularize the religion. American writers such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), and the New England transcendentalists, who believed in the unity of all nature, were also influenced by Buddhist principles. Another milestone in popularizing Buddhism was the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Here speakers such as Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) and D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) helped introduce Theravada and Zen to the United States.

Following World War II (1939–45; a war in which the United Kingdom, United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan) interest in Buddhism was renewed in the West. Zen Buddhism became particularly popular in the United States during the 1950s. As U.S. servicemen returned from war in Japan and in Korea, they sometimes brought with them an interest in Asian culture, including Zen. They shared these interests once back home, contributing to the spread of Buddhism in the United States. The writings of scholar D. T. Suzuki and the work of philosopher Alan Watts (1915–1973) on Zen Buddhism influenced a new generation of people seeking answers to questions about life.

Tibetan Buddhism has become another very popular form of Buddhism in the United States in the twenty-first century. The spread of Buddhism has also been enhanced in the United States by waves of immigration from Buddhist countries in Asia. Despite its growing popularity, only 1 percent of the U.S. population is Buddhist. European nations also have a small presence of Buddhists, but their presence continued to increase slowly in the early twenty-first century.

Sects and schisms

Buddhism had already split into two main branches, or schools, by the first century BCE. In the early twenty-first century there exist three main types of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. *Theravada* means “Doctrine of the Elders,” and it bases its practices and beliefs on the original teachings of the Buddha as gathered in the Pali Canon. It is sometimes referred to as the Hinayana branch, or Small Vehicle, but this is not considered to be a polite term for Theravada. Theravada has a strict interpretation of the Buddha’s teachings and places great emphasis on the final step in the Eightfold Path, right concentration. Meditation and contemplation (deep thought) are considered to be the best ways to attain enlightenment. Theravada is most popular in southeast Asia and is sometimes referred to as Southern Buddhism. Theravada is followed by 38 percent of Buddhists, or 124 million people, in the early twenty-first century. It is the main religious tradition in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. It is also found in parts of China, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

The word Mahayana means “Greater Vehicle.” Mahayana Buddhism is sometimes called Northern Buddhism because it is most popular in

parts of Asia north of India, such as China and Japan. Mahayana Buddhists are less strict in their interpretation of the Buddha's teachings. They also focus on teachings given later in the Buddha's life. While Theravada Buddhists give reverence, or great respect, only to the Buddha, Mahayana Buddhists recognize many *bodhisattvas*, or enlightened beings who are like gods and help others on the path. Achieving enlightenment and nirvana, however, may take several lifetimes.

At the time of Mahayana's development, people were accustomed to worshipping many gods. It was difficult for them to accept a belief system that did not have this feature. The Mahayana school responded to this need by saying that the Buddha was both a man and a godlike being, who used his enlightenment to help others. Many other deities (gods) and bodhisattvas populate the Mahayana faith, including Kuan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion and mercy, and Wenshu, the bodhisattva of wisdom. Mahayana Buddhism is most commonly practiced in Nepal, Vietnam, Korea, China, Japan, Tibet, and Mongolia. It is followed by 56 percent of all Buddhists, or about 185 million people.

The third major school of Buddhism, Vajrayana, or "Diamond Vehicle," is a sub-school of Mahayana. It is sometimes called the Tantric branch. Vajrayana developed during the fifth and sixth centuries CE. Its practices are intended to bring a person to quick enlightenment. Its teachings are based on texts called Tantras, which describe meditation and techniques for Buddhist practice. Some of these techniques include yoga (a physical and spiritual practice that can include holding difficult physical positions for some time), chanting or repetition of *mantras*, and the creation of *mandalas* (circular diagrams with spiritual significance, usually created with colored sand). Tibetan Buddhism is the most well-known form of Vajrayana Buddhism. Vajrayana Buddhism is followed by 6 percent of Buddhists.

Smaller schools Within these three main schools, there are many sub-schools. Pure Land Buddhism developed in China. It tells of a fabled heavenly land in the West that is a midway point on the way to nirvana. This domain is ruled by the spirit of the popular buddha Amitabha. Those believers who do not have the ability to reach nirvana can call upon Amitabha at their death to be reborn in the Pure Land. Teachers there will help them to reach the ultimate goal of nirvana.

China also developed a meditation-centered branch of Buddhism called Ch'an. Ch'an spread in the twelfth century to Japan, where it changed into Zen Buddhism. Zen teaches that the way to become a

Indian Protestantism

Religious writer Huston Smith argues that Siddhartha Gautama was something of a “rebel saint.” Writing in *The Religions of Man* (1965), Smith noted that Buddhism “must be seen against the background of the Hinduism out of which it grew.” Smith went on to note that Buddhism was largely “a reaction against Hindu perversions—an Indian Protestantism.” By “perversions,” Smith was referring to the elaborate ceremonies and power of the priests, or Brahmins, in the Hinduism of Siddhartha’s time. The Buddha felt that these developments had sent Hinduism in the wrong direction, more interested in show and ceremony than in helping the common people.

Just like the Protestant revolt against Catholicism, Buddhism sought to cut through what it saw as hypocrisy, or falseness, in the older religion. Unlike Hinduism, with its Brahman priestly class, the Buddha preached a religion free of authority and free from a chain of command for leadership and power. Each individual, he said, should do his or her own religious seeking and not trust the word of

some priest or preacher. This is illustrated in the Buddha’s words from the Dhammapada: “Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”

The Buddha also encouraged religious beliefs that did not focus on ritual and tradition. Hinduism had a large number of rites and prayers to the gods. The Buddha felt that such rituals served as worldly distractions that kept a person from enlightenment. Soothsayers and prophets, those who claimed to see into the future, played a large part in Hinduism. The Buddha thought such methods were only for those looking for easy answers to life’s difficult questions. Instead, the Buddha offered a religion very different from the Hinduism of the day. Buddha focused on the condition of the human mind rather than on metaphysics. He used experience and reason to arrive at his principles of living, and did not rely on ceremony or the words of ancient priests. He created a religion of social equals, rejecting the caste, or class, system in India.

buddha (spiritual leader) is through self-knowledge, and the way to achieve self-knowledge is through meditation. Although other schools of Buddhism use meditation, the practice is central to Zen Buddhism. Zen does not rely on sacred writings or the followings of a specific teacher, as is common in many other religions. Instead, Zen often uses *koans*, or question-and-answer sessions between masters and students. The questions asked in the koans often seem illogical and require great self-examination to understand. They are thought to help the person gain greater self-knowledge and achieve enlightenment, or *satori*.

Basic beliefs

Buddhism concentrates on the concept of *dukkha*, or suffering, and how to avoid it. In the Buddha’s first lesson, which came to be called “Setting

in Motion the Wheel of the Law or Truth,” he announced the Four Noble Truths. These provide the foundation for all of Buddhism. The First Noble Truth is that existence contains suffering, physical, emotional, and spiritual. The Second Noble Truth explains that suffering exists because of *tanha*, or desire. All desire in life leads to suffering. The Third Noble Truth then declares that to be free of suffering one must first be freed from desire. The Fourth Noble Truth states that release from desire and suffering can be achieved by following the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path consists of eight steps:

right understanding;
 right thought;
 right speech;
 right action;
 right livelihood;
 right effort;
 right mindfulness; and
 right concentration.

Each step on the Eightfold Path can be followed by anyone willing to dedicate him or herself to it. Right understanding means to begin the journey by knowing the Four Noble Truths and the Buddha’s teachings. Right thought is to be dedicated to practicing Buddhism and caring for others. One practices right speech when one does not lie, speak harshly of others, or gossip. Right action consists of following what are called the Five Precepts. These are to not kill, not steal, not overindulge in activities involving the senses, not lie, and not drink alcohol to excess.

To follow right livelihood, a person should avoid working in jobs that are harmful to others, such as trading in weapons or alcohol, or in anything that shames or injures others. Right effort can be practiced by promoting positive qualities in one’s self, such as improving one’s knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings or completing an assignment on time. Right mindfulness is when one does something with one’s full attention. The final step on the Eightfold Path is right concentration, which means to focus the mind, usually through meditation.

The steps of the Eightfold Path are sometimes grouped into three categories: wisdom (including right understanding and thought), meditation (right effort, mindfulness, and concentration), and morality (right speech, action, and livelihood). Buddhists rely on their community, or

Buddhism

The Buddha's birth is depicted with him as a young child, standing on a lotus flower and surrounded by devotees. A dream by his mother before he was born predicted that he would become a great ruler or a great spiritual leader. © LEONARD DE SELVA/CORBIS.



sangha, to help them on their paths. A person following these steps can learn to understand completely the Buddha's teachings on suffering and impermanence and achieve enlightenment and nirvana. Nirvana is when a person stops the cycle of suffering and rebirth.

All things are related, all things change Among other central principles of early Buddhism is the concept of the nonexistence of a soul, or *anatman*. The Buddha declared that separate souls for individuals that remained distinct after death do not exist. Instead, he taught that each person is part of the rest of humanity, but in the most basic way, just as one candle flame is part of the general class of fire. Related to this is the concept of emptiness, or *sunyata*. The Buddha explained that sunyata meant that things do not exist on their own but are part of a larger universal network or web of all things and beings. The world exists as it is because of the presence of everything in it. The Buddha also noted that there were corresponding opposites in the universe. The Buddha determined that if there was suffering, there must also be no suffering.

Another major principle of Buddhism is the idea of the impermanence of all things, *anicca*. By failing to understand that existence is impermanent, people suffer. For the Buddha the idea of emptiness means that

there is no separate self. Rather, people are all part of the same network or fabric. In a sense, reaching nirvana means losing one's individual identity.

Buddhism's different schools Early Buddhism was strict about maintaining the belief that there was no supreme being or god. When the Mahayana school formed, a number of deities, or gods, developed out of it. These deities, called bodhisattvas, assist Mahayana Buddhists on their paths.

Many schools of Buddhism have their own separate beliefs and practices in addition to such core principles. For example, Tibetan Buddhists believe in physical reincarnation, or the soul's rebirth into another body, of buddhas. When a *lama*, or leader of Tibetan monks, who is thought to be a buddha dies, the members of his monastery begin searching for the child who is that lama reborn. In Japan the Zen school of Buddhism relies heavily on meditation to achieve enlightenment. Another school of Japanese Buddhism is Nichiren Buddhism, named after a thirteenth-century Japanese monk. Nichiren believed that all that was needed for enlightenment was knowledge of the Lotus Sutra, one of the most sacred writings in Mahayana Buddhism. Nichiren taught his disciples that chanting the mantra *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* (or "homage to the Lotus Sutra") would bring the seeker to enlightenment.

Although Buddhists worldwide have very different ways of attaining enlightenment, all of them share some core beliefs. These are best summarized in what is known as the Three Jewels. The jewels include a belief in the Buddha, a belief in *dharmā*, or the universal moral law that the Buddha's teachings reveal, and a belief in the *sangha*, the community of fellow believers. When one wants to become a Buddhist and enter on the dharma, one recites the following prayer to an ordained monk or nun: "I go to the Buddha for refuge / I go to the Dharma for refuge / I go to the Sangha for refuge." Also central to nearly all schools of Buddhism is the practice of meditation.

Sacred writings

The oldest Buddhist sacred texts are called the Pali Canon and contain about four million words. They were written in the ancient Pali language and are also referred to as the Tipitaka, or "three baskets," because they are divided into three parts. The first part of the Pali Canon is a section

on monastic law. Its 227 rules advise monks and nuns on how to handle certain situations and relationships between the sangha and the laypeople. The second Tipitaka tells the teachings of the Buddha. It details more than ten thousand *sutras*, or teachings, including guidance on behavior and meditation. The Dhammapada, a collection of the Buddha's sayings and lessons, is part of the second Tipitaka, and is a much-used reference for many Buddhists across all schools. The third Tipitaka contains notes on how to search for wisdom and self-understanding. This section includes songs, poetry, and stories from the Buddha's previous lives. The three sections of the Tipitaka are also called the Discipline Basket, the Discourse Basket; and the Higher Knowledge of Special Teachings Basket.

Theravada Buddhism uses the Pali Canon as its official sacred text. The teachings of the Pali Canon were determined during the First Buddhist Council, held shortly after the Buddha's death. They were passed down orally for more than one hundred years before being written down around the third century BCE.

Mahayana Buddhism developed and revealed more than two thousand new passages to be added to the Buddhist collection of sacred texts. Mahayana tradition tells that many of these sutras were kept secret and only released when people were ready to hear them. They were written between 200 BCE and 200 CE. The Lotus Sutra, or Suddharma-Pundarika Sutra ("White Lotus of the True Dharma"), is the most popular Mahayana text. It includes discussions on the importance of becoming a bodhisattva and of realizing one's essential Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is present in every person and allows them to grow and obtain greater understanding.

Another important Mahayana text is the Prajnaparamita, or "Perfection of Wisdom" sutras, which includes the "Heart Sutra" or "Diamond Sutra." Only a few pages long, the Diamond Sutra contains some of the basic principles of Mahayana Buddhism, including its view of emptiness, nirvana, human nature, and reality. Different Mahayana sub-schools use different sutras as their central texts. Among these writings are the Pure Land Sutra, in which the Buddha describes to his follower Ananda the heaven called Pure Land and how to be reborn there; the Mumon-kan (Gateless Gate), containing the most well-known Zen koan collections; and the Tibetan Book of the Dead, which informs Vajrayana Buddhists about the spiritual opportunities available immediately after death.



The dharmachakra is a sacred symbol representing the Buddha's first teachings after enlightenment. The eight spokes of the wheel stand for each step on the Eightfold Path. The deer statues symbolize Deer Park, where the Buddha gave his first sermon. © CHRISTINE KOLISCH/CORBIS.

A further important text for Buddhists is a book called *Mulamadhya-maka-Karika*, which was written around 150 CE by the Indian monk Nagarjuna. The system of thought detailed by Nagarjuna discusses an important foundation in Buddhism. It is called *Madhyamaka*, or “the middle way.” The phrase “middle way” is often used to describe Buddhism. It illustrates the Buddha’s belief, as discussed by Nagarjuna, that one must avoid extremes in order to achieve enlightenment, including extreme severity or harshness and extreme indulgence or ease.

Sacred symbols

Buddhism is rich in symbols. Many of the different schools find value in different sacred images. Some of the most prominent symbols are the *dharmachakra* (dharma wheel), bodhi tree, Buddhist flag, *vajra* (thunderbolt), and *mandala*. The *dharmachakra* is one of the most well-known Buddhist symbols. It is an eight-spoked wheel signifying the Buddha’s turning of the Wheel of Truth, referring to the Buddha’s first lesson after he achieved enlightenment. The eight spokes on the wheel represent each step on the Eightfold Path. The center of the wheel is a circle that contains three pieces: a hub, a spoke, and a rim. The hub stands for the Buddhist principle of discipline; the spoke, for wisdom; and the rim represents concentration.

The bodhi tree and leaves from the tree are sacred items in Buddhism. At the time of the Buddha’s life, many people in India greatly

respected and even worshipped trees. They were seen as a symbol of wisdom and immortality. Hindu writings describe a divine tree with roots in heaven and branches in the underworld, connecting all beings. For Buddhists, the bodhi tree is held to be sacred because the Buddha achieved enlightenment after meditating under it. Influenced by the existing culture and dominant religion of the time, Buddhist followers began to see in the bodhi tree a representation of the Buddha and his teachings.

The Buddhist flag represents all of Buddhism. Developed in 1880 by American Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907), the flag has five colors that represent five different Buddhist principles. Blue represents universal compassion; yellow is for the middle path; red is blessings; white is purity and liberation; and orange represents wisdom. The colors appear vertically and are repeated horizontally in a single column on the right margin of the flag, with blue on top and orange on the bottom. The combination of these colors represents Buddhist unity worldwide. The flag was officially accepted by the World Buddhist Congress in 1952.

The *vajra*, or thunderbolt, is a sacred object to followers of Vajrayana Buddhism. It is usually made of brass and symbolizes that which cannot be destroyed. It looks like a vertical staff with two prongs each reaching out diagonally from the top and bottom.

Perhaps one of the most visually familiar Buddhist symbols is the mandala. It is often used by Vajrayana Buddhists. A mandala is an elaborate image constructed to help a Buddhist concentrate in meditation. The creation of a mandala can be a form of meditation all on its own. There are many different kinds of mandalas, and each teaches different lessons depending on the different objects it contains. Every object in the mandala has significance, reminding the meditator of a particular principle or idea. Such objects include images of deities and shapes, including diamonds, bells, vajra, dharmachakra, and lotus flowers. The center of every mandala represents the Buddha. Mandalas can be made of colored sand, paper, and fabric. They take several days to create and are destroyed a short time later. This process of creation and destruction is also symbolic. It represents the impermanence of all things.

Worship

Worship in Buddhism basically takes two forms. The first is the practice of veneration, or of showing respect and admiration, for the Buddha, other buddhas, and bodhisattvas. For followers of the Theravada branch,

Mahayana Deities

Mahayana Buddhists believe in bodhisattvas, figures who have achieved enlightenment but have turned away from nirvana to help others. In Mahayana practice, bodhisattvas have become like minor gods and saints. The most powerful of them are awaiting reincarnation in heaven, which is not the same thing as achieving nirvana. Mahayana Buddhists direct their prayers for assistance to the bodhisattvas.

The most popular of the Mahayana bodhisattvas is Avalokitesvara, a god of compassion or sympathy. Able to take any form to help humans, this deity grants requests to people who chant his name. Avalokitesvara can be represented as either a man or a woman, and (s)he is shown in statues and paintings with several pairs of arms sprouting from his/her body. In the palm of each hand is an eye of wisdom. Legend has it that Avalokitesvara has a thousand arms in order to better help all those who ask for assistance.

In China, because compassion is considered a female characteristic, Avalokitesvara is pictured as a beautiful woman wearing a white robe and is

called Kuan Yin. One legend of Kuan Yin says that she was the daughter of a cruel man who wanted her to marry a wealthy man. Kuan Yin was very religious, though, and wanted to be a nun at a temple. Her father made the monks give her difficult chores to discourage her. Kuan Yin, however, was so good that the animals around the temple helped with her chores and convinced the father to allow his daughter to keep her religious life.

Another popular deity is Maitreya, also known as the Laughing Buddha. Loving and friendly, this deity is based on an early Zen monk who was known for his kindness. He is known as the Laughing Buddha because he is most often shown with a round belly sticking out of his robes, and with a big smile on his face. Rubbing his belly is supposed to bring good luck.

A third prominent deity is Majushi, also known as Wenshu in China. This bodhisattva never grows old and comes to people in their dreams as a beggar to help them reach enlightenment. He is shown holding a sword of wisdom in his right hand and a book in his left.

the Buddha is the sole object of veneration, but for believers in Mahayana Buddhism, all buddhas and bodhisattvas are venerated. Such respect can be demonstrated by offering gifts to images of these revered ones in the forms of food, flowers, incense, or water in beautiful bowls. Such images might be paintings or statues at a temple or some relic or physical reminder of a buddha. For example, the temple of Kandy in Sri Lanka has a tooth of the Buddha and has become a holy place of pilgrimage for Buddhists as a result.

Another means of showing respect is by meditating on the qualities of enlightened bodhisattvas. For Buddhists, meditation is like prayer in other religious traditions. It focuses the mind and prepares it to understand or receive higher forms of knowledge or insight. There are two

basic forms of meditation for Buddhists: stabilizing and analytical. In stabilizing meditation, the person is attempting to develop his or her powers of concentration. A simple technique used in stabilizing is to focus on one's breathing and then to clear the mind of all thought. Once the mind is clear, the person can focus on one Buddhist concept at a time. For example, a person might concentrate on the idea that life is impermanent and what that means to him or her.

Chanting a mantra or religious phrase is another meditation technique. Such mantras are generally in Sanskrit and are believed to be words used by a buddha when in deep meditation. The most frequently used mantra, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, is *om mani padme bum*, which is usually translated as "Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus." The jewel represents the teaching of the Buddha, while the lotus is the symbol of wisdom. By clearing the mind, a person prepares for analytical meditation, which allows for insights or sudden understanding. Western psychologists explain such thoughts as coming from the unconscious. In Buddhism, these insights lead to enlightenment.

Meditation requires deep concentration and a lack of distraction. As a result, many Buddhists need to meditate somewhere quiet and private. In some countries with a Theravada tradition, such as Thailand, a layperson, typically a man, can actually join a monastery for a short period of time in order to build up his powers of concentration before returning to life outside the monastery. While in the monastery, these laypeople live by strict Theravada principles. This means that they try to remain pure in thought and deed and go on alms rounds with the monks, observing silence all the while. Alms are donations of food, drink, or other objects. Personal possessions are limited to one pair of underwear, two yellow robes signifying discipline, a belt, a razor, a needle, a water strainer, and a bowl for collecting alms. During their stay they are educated in the principles of Buddhism and given instruction by the monks in right living. Once back from the monastery, these laypeople maintain small shrines in their homes, may go to preaching halls rather than temples to hear teachings, and visit sacred sites on pilgrimages.

The second major form of religious practice and worship involves the concept of *dana*, or generosity. It also deals with the relationship between the lay community and the monks and nuns. Monks and nuns represent a higher form of spiritual achievement. They share this experience and knowledge with laypeople through their examples, by teaching lessons

from the sacred texts, and by holding ceremonies throughout the year. In return, the Buddhist lay community supports the monks and nuns with offerings of gifts and food. Theravada lay Buddhists give food to monks daily when the monks go on their begging rounds, or *pindapata*. Laypeople also help out with chores at temples, cooking and washing for the monks, or putting fresh flowers on a shrine. Laypeople in some Theravada countries provide all the food, clothing, and medicine for the sangha. The concept of *dana*, of generosity and gift-giving, helps to unite the community of laypeople and monks and nuns in the monasteries.

Where worship happens Veneration and the practice of *dana* are used on their own and also as part of rituals and celebrations throughout the Buddhist year. Unlike religions such as Christianity and Judaism, Buddhism does not have regular weekly services. The closest thing to such a weekly tradition comes in Theravada Buddhism with the *uposatha*, days in which to renew a commitment to the religion. These days come on the first, eighth, fifteenth, and twenty-third days of the lunar month, which are determined by the phases of the moon and not by the movement of the sun as in the Western calendar. On these days lay Buddhists, those who are not nuns or monks, will visit the temple or the local monastery. They listen to monks reading from a Pali sutra or delivering a sermon or lesson, and they make offerings of food and clothing to the monks and nuns. They will also meditate on the Five Precepts.

Buddhists can worship at home, at a temple, or at a stupa, a stone pillar or burial mound inscribed with sayings of the Buddha. A Buddhist worshipping at home generally maintains a small shrine in a private area with a statue of the Buddha, candles, and an incense burner. Tibetan Buddhists often also have a photograph of their spiritual teacher on the home shrine. Other Buddhists may place Buddhist texts or Buddhist symbols, such as prayer beads or a bell, representing the enlightened mind, on their shrine. Buddhists pray to the Buddha or other buddhas at their home shrine, depending on the tradition. They usually bow before the image of the Buddha or buddhas as they worship. Buddhists also make offerings of food, incense, and water at their household



Buddhist monks receive alms from laypeople in Thailand. Monks may receive all of their food in alms, and eat only what they are given. For the laypeople, giving alms is a way to build merit. © KEVIN R.

MORRIS/CORBIS.

shrines, just as they would in a temple or at a stupa. By making such offerings, and by meditating and practicing *dana*, Buddhists build merit, or credit for good deeds. This merit helps to determine what kind of life the Buddhist will experience with rebirth, and how close he or she is coming to enlightenment.

Temples and stupas Buddhist temples, such as Cambodia's Angkor Wat and the temples at Sukothai in northern Thailand, are built to symbolize the five elements: water, air, fire, earth, and wisdom. The base of such temples is square, symbolizing the earth, and comes to a point at the top, representing wisdom. Buddhist temples generally have statues and shrines to the Buddha or to buddhas and bodhisattvas. For the followers of Theravada, only images of the Buddha are used as aids to meditation, focusing on his virtue. But Mahayanists worship many different buddhas and bodhisattvas. Images and statues of these, especially in Tibet and China, are included in the temples and are thought to have miraculous or supernatural powers. In China and Japan, Buddhist temples are called pagodas and are built several stories high, with a curved roof and a tower on top.

Though most Buddhist temples are found in Asia, there are also Buddhist temples and centers in other parts of the world. For example, there are temples in more than one-half of the states in the United States. These temples often serve the dual purpose of both religious and cultural centers for the faithful. People must always remove their shoes before entering a Buddhist temple to show respect. While followers of Theravada typically go to the temple for *uposatha* and for festivals, in Mahayana Buddhism the faithful go to the temple whenever they choose, making offerings and praying to various images.

Stupas also serve as places of worship. Though once simple in form, stupas have become larger over the centuries, with some, such as the Shwedagon stupa in Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), reaching one hundred feet in height. Many also are now decorated with beautiful carvings and gold. Outside the stupas the faithful either meditate on the teachings of the master buried there or walk around the structure three times to remind themselves of the three major elements of Buddhism: the Buddha, the *dharma*, and the *sangha*.

Observances and pilgrimages

The most important holy days for Buddhists are New Year's, Wesak, Dharma Day, Kathina Day, and Sangha Day. The dates of these festivals can vary not only between Theravada and Mahayana branches, but also



Buddhists meditate inside a temple. Worship is often carried out at a temple or at a home shrine, before an altar with a statue of the Buddha, candles, incense, and flowers. STEPHEN EPSTEIN/PONKAWONKA.COM.

from sect to sect and from country to country. Moreover, since Buddhists (except those in Japan) use the lunar calendar, the schedule of such holy days can be confusing for Westerners. The Buddhist year begins with the New Year's festival, symbolizing the death and rebirth of the year. In Theravada countries such as Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Laos, the New Year is celebrated for three days from the first full moon day in April. In Mahayana countries, the New Year usually starts on the first full moon day in January, and Tibetan Buddhists generally celebrate it in March. To prepare for the New Year, Buddhists clean their houses very thoroughly and perform cleansing rituals with water to drive out evil spirits. As with all the holy days of Buddhism, the three days of the New Year's celebration include visits to the temple to bring offerings of incense, cloth, flowers, and money for the monks. There are also processions through the streets carrying images of the Buddha, as well as feasting, dancing, and sports events.

Wesak (also spelled Vesak) is the most important of Buddhist holy days, celebrated on the full moon in May for Theravada countries.

Wesak takes its name from the name of the Indian month in which it is held. In Japan it is celebrated in April and is called Hana Matsuri. While some Buddhists celebrate this day only as the Buddha's day of birth, Theravada followers believe it also celebrates the day he became enlightened and died. Homes are cleaned and decorated, and lanterns are set out to symbolize enlightenment. In countries such as Cambodia and Thailand, large numbers of caged birds are set free and live fish are returned to rivers to symbolize the freedom that comes with enlightenment. In other Theravada countries religious processions circle the temple or stupa three times to symbolize the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. Plays that depict scenes of the Buddha's lives are also presented. Many Buddhists visit their local temples for chanting and teachings, and offerings are given to the monks. Gifts of food and clothing are also laid at the feet of the Buddha statue in the temple.

Dharma Day celebrates the beginning of the Buddha's teachings. Traditionally this celebration fell in the eighth lunar month and marked the time when the Buddha and his followers went into retreat for several months during the rainy season. The day is usually celebrated with teachings from the Buddha's first sermon at Deer Park. The retreat months (August to October) are called Vassa. This is a time for Buddhists to renew their belief. The end of this period is marked by the festival of Kathina (held within a month of the end of Vassa). This is a time when new robes are given to the monks by the people of the community.

Sangha Day, also called Magha Puja Day, is held on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March). It celebrates the religious community, or sangha, and recalls the time when more than one thousand enlightened monks gathered to hear the Buddha's first sermon, the Turning of the Wheel of Law or Truth. This sermon detailed the rules for monastic orders. In a tradition similar to Christmas, gifts are exchanged on Sangha Day.

Pilgrimage Buddhists have four main places of pilgrimage: the Buddha's birthplace in Lumbini, Nepal; Bodh Gaya, a small town in India that is the site of the Buddha's enlightenment; Sarnath, also in India and sometimes called Deer Park, where the Buddha gave his first sermon regarding the Four Noble Truths; and Kusinagar, India, where the Buddha died at the age of eighty. Lumbini, in modern-day Nepal, is the most significant of pilgrimage sites for Buddhists. Tradition tells that it was here that the Buddha was born in about 563 BCE. In 1996 a team of archaeologists

Mudras

Mudras are sacred hand gestures. *Mudras* in Buddhism can commonly be seen in statues and other images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. In these images, they are meant to symbolize the presence of the divine and to relay a particular significance. They are used in meditation to aid in concentration and are also present in Indian classical dance to convey meaning.

There are several different kinds of *mudras*. The *abhaya*, or fearlessness, *mudra* is made by raising the right hand to the shoulder, with the palm of the hand facing outward and the fingers extended straight and together. The left arm rests along the side of the body. The *abhaya mudra* is meant to eliminate fear and provide peace and protection.

Often performed at the same time as the *abhaya mudra* is the *varada*, or wish-granting, *mudra*. It is usually made with the left hand, with the arm hanging naturally at the side, the open palm facing forward, and fingers extended. The extended fingers represent the five perfections: generosity, morality, patience, effort, and meditative concentration. This *mudra* stands for compassion and charity.

The *dharmachakra*, or wheel-turning, *mudra* is formed by touching together the tips of the

thumb and index finger on both hands. The circle made by this positioning represents the Dharma Wheel. The hands are held in front of the heart to show that the teachings are from the Buddha's heart. This *mudra* symbolizes the occasion of the Buddha's first sermon after he achieved enlightenment.

There are two different forms of the *dhyana*, or meditation, *mudra*. When the left hand is resting in the lap and the right hand is in another position, the *dhyana mudra* represents wisdom. When both hands are in *dhyana mudra*, they are usually resting at the level of the stomach or thighs, with the right hand above the left, palms facing upward, and fingers extended. In some instances, the thumbs of the two hands will touch the fingertips. This *mudra* is one of meditation and concentration.

The *anjali mudra* is made by placing the palms of the hand and fingers flat together, often before the heart. Sometimes the head is slightly bowed. This gesture can be found in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Statues of the bodhisattvas may display the *anjali mudra*, which indicates respect and worship. Hindus use this gesture in greeting, while Christians may position their hands in this fashion when they pray.

sponsored by the United Nations began excavations and uncovered what they declared was the birth room or chamber of Siddhartha. This discovery finally resolved a long-time dispute between India and Nepal over which country could claim the Buddha's birthplace.

The archaeologists uncovered a series of fifteen chambers buried about 16 feet (4.8 meters) beneath an ancient temple marking the site of the Buddha's birth. There they found a platform of bricks with a memorial stone on top that dated to 249 BCE. This was the year that Emperor Ashoka, who did much to promote the spread of Buddhism, was supposed to have placed a platform of bricks over the Buddha's

birthplace. The archaeologists discovered a stupa nearby, also built by Ashoka, with coins and a figurine of the Buddha. In 2005, sixteen countries, including Nepal, Japan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore, and Thailand, agreed to create a World Peace City in Lumbini.

The great stupa monument at Sanchi in India also attracts many pilgrims, as does the Tibetan holy city of Lhasa, the Yun-kang caves of China with their giant carved buddhas, and the Sri Lankan ruined temple complex of Anuradhpura. There are also many local temples, shrines, and stupas that attract the faithful, such as the Temple of Kandy in Sri Lanka that displays a tooth relic of the Buddha.

Buddhists go on pilgrimages for many reasons. For some, it is one more discipline in their practice and one that can add to spiritual development. Others go on pilgrimages to fulfill a vow or pledge made to the Buddha or buddhas. For example, a person might pray to one particular Buddhist saint in order to recover from sickness or to deal with a particular problem. As part of their promise, they travel to a pilgrimage site dedicated to that saint and make offerings. Still others go on pilgrimages as a way of blending a vacation with their religious practice. Pilgrimage is an important practice for Buddhists, but not one that is required of them. There are no specific times of the year when such pilgrimages are made, though many visit Lumbini or one of the Indian sites for Wesak.

Everyday living

Buddhism's central principle states that, in order to achieve nirvana, one must behave in a moral way, avoid harmful actions, and train and purify the mind. The Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts list measures that all Buddhists should honor in their daily lives. In order to respect the first precept, to refrain from harming living creatures, many Buddhists are vegetarians, meaning they do not eat food that comes from animals. Some Buddhists, following the precept about avoidance of intoxicating drink, do not drink alcohol. Others follow the Buddha's own recommendation about taking a middle path in such matters, practicing not abstinence, but moderation in food and drink. Right work, also a part of the Eightfold Path, helps to determine one's profession. Professions that help rather than harm people, such as teaching, construction of homes, and nature conservation, may be attractive to Buddhists.

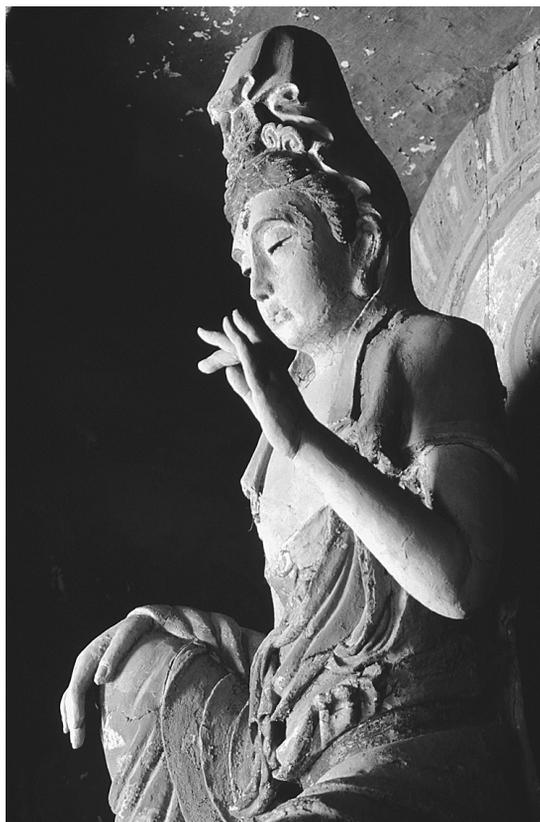
The extent to which Buddhism affects one's daily life, however, greatly depends on tradition and location. For example, in predominantly

Theravada countries, believers periodically spend weeks or months each year in a monastery. In Thailand, lay Buddhists recite prayers or meditate during the day and provide alms of food and clothing to monks on their pindapata (alms-rounds). Lay Buddhists await these monks on their alms-rounds, with rice, fruit, and even small packets of food wrapped in banana leaves. No verbal thanks are given by the monks, only a nod of the head. Buddhists believe that the act of giving is more perfect without thanks. After performing this act of dana, the lay Buddhists go to their jobs or homes, having started the day with a virtuous act.

In the United States and other non-Asian countries, some Buddhists choose to live together in a sangha and build their daily lives around Buddhist principles. Others go about their daily activities and meet with their sangha weekly or monthly. Some choose to dress in robes, although there is no official dress code for the Buddhist laity.

The Buddha did not organize his teachings into a formal structure. It was more important to him that believers follow the dharma to reach enlightenment. Buddhists are not required to attend temple or worship in a particular way. Certain practices, however, have developed to allow people to worship together and share a common experience. If not regularly attending a temple or observing at a shrine, Buddhists can still honor the Buddha's teachings in their daily lives by following the Eightfold Path. Daily meditation is also a usual practice for devout Buddhists.

Rites at birth Buddhism is closely connected to the rites of passage of birth, marriage, and death. In some countries, including Malaysia, there are certain rites that can be performed when a woman is about to give birth. Usually the husband will recite certain sutras and prayers, including the Angulimala Paritta, named after the Buddhist saint, Angulimala, who took special care of women in childbirth. This prayer states, "Sister, since I was born, I (intuitively) know that I have not intentionally deprived any



Kuan Yin is the bodhisattva of compassion and mercy in Mahayana Buddhism, a branch of Buddhism popular in Nepal, Vietnam, Korea, China, Japan, Tibet, and Mongolia. © DEAN CONGER/CORBIS.

living being of life. By this truth may there be well-being for you, well-being for the unborn child!”

After the birth of a child in Theravada countries, the parents take the child to the local temple to be given a name. Then the baby is blessed by monks and sprinkled with water. This is followed by a final ceremony with a candle. The lit candle is tilted so that drops of wax fall into a bowl of water and become solid again. This symbolizes the blending of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water.

Rites at marriage Marriage is considered a secular, or nonreligious, contract for Buddhists. But in addition to a civil ceremony, a Buddhist wedding ceremony can be held, with a monk presiding. In Theravada countries a wedding ceremony will include the symbolic joining of the entire community by wrapping a long piece of string or thread around a picture of the Buddha and then around all those present. The monk cuts two pieces from the string and wraps one around the wrist of the groom. The groom then wraps the second piece of string or thread around his bride’s wrist, symbolizing their unity. In Sri Lanka the wedding ceremony is called *Poruwa Siritha*, or *Poruwa Ceremony*. The *Poruwa* is a beautifully decorated wooden platform on which the traditional Buddhist marriage ceremony takes place. The bride and groom enter the *Poruwa* leading with the right foot. They greet each other with palms held together in the traditional manner of the *anjali* mudra. Instead of a ring, the groom places a gold chain around the bride’s neck and presents her with a white cloth, which she gives to her mother. This symbolizes the groom’s thanks to the bride’s mother for bringing up her daughter correctly.

In other countries the ceremony is simpler, with the bride and groom and family and friends gathered at a shrine of the Buddha. The couple makes offerings of food, flowers, and incense to the Buddha and lights candles. Then the groom and bride recite from the *Sigilovdda Sutra*. The groom first says to the bride, “Towards my wife I undertake to love and respect her, be kind and considerate, be faithful, delegate domestic management, provide gifts to please her.” Then the bride says, “Towards my husband I undertake to perform my household duties efficiently, be hospitable to my in-laws and friends of my husband, be faithful, protect and invest our earnings, discharge my responsibilities lovingly and conscientiously.”

Following this, the guests and parents recite various sutras and chants as a blessing. The *Mangala Sutra* is a typical text for this occasion.

It states, in part, “Not to associate with fools, to associate with the wise, and pay honor to those who are worthy of honor, that is the highest blessing.” The Vandana is another Pali chant used in some ceremonies: “Homage to the triple gems, homage to him, the blessed one, the exalted one, the fully enlightened one.” A wedding feast follows the ceremony.

Rites at death There are a number of Buddhist ceremonies connected with death and funerals. Even at the time of dying, Buddhists believe there is possibility for enlightenment. Some Buddhists wish to go to a monastery to die, while others bring monks and nuns to the home or hospital to pray and chant. In Tibetan Buddhism especially, the moment of death is a time for transformation or changing of a person’s consciousness. Tibetan Buddhists have a ceremony called *phowa* to aid in the liberation of the consciousness, or enlightenment, at the time of death. The phowa prayer is recited: “Through your blessing, grace, and guidance, through the power of the light that streams from you: May all my negative karma, destructive emotions, obscurations [withholdings], and blockages be purified and removed, May I know myself forgiven for all the harm I may have thought and done, May I accomplish this profound practice of phowa and die a good and peaceful death, And through the triumph of my death, may I be able to benefit all other beings, living or dead.”

Upon the death of a Buddhist, a monk is called in to say something about the person. The monk also recites the Five Precepts, a reminder of the changing nature of all living things. Then the monk or a relative pours water into an empty bowl until it overflows into a dish below. This signifies the merit gained by those attending the death. Then the following words are often recited: “Let the pure thoughts of goodwill be shared by my relative and may he/she be happy. As water runs from the rivers to fill the ocean, may well-being and merit within us pour forth and reach our beloved departed one.” The body is then cleaned and put into clothing for burial. As the dead person is already assumed to have been reborn, no jewels or possessions are put into the coffin for the deceased to take along into death.

In many Buddhist countries bodies are cremated after death. Friends of the family gather at this ceremony and offer what is called “incense money,” to purchase incense for the cremation. Feasts are generally served following a cremation and prayers said for the dead. In Tibet it is believed that forty-nine days must pass after the death prayers are

said before the deceased can enter a new existence. This period between death and rebirth is called *bardo*. A photograph or image of the deceased is burned at that time, to wish the person goodwill in his or her new life. Chinese Buddhists also believe in the seven-week period between death and rebirth. They offer prayers for the dead every seven days for forty-nine days and also at the hundredth day after death.

Buddhism's influences

With more than four million followers worldwide, Buddhism is considered to be one of the major world religions. In addition to its religious influence Buddhism has also played an important part in the development of many forms of art and architecture, and has even influenced Western psychology (the science of the mind and its behavior).

Buddhism impacts the arts Buddhist art has had a major impact on the arts of Asia. For example, the image of the Buddha has played a significant role in Asian art as the image of Christianity's founder, Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE) has in Western art. In early Indian versions, the Buddha is generally portrayed smiling, which is meant to show his experience of enlightenment and inner peace. The eyes are often closed, and he is often portrayed seated on a lotus throne with his hands shaped into mudras. This Indian style of representing the Buddha spread with the religion across Asia. In China the Buddha was often portrayed in golden robes with heavy folds. Over time, his eyes and face took on a Chinese appearance. Depictions of the Buddha often were made far larger than life size. In South Korea, at Sokkuram Grotto on Mt. Toham, the Buddha image was carved out of the face of a mountain. Another giant Buddha was carved out of a cliff in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Called the Buddha Vairocana, it guarded the road to Central Asia for centuries until it was destroyed by the Taliban government in 2001.

A different Buddha Vairocana was created in Japan in the eighth century CE. It stood more than 50 feet high, weighed more than 200 tons, and was decorated with 500 pounds of gold. Sri Lanka also has a monumental Buddha sculpture, the Reclining Buddha. About fifty feet long, it is carved out of granite at the Gal Vihara Temple in Polonnaruwa. Thus, the image of the Buddha provided inspiration for the creation of great art works throughout Asia, most of them created by monks who wished to show their devotion and love for the Buddha.

Buddhism also influenced art in Asia beyond religious works. In Japan, for example, Zen Buddhism had a strong influence on many art forms. Simplicity and purity are traditionally part of Zen teachings, as is the calmness that comes with meditation. Zen painters were free to focus on subjects other than the bodhisattvas that dominated Mahayana art. The Zen art of portraiture was one of the earliest to depict humans in a realistic manner. The Zen Doctrine of Emptiness or the Void influenced nonreligious Japanese painters to leave parts of the canvas or paper empty. The viewer mentally fills in what the artist leaves out. In addition, Zen art influenced the painting style of *sumi-e*. In this simple style, black ink and a brush are used to produce many shades of gray. Such pictures may be only a swirl of lines to suggest a scene from nature. This depiction of nature by Japanese artists was influenced by the Zen saying, “The trees show the bodily form of the wind.”

Allied to the visual arts is Buddhist influence on the manuscript arts, including calligraphy (fine handwriting), block printing, and illumination, or book illustration. In China and Japan calligraphy became a true art form. In China such writing skill was a blend of dharma philosophy with the older Chinese tradition of landscape painting. Buddhist monasteries became safe libraries for beautifully illustrated Buddhist texts, just as Christian monasteries preserved illuminated holy works.

Buddhist architecture also influenced sacred building styles across Asia. Buddhist architecture began with the simple stupa, a mound originally covering the ashes of the Buddha. These became increasingly ornate (decorated) over the years. Once the stupa was exported to China it developed into a building called a pagoda. These tall, multistoried towers have upward-curving tiled roofs and were initially used just as the stupa, to enclose a Buddhist relic. Soon this building style spread with Buddhism to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. The pagoda also changed function. No longer was it just a closed tower for a relic, but a building for worship, a Buddhist temple. The pagoda has become a characteristic Chinese and Japanese building style in religious architecture.

Buddhist influences on science Nonreligious Buddhist influence has also been felt in the West. Psychotherapy, or treatment of mental and emotional disorders using psychological methods, has also long recognized the benefits of using some Buddhist principles. There are similarities between the two systems. Buddhism, like psychotherapy, attempts to help people discover why they are suffering so that they can then help to

heal themselves. Some also see a similarity in the idea of “taking refuge” in both systems. In Buddhism, the participant stays in a monastery to focus on personal growth. Similarly, in psychotherapy, the patient seeks refuge in the doctor’s office to try to work through his or her personal problems. Self-awareness is a Buddhist goal, and Buddhist practices from meditation to self-observation techniques are employed by Western psychologists and psychotherapists to help their patients. In particular, psychologists see the similarity between the Buddhist goal of enlightenment and the psychotherapist’s goal of freeing the unconscious mind.

Buddhism has influenced the world both religiously and in secular, or nonreligious, ways since its introduction 2,500 years ago. The scientist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) conceded the influence and importance of Buddhism when he wrote in *The Merging of Spirit and Science*, “The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual and a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. . . . If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.”

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Christianity

Christianity is a religion built on the life and words of Jesus of Nazareth (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE), also known as Jesus Christ. Christianity is founded on the ideas of personal salvation (deliverance from sin) and eternal life for its followers. The Bible is its chief sacred text, and there are three main branches: Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestantism. Modern Christianity is further divided into an estimated twenty-two thousand different denominations (a group within a faith that has its own system of organization). In addition to being possibly the most divided religion in the world, Christianity is the world's largest religion, with 2.1 billion followers. Believers live around the globe, but the heaviest concentration of Christians is in Europe and North and South America. The United States contains the most number of Christians, with 85 percent of the population, or 225 million people, who claim to be Christians. Other major areas of Christian population include Europe, with about 550 million; Latin America, with about 450 million; Africa, with about 350 million; and Asia, with about 310 million.

History and development

Christianity's earliest foundations are based on historical events. The central event of Christianity is, as Huston Smith notes in *The Religions of Man*, "the life of a little-known Jewish carpenter who . . . was born in a stable, died at the age of thirty-three as a criminal rather than a hero, never traveled more than ninety miles from his birthplace, owned nothing, attended no college, marshaled no army, and instead of producing books did his only writing in the sand." It was this man, Jesus of Nazareth, who so affected people that a religion was built around his words and actions. In the early twenty-first century Christianity now includes one-third of the world's population as believers.

WORDS TO KNOW

atonement: In Christianity, the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ to redeem humankind from its sins.

baptism: A religious ceremony in which a person is dipped in or sprinkled with water as a sign of being cleansed of sin.

church: From the Greek, this word refers to the community of all Christians. It is also the place where Christians go to worship.

conversion: When a person adopts a new set of religious beliefs.

creed: A statement of belief or basic principles.

crucifixion: The suffering and death by nailing or binding a person to a cross.

disciple: A person who accepts and assists in spreading the teachings of a leader. In the Bible, one of the followers of Jesus Christ.

doctrine: A set of ideas held by a religious group.

Evangelical: Describing a Protestant group that emphasizes the absolute authority of the Bible and forgiveness of sin through belief in Jesus.

excommunicate: Officially deprive a person of the rights of church membership.

idol: A statue or other image that is worshipped as a god.

Immaculate Conception: The principle of the Roman Catholic Church that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was conceived with a soul free from Original Sin.

incarnation: In Christianity, the belief that God took on bodily form through Jesus Christ, making Jesus at once fully human and fully divine.

indulgence: In the Roman Catholic Church, the belief that paying money to the Church would allow a person to get into heaven or be forgiven for sins that were not yet committed.

Messiah: The expected deliverer and king of the Jews, foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament; used by Christians to refer to Jesus Christ.

Original Sin: The sin that fell upon humankind when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; this act, in turn, led to the separation of humans from God.

Resurrection: The rising of Jesus Christ from the dead three days after his Crucifixion, or death on a cross.

sacrament: A sacred rite, or ceremony.

saint: In Christianity, someone who is judged to be particularly holy and worthy.

salvation: The deliverance of human beings from sin through Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

Trinity: In Christianity, the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three divine persons in one God.

Virgin Birth: The Christian belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and born of a virgin mother.

The historic Jesus of Nazareth Jesus was a Jewish teacher and healer from the first century CE. Although Jesus is accepted as an actual historical figure, there is little known about him outside the stories found in the Bible. According to the Bible, Jesus was born in a stable in the town of Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, to a young woman named Mary and a carpenter named Joseph. Little is known of Jesus's childhood or youth. According to the Bible, at age twelve he was taken on a trip to Jerusalem and became separated from his parents for a time. He was finally found in the temple, where he was listening to and questioning Jewish scholars.

By his late twenties Jesus began his teaching near his hometown of Nazareth in northern Palestine. He traveled all over Galilee, gathering disciples (persons who accept and assist in spreading the teachings of a leader), including the fishermen Simon (renamed Peter, or “rock” in Greek, by Jesus) and Andrew. Soon he had gathered twelve disciples who traveled with him as he spread a message of love, acceptance of others, and the power of God's love for humanity. Jesus inspired in his followers a sense of mutual affection and joy and urged them to get rid of the selfish boundaries between people. As Jesus said in Matthew chapter 22, verses 37–40 (also referred to as 22:37–40), “You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” Jesus also preached that those who followed the word of God would have everlasting life.

In Matthew 6:14–15, Jesus spoke of the power of forgiveness: “If you forgive men their trespasses, our heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” For Jesus, love and forgiveness were the keys to salvation.

He soon attracted many followers. According to the Bible, Jesus also had the power to heal; he restored movement to the lame, sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf. His followers began to suspect that he was the Messiah for whom all Jews had been waiting. The Jewish Bible speaks of a Messiah, a person appointed by God to free the Jews from their enemies and then become King of the Jews.

Ultimately this popular new movement with Jesus as its leader attracted the attention of the authorities. Although the territory of Palestine, where Jesus lived, was technically under the control of the Roman

About Christianity

- **Belief.** Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that his Crucifixion (death on the cross) and subsequent Resurrection (rising from the dead) all make up for the sins of humankind. A belief in Jesus and his suffering leads to salvation.
- **Followers.** Christians number about 2.1 billion, making Christianity the world's largest religion.
- **Name of God.** The Christian god is called God and is also known as the Lord or the Father. Jesus is believed to be the Son of God. The concept of the Trinity makes God a combination of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- **Symbols.** The cross and the simplified sketch of a fish are two dominant Christian symbols.
- **Worship.** Religious services are held in churches. Most Christians pray and observe the sacraments, or rites, of baptism and Holy Communion.
- **Dress.** There is no special dress for Christians.
- **Texts.** The Bible, consisting of the Old Testament, of Jewish origin, and the New Testament, written after the time of Jesus, is the sacred text of Christianity.
- **Sites.** The Holy Land (the places in Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank connected with the birth, life, and death of Jesus) contains sites sacred to all Christians.
- **Observances.** Christmas and Easter are the two major holy days in the Christian calendar. Christmas observes the day of Jesus's birth. Easter recognizes his Resurrection from the dead.
- **Phrases.** There is no single phrase that unites all of Christianity, though many would recognize and respond to a phrase such as "May the Lord be with you."

Empire, traditional Jewish leaders maintained quite a bit of authority. The ruling body at the time was a group of seventy-one Jewish elders called the Sanhedron. The Sanhedron felt threatened by Jesus's teachings and by the popular opinion that he might be the Messiah. They did not have the authority to eliminate Jesus, but they knew that the Romans did. The Romans did not want any mass movements in Palestine that might challenge their authority. Visiting Jerusalem for the Jewish holy days of Passover, Jesus held a final meal with his followers and announced that he knew that one of them would betray him. This dinner became known as the Last Supper.

Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, one of his followers, and arrested by the Sanhedron. When Jesus refused to defend himself, the Sanhedron took him to the Romans, charging him with sedition, that is, encouraging people to rebel against the government. Again, refusing

to make any defense at his trial, he was sentenced to death by the Roman governor of the region, Pontius Pilate. Jesus suffered a painful death by crucifixion (execution by nailing or binding a person to a cross) and was placed in a tomb. Three days later it was discovered that the heavy stone that sealed the entrance to his tomb was moved and that his body was gone. According to the Bible Jesus later appeared to his disciples. He had risen from the dead. It was word of this miracle, known as the Resurrection, that the disciples spread.

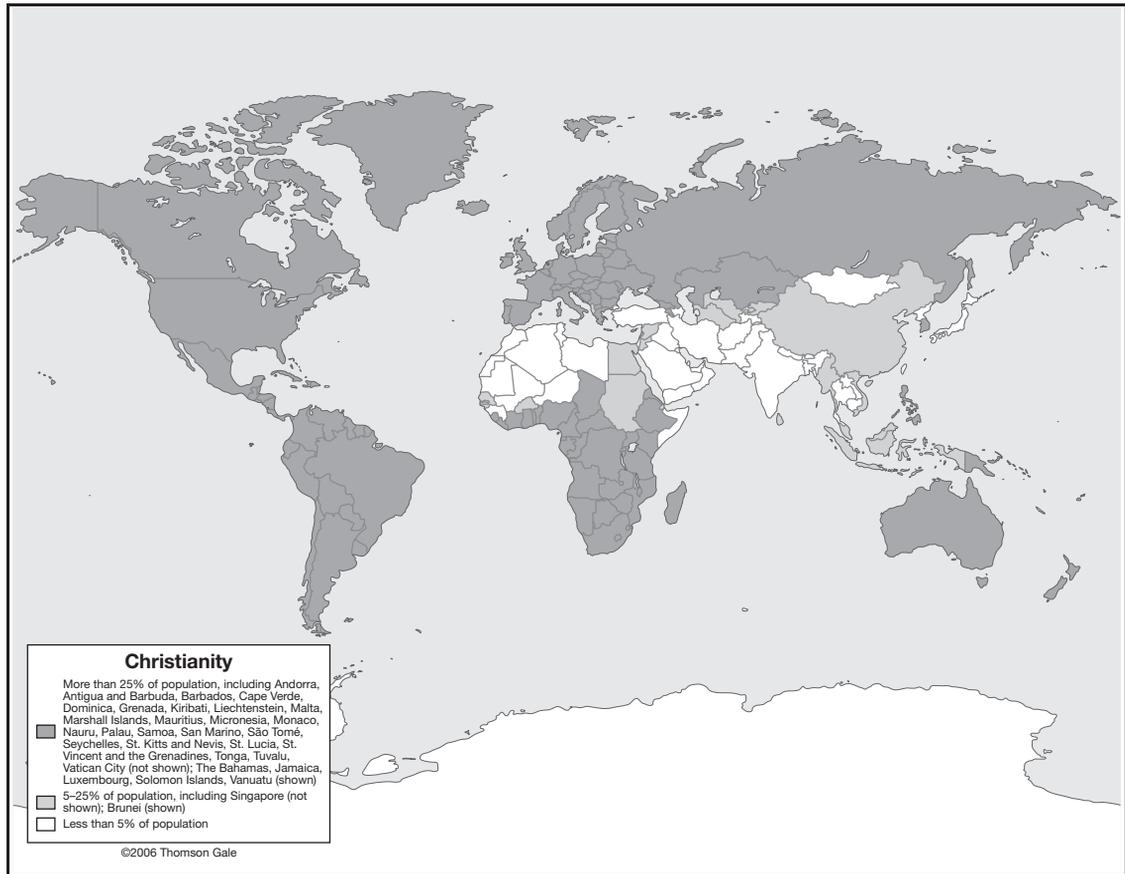
In his death and Resurrection, Jesus proved to be an even more powerful figure than in life. Soon Jesus became known by a title coming from the Greek word *christos*, or “anointed one,” a meaning similar to “messiah.” The form was shortened to Jesus Christ, and common use turned this title into his last name.

The rise of early Christianity Although it is not clear whether Jesus himself ever claimed to be the Son of God, his disciples did claim it. They began to write down their own interpretations of his life and words. His followers and believers called themselves an assembly. By the third or fourth century CE, this specific type of assembly took on the name *church*, from the Greek, *kuriakon*, which means “belonging to the lord.” “Church” came to mean not just the building where Christians worship, but also the group of believers. These early believers, including the apostles (Jesus’s twelve closest followers, or disciples) Peter, James, Matthew, John, and Thomas, preached the word of Jesus only to Jews at first. But soon the word of the Resurrection spread across the Mediterranean world.

The spreading of the religion outside the community of Jews was largely due to the work of a converted Jew, Saul of Tarsus (died c. 67 CE), who later became known as Paul or Saint Paul. Paul was not one of the original apostles. In fact, he had been involved in persecutions (campaigns of mistreatment aimed at stopping the growth of a religion) directed against disciples of Jesus. It was only long after the execution of Jesus that Paul had his conversion experience (or change of beliefs) and began his ministry. He was the first to begin preaching to the Gentiles (those who were not Jewish).

Through the writings and teachings of Paul, Christianity slowly began to separate itself from Judaism. The new religion adapted many of the forms of worship of the older Judaism, even incorporating its holy book, the Tanakh, into its teachings. Christians refer to the

Christianity



Christianity has 2.1 billion followers around the world. The largest number of followers are in Europe and North and South America. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

Tanakh as the Old Testament. At the same time Christianity was developing its own texts. The four Gospels, written in the first and second centuries, detail the life of Jesus. Christians soon also developed two primary sacraments, or sacred ceremonies: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is a religious ceremony in which a person is dipped in or sprinkled with water as a sign of being cleansed of sin. In the Christian religion baptism also signifies that a person has been admitted to church membership. The Last Supper, also referred to as the Eucharist, is a remembrance of Christ's last meal with his disciples before he died. The faithful met on Sundays, for it was on a Sunday that Jesus had risen from the dead. They said prayers together, reading from the Old Testament and from Paul's letters.

Soon the church began to organize. Members of the congregation (gathering or group) took on the jobs of preaching, leading the Sunday services, and collecting offerings from the believers. These tasks were later taken over by church officials. Bishops became administrators, overseeing the operation of the church in a city or district, while priests led worship. These offices slowly came to be officially separate from the laity, or regular members of the congregation. A ceremony called ordination gave a person holy orders or the duties of a priest.

Meanwhile, missionaries spread the gospel (a term meaning “good news”) of Christ, finding converts throughout the Roman Empire. (A convert is a person who changes their religious beliefs.) The first pope, or leader of the church, was established at the end of the first century. The New Testament was collected by about 130 CE, and this helped to spread Christianity.

Persecution of early Christians For the first few centuries of its existence, Christianity was a martyr’s religion. (Martyrs are people who sacrifice their lives for the sake of their beliefs.) Some of the worst persecutions of early Christians happened during the reigns of the Roman emperors from about 81 to 305 CE. The emperors made the new religion illegal and often executed believers who would not give up their faith. Such persecutions were the result of Christians refusing to worship the Roman state or its emperor. In ancient Rome, the emperor himself was considered a god. Worshipping the emperor and the gods of Rome was a sign that a person was a good Roman citizen. A religion like Christianity that taught there was only one God and whose believers could not worship the emperor was a threat to the emperor’s power.

Despite such difficulties, by the fourth century, Christianity had spread as far west as Spain and into both Persia (present-day Iran) and India to the east. In 313 the Roman emperor Constantine (d. 337; ruled 306–337) declared a policy of religious tolerance. He made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire. Then in 380 Theodosius I (347–395) declared it the official religion of the Roman Empire. As of 410 Christians had the power to ban non-Christian religions from the empire. The church adapted parts of the Roman culture to its organization. It used Roman political districts to mark its own religious districts and allowed more state involvement in church affairs.

With mainstream acceptance came internal quarreling over doctrine (a set of ideas held by a religious group) and beliefs. From about 275 the church, especially in Asia Minor (the area of modern-day Turkey),

became involved in doctrinal arguments. For the next several hundred years, large councils of bishops (clergymen who rank above priests) met to decide matters such as the nature of the doctrine of the Trinity. Under the doctrine of the Trinity, God is united into a single figure with three sides: the Father (a creative side), Son (the earthly part), and Holy Spirit (the supernatural, or spiritual, aspect). Still, some believed that God the Father was more powerful than the other two parts. Councils in 325 and 381 decided that issue. They wrote the Nicene Creed, a statement of belief in one God with three aspects.

The first monasteries are formed During the fifth to tenth centuries the monastic system arose. This development was prompted in part by early hermits who had escaped Roman persecution by going off into the desert and living there in seclusion (alone). In this new system, a person could dedicate himself to a secluded and celibate (having no sexual relations) life of thinking about Christ and the Bible. These men were called monks. Buildings called monasteries became places of safety from persecution as well as places of spiritual contemplation (deep thinking) and learning.

The Benedictine Rule, or Benedictine Order, was one of the first such monastic orders, founded in 525 at Monte Cassino, Italy. Other monastic orders formed throughout the early history of Christianity, helping to preserve the traditions of the church. The orders kept the sacred texts in huge libraries and practiced the forms of religion and prayer as established by the early Christians.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is established The two centers of Christianity were Rome and Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey). These cities were also centers of the Roman Empire. With invasions from northern Europe in the fifth century and the loss of political power, Rome was placed in a much weaker position than Constantinople, the eastern capital of the empire. There were divisions between the two seats of power. The church in Rome by the end of the second century began using Latin as the language of worship and in religious texts. The church in the East, however, still used Greek. The bishop of Rome became the pope, or leader, of the church in the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas). The Eastern Church had a less centralized structure, with the patriarch, or district leader, of Constantinople as the unofficial head of that branch. Most real power in the East, however, lay in the hands of the emperor.

These differences intensified over questions of doctrine, particularly over the Nicene Creed. Finally in 1054 a formal separation took place, resulting in two distinct churches: the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Thereafter, the popes in Rome fought for secular, or political, power with the princes and kings of Europe. By 926, European states had loosely joined together as the Holy Roman Empire, with the pope in Rome as the spiritual head. The pope would in turn make one of the many princes in Europe the emperor. This system remained in place until 1806. However, there was continual competition between the popes and the princes for power.

Meanwhile the Eastern Orthodox Church extended its control over Asia Minor and over Christians in the Middle East. Constantinople became the center of what was called the Byzantine Empire. This empire ruled over what had been the eastern half of the Roman world, including Asia Minor, the Middle East, parts of North Africa, and some of Europe, including what is now northern Greece, from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. This control, however, soon found new competition in the form of another religion, Islam.

Early conflict between Christianity and Islam In the eighth century the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Byzantine Empire faced another challenge. Traditional Christian areas of North Africa, Egypt, and Palestine came under the control of the followers of Islam (a religion marked by belief in one God, Allah, and the acceptance of Muhammad as the chief and last prophet of God). The Catholic Church in the West also felt the power of Islam when Spain was invaded in the eighth century and Muslim, or Moorish, rule was established there.

Although in some instances the two religions managed to live peacefully side-by-side, relations were more typically hostile. Such hostility was a result of different beliefs about Jesus. Christians see Christ as godlike and part of the Trinity. But for Muslims, Jesus was just one more prophet or messenger of God, and Muhammad was the major prophet. Muslims also believe the Bible is not accurate. For them, the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, is the final word of God. The religious differences between Muslims and Christians led to tension between the two groups.

This hostility led to the Crusades, a series of military expeditions undertaken by European Christians in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries in an attempt to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims. (The Holy Land consists of the Biblical region of Palestine, which includes

Christianity

In 313 CE the Roman emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be a legal religion under the Roman Empire. By 380 it had become the empire's official religion. THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION.



sites considered sacred by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.) The Crusades were largely unsuccessful. Although those who participated in the First Crusade did retake Jerusalem in 1099, later Crusades could not maintain this foothold in what had become a Muslim-dominated region.

The Inquisition and humanism As the Roman Catholic Church gained power over the princes and kings of Europe in the Holy Roman Empire, it also created the Inquisition, a group formed to control heresy (opinions or beliefs that go against church teachings) by means of harsh punishments. The Inquisition began in the thirteenth century and by the sixteenth century it had become an official office of the Catholic Church. During the Middle Ages (the period of European history from c. 500–c. 1500), the Inquisition used forms of torture to get confessions of heresy from people. Those found guilty were burned at the stake.

In 1453 Constantinople, the center of the Eastern Orthodox Church, was conquered by the Muslim Ottoman Turks, a tribe that was creating a great Islamic empire in the Middle East and in Asia Minor. In time the Turks also took over Greece, causing many Christian scholars and

intellectuals to flee. These intellectuals arrived in Europe and joined a revival of classical art, literature, and learning in Europe that was slowly giving a new emphasis and focus to the way humans looked at the world and at God. This spirit of humanism, a philosophy based upon human reason, actions, and motives without concern for supernatural phenomena, was at odds with the elaborate form of religion practiced by the Roman Catholic Church.

The Reformation gives rise to Protestantism By the sixteenth century European explorers were spreading Christianity to the New World, both North America and South America. At this time, too, there was growing discontent with practices of the Church, such as the selling of indulgences. An indulgence was when people would pay money to the Church with the impression that they could buy their way into heaven or be forgiven for sins that were not yet committed. Critics thought that such practices distorted the original goals of the Church. Salvation should not be sold, these critics said. Rather, it should be earned by belief in Jesus Christ and by good works.

The German Augustinian monk Martin Luther (1483–1546) opposed such practices in 1517 by supposedly nailing his ninety-five theses, or propositions, onto the door of the local church. He was excommunicated, or removed from membership in the Catholic Church, because of his action. Luther went on to preach a reformed Christianity that emphasized individual faith as the most powerful ingredient in a person's salvation. Luther's proposed changes ending the selling of indulgences, and simplification of rituals drew new believers and inspired other reformers. Because the movement sought to reform church practices, it became known as the Reformation. Since it began as a protest against the perceived abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, the new sects that resulted became known as Protestant.

Catholics reacted to these reform movements with the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century. Led by conservative Catholics and Pope Paul III (1468–1549), the Counter-Reformation wanted to reform the church, but slowly and from within. They hoped their reforms would stop Protestant advances and preserve Catholic traditions.

Protestantism continued to grow, giving rise to new groups with different beliefs. Organized forms of Christianity, however, faced a new test with the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment focused on the power of human

reason instead of divine wisdom and placed new focus on the logic of science over faith.

In the nineteenth century scientific discoveries and new theories about life's beginnings led many people to feel that a literal reading of the Bible was no longer reasonable. The church's influence over individuals and nations began to weaken. At the same time, however, many new Christian denominations appeared, stressing Adventist doctrines. These beliefs asserted that the Second Coming (or Advent) of Jesus Christ was near, that the world would be destroyed, and only the faithful would be with Jesus Christ in heaven. The North American group Jehovah's Witnesses is an Adventist religion.

Christianity in the twentieth century Christianity continued to grow throughout the twentieth century. The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) was an attempt at reviving Catholicism. The council also hoped and worked for closer connections with other Christian branches and with Judaism. Communist governments throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which had prohibited many types of religious celebration, collapsed in the late 1980s. The political system of communism eliminates private property and gives the state control of goods and services. After communists lost control, the Eastern Orthodox Church in many central and eastern European countries and in Russia was able to hold services without fear of repression.

Another trend in the twentieth century was a decline in Europe of religious affiliation, or formal connection with an organized church. This was accompanied by a sharp rise in church membership in Asia and Africa. Changes in social values forced Christian churches to address issues once avoided, such as female clergy. Many Christians, especially those belonging to more conservative Protestant denominations, object to the changes introduced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They feel that these changes, like changing AD (*Anno Domini*, In the Year of Our Lord) and BC (Before Christ) to CE (Common Era) and BCE (Before the Common Era), is an example of the secular, or nonreligious, world taking power over religious life.

Sects and schisms

There have been three major schisms, or divisions, in Christianity, resulting in three major branches: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. In addition, some scholars consider that there have



The life and deeds of Jesus are portrayed in the Gospels of the New Testament. They include (clockwise from left) his birth, baptism, the Last Supper, and his resurrection from the dead. © ARTE & IMMAGINI SRL/CORBIS.

been four major schisms, with the fourth being the creation of the Eastern Rite Churches, or Oriental Orthodox and Assyrian Churches.

Rise of the Eastern Orthodox Church Doctrinal disputes over the Trinity were at the heart of the disagreement between the Western Church, centered in Rome, and the Eastern Church, centered in Constantinople. In 1014 the Western Church included “filioque” in the Nicene Creed,

the statement of the chief beliefs or tenets of Christianity. That statement read, in part, “I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . And in the Holy Ghost . . . Who proceedeth [comes or arises] from the Father and the Son.”

The addition of “filioque,” or “and the Son” to this fundamental declaration meant that such a spirit does not come solely from God but from God and the Son, Jesus Christ. This idea went against teachings in the Eastern Church. As a result, the patriarch of Constantinople closed all Latin-speaking churches in the city, the official language of the Western Church. This act led to countermeasures by Rome, until each church by 1054 had excommunicated the other, or forced them out of membership. Thereafter, the Eastern Church, claiming to be the legitimate, or official, version of Christianity, called itself the Eastern Orthodox Church. In turn the Western Church, claiming to be the universal version, called itself the Roman Catholic Church.

Although there was an attempt to reach peace between the two branches, both continue to use different versions of the Nicene Creed. There are many other differences as well. The Eastern Church is less centralized in its administration. Instead of an overall leader such as the pope in Rome, it has patriarchs or metropolitans, who do not rule the entire Eastern Church but only a portion of it. Neither is the Eastern Church the primary religious teaching authority, as it is in Catholic tradition. Moreover, priests in the Eastern Church are not required to be celibate, although their bishops are. Members of the church who are not clergy also have more power and responsibilities in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Salvation is more of a group concern in Eastern Church tradition, and the mystical element of the religion is emphasized. Eastern Orthodox tradition is the dominant religion in Bulgaria, Belarus, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and the Ukraine and is also found in Albania, China, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the United States.

The Roman Catholic Church after 1054 solidified its standing in Europe and then spread to the New World with voyages of discovery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Italy, France, Spain, Ireland, Austria, Poland, and Portugal in Europe are strongly Catholic countries, as is much of Central America and South America. The Catholic Church differs from the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity in its central organization. The idea of papal infallibility, meaning that the pope cannot make mistakes in matters of religious doctrine, is unique to Roman

Catholicism. The church is the teaching authority of the faith, and the pope has the final word about matters of faith or morals.

Protestantism The next major schism within Christianity occurred within the Western branch. By the sixteenth century the Roman Catholic Church had become top-heavy in bureaucracy and ritual. Purists, or those who believed in traditional standards, felt that the meaning of Christ's suffering had become lost in all the rituals. Many rituals of the time were performed without any true feeling. Reformers such as Martin Luther wanted to return to a simpler form of the religion.

For such reformers, the Bible was the central authority, not the people who ran the church. They protested against practices such as selling indulgences. Men like Luther, John Calvin (1509–1564), Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), and John Knox (c. 1514–1572), believed in the idea of “justification by faith alone.” In other words, for these reformers faith was not simply a matter of accepting Christian doctrine and doing good works, but of actually and personally experiencing the presence of God. Good works do not necessarily lead to salvation, but they do follow from someone who already has faith.

Protestant denominations For Protestants, no priests or other people are needed to help a believer know God. These reformers believed in a personal faith founded on what came to be called the Protestant Principle: that a person's devotion is to God and not to the trappings of religion or to the priests of religion. All the accessories of religion, such as ceremonies and icons (pictorial representations or symbols), should be examined and never placed on a higher level than a direct love of God. Protestants do use the accessories of religion, but they try not to rely on them more than on God.

The personal experience of God that the Protestant Reformation stressed and the Catholic Counter-Reformation diminished dominated much of sixteenth century history in the West. But this emphasis on the personal experience of God led to the multiplication of many Protestant sects. Most differed from Roman Catholicism primarily through the ways they ran their churches, but a few introduced important new ideas into their theologies. For instance, Calvin taught that humans are so wicked they can do nothing to bring about their own salvation and must depend solely on God's grace and mercy. This idea opposed the theological idea that salvation could be “earned” through good works. This theological, or religious, idea called predestination, or the idea that

God sets aside some people to be saved and others not to be, is central to Calvinism, the religion founded by Calvin.

The Anabaptists, a group with its origins in Germany and Switzerland, believed only adults, those who could freely choose faith should be baptized. Anabaptists also were pacifists (people who believe in non-violence), who denied believers the right to use weapons even in self-defense. Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Convention are two North American branches of Anabaptists.

Another major division within Protestantism came from England. There, King Henry VIII (1491–1547) broke from Rome in 1534 over the pope's refusal to grant him a divorce. The Anglican Church, or the Church of England, maintaining many of the rites of the Catholic Church, was formed as a result. Anglicanism gave rise in North America to the Episcopal Church.

Reaction against the authority of the Anglican Church led to the multiplication of Protestant sects in England. Puritanism was a sect that grew out of the Anglican movement. The Puritans wanted to further “purify” the religion from any of the practices associated with the Roman Catholic Church. The Baptist Church, founded by John Smyth (c. 1570–1612), grew out of one of many separatist movements in the Anglican Church. As the name suggests, Baptists take the sacrament, or holy rite, of baptism as a central belief and ritual. Quakers and Methodists also came from Anglicanism or reacted against it. George Fox (1624–1691) founded the Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, in the mid-seventeenth century. Pacifism is a central belief for Quakers. They do not practice the sacraments but rather seek an individual experience of God within themselves. John Wesley (1703–1791) founded Methodism in 1739. This denomination also values a direct experience of God. Wesley taught the idea of perfectionism, a belief so high and pure that it cleanses the individual of Original Sin.

Christianity's 2.1 billion members can be broken down by religion and branch: 1.1 billion Roman Catholics; 510 million Protestants; 216 million Eastern Orthodox; 158 million independents; and 31.7 million without a clear connection to a larger umbrella group, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Basic beliefs

The central belief in Christianity is that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of humankind. By believing in Jesus's death and Resurrection, people

can be saved. Their sins can be redeemed, and they can find eternal life in heaven after death. “I am the way,” Jesus said in John 14:16, “and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me.” These words took on new meaning following the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Primary Christian doctrines The words of Jesus were put down in writing during the century following his death in the first four books of the New Testament, called the Gospels. In addition to these books, there are also numerous creeds, or statements of belief, made by later followers in large church councils and not included in the New Testament. The life and deeds of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels are considered the heart of Christianity. These later creeds record the attempts of followers to make sense of the teachings of Jesus and to combine them in an organized body of thought and belief. Not all Christians agreed on all creeds, and this, among other differences, led to an array of Christian denominations. Three primary doctrines, however, are fairly standard across denominations: Incarnation, Atonement, and the Trinity.

The doctrine of Incarnation holds that Jesus was both man and God at the same time. According to this creed, God the Father became incarnate, or took on bodily form, for the sake of humanity. It was not that Jesus was half human and half divine. Rather, as the Council of Nicea decided in 325, Jesus was of the same substance as God the Father.

The doctrine of Atonement speaks of reconciliation between God and humankind, a settlement ending the separation between God and humans. This separation was caused, according to some interpretations, by Original Sin. (The doctrine of Original Sin says that sin, or disobedience to God, began when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.) This Original Sin had to be paid for, and it was the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross that redeemed humanity. Others see this separation in a more psychological (dealing with the human mind) manner. For example, the word *sin* has roots that are similar to the word *sunder*, meaning “to split” or “to divide.” In this interpretation Original Sin represents the sense of alienation, or distancing, that humans have from one another and from God. Through belief in Jesus people can erase sin and achieve a sense of oneness. For Christians, belief in the Atonement of Jesus is the way to salvation.

Related to salvation is the Christian concept of the afterlife. Although this may vary between denominations and individual Christians, the vast majority of Christians believe in some kind of heaven, in which believers enjoy the presence of God and the company of other believers after

death. Views differ as to whether those of other faiths or those of no faith will be in heaven. Concepts of what heaven will be like differ as well. Fewer Christians believe in the existence of hell, where unbelievers or sinners are punished. There is also no complete agreement as to whether hell is eternal and whether its punishment is spiritual or physical. Some Christians reject the notion of hell altogether.

The third major doctrine of Christianity is belief in the Trinity. While Christianity is monotheistic, it also holds the concept that the single, eternal God is composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This three-in-one concept of God stirred great debate in early Christianity, just as the idea that Jesus was wholly human and wholly divine at the same time did.

Added to these basic beliefs are others, not necessarily held by all denominations. Some hold a firm belief in the historical Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. Not all denominations believe in the virginity of Mary and thus in the virgin birth of Jesus. Some believe that Jesus was the messiah who was foretold by the Jews or that Jesus will return in the so-called Second Coming and will judge all humans and receive, or allow into salvation, those who are faithful. Many believe that the Bible was inspired by God but written by humans and is the first and last word of authority for Christianity. Christians believe more or less strongly in each of these doctrines, depending on their denominations.

Sacred writings

The Bible, composed of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the sacred book of Christianity. The word “Bible” is from the Greek word meaning “the books.” Christians largely believe that the Bible is the word of God as written down by men. The Old Testament is made up of parts of the Jewish Bible, the twenty-four books of the Jewish Tanakh. The Roman Catholic Church also includes parts of what is known as the Septuagint, or the Apocrypha, while the Eastern Orthodox Church includes still other Jewish texts. Protestants generally accept that the twenty-four books of the Tanakh make up the Old Testament.

The New Testament, concerned wholly with the development of Christianity, comprises twenty-seven books, originally written in Greek. These books come from the early Christian period, the earliest being the seven epistles, or letters, written by Paul between about 50

and 60 CE. Much of the rest of the New Testament was written in the succeeding fifty to one hundred years. The organization of the books in the Bible, however, does not reflect the chronology, or order in time, of its writing. Rather, the New Testament begins with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which tell of the life of Jesus and what he said and did. Then follow the Acts of the Apostles, a history of the missionary efforts of the apostles. This, in turn, is followed by the Pauline epistles (those written by Saint Paul), clarifying and enlarging on religious doctrines, and then by general epistles. In all, thirteen of the epistles have been attributed to Paul, accounting for about one-third of the New Testament. The final book of the New Testament is Revelation, which reveals the secrets of the workings of the heavenly world and foretells the Second Coming of Christ.



Sacred symbols

The primary symbol of Christianity is the cross, representing the suffering, Crucifixion, Atonement, and Resurrection of Jesus. The cross is a strong symbol in churches and often appears on their roofs and in homes. Its presence recalls the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The cross is also sometimes worn around the neck as jewelry.

Another early symbol of Christianity is the primitive drawing of a fish made of two curving lines, or arcs. In the early days of persecution, if two Christians met they could identify themselves to each other by this symbol. One would draw an arc in the sand, and the other would draw a reverse arc to fashion the shape of a fish. Two things make this a powerful symbol. One is the reference in the Bible to Christians as being fishers of men. The other is the fact that the Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, also forms, in Greek, the first letters of the words “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” Thus, this simple symbol was a heavily encoded message.

While the cross and the fish are primary symbols of Christianity, the religion is filled with other icons and symbols. The dove is another

Among the symbols sacred to Christianity are the cross and a primitive drawing of a fish. The cross is used as a symbol of Jesus’s sacrifice for humankind, while the fish was first used as a means by which Christians could identify one another. © ROYALTY-FREE/CORBIS.

Christian symbol, especially when depicted with a halo of three rings. The dove is used to represent the Holy Spirit, while the three rings of the halo represents the Trinity. The image of a lamb similarly symbolizes Jesus, the “lamb of God” (*agnus Dei* in Latin).

Worship

The form of worship for Christians was established in the early days of the Church. At first some of the worship service was borrowed from Jewish forms, so that the faithful said prayers together, sang from psalms (biblical hymns), and read scripture, mostly from the Old Testament at first and later from Paul’s letters. As Christianity developed more of its own writings in the New Testament, the readings tended to come more and more from that section. Worship services were held on Sunday, considered the day of Jesus’s Resurrection. In addition, the early church had two main sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper, also known as Holy Communion or the Eucharist. The Lord’s Supper is a reenactment of the Last Supper, when Jesus and his disciples shared bread and wine on the night before his Crucifixion. At one time this Lord’s Supper was a community dinner after which the faithful received symbolic bread and wine. Now, it is a more symbolic gesture of drinking holy wine and eating a blessed bread wafer, representing the body and blood of Jesus.

Modern forms of worship largely follow this basic format. Services are held in churches and cathedrals, buildings that often double as community centers. Sunday school classes are often held for children to teach them church doctrine. No special clothing needs to be worn for services, though the faithful usually dress formally. Members of the congregation sometimes sit in pews, or rows of benches, and also stand at various times during the religious service or kneel with their hands held in front of them to pray. All branches of Christianity observe the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper with varying forms and meanings.

Besides baptism and the Lord’s Supper, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church recognize other sacraments: confirmation, or formal acceptance of a person into the church; marriage; the taking of holy orders to become a bishop, priest, or deacon of the church; extreme unction, a rite that is meant to give spiritual comfort

to the sick and dying; and penance, during which sins are confessed and forgiven. Protestants, in general, have fewer ceremonies and rites.

Mass A part of the service in most branches of Christianity, however, includes a sermon or homily, a discussion by the priest or clergy about some aspect of the Bible or perhaps a topic of current social interest viewed in context with Christian teaching. In some denominations, laypersons are encouraged to speak, while in others, only the official clergy or priests conduct services. Music is often a part of services, with choirs and organ accompaniment.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Anglican Church the reenactment of the Last Supper is the central part of the worship service. Catholics call this celebration the Eucharist or Mass. In the orthodox tradition it is called the Divine Liturgy (liturgy is a public act of worship). For Anglicans it is the Holy Eucharist. In all three traditions a priest leads the service. In both Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Sunday attendance is required of all members and is called a “holy day of obligation.”

There are two parts to the Eucharist or Divine Liturgy. The first part consists of hymns, prayers, Bible readings, and recitations of various teachings and prayers by the entire congregation. The second part is the actual celebration of the Last Supper, with the symbolic eating of a wafer and drinking of wine. Catholics also make the sign of the cross at various times during the service by placing the right hand to the forehead, to the breast and to the left shoulder and to the right shoulder, with the words: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Music and singing also forms a part of the mass.

A typical worship service in a Protestant church is led by a preacher or minister and focuses on a sermon or a teaching from the Bible. Some services are opened with prayers from the Bible. Though the Lord’s Supper, also called communion, is part of Protestant worship, it is not necessarily a weekly matter. Some Protestant denominations observe it monthly; others, every three months. The congregation sings hymns together and recites prayers, such as the Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer is one of the oldest prayers of the Christian Church. The Bible attributes it to Jesus himself, who taught it to his disciples. Versions of it appear in both the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and it continues to be used in most Christian denominations. Most Christian authorities consider it a central statement of belief.



Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses; as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.



The second part of the Eucharist, or Divine Liturgy, is a celebration of the Last Supper. This includes a symbolic eating of a bread wafer and drinking of wine.

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Observances and pilgrimages

The primary holy days for Christianity are Christmas (celebrated on December 25 in the Western tradition) and Easter (celebrated in the Western tradition on the first Sunday after the first full moon in spring). Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, although it is not known for sure what time of the year he was born. Easter celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus. Although these holy days are commonly celebrated worldwide on the dates recognized by the Western tradition, in some areas, including parts of Eastern Europe and in the Middle East, they are often celebrated later. This is because some churches in the Eastern tradition continue to calculate the dates of Easter and Christmas using the older Julian calendar (established by the Roman Empire, establishing a 12-month year with 365 days) rather than the more modern Gregorian calendar (a 1582 revision of the Julian calendar).

Christmas takes its name from the old English *Christes maesse*, literally “Christ’s mass.”

Christians have been celebrating Jesus’s birth on December 25 since at least the early fourth century. On this day, Christians attend a special mass. They will listen to a priest read the account of Jesus’s birth in the Bible and sing songs in praise. Even for Christians who do not practice their faith daily, Christmas is an occasion that will bring them back to the church.

In the weeks leading up to Easter, called Lent, Christians go without something notable in their lives to honor the sacrifice made by Christ when he died on the cross. They attend mass and hear special readings from the Bible.

Pilgrimages Pilgrimages for Christians are voluntary journeys; they are not required. People make them for a number of reasons. Some go in search of a miraculous cure. Others wish to renew their faith by visiting sites mentioned in the Bible or connected with the life of Christ. Such visits most often include the Holy Land (modern-day Israel), Jordan,

and the West Bank, where Christ was born and preached his message. Among the sites is Jerusalem, a city holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This is a site of many of the events in the life and death of Christ. The Via Dolorosa, or way of suffering, is traditionally believed to be the path Jesus followed on his way to his crucifixion. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher (tomb) is believed to be built on the spot where Jesus was crucified and near where he was buried. Also in the Holy Land is Bethlehem, birthplace of Jesus, and Nazareth, where he came of age.

Santiago de Compostela, in the northeast of Spain, has also long been a pilgrimage site for Christians. The remains of St. James, one of the original twelve disciples, are believed to be buried here. The medieval pilgrimage route of several hundred miles, the Way of Saint James, or *Camino de Santiago*, is still walked today by the faithful. Pilgrims also visit the church in the city and pray to St. James, hoping for a miracle to solve their problems or cure their illnesses. There are many holy shrines around the world associated with curing powers or with miracles. Lourdes, in southern France, is one such place, and Fatima, in Portugal, is another. Both are believed to be places where Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared to young people who had prayed to her.

Throughout Europe there are shrines and cathedrals that have special importance for Christians. Many Catholics take a trip to Rome to visit Vatican City, the headquarters of their church and residence of the pope. Protestants often visit the Church of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany. This is considered the center of the beginnings of Protestantism. Great cathedrals such as Notre Dame in Paris and the Cologne Cathedral in Germany draw millions of visitors, both religious and non-religious, each year. Such cathedrals, built over generations (and sometimes over centuries), represent for Christians a visible sign of belief and faith, and often hold relics of famous early Christians. Nonreligious visitors can appreciate the cathedrals for their beauty and art.

Everyday living

Many Christian denominations practice fasting (cutting food intake back to one full meal a day) and abstinence (avoidance of meat for the day) as part of their observance of holidays. During Lent, for instance, Roman Catholics are asked to fast on Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent) and Good Friday (the Friday before Easter). Certain days are also set

Christianity

One of several rites of passage in Christianity, baptism symbolizes that a person is a Christian. It is often carried out with a newborn child, whose head is splashed with water from a shallow pool before a supportive group of family and friends. AP

IMAGES.



aside for abstinence. In the Roman Catholic tradition, each Friday during Lent is declared a day of abstinence, when the faithful are asked to avoid eating meat. The Church does not recognize fish as a type of meat, so observant Catholics may eat fish on these days.

There is no specific dress code or diet for Christians. The clergy of various branches, denominations, and orders do, however, have distinctive clothing. This includes the priest's collar, the robes of some monks, the black attire and headpiece that nuns (women who have devoted their lives to God) used to wear, and the distinctive robes and circular hats worn in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In the Western tradition, the pope, the cardinals, and the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church wear hats or caps called *mitres* that are presented to them when they enter into their offices. Mitres are related to the ancient crown of the Roman emperors in Constantinople and are a sign of the authority these people hold.

Rites of passage Major stages of life, or rites of passage, are celebrated by the Christian church. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions make these rites into central sacraments. Protestant churches also celebrate them. The first rite of passage comes at birth with baptism. Since baptism is a sign that a person belongs to Christ and is a Christian,

the ceremony is also called a christening. The newborn usually has a few drops of water splashed on its head or is immersed in shallow pool. An official of the church, such as a priest or minister, carries out the ceremony, while saying “I Baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This service is attended by friends and family and by persons chosen by the parents to be godparents, who promise to help raise the child as a Christian. In some Protestant traditions, though, children are not baptized until their parents and other church members feel they are old enough to understand the commitment they are making in the ceremony.

The next major rite of passage for Christians is confirmation, or joining the church as an adult. This service basically “confirms” the promises of faith made at baptism. Some groups that do not practice infant baptism, such as Baptists and Pentecostals, have a separate adult baptism for this ceremony. Children in the Catholic religion receive penance and First Holy Communion at age seven or eight, which is considered the “age of reason.” Confirmation follows because they are now believed able to understand the promises made at their baptisms.

Before the service, candidates for confirmation usually study their religion in small groups. At the service, the young person answers a series of questions about his or her faith and promises to reject evil. Then, in the Catholic tradition, the bishop puts his hand on the person’s shoulder, says the person’s name (there may be a special confirmation name after a saint), and traces the sign of the cross on the forehead with holy oil to show this is a child of god. Methodist ministers also put a hand on the candidates. In the Baptist church everyone watching the confirmation extends his or her right hand. This shows acceptance and fellowship of the group. This ceremony formally accepts the candidate into the religion.

Weddings are another rite of passage in Christianity, as they are in many other religions. Christian weddings are usually celebrated in a church, but they can also be held at homes or even outside in parks or at the beach. Inside or outside, the groom usually stands in front of the minister or priest performing the service. Then the bride’s father will bring the bride to the groom, symbolically handing over his daughter to her new husband. A minister or priest generally reads from standard wedding vows in which the bride and groom promise to be true to one another in all circumstances. Many couples write their own vows, or

wedding promises. The couples also exchange rings, which they wear on the fourth finger of the left hand.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church the ceremony most often follows the traditional two-part model. First comes the betrothal, or engagement service, which is followed by the marriage service. In the betrothal service, the priest first blesses the rings the couple exchange, and places them on the fourth fingers of their right hands. Later comes the marriage ceremony. The priest gives the man and woman lighted candles to hold, signifying that the light of God will follow them through their married lives. A wedding crown, made of flowers or an actual crown of gold and jewels, is placed on the groom and then on the bride, and the two drink from a common cup to signify the life they will be sharing. Portions of the Bible, including the letters of Paul, are read at these services.

Finally, Christianity also provides for believers at their time of death. For Christians, death is not an ending, but a beginning. Christians believe that there is a life after death. This is stated clearly in the Apostle's Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and Life everlasting." For Christians, death is a passage to eternal life. Just before death, if possible, ministers or priests will give a final sacrament to the believer. This is called the anointing (touching with oil) of the sick. The priest or minister touches the dying person with holy oil and says, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up. Amen." Catholics also confess their sins to the priest so that they can go to heaven without waiting in purgatory.

After death, all Christian traditions follow a similar routine. There is a public announcement of the death, the body is prepared, there are funeral services at a church, a procession of cars to the cemetery, and then a burial, where the body is placed in a coffin into the ground, or a cremation, where the body is burned and the ashes placed in a container and later buried or scattered. Often, there is a viewing of the body. This is usually held at the funeral home after the body has been embalmed, or preserved with chemicals. The coffin lid may be open so that mourners, those saddened by the death, can see the dead person one last time. Funeral services include prayers, the singing of hymns, and speeches, or eulogies, in honor of the dead person. In Catholic tradition, there is a vigil service (where people come to grieve over the dead



Christian worship services are held on Sunday, considered the day of Jesus's resurrection from the dead. Christian influences are particularly strong in the West, where the work week and holidays are often set around important dates in the Christian calendar.

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person) at the funeral home or church. This is followed several days later by a funeral mass in the church, and then another ceremony, the rite of committal, when the body is buried.

In Eastern Orthodox tradition, the vigil service is called *parastasis* or *panikhida*, and is a time for thinking about death. The Eastern funeral service includes hymns, chants, and Bible readings. Burial is preferred but the Orthodox Church allows cremation if the law of the country requires it. Christian funerals are usually followed by a meal at the home of the deceased or dead person. This is a chance for friends and relatives to express their sadness over the death and release their emotions.

Confession Another rite that has an ongoing role in the lives of Catholics and Orthodox alike is the sacrament of confession. Confession, also

called penance, is a sacrament through which sins can be repented and absolved, or forgiven. For Catholics confession is officially called the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Reconcile means to restore, and by confessing, Catholics believe they restore their relationship with God. This can be done sitting face-to-face with a priest and telling the sins one has committed. Confession also happens at regular times in a confessional, a kind of booth where the priest is shielded from the layperson by a screen.

Sins are of two types, minor, or venial, and major sins, or mortal. Examples of venial sins are gossiping, rudeness, and cursing. Examples of mortal sins are sex outside of marriage and divorce. The priest will forgive the sins and give the believer religious duties to perform, such as reciting the Lord's Prayer many times. Catholics are required to confess twice each year. However, for Protestants, who believe that no intermediary is needed between humans and God, such confession of sins is a private matter. Anglicans (Episcopalians) have a voluntary private rite of confession similar to that of Catholics, but not all members of the faith use it. General confession during Holy Communion is more common. For all Christians such periodic confession is an important part of the faith.

Christianity's influences

Christianity has been one of the most influential religions in world history. It has been a dominant force not only in theology, or the formal study of religion, but also in education, art and architecture, in the structure of Western society, and even in politics. The Christian church has, in large part, shaped societies in Europe and the Americas.

The very rhythms of life in the West are attuned to Christianity. For example, the workweek typically begins with Monday and ends with Friday or Saturday, with Sunday being a day of rest. The occasions of Christmas and Easter likewise shape annual rhythms. The concept of the nation and state grew with the Western church. The pope, at times, has proved a mighty leader of the West. Such leadership did not always result in the best outcomes: the long and bloody history of the Crusades, for example, and the harsh years of the Inquisition, are not high points of Christian history.

With its emphasis on helping the poor, the weak, and the ill, Christianity has led missions around the world to aid the sick and feed the hungry. Christians worldwide have spearheaded programs to bring social

justice (the idea that all people should have equal opportunities) and fair treatment to people who are oppressed, or mistreated, by their governments. Christians have also played an important part in opposing war and promoting global peace.

Christianity has had a long tradition in education. Some of the earliest universities in Europe were founded by the Christian church. Some of the greatest medieval thinkers, such as Italian Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), advanced philosophy through their close examination of religious questions. Christianity still plays a large role in education in the United States, where many schools from kindergarten through university are run by faith-based institutions. Many fundamentalists (people who believe in the Bible as a complete and accurate historical record and statement of prophecy) question scientific theories that conflict with Christian theology, such as the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin (1809–1882), and put forward alternative theories to describe the way that life on Earth has evolved.

Influence on the arts Perhaps one of the most visible areas of Christian influence has been in literature. The Bible stands as one of the earliest and most popular texts in the world. Writers such as Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) have found inspiration in Christianity's doctrines. His *Divine Comedy* describes the poet's journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven. England's Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400) wrote his *Canterbury Tales* about a group of pilgrims traveling to a shrine, creating one of the classics of literature in any language.

Since the time of Dante and Chaucer authors of all nationalities have found further inspiration in Christianity and the Bible. Modern examples of writers influenced by their Christian beliefs include the poet T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), one of the most important poets of the twentieth century. His poems and plays criticize the material world that has forgotten spirituality. The novels of the Englishman Graham Greene (1904–1991), such as *The Power and the Glory*, were strongly influenced by his Catholicism.

Christianity has also had great influence in art and architecture. Art in the Middle Ages was primarily religious in theme. Italian painters Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) made religious themes the subject of their most famous works. Michelangelo is remembered for his famous paintings of scenes from Genesis on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, part of the Vatican (the head of the Catholic

Church) in Rome. Leonardo's fresco, or wall painting, in Milan, Italy, called the *Last Supper* is equally famous for its depiction of Christ and his disciples. It was not until the sixteenth century that Western painting began to move away from Christian themes.

Architecture was also strongly influenced by Christianity. During the late Middle Ages builders began designing and building Gothic (a style of architecture) churches that feature soaring vaults and pointed arches that make the faithful look heavenward. Western music also was heavily influenced by Christianity. Much of the work of the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), for example, was created for church services. From literature to architecture to music, Western art would not be what it is without the influence of Christianity.

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Confucianism

Confucianism is most simply defined as a philosophy of life based on the teachings of the Chinese scholar Confucius (c. 551–c. 479 BCE). A philosophy is an approach to understanding the values and reality of existence. The religion emphasizes love for humanity, the value of learning, and devotion to family, including ancestors. Confucianism teaches that there is a natural order to society, which relies on proper relationships. If these proper relationships are maintained through traditional rituals and etiquette, or *li* (good manners), society will also be well ordered. Another important aspect of Confucianism is the concept of *ren* (also spelled *jen*), or social virtue and empathy, the ability to feel for and sympathize with others.

In its early development Confucianism was primarily an ethical system, describing how to lead a good, moral life. After his death Confucius's sayings were written down by his followers. His teachings increased in popularity until the time of the Han Dynasty, when Confucianism became China's official state religion. (A Chinese dynasty is the period of reign by a ruling family, in this case the Han family [206 BCE–220 CE]). Although Confucius himself spoke little about spiritual matters, focusing instead on how to live a proper, moral life, later scholars added more mystical, or spiritual, concepts during the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). They borrowed from such Chinese religions as Daoism and Chan, or Zen, Buddhism. The religion remained the basis for ethical behavior in China for more than two thousand years. It also gained followers in Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and Japan.

Scholars still differ on whether or not to call Confucianism a religion or a philosophy. Many followers of Confucius's teachings refer to their practices as a moral code or world view and avoid labeling it a religion. Although many followers of Confucianism practice rituals such as veneration (a form of worship) of ancestors, belief in a god, and sacrifice to spirits, these practices date from before the time of Confucius and

WORDS TO KNOW

benevolence: The tendency to do good and to be kind to others.

canon: The official, sacred texts of a religion.

de: Political power that is the result of a ruler's virtue and honesty.

dynasty: A sequence of rulers from the same family.

ethics: The study of moral values and rules or a guide to such values and rules.

etiquette: Proper behavior; good manners.

filial piety: The respect and devotion a child shows his or her parents.

Five Classics: The original texts used by Confucius in his practices and teachings: Liji, Shijing, Shujing, Chunqui, and Yijing.

Four Books: The most prominent of Confucian sacred texts, established by Zhu Xi: the

Analects, the Mencius, Da Xue (Great Learning), and Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean).

junzi: A gentleman or superior man.

li: The rules of behavior a person must follow to reach the Confucian ideal of correct living.

metaphysical: Having to do with the philosophical study of the nature of reality and existence.

philosophy: The study of morals and reality by logical reasoning to gain a greater understanding of the world.

ren: Empathy, the ability to feel for and sympathize with others; the highest Confucian ideal.

Tian: Heaven, or the principle of ordering the universe.

wen: The arts of music, poetry, and painting.

by themselves do not make Confucianism a religion. In a broader sense, however, Confucianism has much in common with religions: it is a belief system that promotes morality (a code of behavior), that has a specific view of humanity's place in the universe, and that guides believers in their everyday lives.

In the early twenty-first century there were a reported 5.6 million followers in China alone. Because Confucianism is not an organized religion, however, it is difficult to count its followers. (An organized religion is one with a formal structure of authority and membership.) Confucian ideas have entered all aspects of Chinese society, and most Chinese recognize and practice some of the aspects of the system, including its emphasis on family and respect for elders. In that respect, much of the 1.3 billion people of mainland China still follow the fundamentals of Confucianism.

History and development

Confucius is the most famous philosopher in Chinese history. He was born Kong Qiu (or Kong Chiu; the family name is Kong) in about 551 BCE. (There are several other variations on his name, but he is most commonly known by the Latinized version, Confucius.) His parents were Shuliang-He and Yan-Zhensai and his birthplace was the city of Qufu in modern-day Shandong province. His father died before he was three, and Confucius was raised by his mother. Although he was poor, Confucius determined by the time he was fifteen that he would become a scholar, or a person who devotes his or her life to learning and study. As a young man he held various minor offices, such as keeping accounts of sheep and cattle. He also married early, to Qiguan-shi, and had, by some accounts, both a son and a daughter. His daughter later married one of Confucius's closest disciples, or followers.

He focused his scholarly studies on the ancient Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE). Confucius lived during a time of great social disorder and uncertainty. He wanted to restore order to Chinese society and saw the Shang Dynasty, with its well-defined social classes, court and family etiquette (proper behavior) and rituals, and orderly government, as an ideal model. His studies of the past led him to believe that the problems of society had much to do with the quality of leadership, or lack of leadership, in government. Confucius was also disturbed by the new sense of individualism that was gaining popularity in Chinese culture. (Individualism focuses on the needs of the individual rather than the good of the community.) As a remedy to the social problems of his time Confucius began to define a set of principles based on traditional Chinese culture and its heavy reliance on the family as the foundation of a well-ordered society.

Confucius hoped to put into practice his new theories about the family. He also wanted to teach rulers to be informed and virtuous. In order to spread his teachings Confucius opened a school to help young men to learn ethical leadership skills. After the age of fifty, he traveled widely for thirteen years, along with a small group of disciples, teaching his doctrines (set of beliefs) of proper etiquette and ritual to maintain a correct life. He pleaded with rulers to follow his principles, but received little response. He escaped assassins and near-starvation. When he returned to his home state of Lu, he continued to teach his followers, who came from all social and economic classes, until his death in 479 BCE.

China during the time of Confucius Confucius set out to reform government so that it could better look after the people. His philosophy was practical; he wanted to develop a system of ethics, of daily good behavior, by which people could regulate their lives. Confucius differed from other thinkers of the time, the Legalist, or Realist School, who wanted to organize society from the top down. Legalists believed in controlling society through threats and strict punishment. For them, laws were the organizing force of a society. People were at heart ignorant and had to be controlled by a complex set of rules and regulations.

Confucius, however, wanted to reform society from the bottom up, beginning with the family. He reasoned that if people learned respect for one another and love, trust, and loyalty within the family, then these relationships would extend beyond the family to society as a whole. Thus he placed great emphasis on five primary relationships that reach throughout society: those between father and son, between husband and wife, between elder and younger brother, between friends, and between ruler and subject. All these relationships were ruled by the idea of respect that a son must give to a parent, or what is called filial piety (*xiao*), and the loyalty (*zhong*) that a subject gives to his or her ruler. Women consistently ranked below men in the model hierarchy, or ladder of authority: A wife owed respect to her husband, sons (and daughters) to their mothers as well as their fathers, and so on down to the wives of the sons, who owed respect to everyone. The ideal ruler, for Confucius, should be the model gentleman, who rules by *de*, or political power achieved through virtue and honesty.

The ideas for Confucianism grew out of a troubled time in China. The centralized power of the emperor was breaking down, and society in general was suffering because of it. Confucius was born during a period known as the Zhou Dynasty. This dynasty lasted from the eleventh century BCE to the third century BCE. In 771 BCE, however, under pressure from invading tribes from Central Asia, the Zhou kings had to move their seat of government eastward to what is modern Loyang. The next several hundred years, 771–401 BCE, are known as the Spring and Autumn Period of Chinese history. Although the power of the central government was failing, this period was very rich in terms of philosophy and political theory (the organization and structure of government). In addition to Confucius, these years also saw the rise of the teachings of Laozi (b. c. 604 BCE; also known as Lao Tzu), the founder of Daoism in around the seventh century BCE.

All through this period China was divided into warring states. The Zhou emperors never became strong enough to unite the country or to control the warring feudal lords (members of prominent families who made their living from plots of land, called fiefs, assigned to them by the emperor). Invasions came from the west and south, and small kingdoms banded together for a time for mutual protection and then broke apart. It was a dangerous and lawless time, and Confucius, as well as other philosophers, looked for a way to make society better and more stable.

The period after the time of Confucius is called the Warring States Period (401–256 BCE) because of the violence and disruption of the time. The work of the philosopher Mengzi (also spelled Meng Tzu), known in the West as Mencius (c. 371–c. 289 BCE), further developed Confucianism. Mengzi comes from the Warring States Period. Because so many philosophers were at work, the period from 551 to 233 BCE is also referred to as the Period of the One Hundred Schools, or systems of thought.

The slow spread of Confucianism Confucius formed a school and had followers, teaching mainly through a question-and-answer technique and by providing stories from real life that had larger meanings. When Confucius died, his followers wrote down his sayings and teachings in the *Lun Yu*, also known as the *Analects*. Confucianism did not gain a large following very quickly. One reason for this is that Confucius took principles from an older age of Chinese civilization, when family ties, etiquette, and ritual regulated society. Because such traditions and rituals were breaking down in his time, Confucius became something of an anthropologist (a scientist who studies human behavior) of Chinese culture and studied the ancient ways. He then brought them back into Chinese life as a system for good behavior. This was a difficult task, for such traditions are hard to learn. Confucius's attempts to reintroduce these beliefs were tasks that took longer than his lifetime.

Another reason Confucianism was slow to grow is that the generations following Confucius had to deal with the Warring States Period, a bloody era when little kingdoms battled one another for land and power. Following the death of Confucius, his school split into eight different schools, each of which claimed to be the authentic, official Confucian school. Confucianism also had competitors in the thoughts of such philosophers as Mozi (also spelled Mo Tzu and Micius; c. 470–391 BCE) and

About Confucianism

- **Belief.** Confucians believe that humankind is basically good and perfectible. They also believe that by observing ritual and courtesy in daily life and through education, a person can lead a right life and also create a well-ordered and peaceful society.
- **Followers.** Confucianism has 5.6 million followers, mostly in East Asia.
- **Name of God.** Tian, which means Heaven, or the ordering principle in the universe, represents God.
- **Symbols.** The yin and yang symbol is sometimes used to represent the balance found in Confucian ideals.
- **Worship.** There is no regular religious service for Confucians, though there are temples built in Confucius's honor at which offerings are sometimes made.
- **Dress.** Confucians do not wear a standard type of dress, but they do remove their shoes when entering a Confucian temple.
- **Texts.** The Analects, the collected sayings of Confucius, is the primary Confucian text.
- **Sites.** The Temple of Confucius at Qufu, Shandong province, in China, is the main Confucian pilgrimage site.
- **Observances.** The birthday of Confucius, celebrated in late September or early October, is the major Confucian festival.
- **Phrases.** There are no commonly used phrases that unite all Confucians, though some of the sayings of Confucius from the Analects are universally recognized as Confucian.

Yang Zhu (440–c. 360 BCE). For Mozi, the problem with society was that people loved too selectively rather than giving their love universally, meaning to love everyone. Yang Zhu, meanwhile, preached a form of individualism and the promotion of self-interest.

Becomes state religion under Emperor Wu In 206 BCE the Han Dynasty began. By this time Confucianism already played a major role in the political life of the nation. The emperor Wu, who lived from 156 to 87 BCE, made Confucianism the official state religion. In 136 BCE Emperor Wu established what became the Imperial University, solely for the study of Confucian Classics, or the Five Classics. These are texts mostly from before the time of Confucius that were adapted to Confucianism in five different subject areas: metaphysical or spiritual, political, poetic, social, and historical. In less than seventy-five years enrollment at the university had grown to three thousand students.

It was also under Emperor Wu that Confucian books became the basic texts for all levels of education and that they were used for examinations for the civil service, once the reserve of privilege and family connections. Confucianism changed all that, basing entry into the bureaucracy, or government services, on merit (performance) rather than birth. By the midpoint of the Han Dynasty, in the year 58 CE, Confucianism had made such inroads into the state that government schools were required to make sacrifices to Confucius. The Five Classics were later inscribed on stone tablets for all to see.

Spiritual aspect develops Further development of Confucian principles came with the work of Dong Zhongshu (also called Tung Zhong-shu;

c. 179–c. 104 BCE), who introduced more spiritual elements into Confucianism. For Dong, human actions have results not only in the physical world but also in the spiritual world. He merged theories of spiritual forces from many different schools of thought, including native religions ranging from shamanism (belief in powerful nature spirits that a shaman, or holy man, can reach) to Daoism into his explanation of the Confucian way, emphasizing a love of the natural or cosmic order. In so doing, he further justified the role of the emperor as the living link between Tian and Earth, or the Son of Heaven.

Not all Confucians agreed with the direction taken in Dong's philosophy, but the belief system continued to wield great power throughout the Han period. Soon all public schools in China were offering regular sacrifices to Confucius; the Imperial University enrolled thirty thousand students, and temples in honor of Confucius were built throughout the land. Together with the emperor and the godlike personages of Heaven and Earth, Confucius was fast becoming one of the most respected symbols of power and authority in China. Later, in 492 CE, he was made a saint; by the eleventh century he was raised to the rank of an emperor; and in the early twentieth century he was made a god.

Although spiritual matters in China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) were left largely to Buddhism and Daoism, Confucianism coexisted well with them. In part this was because Confucianism deals primarily with how a person reaches personal perfection in this lifetime. By the time of the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE), Confucianism had become central to Chinese tradition, just as Confucius had planned, but it had still another major leader to come. Zhu Xi (also spelled Chu Hsi; 1130–1200) helped Confucianism become a religion with not only an ethical program but also a metaphysical, or spiritual, one.

What came out of this work was a philosophy known as neo-Confucianism. Zhu Xi added four more sacred texts to the Confucian canon, or group of accepted scriptures, including the Analects, Mencius, Doctrine of the Mean, and the Great Learning. These Four Books then became the central texts studied in school and in preparation for civil service examinations. Neo-Confucianism gained a higher status than both Buddhism and Daoism in Chinese society. It analyzed and interpreted the great works of the Confucian tradition. Although neo-Confucianism did build up the spiritual side of Confucianism, Zhu Xi also emphasized the rational and practical side of the religion. This encouraged future scholars to focus on law, politics, and economics.

Confucianism

Confucius developed his system of thought, later called Confucianism, during a time when China was in great unrest. He taught that respect, etiquette (proper behavior), and order would help bring about a stable society. HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES.



Spreads throughout Asia Following the development of neo-Confucianism, Confucianism spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and eventually became the dominant intellectual force throughout East Asia. The royal court of Korea accepted Confucianism by the fifteenth century, and by the seventeenth century the philosophy had entered Japan. Confucianism has continued to grow and be reworked by new scholars in new eras. For many, Confucianism reached its height in China during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). Qing rulers described themselves as great examples of Confucian kingship and also used the belief system as a form of control.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries China became increasingly open to Western influence, or influence from the nations of Europe and the Americas. As foreign powers invaded China, seeking influence and increased trade, Western ways and ideas also crept into Chinese society, making many people begin to question the age-old Confucian tradition of the importance of the group over the individual. Christian missionaries, people who preached Christianity among non-Christian people, also increased their presence during this period. Indeed, Roman Catholic Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century first spread the words of Confucius to the West. These same missionaries gave the Chinese philosopher and wise man the name by which he is known in the West, Confucius.

Western ideas, including Leninism and Marxism (forms of communism, an economic and political system that emphasizes communal ownership of property and political power rooted in the working classes), took root in China. In 1949 the communist People's Republic of China was created. The leaders of this movement, including Mao Zedong (also known as Mao Tse-tung; 1893–1976), suppressed Confucianism as much as they could, arguing that it was a belief system that held the people in chains. For the communists, Confucianism, with its emphasis on tradition and ritual, was an artifact of the past that would not work in the ideal communist future. Confucianism, however, has survived and remains a central tradition at all levels of Chinese society.

Sects and schisms

There were eight distinct schools of thought that developed shortly after the death of Confucius. His most prominent follower, Mencius, worked

Mencius

More than one hundred years after the death of Confucius, the second most influential figure of the religion was born. Mencius (372–289 BCE) preached a philosophy of benevolence, or kindness and caring, towards others. For Mencius, human nature is essentially good and perfectible. He also argued for introducing a class of scholar-officials, which ultimately led to the Chinese civil service, a class of employees who served the emperor in administering the empire, the longest-established human institution on record.

Mencius criticized the philosophy of Mozi and the Mohists for their indiscriminate (random or without limits) love for all people. For him, it was not right that a stranger should be entitled to the same degree of love as a parent. Equally, he found that the individualism of Yang Zhu led to political disorder. Instead, Mencius felt that the beliefs of Confucius could be used to train the common people and the ruling class. He taught that kindness was the most effective way for rulers to maintain their power.

Mencius also taught that by fully understanding one's own heart and nature, a person can come to know Tian, or Heaven, a Chinese concept that there is a power or moral law that drives the universe. Mencius helped develop moral Confucianism to its highest form. His teachings were written down in a text called the *Mengzi*, also known as the *Mencius*.

Another follower of Confucius, Xun Zi (also spelled Hsun Tzu; c. 300–230 BCE) further developed Confucianism by emphasizing, in opposition to Mencius, his theory that human nature is not necessarily good and that citizens must be socialized by education and a continual quest for knowledge and wisdom. For Xun Zi, the real nobleman was one who keeps his instincts and desires in check for the public good.

from the same fundamental belief in the natural goodness of the human spirit. However, after Mencius, Xun Zi disagreed with this position, arguing that human nature was evil and that a human's desires and passions had to be held in check by a strong state. The work of Xun Zi helped develop the Legalist school of thought, which was an offshoot of Confucianism. This school believed that laws are the only things that keep society from breaking down into chaos.

When Confucianism became the official state religion during the Han Dynasty, Scholastic Confucianism became the main branch of the religion. This school was based on the study of classic texts. But because there were different versions of such texts, Scholastic Confucianism soon divided into the New Text School and the Old Text School. The New Text School had a more spiritual and religious interpretation of Confucianism than did the more realistic, human-oriented Old Text School.

The next major Confucian school was neo-Confucianism, as developed by Zhu Xi during the Song Dynasty. This school incorporated bits of Buddhism and Daoism and also added new sacred texts to the religious canon, shifting the emphasis from classics of Chinese literature to more contemporary writings. A further reformed type of Confucianism appeared in China in the nineteenth century. It attempted to raise Confucius to the status of a divine being, like Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 33 CE) in the Christian tradition. In the twentieth century, Confucianism lost its place as the official state religion and no longer formed the core of the educational program. Still, new schools of thought were developing, including New Confucianism, which led, in turn, to Modern Neo-Idealistic Confucianism and Modern Neo-Rationalistic Confucianism.

Outside China, there have also been distinct schools of Confucianism. In Korea the tradition is known as Yi Confucianism, and was built on the work of Zhu Xi. In Japan, Zhu Xi's form of neo-Confucianism was introduced in the seventeenth century. There its followers reworked many of the principles of the Japanese religion Shinto in Confucian terms. The Japanese warrior class, known as the samurai class, adopted elements of Confucianism for their own code of conduct, called *bushido*.

Basic beliefs

Confucianism is a deliberate tradition based on five main principles. The first and most important principle is *ren*. This highest of virtues is similar to what the Western tradition calls empathy, or being able to feel what

others feel. Ren involves being able to feel love for another and realizing the dignity of human life. Ren also leads to the concept of reciprocity, or consideration for others. Confucius states in the Analects, “What you do not want yourself, do not do to others,” an idea that was later echoed in the Christian saying “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

The second major principle of Confucianism is *junzi* (also spelled *chun-tzŕ*), which translates as the “son of a ruler.” This concept characterizes the superior man, or the perfect gentleman. Such a person displays generosity of spirit, confidence (without arrogance or pride), openness, and honesty. The superior man is a moral guide to the rest of society. Furthermore, the *junzi* is the ideal partner in any relationship.

The third principle of Confucius’s tradition is *li*, or ritual and right conduct. This includes the idea of propriety, or the way in which things should be done. But *li* is not simply a ritual-like sacrifice to the spirits of nature and ancestors. Ritual in this sense is used to mean a whole set of morally binding social customs, or rules of decent and polite behavior, in a wide variety of circumstances. Here tradition determines just what is right and wrong in a particular social interaction. In addition, Confucius taught the Rectification of Names principle, which means that a father should behave like a father, a son like a son, and a ruler like a ruler. This means that people must know what both the words and these social roles imply, in order to act within proper bounds. *Li* also is important in the Doctrine of the Mean, which teaches that life should be a balance between extremes.

Li is also important to the Five Relationships, which Confucius defined as father and son, older brother and younger brother, husband and wife, older friend and younger friend, and ruler and subject (and, by extension, teacher and student and many other similar relationships). These relationships are strictly defined in Confucianism, with age (and gender) determining respect. With a husband and wife, the wife should



The Confucian principle of ren is the most valued in the religion. It refers to being able to understand and feel what others feel, summarized by Confucius as, “What you do not want yourself, do not do to others.” NANCY MATUSZAK.

be supportive. When a ruler is kind, the subject should be loyal. Similar conditions are placed on friendships and sibling relationships. Three of these five relationships deal with family, the most important element in society for Confucius and for Chinese society over thousands of years. Thus, *li* also includes filial piety, the idea that children should respect and honor their parents.

The fourth principle of Confucianism is *de* (also spelled *te*), political power that is the result of a ruler's virtue (goodness) and honesty. For Confucius, physical might was not the proper way to rule. Rather, a ruler should gain the support and loyalty of the people through his own virtuous behavior. The state depends on three things, Confucius said: a strong military, economic well-being, and the faith and trust of the people. The last was the most important. Without the confidence of the people, the state would fall. Leadership without virtue and honesty, Confucius said, is not true leadership. Rulers and kings need to control themselves first; they must rule their own passions before they can rule their people. They should be devoted to the public welfare.

The fifth Confucian principle is *wen*, which deals with the artistic side of a culture. These include art, poetry, and music, activities highly valued in Confucian thinking. Confucius believed that art is an excellent instrument for moral education and inspiration. The arts enrich not only a person but also the state, by making others want to follow the example.

The five principles of *ren*, *junzi*, *li*, *de*, and *wen* were the central points of Confucius's program to reintroduce tradition to China. He taught that by following proper behavior, people would learn self-restraint, which would make for a peaceful and well-ordered world. The Confucian idea of ritual was not the empty performance of tired tradition, but an acceptance of the importance of ceremony in one's life. By performing such rituals and behaving properly, one's life becomes ordered. Such good manners would then extend beyond one's family and friends and into the larger world.

Importance of education Confucius also emphasized the need for education. Real understanding, he believed, comes only through careful study. For Confucius, even those born in a low social class can rise through education and hard work. One of the new ideas introduced in Confucian thought was that of meritocracy, or social position based on performance rather than birthright. Through education in morality, government, and the arts, humans could improve themselves. Confucius, as a

teacher, also emphasized the Six Arts: ritual, music, archery, chariot riding, calligraphy, and computation, or mathematics. For him, however, the highest form of education was a moral education.

During his lifetime Confucius gathered together the core elements of the Confucian system. Confucius always claimed to be a transmitter, or spreader of news, rather than a creator. He was presenting many concepts and principles that had long been valued in Chinese society but had fallen out of favor over the years of social disorder and lawlessness. Collecting and utilizing traditions such as filial devotion, loyalty, respect for tradition and ritual, and an emphasis on knowing one's role in the world, he transformed past ideas into a new system. His emphasis on the Five Virtues of benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom, and sincerity were blended into guidelines for right living. For Confucius and his followers, right doing became right being. This was as true for the common person as it was for emperors. Confucius thought that by educating rulers in the Confucian way, all would be well with society. He sums up his bottom-up philosophy in this saying from the Analects:

If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there be beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.

If there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.

If there be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

Sacred writings

There are three different groups of books that form the Confucian canon of sacred texts. Among these three groups there are overlaps, with certain texts being included on all three lists. The most prominent books in the official Confucian sacred texts are the Four Books, which were established as the primary texts of Confucianism in the eleventh century by the scholar Zhu Xi. They have remained the most important Confucian texts into the modern era. Zhu Xi's texts include the Lun Yu, or Analects, sayings and teachings of Confucius written down by his disciples beginning about seventy years after his death; the Mencius, the teachings of Mencius; the Da Xue (also spelled Ta Hsueh), or Great Learning, written between 500 and 200 BCE; and the Zhongyong (also spelled Chung Yung), or Doctrine of the Mean, which is more mystical in its themes than the other books. The last two texts were adapted from chapters in an earlier book, the Liji (also spelled Li-chi), or Record of Rites, a description of religious practices from the eighth to the fifth century BCE.

The Liji and four other texts form what is known as the Five Classics, the original texts used by Confucius in his practices and teaching. In addition to the Liji, the Five Classics include the Shijing (also spelled Shih-ching), or Classic of Odes, a compilation of 305 songs from the Chou Dynasty; the Shujing (also spelled Shu-ching), or the Classic of Documents, a historical record dating back to the third millennium BCE; the Chunqiu (also spelled Ch'un-ch'iu), or Spring and Autumn Annals, a chronicle of the political and diplomatic doings of the Lu state during the time of Confucius and most probably writing by Confucius himself during his final years; and the Yijing, or Classic of Changes (sometimes referred to as the Book of Changes), the famous book of prophesy that uses sixty-four hexagrams, or patterns of six lines, that are interpreted as omens of coming events.

The texts that compile the Thirteen Classics were developed during the Tang and Song dynasties, after the introduction of the Five Classics and before the adoption of the Four Books. They are made up of the Five Classics as well as the Analects and the Mencius. In addition, these texts include three commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals and five other texts, including the Xiaojing (also spelled Hsiao-ching), or Classic of Filial Piety, and the Erh Ya, or Near to Correctness.

Perhaps the most important single Confucian text is the Analects. The book is filled with quotations from Confucius, including “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”; “I hear, I know. I see, I remember. I do, I understand”; and “Choose a job that you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” The Analects also provides important biographical information about Confucius, for he uses himself as an example in stories of everyday living.

Sacred symbols

Symbolism in Confucianism is rich and varied. In the religion's early days the Five Classics themselves were taken as symbols for the followers of Confucius. Since Confucian texts are written in Chinese characters, many of the characters or words themselves have become important symbols of Confucianism for the Chinese faithful. For example, the Chinese character for ren, the idea of benevolence and empathy, is perhaps the most important single principle of Confucianism. It is made up of two other characters: that for “person” and that for

“two.” The combined character symbolizes the relationship between two individuals, a principle at the heart of the Confucian belief system. Another important symbol for harmony and righteousness comes from a stylized version of the Chinese word for “happiness,” written twice and connected by a line.

Confucianism also shares the Yin-Yang symbol with Daoism. This symbol represents the connectedness of opposing forces in the universe. It is a circle divided into two equal and curving parts, one black and one white, with a black dot in the white section and a white dot in the black section. This represents the two types of forces in the universe, the male or sunlike yang force and the female or receptive moon force of the yin. The symbol shows these two forces in balance and harmony.

Worship

Confucianism has no clergy and no traditional houses of worship. Instead, it is incorporated into every aspect of a person's life. In the modern world perhaps the idea of ancestor worship or respect comes closest to a form of Confucian worship. Many Chinese and other believers have shrines to dead relatives in their homes. At these home shrines and altars, tablets listing all the ancestors' names, as well as pictures of deceased relatives are kept. At special times throughout the year, and for some families on a daily basis, special food and drink are offered to the pictures of these departed ones by the father or oldest male of the family. This is done as a way to honor the deceased, as well as a way to remember those who have died. The neo-Confucian book *Family Rituals* was the primary source for how to conduct such family rites. It governed the rituals of filial piety toward ancestors from the thirteenth to the twentieth century not only in China, but also in Japan, Vietnam, and South Korea.

More public rituals sometimes occur at the Confucian temples built throughout China and East Asia. Although many of these temples have been converted into museums, offerings are still sometimes made in the spring and fall. Most prominent among these temples are the Temple of Confucius in his hometown of Qufu and the Temple of Confucius at Beijing. Outside of China, the ancient rites and traditions of Confucianism are still maintained at places such as the Confucian Temple of Literature in Hanoi, Vietnam; Chongmo, or the Royal Ancestral Shrine in South Korea; and the Confucian shrine at the National Confucian Academy in Seoul, South Korea. For example, at Chongmo on the first Sunday in May, people make offerings of wine, food, and incense to the royal spirits. This ceremony, carried out according to the *Record of Rites*, also involves dance and music. The Confucian shrine in Seoul and those around the countryside of South Korea are sites for honoring Confucius on his birthday, celebrated in late September or early October.

Confucian temples were once the sites of many offering ceremonies. Sometimes these were led by the emperor himself. For example, the emperor would perform the winter solstice (the shortest day of winter) ceremony in Beijing to celebrate the return of positive yang energy, wearing blue robes embroidered with dragons. At the Confucian temple, he would light a pile of sticks set onto the circular-shaped altar, signifying the shape of heaven. The rising smoke from this fire summoned the god Shangdi, the Supreme Lord, to the ceremony. The meat from a young bull would be served as an offering, all accompanied to the

music of gongs, flutes, and stones beaten like drums. The emperor would also lead the ceremony at the Temple of Agriculture at the beginning of the planting season, plowing a furrow in a sacred field.

Confucians also practice a form of meditation known as “quiet sitting,” which is described in the book *Great Learning*. Quiet sitting is much like meditation in religions such as Buddhism and Daoism and like them involves a clearing of the mind. Confucians may meditate on a moral lesson or simply focus on their breathing. Unlike meditation in Daoism and Buddhism, though, quiet sitting is not an attempt at reaching harmony with a greater reality. Instead, it is considered a preparation for learning and understanding.

Observances and pilgrimages

The primary festival for Confucians is the birthday of Confucius, celebrated on the twenty-seventh day of the eighth lunar month, which usually places the day in late September or early October. In some traditions, September 28 is set aside as the official date. Traditional followers of Confucianism make offerings to Confucius and visit temples. At his birthplace in Qufu, the locals have created the International Confucian Festival to celebrate the occasion. People dress in costumes typical of the time of Confucius. Performances of some of the more traditional rituals are given as well as readings from the *Analects*. The celebration attracts many tourists. In Taiwan Confucius’s birthday is celebrated as Teachers’ Day, a national holiday honoring all teachers who carry on the work of Confucius, who is considered the first great teacher.

Another Confucian festival is Ching Ming, on April 4 or 5, when families visit the graves of their ancestors. Families make offerings, including incense and paper likenesses of ancestors, and cook special foods, including chicken and pork, to eat afterward. The Chung Yeung Festival, or Autumn Remembering, is also a time to remember ancestors. Special offerings of rice cakes and wine are made at family shrines and altars, and the family visits the graves of their ancestors. This festival takes place in September or October.

Confucians also celebrate the Chinese New Year, usually in February. This several-day-long festival involves dance, costumes, and feasts. It is a highlight of the Confucian year. The dragon dance is held on the first day of the year, and represents the return of light, or of positive yang energy. Dragon dances can be performed on a stage or as part of a procession

Is Confucianism a Religion?

Confucius had little to say about gods or spirituality. In the *Analects*, Confucius, responding to a question about how one should serve the dead and the gods, said, "You are not able to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?" Asked about death, he responded, "You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?" Confucius wanted to deal with relationships among the living, not between the living and God. His goal was the perfection of the living person and the existing society.

Confucianism has no clergy (priesthood), no organized body of followers, and no real discussion of what happens after death. There are Confucian temples, but many have been turned into museums to the life of Confucius and are not places of worship in the traditional sense. Confucius himself never claimed divine, or godlike, status. For these reasons, many people argue that Confucianism is not a religion at all, but rather an ethical and philosophical system.

Others say that Confucianism is a religion because it deals with the most important matters in life: how to live life well and fully, and how to heal the wounds of society. If religion is understood in its broadest terms, as a belief system that sets moral standards, talks about the appropriate place of humans in the universe, and answers questions about how to lead a good daily life, then Confucianism is a religion. Confucianism does have some things to say about the spiritual realm and *Tian*, the godlike principle by which the universe is ordered. Confucius, describing the passage of his life, explains in the *Analects*, "At fifty I understood the decree of Heaven." In other words, he felt that he had been appointed to his task by a spiritual power above his understanding.

Confucius also told his followers never to neglect the offerings due to Heaven. In fact, such rituals were part of the tradition he was attempting to preserve. The Chinese had for millennia made offerings and sacrifices to dead ancestors, to Heaven, and to the many and various gods of nature. Chinese folk religion (traditional beliefs) had a long tradition of two-way communication with the spirit world. People regularly made offerings to spirits: food and drink were presented at altars, incense burned, and prayers said. The spirits, for their part, communicated with the living by means of omens, or signs of things that are about to happen.

Confucianism is a belief system completely in harmony with such rituals. In fact, one of the classic Confucian texts is the *Yijing* (also spelled *I Ching*), an ancient text used to interpret omens. Confucius also says in the *Analects*, "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray." Throughout the *Analects*, Confucius advises his followers to respect the spirits and to make offerings and sacrifices to them with care, thought, and sincerity.

In addition, the work of Confucius helped uphold the claim of rulers of the Zhou Dynasty that they had been put into power by the Mandate of Heaven, or by holy decree. When it became a state religion during the Han Dynasty, Confucianism helped the emperor legitimize the status of the rulers as decreed by Heaven. The scholars, or *ru*, those who had mastered the classic tradition and knew all the rituals, were in charge of state ritual offerings and sacrifices to various gods. For the people who believe in and practice Confucianism, this path is generally considered a philosophical and scholarly tradition, very much like religions such as Buddhism and Daoism.

through town. A string of participants is covered in a long dragon robe and they follow a young girl carrying a red ball or a light, which symbolizes yang power. Finally the dragon “swallows” the red ball, demonstrating a symbolic unity with the gods and an acceptance of the light. Family banquets are another high point of the New Year’s celebration, with several kinds of meat and fish served, along with special rice cakes. Red envelopes filled with money are passed out to younger members of the family as gifts.

The main pilgrimage site for Confucians is to the birthplace of Confucius in Shandong province. His hometown, Qufu, is the site of a temple complex, built in 478 BCE and reconstructed many times since. Extending over almost fifty acres, this complex contains several hundred halls and pavilions, each containing statues of prominent Confucians and pillars that have the sayings of Confucius carved into them. The center of this complex is the Dacheng Dia, the Great Hall of Confucius, set in a grove of trees. Its two roofs are supported by ten marble columns, each with intricate dragon carvings on them. More dragons appear, painted in gold, on the blue roof beams. Inside the hall are statues of Confucius and the four men who followed him during his thirteen years of wandering. Qufu is also the site of his grave and the graves of thousands of descendants (offspring). The Kung Family Mansion, where the descendants of Confucius lived, is a pilgrimage site in the same town. It consists of 152 buildings and was built during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Qufu is now a protected United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site.

Everyday living

Confucianism is a system for living that deals with the major relationships in a person’s life, and includes a code of conduct to accompany each situation. Thus, it deeply affects the daily lives of those who follow Confucian teachings. Li, or propriety and correct behavior, is a major principle in Confucianism. Some Confucian values are so deeply ingrained in Chinese culture that people are not consciously aware that they are behaving in a manner taught by Confucius. While such social rules are found worldwide, they are an especially strong and vital part of the etiquette system of East Asia. There is no official type of clothing that believers or followers of Confucianism wear, yet there is always the message of li to be appropriate and to act with moderation. Neither are

Confucianism



Confucian texts became the basis for education in China around the first and second centuries BCE. Modern students in countries with a strong Confucian influence still study the texts. © SETBOUN/CORBIS.

there special food restrictions for followers, but here, too, the idea of moderation and appropriateness comes into play.

Rites of passage Since the days of the Han Dynasty there have been four major rites of passage, or markings of stages in life, in Confucian tradition. Though the full rituals for these rites of passage are seldom followed in the modern world, bits and pieces of them are still found throughout East Asia. The first rite of passage is birth. Special ceremonies accompany a child's birth, and a special diet as well as a month of rest is recommended for the mother. The first-, fourth-, and twelfth-month anniversaries of the baby's birth are also celebrated.

A second major rite of passage takes place when a child reaches maturity. This occurs at age twenty for sons and, for daughters, upon her wedding engagement. This rite is sometimes referred to as the "capping" ceremony, because fathers, through a sponsor, present their sons with a square-cornered cap that represents maturity and give their sons a special name. The extended family gathers, and the young man is served chicken.

For girls this coming-of-age ceremony happens when she is engaged to be married, usually between fourteen and twenty. A pin is placed in the girl's hair by a sponsor chosen by the mother, and an adult's cap is placed over this. The girl then puts on adult clothing and receives a new name. This rite, however, is no longer very common.

A third rite comes at marriage. Confucian ritual controls various aspects of this ceremony: the proposal (and its appropriateness in terms of social class and standing); engagement; the dowry, or presents to the groom's family from the bride's family; the date of the wedding, the organization of the wedding ceremony and reception; and even the ceremony on the morning after the wedding, when the bride serves breakfast to the groom's parents. This represents the changing of loyalties for the bride, from her own family to her in-laws. The third day after the wedding, the bride pays a visit to her birth family, but is no longer considered part of that family. She has become part of the groom's family.

Death is the final Confucian rite of passage. Although the actual burial may be performed by a Buddhist, Taoist, or even Christian religious person, the rituals come from Confucian tradition. Tradition dictates the sorts of clothes to wear while grieving, as well as what will be said on special anniversaries after the death. White is the funeral color in China.

Zhu Xi established strict rules for every step of the mourning process and funeral, even the demonstration of grief or sadness. For example, if news of the death reached a person when he or she was away from home, that person was to cry when first learning of the death. Traveling home, the person could cry again whenever he or she felt sadness. Upon reaching the border of the home province, then of the hometown, and finally the door of the home, the person was required to wail and cry.

After the death, mourners put rice in the mouth of the deceased. Then the body was washed and dressed and sealed in a coffin, along with food, clothing, and gifts. The coffin would remain in the home for three months before burial. A "soul" seat and cloth were set next to the coffin, and food and drink were offered there for the next three months, as it was believed that the soul would remain in the house for that period of time.

For Confucians, there is no real concept of an afterlife. The soul or spirit might live on, but death was the end of bodily existence. After three months the body was finally buried and further offerings of food and

wine were made to the Tu Di Gong, the Earth God, one of the huge number of gods in the Chinese pantheon, or group of gods. The deceased's name was added to the family list of ancestors on the ancestor tablet. If the deceased happened to be the head of the family, that name was not simply added to the list of ancestors. Instead, it became the first generation of ancestor to be worshipped, and the preceding generations were adjusted accordingly. Confucians were required to worship only five generations, so as ancestors reached the sixth generation, they would be taken off the reverence list.

Such strict funeral traditions are rarely followed in modern times, particularly after the People's Republic of China was established and Confucian traditions were suppressed. Such religious suppression, however, has decreased and the old ancestor altars and tablets are making a comeback. Other modern changes have required some adaptation of these Confucian rites. For example, tradition holds that a male member of the family lead the ancestral rites. In modern times China faced an overpopulation problem, that is, there were too many people being born than the nation could support. As a result Chinese law now allows only one child per family, so it is often now a female who must lead the ancestral rites.

Confucianism's influences

Confucian tradition has become so deeply rooted in Chinese society that it affects people's everyday lives, whether they realize it or not. It also has influenced society in such nations as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The family rituals and respect for age and authority in Confucianism were especially appealing to Koreans, for family connections had long been an important part of Korean culture. Korean Confucianism also had an influence on the role of women in society. Before the arrival of Confucianism, Korean women had inheritance rights and also were not necessarily expected to leave their families to live with their in-laws. This all changed, however, when Confucianism, with its male-dominated philosophy, became dominant in Korea.

Japanese Confucianism deviated even more from the traditional Chinese version. In Japan the idea of filial piety and devotion was replaced by the concept of loyalty to the ruler as the most important of the Five Relationships. Most Japanese also held on to some Shinto beliefs, the native religion of Japan. The most important of these was the belief that the emperor was divine, or godlike. This was another



The Confucian ideal of filial piety, or respect for family elders, was particularly strong in China. Confucianism in Japan, however, adapted this aspect to loyalty and respect for the ruler. THE ART ARCHIVE/NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM TAIWAN.

deviation from Chinese Confucianism, which holds that a ruler will be removed from power by Heaven if he does not act morally. Another difference was that the samurai (warrior) class was considered the highest class instead of the scholar-bureaucrat of Chinese Confucianism. All these changes had profound consequences over centuries of Japanese cultural development.

Confucianism had a strong influence on the code of the samurai. The samurai combined Confucian ethics in their study of military arts and redefined themselves as Confucian junzi warriors, noble and just. One of the greatest samurais of the period, Yamaga Soko (1622–1685), wrote down the code of the warrior, called bushido. He used numerous Confucian elements in the description of bushido, such as self-discipline, loyalty, filial piety, and belief in ritual and tradition. Yamaga’s work taught many samurai the code of the warrior. Among these was the leader of the legendary forty-seven *ronin*, or masterless samurai. These ronin were known for their selfless dedication and loyalty. They, in turn, have inspired numerous stories, plays, and movies in Japan.

In Vietnam, Confucianism appears to have had less of an influence than in Korea and Japan. The Vietnamese people did not take Confucianism as a whole; rather, they chose those aspects that fit with their

culture. For example, the male-dominated aspects of Confucianism were not adopted in Vietnam. As a result, women continued to work alongside their husbands in the field or in shops. If widowed, a woman could remarry.

The Arts and education Further influences can be seen in the arts and scholarship. Confucian emphasis on *wen*, or the arts, has given a high social status to artists, while military people are usually ranked toward the bottom of the social scale. Many officials of the Chinese state through history have spent their spare hours as poets. A famous example of this is Wang Wei (701–761), a respected Tang scholar-official, who became famous for his nature poetry. For Confucius, knowledge of poetry was a requirement for being a gentleman. Confucius had his students memorize the several hundred verses in the *Classic of Odes*, and he also used the poems in his teaching because he thought that if one did not know poetry, one did not know how to speak. Poetry, for Confucius and his followers, was a means to help a person understand the truth, promote unity between people, and promote a better understanding of nature. Confucius also had a special love of music and dance, and both of these were incorporated into the life of the noble gentleman.

Moreover, Chinese landscape painting was influenced by Confucian ideals of harmony and balance. Chinese landscape painting paid special attention to tradition and *li*, or propriety. In painting *li* was demonstrated by a faithfulness to nature as well as conventionalized symbols for representation of rocks, vegetation, bark, water, and other aspects of the natural world. *Li* also governed the way a picture was put together: the size of the artwork, for example, or the type of brushes and style of stroke. Chinese painters of the tenth and eleventh centuries were interpreters of *li*, and landscape became the principal subject for their pictures. Korean art was also greatly influenced by neo-Confucian principles. Artist Chong Son (1676–1759) took from neo-Confucianism the need to depict not an imaginary Korean landscape but an actual one, creating a unique Korean tradition in landscape painting. This emphasis on art in Confucianism influenced the spread of artistic expressions for centuries thereafter.

Confucian ideals not only inspired art, they also became the subject matter of literature. Perhaps the most famous and greatest Chinese novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* from the eighteenth century, is filled with the ideas of Confucianism. Following the events in the lives of the

Jia family, the novel shows the son dominated by the father; the mother, a powerless woman; and the grandmother, commanding deep respect as the oldest in the family. The son is also busy studying Confucianism for the civil service exam and marries a woman his grandmother and father choose for him.

Finally, Confucianism has had a strong impact on education and scholarship throughout East Asia. The scholar-bureaucrat was a Confucian ideal, and knowledge is deeply valued in Confucian societies. Such an influence has lasted through the centuries, making the attainment of higher education a primary goal for young people in Asia. With its emphasis on this world and not the next, Confucianism encourages a person to attain the highest level of success he or she is able. The role of the scholar remains a respected one, and these scholars continue to build on the Confucian tradition.

The New Confucians, a group of East Asian thinkers, have worked since the 1920s reforming Confucianism to adapt it to life in the modern world. However, many aspects need no adapting. For example, democratic principles can be found in the Confucian belief, as stated by Mencius, that people have the right to rebel against an unjust ruler. Furthermore, these scholars agree that the Confucian ideals of education and self-cultivation are as meaningful now as they were in the time of Confucius.

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Daoism

Daoism (also called Taoism) developed in China, perhaps as early as the sixth century BCE. It takes its name from the Chinese character *dao* (pronounced “dow”), which means “way” or “path.” For believers, called Daoists, the Dao is the rhythmic balance and natural, flowing patterns of the universe. The Dao orders the universe, nature, and a person’s life. Central to the idea of the Dao is *wu wei*, which is literally “inaction” or “nonaction” but is actually closer in meaning to “noninterference in the way of nature.” It describes the effortless action that arises from a sense of being connected to nature and other to people.

Along with Buddhism and Confucianism, Daoism is one of the three chief belief systems of China. It once had followers numbering in the hundreds of millions. A new government took over China in 1949, however, and suppressed all religions. Thousands of Daoist and Buddhist monks were sent to labor camps. Daoist monasteries and temples were converted for other purposes or destroyed. People were strongly discouraged from practicing any religion. Religion in China at the early twenty-first century is still not openly practiced. Many people worship in private or in secret, so it is impossible to determine the number of people in mainland China who are Daoists. The religion has spread to other parts of Asia, however, including Taiwan, where between twenty and thirty million people claim to be believers. Vietnam and Korea also have large numbers of followers, and in North America, Daoists number about thirty thousand.

History and development

According to Daoist tradition, the religion was first developed by Laozi (born c. 604 BCE), whose name is variously spelled Lao-tzu, Lao-tsu, Lao-tse, or Lao-tze. The name means “Old Master.” According to legend Laozi was conceived by a shooting star and born as an old man with a flowing white beard, after spending eighty-three years in his mother’s

WORDS TO KNOW

acupuncture: Traditional Chinese medical treatment that uses needles inserted into the body at specific locations to stimulate the body's balanced flow of energy.

alchemy: An ancient science that aimed to transform substances of little value into those of greater value, such as lead into gold.

canon: Accepted group of religious texts.

Dao: The path or way; the rhythmic balance and natural, flowing patterns of the universe.

de: Virtue, virtuousness, and power.

dynasty: The period of reign by a particular ruling family.

enlightenment: The achievement of spiritual understanding.

folk beliefs: The beliefs of the common people.

meditation: Quiet reflection on spiritual matters.

philosophical Daoism: A form of Daoism by which followers seek knowledge and wisdom about the unity of everything in existence and how to become closer to it.

polytheistic: Worshipping more than one god.

prophecy: Prediction of future events.

pu: Uncarved or unformed; the state of simplicity to which Daoists try to return.

qi: The breath of life or vital energy that flows through the body and the earth.

religious Daoism: A form of Daoism that recognizes gods, ancestor spirits, and life after death.

wu wei: Nonaction, or deliberate and thoughtful action that follows the Dao.

yin and yang: Literally, "shady" and "sunny"; terms referring to how the universe is composed of opposing but complementary forces.

womb before birth. It was Laozi who authored the *Dao De Jing* (also spelled *Tao Te Ching*), often translated as "The Book of the Way and the Power (or Virtue)." This short text has been translated more than one hundred times and remains the central and most sacred Daoist writing.

Daoism originally began as a philosophy, or a method for seeking knowledge and wisdom. Its basic concepts and beliefs are established in the *Dao De Jing*, composed sometime between the sixth and third centuries BCE, and in the *Zhuangzi* (also spelled *Chuang-tzu*), or the "Book of Zhuang," which was written about 350 BCE. Philosophical Daoism continued as an independent belief system until the thirteenth century CE, when the various schools of philosophical Daoism were absorbed by what is called the neo-Confucian school of thought. Neo-Confucianism is a branch of Confucianism through which followers believe they can become wise through methods of both spiritual and

attempts at self-improvement. Confucianism in general focuses on respect and proper behavior to form a harmonious society.

In the second century BCE philosophical Daoism gave rise to religious Daoism, which also included ancient folk beliefs (beliefs held by the common people) involving the worship of dead ancestors, the belief in nature gods, and the search for immortality, or life after death. Religious Daoism is also known as *Dao jiao* (also spelled *Tao chiao*). One of the earliest religious Daoist schools was that of the Huanglao masters, who were devoted both to Laozi and to the first emperor of China.

Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor (259–210 BCE), established many of the basic elements of Chinese civilization and is very respected for his support of Daoist teachings. His name may come from his presumed homeland near the Yellow River, or from the color of the earth. The Huanglao masters formed a branch of Daoism called *Huanglao Dao*, or “The Way of the Yellow Emperor and the Old Master.” (“Old Master” refers to Laozi.) The Huanglao masters blended the ideas of *wu wei*, or effortless action, with spiritual techniques for achieving immortality. They became powerful advisers at the court of the Han Dynasty (c. 202 BCE–c. 220 CE), despite the fact that Confucianism had been declared the state religion. (A dynasty is the period of reign by a particular ruling family; in this case, the ruling dynasty was that of the Han family.)

The next major development in religious Daoism came with the revelations, or teachings that came directly from the gods, given to the holy man Zhang Daoling (also spelled Chang Tao-ling) in 142 CE. He became the first of the great Celestial Masters, and his religious movement became known as the “Way of the Celestial Masters,” *Tianshi Dao*. This religious movement also became known as the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice, so named because of a donation or household tax of that amount of rice given annually to the priests of the religion. When Zhang died, control of the religion passed to his family, who further developed it.

Becomes official religion The Celestial Masters continued to grow in power and number. In 215 CE, under the administration of Zhang’s grandson, Daoism found official recognition as a religion. By the end of the third century some of the most powerful families of north China had taken up Daoism. By this time the Celestial Masters had gained political power and were functioning as messengers between the ruler and the people. In some cases they also functioned between the

About Daoism

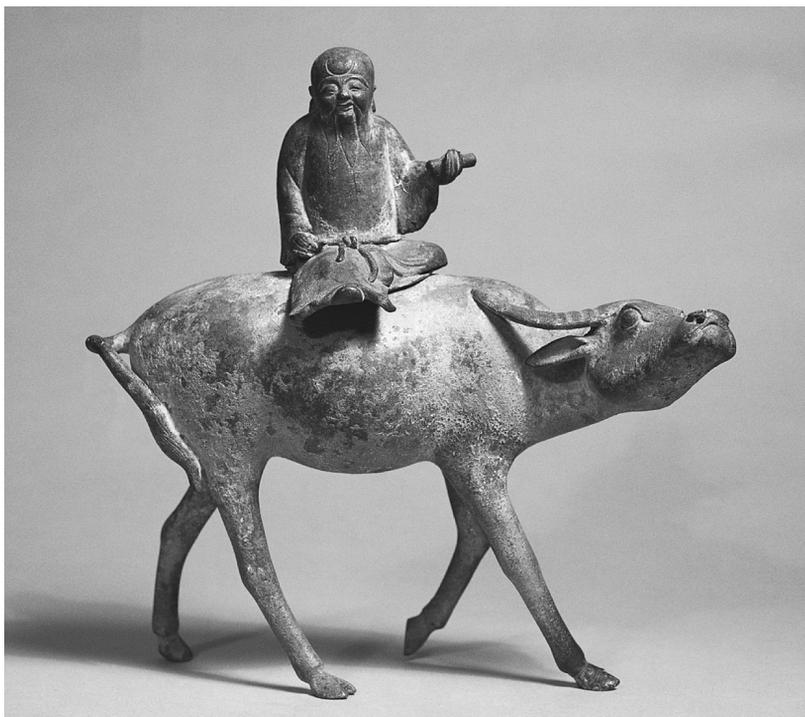
- **Belief.** Daoists believe in the rhythmic balance and natural, flowing patterns of the universe, called the *Dao*, and that by living in harmony with the Dao, one gains true understanding of reality and can even achieve immortality.
- **Followers.** It is difficult to calculate the true number of believers in Daoism because many Daoist followers in China practice in secret. There are between twenty and thirty million believers on Taiwan and about thirty thousand in North America.
- **Name of God.** For some faithful, the abstract concept of the Dao is godlike. *Tian*, or heaven, is also a godlike concept. The Jade Emperor, Yu-huang, is the most powerful deity for followers of religious Daoism.
- **Symbols.** The yin-yang symbol, a divided circle with equal parts of black and white, is the most important symbol in Daoism, representing the balance of opposites in the world.
- **Worship.** Religious rites are held at Daoist temples, but Daoists also worship at shrines in their homes and through meditation, or quiet reflection on spiritual matters.
- **Dress.** Daoists do not wear any special clothing when attending the temples, but they usually remove their shoes before entering.
- **Texts.** The Dao De Jing is the main philosophical and sacred text of Daoism.
- **Sites.** The Five Mountains in China are perhaps the holiest places of pilgrimage for Daoists.
- **Observances.** The Chinese New Year, in January or early February, is the primary holy day for Daoists, who call it the Day for All Gods to Descend to Earth.
- **Phrases.** There are no commonly used phrases that unite all Daoists.

ruler and heaven, or *Tian*, where the gods lived and where faithful believers in religious Daoism would go after death.

Over the next several hundred years religious Daoism continued to grow. Traditional magical practices were added, including alchemy, an ancient science that aimed to transform substances of little value into those of greater value, such as lead into gold. Religious Daoism also formed a concept of life after death (that believers ascend to heaven and become even closer to the Dao). The movement also developed an organized monastic system, where monks lived secluded from the world.

In the fifth century reforms in the Way of the Celestial Masters led to its acceptance by even more of the higher classes of Chinese society. The reforms brought the religion more into line with the level of organization that Buddhists, with their emphasis on order in daily life, practiced. This

Daoism



Laozi, the founder of Daoism, is said to have ridden a water buffalo towards the west, away from the lawlessness in China during his lifetime. At the border, however, he was stopped and asked to write down his wisdom. This became the Dao De Jing. © BURSTEIN COLLECTION/CORBIS.

organizational change helped make Daoism the state religion of North China for a time. Similar reforms happened in the south, with court ritual added to the religion to make it more acceptable.

The Tang Dynasty (618–907) marked a high point for religious Daoism. The founder of the dynasty, Li Yuan, claimed to be a descendant of Laozi. Daoist texts, along with those of Confucianism, were used for civil service examinations under the Tang. Monasteries multiplied, and the Dao De Jing was translated and reached India, Japan, and Tibet. In the early twelfth century the name of the Celestial Masters was changed to the Way of the Orthodox Unity.

Declines in practice After the thirteenth century Daoism went into decline. A popular rebellion in 1849 led to the destruction of Daoist and Buddhist temples throughout the country, including the temple complex at Dragon Tiger Mountain, where the Celestial Masters had their center of power. The New Life movement, begun in the early twentieth century by the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek (1897–1975), also suppressed Daoist centers. The movement was intended to return China to the path of reason and Confucianism. To this end, students were recruited to go

out into the countryside and destroy Daoist temples, statues, and texts wherever they could find them. The huge Daoist canon, or group of religious texts, of more than five thousand volumes was almost lost during this time.

All religious practice in China was banned in 1949, after Mao Zedong (1893–1973; also spelled Mao Tse-tung) seized power and established the communist People's Republic of China. Communism is a political theory of a classless society where all people are equal and work for the benefit of the group. It believes that religion is a way to suppress the people to comply with the will of the state. Mao particularly targeted religion during the period called the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The communist leader called on young people to protect the communist state by violence and intimidation.

Mao's critics, including religious leaders, were targeted as enemies. Monks were taken from monasteries, and the monasteries and temples were either destroyed or used for other purposes. Most Daoist holy sites and temples were ruined in this process. Beginning in 1982, under the new leadership of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), however, more religious tolerance was introduced. Daoism, as a respected part of China's past, was once again looked upon favorably.

Daoism in the twenty-first century Numerous Daoist religious sects survive in China and on the island of Taiwan. Both countries have national Daoist associations, and all schools and sects of Daoism regard Zhang Daoling as the First Celestial Master. In the early twenty-first century, however, all Daoists followed the words of the current Celestial Master.

Daoism has spread to other Asian countries, including Thailand, Vietnam, and Korea, and has reached Europe and North America. Here its message of contemplation has found a home with many who have become disappointed with modern life. Moreover, the Daoist ideas of creative inaction and letting nature take its course are appealing to a new generation throughout the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas).

Sects and schisms

The major schism, or division, in Daoism, occurred between philosophical Daoism and religious Daoism. Religious Daoism attempted to discover a way to immortality (eternal life). The roots and traditions of religious Daoism go deep into the Chinese past and are linked to folk

religions, the traditional beliefs of the people. Such folk religions recognized the role that forces of nature played in the lives of humans. The ancient Chinese, most of whom were farmers, paid close attention to nature and searched for rhythms or unseen patterns that gave their lives meaning. They saw spirits in the mountains and trees and honored them.

Ancestor worship, or praying to the spirits of dead relatives to show respect, was also a major part of Chinese folk religion. The Chinese believed that the spirits of great leaders continued to live on after earthly death. They thought that by praying to such spirits, they could receive assistance in their daily lives. Chinese folk religions had also searched for ways to find longevity, or longer life and immortality, or eternal life. These searches took many forms, ranging from prayer and meditation (quiet reflection on spiritual matters) to taking drugs that were supposed to prolong their lives.

The Celestial Masters Religious Daoism further divided into other sects. The first major sect in religious Daoism was the Celestial Masters (also called Heavenly Masters), founded in West China in the second century by Zhang Daoling. The Celestial Masters advocated the confession of wrongdoings or sins as a way to heal illnesses and reach immortality. Various healing spells were also central to the early form of this sect.

The Celestial Masters sect remains the most important form of religious Daoism to this day. Followers honor the founder, Zhang Daoling, as an immortal, a spiritual being who has attained greater awareness and understanding of the Dao. An immortal is not born and does not die. He or she can travel around at will and cannot be easily harmed. Some immortals take up the role of

Laozi

The central figure in Daoism is Laozi. It is not known if he ever actually existed. Daoist tradition places his birth in 604 BCE, in a village in the eastern half of modern Hunan province. Laozi was supposedly the keeper of the archives, or histories, for the Zhou (also spelled Chou) Dynasty (1027–256 BCE) in their capital of Luoyang. Titled a *shih*, or historian, Laozi may also have worked as an astrologer to the court. (An astrologer studies the movements of the stars and planets, interpreting how these movements may affect events on Earth.) As Laozi's fame as a wise man spread, he attracted visitors. One of these visitors was supposedly Confucius (551–479 BCE), the founder of Confucianism, who was more than fifty years younger than Laozi. Legend has it that Laozi found the younger man's ideas about tradition and acceptance of one's proper role in society rather silly.

Later in his life Laozi planned to leave China for good. He was tired of everyday life at the royal court and saddened by the lawlessness of his times. He rode a water buffalo toward the west but was stopped by a border guard, who asked the wise man to write down his wisdom before leaving his native land forever. This he did over the course of several days. The compilation of Laozi's wisdom is usually called the *Dao De Jing*, although it is sometimes also called the *Laozi* after its author. After writing this text, Laozi reportedly left China, never to be heard of again. Later legends placed him in India.

Many believe that Laozi is actually a combination of several "old masters," or Daoist leaders. Whether or not he was an actual person, the figure of Laozi has deeply affected the philosophy and religion of China. Chinese believers have made offerings and sacrifices to Laozi for two thousand years.

guide to men or women and aid them until they become enlightened and reach the Dao.

The major ceremonies of this early Daoist sect dealt with curing believers of illnesses by ceremonial means. Illnesses were thought to be a punishment for bad deeds. Believers prayed and made appeals to various heavenly agents to cure them and forgive their sins. The teachings of Laozi, as interpreted by the Celestial Masters, were central to religious Daoism. These teachings focused on right action and good works to ensure immunity from disease. In this respect they came close to the Confucian ideal of accepted social roles and social involvement than to the withdrawal from society and rejection of roles found in philosophical Daoism.

Laozi himself began increasingly to take on divine qualities for the Daoist religion. By 165 CE official sacrifices of slaughtered animals and offerings of food and drink were being made to him. Twenty years later a temple was built in his honor. After several centuries he became a god to many Daoists.

The Way of the Great Peace Toward the end of the second century CE a second Daoist religious movement was founded by a reformer called Zhang Zhue (died 184; also spelled Chang Chueh). This movement hoped to create a utopia, or a perfect society, in which the search for the Dao was the primary goal. Zhang Zhue used ancient tradition in his movement, recalling the glories of the rule of the Yellow Emperor. This ancient era was called *Taiping*, or “Great Peace,” and Zhang Zhue’s movement was called the Taiping Dao, or Way of the Great Peace.

Zhang Zhue told his followers that the era of the Han was almost over, and that his Daoist utopia would replace it. The symbol of this utopia was the color yellow, and Zhang Zhue’s 200,000 followers wore yellow turbans, or hats made from strips of cloth, as a sign of their unity. Eventually this band of followers rose against the Han in what is called the Taiping Rebellion, burning towns and destroying property. Government troops finally stopped the rebellion after a year of fighting.

Neo-Daoism and the Mao Shan Along with these religious sects came more reinterpretations of philosophical Daoism. The *xuan xue* (also spelled *hsuan hsueh*), or “dark learning,” explored the spiritual side of the Dao De Jing and the Zhuangzi texts. It is sometimes called Neo-Daoism. The leaders of this movement, such as Wang Bi (also spelled Wang Pi; 226–249), tried to bridge the differences between Daoism

and Confucianism, and stressed a form of Daoism that did not withdraw from the world but participated in an orderly society.

The fourth century saw the creation of two other powerful religious sects, which together are called the Mao Shan, or Mount Mao. These sects incorporated magical practices into religious Daoism, including alchemy and communication with the gods. The Mao Shan became very popular, lasting hundreds of years and attracting, for a time, more followers than the Celestial Masters.

Toward the end of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) numerous smaller sects formed, especially in the north. These groups included Supreme Unity, Perfect and Great Way, and Complete Perfection, or Quanzhen (also spelled Chuan Chen). Supreme Unity was a movement that emphasized magic in order to fight disease. It also promoted rules of good conduct. The Perfect and Great Way was best known for its teachings on ethics and morality.

Complete Perfection emphasized the importance of meditation and simplified many of the rituals that religious Daoism had developed. Complete Perfection became a strong monastic movement, with the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing as its center. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Complete Perfection came to be a favorite of the ruling Mongols, and its chief priest was taken to Central Asia to preach to Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227). This sect, and that of the Mao Shan, continued to be popular into the twentieth century. Orthodox Unity and Complete Perfection, however, were the two main strands of Daoism to survive the twentieth century.

Basic beliefs

The core of Daoism is the Dao, which maintains order and balance in the universe. There are several levels of the Dao. Among them are the Great Dao, the Dao of nature, and the Dao present in each person's life. The Great Dao is the invisible force behind all creation. This constant Dao is the beginning of everything, and everything returns to the Dao in an eternal cycle. (In Daoism, time itself is cyclical, meaning that everything always comes back to its starting point. This is different from the linear Western concept of time, with one starting point and a different ending point.) This Great Dao is also mysterious and cannot be explained in words. Rather, it can only be felt. The Dao of nature is the controlling rhythm of the natural world. A third type of Dao is the way in which

Zhang Daoling

Zhang Daoling lived in the first and second centuries CE. He was the founder of the Celestial Masters. A student of Daoism, Zhang claimed to have received a revelation in 142 CE from Laozi that told him that the end of the world was coming soon and that he should gather the faithful together. In this same communication, he was given the title Celestial Master, or Heavenly Master (*Tianshi*). His movement came to be called *Tianshi Dao*, or the "Way of the Celestial Master."

He drew upon the tradition of the shamans, or folk healers, who had long been a part of Chinese folk religion. He taught that salvation (freedom from suffering) and the curing of illness could come only with the confession of sins and strict moral behavior. For Zhang Daoling a purified soul meant good health, and this message quickly became popular with the people of what is now Sichuan (also spelled Szechwan) province. He replaced folk belief in demons with the images of three heavens.

Zhang Daoling also established twenty-four governing areas, or parishes. His church used the *Dao De Jing* for religious instruction but also

created its own holy texts and rules. Daoist priests, who could be men or women, were called libationers. Daoism, with its respect for the feminine, has always granted men and women equal standing. These early libationers ran inns or hotels that were open to all travelers, and they interpreted the *Dao De Jing* to the faithful. They also kept a list of the faithful and of their behavior, both good and bad. Zhang was able to fund his church by a religious tax of five pecks, or baskets, of rice annually, giving his sect the nickname the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice.

With Zhang Daoling's death in about 156, control of his sect passed to his son, Zhang Heng, and then to his grandson, Zhang Lu, who established a Daoist religious state in what is now Sichuan province. The sect has survived for almost two thousand years. The current Celestial Master is considered to be a direct descendent of Zhang Daoling. Dragon Tiger Mountain, home to sixty-three unbroken generations of Celestial Masters until the rise of the communist state, was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Now the Celestial Master is headquartered in Taiwan.

each human being lives his or her life, meaning how the Great Dao affects each person.

The goal of Daoism is to become one with the Great Dao. The *Dao De Jing* states that humans are faced with the basic problem of knowing who they really are. By accepting that humans are all part of the Dao, they can live in unity with it. Nature, in Daoism, is not something to be conquered or controlled. Instead, people need to live in harmony with nature. By focusing on the Dao, people can awaken themselves to this eternal rhythm and reach enlightenment, or spiritual understanding.

The concept of *de* Throughout Daoist texts, moving water is used to represent the flow of Dao in people's lives. The flow of water plays a key part

in the concept of *de*, translated as “virtue,” “virtuousness,” and “power.” *De* is the second element in the *Dao De Jing*, the Dao within people. Numerous chapters of that book are devoted solely to an explanation of how *de* works in people’s lives. Thus, *de* deals with informed action (conscious and aware choices) and virtuous behavior. Virtuous behavior is when one acts morally, with respect and consideration for others.

These give rise to another concept, *wu wei*. This is the sort of effortless action a person achieves when he or she is in harmony with the Dao. Like water in a stream as it shifts its form to go around rocks and other objects, *wu wei* smooths the edges of those hard surfaces.

The Three Jewels Also associated with *de* are three types of virtue: compassion, or consideration of other people and their feelings; moderation, or self-control and restraint; and humility, or humbleness. These are called the Three Jewels. Daoists believe that people are kind and considerate by nature. If left to themselves, they will naturally develop into good human beings. By practicing the Three Jewels, a person can get closer to the Dao.

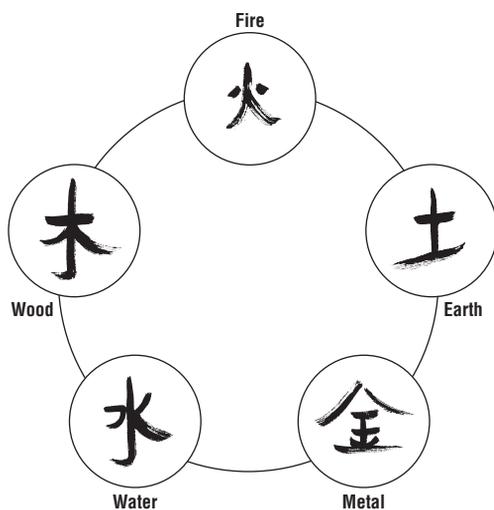
De can also mean “power.” In that sense the concept of *qi* (also spelled *ch’i*) is important. *Qi* literally means “breath” but refers to a vital, or necessary, energy that each person has and must preserve in order to be one with the Dao. As the Dao flows through people’s bodies, it is necessary to remove any blockages to that flow. One early group of Daoists developed specific techniques to accomplish this, blending meditation, a special diet including medicinal herbs, and breathing and movement techniques. The movement techniques developed into the martial art known as *taijiquan* (also spelled *tai chi*).

Unlike Confucianism, Daoism emphasizes following one’s own instincts to reach a true awareness and understanding of existence. Simplicity and spontaneity, or following natural impulses, are also important. To return to the Dao, a person needs to remove the clutter from his or her life. Someone who lives by *wu wei* lives according to his or her true nature, a state before that person was changed by knowledge and learning. Such a state is called *pu* in Daoism, meaning a clean slate or an uncarved block of stone.

The Five Elements Daoists believe that the human being is a microcosm, or a small model, of the universe. The five directions correspond to the Five Mountains (the holy mountains of China), to the sections of the sky, and the seasons. (In Daoist belief there is an extra season in addition to

Daoism

The five elements



The Five Elements in Daoism are water, fire, earth, metal, and wood. They are all believed to be interconnected and a part of the great Dao.

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the usual four; this fifth season is called late summer.) These are reproduced in the human body, with its five major openings, and five major organs (liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys). For Daoists, the Five Elements of water, fire, earth, metal, and wood are all interconnected, part of the Great Dao. The Five Elements theory is vital to Chinese medicine and the development of acupuncture, a Chinese healing tradition that treats bodily disorders as blockages of energy, using needles inserted at key points in the body to free the energy. Each of the internal organs is associated with one of the Five Elements and must be kept in balance for good health and to be in harmony with the Dao.

The search for immortality also plays a part in Daoism. Alchemy and magical practices were prominent in various sects of religious Daoism, as was an emphasis on astrology (the practice of foretelling the future by the movement of the stars and planets), breath control, hygiene (any practice, such as cleanliness, that preserves health), yin-yang balance, and the Five Elements.

Gods in Daoism Religious Daoism has its own temples, priests, sacred writings, rites, and gods. It is polytheistic, meaning it recognizes many gods, each of whom is worshipped for different functions. These include Laozi, who is considered a saint by some and a god, Lord Lao, by others. Primary among the major deities is Yuhuang, or the Jade Emperor, the ruler of Heaven and the strongest of all the gods. He monitors heavenly activity, and all the other gods must report to him. Heaven, in religious Daoism, is organized in a hierarchy, or with gods ranked one above the other.

Directly beneath Yuhuang in importance is the High God, Yuanshi Tianzong, or the First Principle. He existed before the universe and is eternal. Below the High God is *San Qing* (also spelled *San-ching*) the collective name of the Three Pure Ones (Jade Pure, Upper Pure, and Great Pure), describing the areas of Heaven where they are supposed to live. These three are usually seen as representing different aspects, or sides, of Laozi, and, as such, they are not rulers. Instead, they try to save humans with teaching and kindness.

Next in importance are the *San Guan* (also spelled *San-kuan*), the Three Officials who administer Heaven, Earth, and Water. San Yuan, the Three Primordials or Principals, created the universe, and the Eight Immortals, or *Ba Xian* (also spelled *Pa-hsien*), are popular gods modeled on historical persons who reached worldly perfection. Religious Daoists believe that after death they may become important ancestors, just like those they worshipped during their lifetimes. There is also a form of hell, with nine different stages of punishment, each of which is ruled by a different demon king. Prayers, however, can help get a person out of hell. Magic rites, exorcism (or ridding the body of evil spirits), and communication with the spirit world are all duties of the Daoist priest.

It is important to understand, however, that Daoism, as it is viewed in the West, is mainly the philosophical branch of the belief system. The major themes of that sort of Daoism include quiet action, the power of emptiness or a sense of being at one with the universe, detachment (being apart from worldly concerns), openness and spontaneity, the strength of the yin aspects of life, and the belief that human values are not absolute, that individuals in different times and societies may find different and equally valid truths.

Sacred writings

The most important text for Daoists is the *Dao De Jing*. This book contains the major ideas of Daoism, including the concepts of the Dao itself and the importance of living one's life in unity with the Dao. Daoist legend says that Laozi, who served a Zhou emperor, was so upset with the warfare and chaos of his time that he decided to leave China in search of a more peaceful kingdom. His writings were compiled as the *Dao De Jing*, a work of five thousand Chinese characters, divided into eighty-one chapters. It was originally intended as a handbook for the wise ruler but includes teachings that have also been adapted for all followers of the Dao.

Historians agree that this text was most likely written not by one person, but by several people. Until the time of the *Dao De Jing*, the term *Dao* was used for the way of thought of many schools, meaning simply their doctrine, or teachings. But with the *Dao De Jing*, an attempt was made to find a higher meaning for Dao, the ultimate unifying force of the universe.

Another important text is the *Zhuangzi*, written in part by the famous philosopher Zhuangzi (c. 369–c. 286 BCE). Where the *Dao De Jing* is

Daoist Gods

Religious Daoism has many gods and goddesses, as well as various levels of heaven. The gods live in a complex and structured land similar to that of the Chinese imperial system. This was an elaborate system with many levels of government and workers, from the emperor to his advisers near the top to the servants at the bottom. Among the most popular Daoist gods are the *Ba Xian*, or the Eight Immortals, as well as Xi Wang-mu, Mu Gong, and Zao-jun.

The Eight Immortals are symbols of good fortune. They are based on actual historical persons. Only one of the *Ba Xian* is a woman. Each represents a different condition of life, including masculinity and femininity, wealth and poverty, youth and old age, and nobility and the common man.

Cao Guojin: During the Song Dynasty Cao fled to live in shame as a hermit after his brother became a murderer. He then met Lu Dongbin, who taught him how to become an immortal.

Han Xianzi: He lived during the Tang Dynasty. Han is known for his temper and for his supernatural abilities. He received immortality after falling from a peach tree.

He Xiangmu: The only female *Ba Xian*. He Xiangmu spent her life as a hermit in the mountains. While she was dreaming she received instructions on how to obtain immortality. Afterwards she developed the ability to fly from mountain peak to mountain peak.

Lan Caihe: He lived as a beggar, dressed in rags and wearing only one boot. Then one day Lan suddenly disappeared into the clouds as an immortal.

Li Tieguai: He walks with an iron crutch, which was given to him by Xi Wang-mu or by Laozi after one of them healed

his leg. Either Xi or Laozi then taught Li how to become an immortal.

Lu Dongbin: He received a magical sword from a dragon on Mount Lu. He used it to conceal himself in Heaven. Lu believes that compassion is the way to achieve perfection. He uses his sword to conquer ignorance and aggression.

Zhang Guolao: He lived during the Tang Dynasty. Zhang is a living form of ancient chaos.

Zhongli Quan: A military leader during the Han Dynasty, Zhongli Quan fled to the mountains. Daoist saints there instructed him on how to gain immortality.

Together, Xi Wang-mu and Mu Gong represent the balance of yin and yang. Xi Wang-mu is the goddess of immortality. She rules over the paradise of the immortals, where she keeps a nine-storied jade palace that is surrounded by a wall of gold. She is often referred to as the Royal Mother of the West. Xi Wang-mu is married to Mu Gong, the god of immortality. He is often called the Royal God of the East.

Zao-jun is more popularly known as the Kitchen God. He is protector of the family. Zao-jun's story originates in Chinese folk beliefs. A mortal named Zhang Lang was married to good woman and lived a successful life. He fell in love with another woman, however, and left his wife. When this woman left him, Zhang went blind, lost his wealth, and became a beggar. One day he received food from a kind woman. He told her his story, after which his vision returned. Zhang saw that the kind woman was his wife and felt deeply ashamed. He jumped into the hearth (fireplace). Zhang's wife tried to save him, but she was unsuccessful. She placed a plaque above the hearth and made offerings in his honor, beginning the veneration (or worship) of the Kitchen God.

compact and poetic, the Zhuangzi is rambling and often takes the form of a fable, or moral story. Less political in nature and dealing more with rules for living a private life, the book uses satire, or ridicule and humor, and nonsense to poke fun at Confucianism. It also tries to explain the Dao by using stories and poetry. Zhuangzi also introduced the concept of the fully enlightened person who lives apart from the rest of the world. These “supreme men” possess magical abilities, including the power of flight. This concept later gave rise to the principle of immortals that forms a large part of religious Daoism.

The Lie Zi is another significant text. It was written by a philosopher of the same name and is often translated as the “True Classic of Perfect Emptiness.” This book extended the spiritual roots of Daoism and attempted to bridge the gap between Daoism and Confucianism. The Taiping Jing (also spelled Tai-p’ing Ching), or “Classic of the Great Peace,” deals with immortality. It provides specific instructions on how to reach eternal life. The Huainanzi (also spelled Huai-nan-tzu) is a collection of essays by trained spiritual magicians, or *fang-shih*. The Yijing (also spelled I-Ching) is a book of hexagrams used to tell of future events. Though it was written before Daoism was established, the Yijing is employed in various Daoist rituals.

While these early texts form the core of Daoism, there are thousands of other texts that make up the sacred writings of both the philosophical and religious branches of Daoism. The entire collection of Daoist sacred, philosophical, magical and alchemical texts is called the Daozang (also spelled Tao-tsang), or the Daoist Canon. Many works of the canon, first printed in 1190, date back to the third century BCE. There are more than 1,500 works, divided into two main sections: the Three Grottoes and the Four Supplements. These sections include such works as the Dao De Jing and also texts from all the major Daoist religious sects.

Sacred symbols

The most recognizable symbol of Daoism is the yin-yang, a circle divided by a curving line into equal white and black spaces. Each of these halves, in turn, has a small circle of the other color in it. This symbol speaks of the balance between opposites in the universe. The yin is the softer element, the feminine, dark, and open aspect of the universe. The yang is male, light, and controlling. For Daoists, it is best to have yin and yang as balanced as possible.

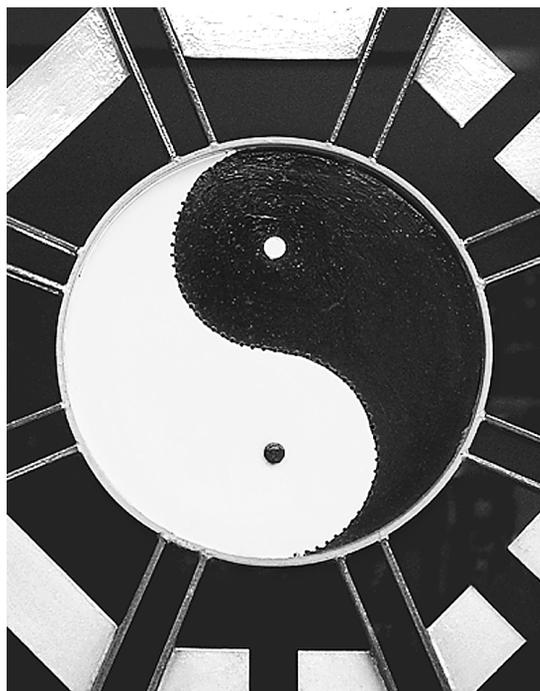


The Eight Immortals are popular Daoist gods who often get involved with humans to help them on their path to realizing the Dao. They are based on actual historical figures. © KEVIN R. MORRIS/CORBIS.

The *bagua* (also spelled *pa kua*) is a related symbol. This symbol is made up of eight trigrams, or combinations of three broken or unbroken lines, from the Yijing that represent the ever-changing nature of the universe. These eight trigrams are arranged in an octagonal, or eight-sided, pattern around the yin-yang symbol.

The Chinese character for Dao is also a typical symbol of Daoism. This character basically means “path.” For Daoists, the symbolic path is the Dao, which we all come from and return to. Dao can also mean “way,” or method of doing something, as in the way of the universe, or the way of life Daoists follow. The character for Dao is built from two smaller characters, that for “head” and that for “foot.” The foot signifies the idea of path, while the head adds the concept of choice. Daoists also see a deeper significance in the use of these two characters, representing both a beginning and an ending, or the continuous cycle of the universe.

Among the hundreds of Daoist deities are the Ba Xian, or Eight Immortals, many of whom are depicted with symbols of their power. The Eight Immortals represented to believers eight aspects of daily life: men and women, young and old, noble and peasant, and rich and poor. Lu Dongbin (also known as Lu Yan), for example, is primary among these immortals. He is associated with medicine and also has charms that can control evil spirits. His symbol is the sword. Typical paintings portray him with a sword and flowing robes. Another Immortal, Li Tieguai (also known as Di Kuai Li), is also associated with medicine. Because he always fights for the poor and infirm, his pictures often portray him as a beggar with a crutch. Han Xiangzi, another Immortal, was a great poet and musician and is portrayed with a jade flute. These images are not very familiar to most Westerners, but they are well known to the faithful.



The yin-yang symbol represents the balance between light and dark, masculine and feminine. This balance symbolizes the harmony of the Dao and is the goal of all Daoists. © ROYALTY-FREE/CORBIS.

Worship

Daoist priests dress in colorful robes and wear rimless black caps. They conduct religious rites, which are ceremonial acts that occur according to particular instructions. Such rites include chanting, reciting of various ritual prayers, meditation, discussion of sections of the Dao De Jing, burning of incense, and issuing prayers to various gods and goddesses.

Rites often take place in Daoist temples, which can be filled with vibrant artwork depicting the various deities and immortals. In Asia such temples are often designed as pagodas. A pagoda is a building several stories tall, with roof tips that curve upwards. In Taiwan alone there are more than eight thousand such temples, with 33,850 Daoist clergy, or priests. The People's Republic of China has 1,500 Daoist temples.

The basic form of Daoist ritual is the *jiao*, or offering, done to pray for assistance from the gods. These offerings range from simple wine and food placed on a family altar to more complex ritual offerings that celebrate one of the many holy days of the Daoist calendar. Priests prepare for the more

elaborate offerings several days in advance by purifying all the robes, musical instruments, sacred scrolls, candles, and incense over hot oil.

On the first day of such typical offering festivals, the priests form a procession through the town and call on the Three Pure Ones to attend their ritual. A yellow banner is placed outside the temple to attract the attention of the gods. Priests sing and dance at such offerings, providing gifts such as tea, candles, or fruit to summon the gods. Ceremonies may include the Division of the Lamps, in which candles are lit in a darkened temple to signify the coming of light to the world. Such rituals may last for as long as three days, accompanied by fireworks, chanting, and music.

Priests may also perform occasional rituals of exorcism, driving out evil spirits. Such exorcisms can be done in homes or even outdoor spaces where it is thought evil spirits dwell. Priests use a variety of religious tools, including flags printed with scripture, blessed water, incense, swords, and even whips made of peach wood with which to fight the demons. Ritual words are chanted as the procession of priests passes through the home or outside area.

Home shrines Less elaborate rituals are also held throughout the year. Daoists are encouraged to worship on their own as well. Most Daoist families have a family shrine with a family tree of their ancestors and candles surrounding it. A shrine is usually a small area in or near the home where a person can worship instead of attending a larger temple. It may contain items that represent the deity or are offerings to the god. The shrine may have pictures of the worshipper's personal god or of one of the major gods in the Daoist pantheon, or group of gods.

People light candles and burn incense at a shrine to call on the souls of their departed relatives or to call on certain gods to ask for assistance. Wine may be poured and food, including meat, rice, and cookies, are placed on the home altar or shrine. There are rites for health, prosperity, and long life, among many others.

Meditation is another form of home worship. Meditating on the Dao is considered the way to reach unity with it. Special breathing techniques are used, as are exercises such as *taijichuan*, which ensure that the flow of the *qi* in the body is not blocked or restricted.

Temple services The Daoist calendar provides many festivals throughout the year, but there are no regularly scheduled services at the temples as some other religious traditions. The shrines and temples are kept open



*Daoist priests dress in colorful robes and wear simple black caps. They conduct religious ceremonies that may include reciting prayers, reading from the *Dao De Jing*, and meditation.* AP IMAGES.

at all hours so that the faithful may come to light candles or incense and pray. They may also receive a prediction in the form of a slip of paper taken from a bamboo tube. People with urgent needs consult priests who can perform the proper rituals. Leaving offerings at roadside shrines is also considered a form of worship for Daoists.

Daoist temples also once served as a center for communal life, providing entertainment with fairs, puppet shows, storytellers, and opera. This secondary function has been greatly reduced since public expressions of religion were suppressed in mainland China in 1949. Temples in Europe and North America usually serve other purposes, such as office space or community centers, in addition to being Daoist houses of worship. These community centers often offer classes in Daoist philosophy, martial arts such as taijichuan, Chinese herbal medicine, and the classic art of *feng shui*.

Observances and pilgrimages

The Daoist calendar is filled with holy days honoring the birthdays or death days of various immortals or the name days of a range of deities. Many of these fall on or near the fifteenth of the month. Important among these days are the birthdays of the Eight Immortals, spread throughout the year. Offerings are made at temples on such days, and families also make offerings at home shrines to departed ancestors. The ninth day of the first lunar month is the birthday of the Jade Emperor. Usually, a grand ritual assembly, called the Jade Emperor Assembly, is held in temples to celebrate the day, while the people gather to burn incense. Some Daoists celebrate the traditional birthday of Laozi, on March 5.

Another, smaller festival is held on the fifteenth of August. This day celebrates the birth of the Earth God, Zhong Yuan. It is also a time to come to the assistance of lost souls, who are forced to wander aimlessly because they did not have a proper burial. A primary part of this festival is the ritual of the Floating of the Water Lamps. Following a summoning of the gods by priests, a member from each household accompanies the priests to a nearby river or stream. There each sets a small paper lantern with a lit candle in the water to float downstream. The candles are meant as a guide to the lost souls, liberating them and showing them the way upward to heaven. Sometimes the ritual of the Universal Salvation is also performed at this festival. In it a huge banquet is set up of cakes, bread, fruit, and any other delicacies that can be provided. The priest first blesses the food and then invites the lost souls to join in the feast. Finally, the priest tosses the food to the gathered faithful, symbolically sharing it with the lost souls.

Chinese New Year Chinese New Year occurs in late January or early February and is one of the most important Daoist celebrations. Chinese New Year falls on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month. The precise date varies from year to year because the Chinese follow a lunar calendar, which is attached to the phases of the moon instead of the 365 set days in the Western-style calendar.

The New Year is also called the Day for All Gods to Descend to Earth, and it is the primary Daoist holy day. Daoists believe that this day marks the rebirth of the positive force in the universe, yang. Before the New Year celebration takes place, however, there is a week-long period of reflection and reckoning, or assessment of deeds. Another widely

celebrated day is called the Day for the Kitchen God to Ascend to Heaven and Report the Good and/or Bad Actions of People to the Jade Emperor, Yu-huang. In order to make the Kitchen God report good things to the Jade Emperor, people will smear his lips with honey.

On the first day of the New Year festival, a procession winds through the streets of towns and cities, led by a long column of people covered in a dragon costume. This dragon follows a small child carrying a red ball, symbol of the return of yang, or positive energy. At the end of the procession, the dragon swallows the ball to bring long life to people and to symbolize unity with the gods.

In temples and private homes rituals are held welcoming the Three Pure Ones. Sweets are offered because the Chinese word for sweets and for Heaven is the same, tian. Wooden blocks are tossed like dice to tell when the gods have finished their meal and have granted the wishes of the faithful. Special offerings are made in the home to ancestors. The entire family gathers to have a large meal of fish, meat, and special cakes. Gifts are exchanged and red envelopes with money are given to children.

Balance to the year Religious Daoists divide the year into three parts. The first, the Reign of the Spirits of Heaven, follows the New Year and lasts for six months. To usher in this period, a banquet is served for the gods in the temple and then taken home by families and eaten. At the end of the Reign of the Spirits of Heaven, ceremonies are performed to give those who have not followed the Dao a second chance. The second part of the year is the Reign of the Forgiver of Sins, and the third is the Reign of the Water Spirits. Each begins on the fifteenth of the month and is welcomed by a banquet to the gods.

These three divisions provide a focus for religious Daoists. The first half of the year is a time for recommitting to one's religion and for making prayers to the heavenly gods. The second period is a time to dwell on one's sins and ask for forgiveness. And the third division of the year brings the faithful to think of water, one of the five basic elements, but also a symbol for the flow of the Dao and for the effortless action of wu wei.

Pilgrimages Many Daoist holy places in China have been disrupted and, in many cases, destroyed in modern times. However, many sacred sites

still remain, including the Five Mountains so highly praised by early Daoists. These mountains include:

- Tai Shan, the eastern mountain, in Shandong province;
- Heng Shan Bei, the mountain of the north, in Shanxi province;
- Hua Shan, the western mountain, also in Shanxi province;
- Heng Shan Nan, the southern mountain, in Hunan province;
- Song Shan, the mountain of the center, in Henan province.

The palace of Zhang Daoling, the Celestial Master Mansion, in Yintan, Jiangxi province, China, is the classic seat of the Daoist popes, or Celestial Masters. After Mao Zedong brought communism to China in 1949, the Celestial Masters abandoned their traditional home and moved their headquarters to Taiwan, an island off the coast of mainland China. The White Cloud Daoist Monastery in Beijing is also a holy site for Daoists, as is the Eight Immortals Temple in Shanxi province and the Purple Heaven Temple on Mount Wudang in Hubei province.

Daoists visit these sites for a variety of reasons. Many find a closer connection to their beliefs simply by being in one of the sacred or historic sites associated with Daoism. They go to meditate, pray, or make offerings. Some use such pilgrimages as a way to ask a favor of the gods; others use such visits to put them into closer contact with the Dao. Still others combine tourism or vacations with more religious reasons.

Everyday living

Daoists believe in selective, careful, and well-thought-out action. This concept of *wu wei* is applied daily in the lives of those who follow Daoism. Decisions, especially important ones such as marriage, choice of career, and family matters, are carefully considered before taking action. Often the Daoist priest is consulted before such decisions are made.

There is no special clothing particular to Daoists. Many follow a vegetarian lifestyle, resolving not to harm nature or to take the lives of animals. The Daoist interest in health and vitality, in preserving the *qi*, generally leads to a healthy lifestyle of moderation in all things.

Meditative exercises Meditation is another daily practice for Daoists. It promotes a more deliberate lifestyle, thoughtful and aware, as well as less hurried. The basic rule for meditation is given in the *Dao De Jing*, which states, “Empty your mind of all thoughts.” Such meditation is also referred to as “sitting and forgetting” in the *Zhuangzi*.

Feng Shui

One of the more well-known aspects of Daoism to those outside the religion is *feng shui* (pronounced FUNG shway). For many in the modern world, feng shui is simply a method for designing and decorating living or working space. But feng shui is much more than a system of interior design. It is actually a religion of its own that has been blended into Daoist practice. *Feng shui* means “wind and water,” and archaeological evidence (physical remains of the past) indicates it may be four thousand years old.

Feng shui discovers the *qi*, or energy of the Dao, as it runs through the earth and affects humans. Followers of feng shui believe that it is necessary to channel the *qi* to keep it from disturbing the lives of humans who live in it. Those who practice feng shui attempt to ensure that the *qi* flows properly in one’s living space and that a proper balance of yin and yang is found.

It also uses astrology, a form of telling the future from the positions of the stars and planets on one’s birth date. The *Yijing* (also spelled *I Ching*, or “Book of Changes”), an ancient Chinese text for telling the future by the placement of

symbolic hexagrams (patterns of six lines), is also used in some schools of feng shui to help determine the correct environment. In its earliest form feng shui was used for finding the best gravesite. Later it came to be used to determine the best place to build an imperial palace. Over the centuries it was turned into a science and art for the common people as well. Even in the early twenty-first century many Daoists would not think of buying an apartment or redesigning their homes without consulting a feng shui master.

Feng shui is applied in everyday life to design interior space that allows for the healthy circulation of *qi*. Feng shui rules warn against having the foot of the bed facing the door, for example, for the flow of *qi* will disturb sleep. Rounded corners are preferred for pools. Windows should not slide up and down, for that way they do not allow enough *qi* in or out. Numerology, or the study of the spiritual power of numbers, also plays a role in feng shui. One should always have an even number of dining room chairs, for example. Odd numbers represent loneliness, while even numbers represent luck.

Daoist meditation has several levels, and only the most practiced students or masters ever reach the highest level. Breath control is part of meditation. Daoists try to guide the breath through the body, concentrating on inhaling, holding, and exhaling in rhythm. At first this is accomplished by actually counting the time for each part of the breathing process, but eventually such breathing can become second nature.

The breath is the *qi*, or energy of the body. Daoists attempt to direct the flow of *qi* by breath control. Visualization is also used in meditation. In this process, the person focuses on a god or on one of the heavenly bodies in order to push out negative thoughts, such as anger and jealousy. Many Daoists also practice the art of *taijichuan* in order to help channel *qi*. *Taijichuan* uses gentle movements to promote health and long life.

Its goal is to return the body and the mind to its original pure state. Daoist taijichuan uses a lot of stretching and turning in the 108 movements of the exercise.

From birth to death Daoism figures into the major events of each person's life. Babies in the womb are protected by the guardian spirit, Tai Shen, so pregnant women make regular offerings to that deity. After birth, further offerings are made to female spirits. These offerings are usually of baby clothes, for these spirits are considered to be mothers themselves. A Daoist adult is chosen as a godparent, and more offerings are made when the infant is four months old to ensure its health and safety. The child's first birthday is celebrated with a banquet. Mother spirits are believed to protect the child as it grows, and as the children grow older they learn to chant parts of the Dao De Jing, perform the exercises of taijichuan, and practice calligraphy (beautiful handwriting). Good calligraphy requires concentration and skill, as the artist must control the amount of ink used in each brush stroke and the flexibility of the brush. It is considered by many to be a process that unites body and mind.

Weddings are also special events in the life of Daoists. Though the full rite, created over two thousand years ago, is no longer practiced, parts of that rite are still used. Often a Daoist specialist is consulted to make sure the bride and groom are compatible. The bride and her parents visit the shrines of their ancestors on the day of the wedding, and the groom performs a ritual at his ancestors' shrine to remind him of his duties as a husband. The actual ceremony is brief and simple, but this is followed by an elaborate banquet where the bride and groom sign the document of marriage. The day after the wedding, the bride goes to her in-laws bearing gifts to show that she will soon have children. Three days after the wedding ceremony she returns to her own parents, no longer a member of that family, but now a visitor.

Daoists believe that a person's body and passionate spirit are buried after death, but that the pure spirit lives on. Therefore, Daoist funerals are usually quite elaborate. The day of the funeral is determined by a Daoist calendar specialist. A Daoist priest may come to the person's home to make sure preparations for the funeral are in order. Favorite belongings, food, and white papers with prayers, charms, and spells written on them are also placed in the coffin. Later, these pieces of paper are taken from the coffin and burned in order to send them to heaven. A banquet is served once the coffin is sealed.

Daily details Daoism affects all aspects of a believer's life. A typical day for a Daoist might begin with an offering at the family altar or shrine. This could be food for an ancestor or perhaps the burning of incense for the Earth God to bless the day's activities. The Daoist calendar might be consulted to see what is supposed to happen on that day, for Daoists are strong believers in the effects of the movements of the planets and various nature spirits on a person's life. Many buildings, including homes, schools, and offices, may have been built and furnished according to the rules of feng shui. If the family feels out of balance, a Daoist priest might be asked to perform an exorcism to rid the home of evil spirits.

On his or her way to work, a Daoist might participate in or see others practicing taijichuan in the parks. If ill, the person might visit an acupuncturist or someone who practices herbal medicine. A Daoist procession might be passing along the street where a person walks, or a ritual might be in process in a temple. Back at home at the end of the day and as the family gathers for dinner, they are watched over by the Kitchen God, for every family usually has a picture of this deity in the kitchen, ready to report on their actions at the end of the year.

Daoism's influences

Daoist thought has had a significant effect on Chinese life and culture. The basic principle of Daoism, to live in unity with the Dao, shapes the lives of millions. Practices such as breath control and taijiquan, for example, have become a part of the regular routine of millions. In any park in a major city of China or Taiwan, people can be seen practicing taijiquan, seeking the benefits of its control of qi, even if they are not aware of how the practice links them to a religious tradition. Similarly, the portrayal of nature in Chinese art evokes the Dao, with its simplicity, clean lines, and open space inspiring a feeling of calm and quiet. This is a direct result of the Daoist emphasis on living in harmony with the patterns and rhythms of nature and the Dao. The Daoist ideal of self-restraint and humbleness, parts of *de* (virtue) is valued by many Chinese people, whether they are practicing Daoists or not.

Influences on medicine Chinese herbal medicine is based largely on the work of early Daoists who were searching for immortality or concerned with maintaining a positive flow of qi in the body. Over the course of centuries, Daoists have discovered and recorded the medicinal uses of thousands of plants, including trees, flowers, fruits, herbs, and fungi.

Daoists have also long emphasized a balanced diet to maintain good health. Many experiments with plants and minerals are recorded in the sixteenth-century Daoist work, the *Great Pharmacopoeia*, or directory of drugs. Perhaps the earliest medical book is Daoist in origin, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic on Medicine*, more than two thousand years old and the product of a Celestial Master.

Daoist Sun Sumiao lived during the Tang Dynasty and practiced traditional Chinese medicine. He has been called the “king of medicine.” Sun contributed much to Chinese traditional medicine, and he shared this knowledge in several books. Among his works are the *Treatise on Alchemy* and *Inscription on Visualizing Spirits and Refining Vital Breath*. The *Inscription on Visualizing Spirits and Refining Vital Breath* discusses the relationship between body, breath, and spirit. It details how breath and spirit must be maintained in order to care for the body and describes how, through practice, one can achieve long life and realize the Dao. Daoists of the Tang Dynasty who wished to study the breath often referred to this book. The *Treatise on Alchemy* addressed food in much the way a modern doctor might. Sun suggested that “when a person is sick, the doctor should first regulate the patient’s diet and lifestyle.” If that treatment failed he recommended looking at additional therapies, such as acupuncture.

The Five Elements and yin and yang principles are important to Chinese medicine. When the qi is blocked, it can create pain or other problems in the body. The elements of yin and yang are used to identify and resolve these problems. While yin and yang are two opposites, they are always shown together. Ideally, each side will be equally balanced. When they fall out of balance, a person becomes ill.

The Five Elements of fire, earth, wood, metal, and air can also become out of balance, causing sickness. Each part of the body is related to a particular element. For instance, the heart is “fire” and the kidneys are “water.” If a person has a complaint about the kidneys, it is possible his or her “water” is not properly balanced. Determining which elements are imbalanced is very complicated and takes years of study.

Acupuncture and acupressure are techniques to help correct any imbalance between yin and yang or the Five Elements in the body. In acupuncture, thin needles are inserted into certain points in the body that have been determined to control the flow of qi. These points are not necessarily close to the affected part of the body, but they release energy to



Many Daoists practice taijichuan, or tai chi, to help keep their body and mind pure and balanced. The practice of taijichuan has become popular even with people who do not follow the religion. AP IMAGES.

that point to aid in healing. The depth of the needles in the skin and the twisting of them all determine the extent of the treatment. In acupressure, a similar release and direction of qi are accomplished with manipulation and pressure put on the same points, without the use of needles. The details of acupuncture practice, including the pressure points on the body, the benefits and side effects, and the ways to apply the needles, were gathered together from 475 to 221 BCE and published in the *Yellow Emperor's Classic on Medicine*. Knowledge of acupuncture and its techniques grew rapidly into the fourteenth century. It has been widely practiced in China since this time.

Both acupuncture and acupressure were developed by Daoist masters. Acupuncture began to be noticed in the United States in the early twentieth century, but it was rarely practiced until the 1970s. Since then it has slowly become more widely used in the West. Western medical science, however, has had difficulties understanding how the principles of

yin and yang and the Five Elements, on which acupuncture and acupressure are based, fit into its very different approach to health and healing. Qi has no similar counterpart in Western medicine. Nevertheless, many Westerners increasingly seek out these Chinese therapies as an alternative to other medical treatments.

The Daoist emphasis on direct observation of nature has influenced the Chinese attitude towards science in general. For example, the Daoist herbalists made minute and detailed drawings of the plants they wished to record, and this in turn led to advancements in the science of botany, the study of plants. The herbalists helped to advance the classification and physical description of plants by their careful drawings.

Influences on the arts This close observation of nature also made a deep impression on Chinese art. Historians point out that one of the high points of Chinese art in the seventeenth century came at a time when Daoist thought and influence were experiencing a renaissance, or rebirth and growth in popularity. Nature became the subject matter for painters; humans were included in such paintings but usually were portrayed as very small creatures against the vastness of nature. Such paintings were meditations in themselves, with each brushstroke the result of precise, planned effort. The paintings could take minutes, days, or years to complete.

Chinese calligraphy owes its development as an art in large part to Daoist monks and believers who practiced such printing as a form of meditation. As with paintings, calligraphy could take minutes or days to create. The final product reproduces Chinese characters, or written words, with ink and brush in a way of simple beauty. One of the most famous Chinese calligraphers was Wang Xianzhi (334–386 CE). Wang, a Daoist, lived during the Jin Dynasty (317–420). He worked in several government positions and eventually achieved a high rank. Wang studied calligraphy under his father, Wang Xizhi. Both were very skilled. Together they were known as *Er Wang*, meaning the Two Wangs. Wang Xianzhi experimented to form his own style of writing calligraphy, known for being bold and sophisticated.

Similarly Daoism has had a strong effect on Chinese literature, including the lyrical and concise verse of the *Dao De Jing* and the storytelling humor of the *Zhuangzi*. The same reverence for nature seen in the visual arts can be found throughout Chinese literature. Li Po (also spelled Li Bai; 701–761) was the author of more than one thousand poems, most

of which deal with nature in the life of a Daoist. Even a war poem, such as his “Moon over Mountain Pass,” which talks of the horrors of battle, begins with a lyrical vision of nature:

A bright moon rising above T'ien Shan
 Lost in a vast ocean of clouds.
 The long wind, across thousands and thousands of miles,
 Blows past the Jade-gate Pass.

Writings of the popular Mao Shan religious sect influenced later Chinese texts, particularly in the Tang Dynasty. Li Po, one of the greatest poets in Chinese history, was a Mao Shan member. One of the central Mao Shan texts, *Lives of the Perfected*, inspired the Chinese classic, *The Intimate Biography of Han Emperor Wu*. This story relays the events that unfold when the goddess Xi Wang-mu, Royal Mother of the West, visits Emperor Wu. This, in turn, influenced Tang romantic literature.

Daoist thought influenced the Chinese language itself, with concepts of the Dao, de, and qi, assuming new and more complex meanings. Dao, for instance, came to mean a path to universal harmony and internal balance. De, which had originally meant raw power, came to represent power and strength through virtue. Qi now refers to the vital energy brought by breath.

Influences in and outside China Daoism influenced other religions, including Confucianism and Buddhism. While Confucianism defines social conduct, Daoism describes conduct that goes beyond society. For example, the sense of detachment Daoism teaches often leads to rejection of society and its influences. Daoism is about finding individual balance apart from the world, while Confucianism teaches that such balance is found only in society, by following the rules and rituals of society. Thus, the two systems are themselves representative of the idea of yin and yang. Daoist thought also has its social aspects, however, while Confucianism, with its regard for the mysticism of the Yijing, also has some occult features. In some respects, then, each religion borrowed from the other.

Daoist terms were used to interpret Buddhist principles, especially those regarding meditation. For example, after achieving enlightenment, the Buddha was described as having reached the Dao. Also, the Buddhist idea of *nirvana* (the end of suffering) was equated with wu wei.

Daoism has also had influence in the West. Daoist techniques of meditation have been incorporated into many forms of religion and

into therapeutic (healing) schools. Daoist practices, including feng shui and taijichuan, have found a welcome home in the West, and the Daoist respect for nature has found its way into Western environmental movements. The concept of Dao has been adopted for use in book titles, from business management guides to cookbooks to the interpretation of quantum physics, as in *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, by Fritjof Capra. All these influences of Daoism indicate how strong the concept of the religion is in the world.

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Greco-Roman Religion and Philosophy

The ancient Greek and Roman worlds made important contributions to both religion and philosophy, the study of the nature of truth, knowledge, and moral values. In fact the word *philosophy* is of Greek origin, combining the words *philia* or “to love” with *sophia* or “wisdom.”

Greek and Roman religion was polytheistic; ancient Greeks and Romans worshipped many gods and goddesses. Devout members of both groups believed that there were gods who influenced all natural phenomena. Ancient Greeks developed elaborate myths, or stories that explained these phenomena in terms of how these deities behaved, their strengths and weaknesses, and their histories. Each Greek *polis*, or city-state (independent political units consisting of a city and the countryside around it) had its own set of important gods and goddesses and its own way to worship and honor them. Eventually most Greeks identified a pantheon (a group of all gods and goddesses) of twelve major deities.

The Greeks called this set of twelve gods and goddesses the Olympian gods, because they supposedly lived on Mount Olympus in northern Greece. They were led by Zeus and his wife Hera. The worship of these twelve deities was connected to the political life of the city-state, and all citizens were expected to participate in public worship as part of their duty to the state. The Romans, who greatly admired Greek culture, later identified their own deities with powers similar to the Greek gods. Many of the myths and other stories known about the Greek gods actually have come through Roman authors, who adapted the work of Greek writers or created stories of their own to fit their conception of the Greek deities.

Ancient Greeks and Romans were strongly affected by these gods and goddesses. They worshipped them daily, offering parts of each meal to the gods and taking part in special religious festivals and holidays. The major life cycle events of birth, marriage, and death were also

celebrated by religious rituals and ceremonies. The Greek myths, in turn, attempted to explain the mysteries of life and nature, such as the origin of the world and the creation of the seasons. However, Greek religion, and later Roman religion, had no specific rules of proper behavior. There was no set of religious beliefs or principles to follow. Each citizen was free to decide how he or she should behave, as long as he participated in the public official worship ceremonies.

As a result, in Greek secular (nonreligious) life there was room for discussion about what a good life meant, and even for wondering about how nature is constructed. Greco-Roman philosophy, the system of thinking established and used in ancient Greece and Rome, took over the discussion of these questions. In other cultures these questions were answered by religion. For this reason, Greco-Roman philosophy was revolutionary in the history of human thought. It relied on logical reasoning, established the first scientific vocabulary, and generally laid the foundation for much of future Western philosophy (the philosophy of countries in Europe and the Americas). From the sixth century BCE on, the Greco-Roman tradition served as the dominant religious and philosophical system of the western world until about the fifth century CE.

Greco-Roman philosophy focused on objective inquiry, asking unbiased questions that favor no particular outcome. It is often seen as humanity's first attempt to provide rational explanations for the workings of the world, without mythological content (traditional legends or stories) or the use of gods to explain existence. The Milesian School (early philosophers who tried to explain how nature was made) searched for an underlying element, *archē*, constituting all matter. Later Socratic thought, which followed the teachings of the Athenian philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE) added social, ethical, and political theories to established philosophy. These philosophies later inspired Roman thinkers during the period of the Roman Empire (c. 31 BCE–476 CE).

Although many of the answers found by early Greek philosophers regarding the nature of the universe were later proved false, their use of logical analysis led to the rise of the scientific method. The scientific method is an approach to conducting research in which a problem is stated, data or pieces of information are gathered, a hypothesis or intelligent guess is made from these data, and this hypothesis is then tested through experiments. Socrates, for instance, developed a teaching

WORDS TO KNOW

apathia: Stoic belief that happiness comes from freedom from internal turmoil.

apeiron: Anaximander's term for the first principle, an undefined and unlimited substance.

archē: The beginning or ultimate principle; the stuff of all matter, or the building block of creation.

ataraxia: Serenity, tranquility, or peace of mind.

atomism: The belief that matter is composed of simple, indivisible, physical particles that are too tiny to be observed by human beings.

consciousness: The condition of being aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and existence.

emanation: That which inevitably flows outward from the transcendental (spiritual, beyond human experience) central principle of reality, "the One," in the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus.

empiricism: Belief that knowledge comes through the senses.

Epicureanism: The philosophy of Epicurus and others that states that the highest good is pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

ethics: Branch of philosophy concerned with the evaluation of human conduct.

Logos: Meaning word or logic, it is the defining pattern of the universe, similar to the Dao in Chinese philosophy.

metaphysics: The branch of philosophy that deals with explanations for the most general

questions of being, such as what brought the world into being, and the nature of space, time, God, and the afterlife.

metempsychosis: Transmigration of souls, or the migration of the soul into a different form, animal, or object after death.

morality: Following the rules of right behavior and conduct.

pantheon: A collection of deities, or gods and goddesses.

philosophy: The rational or logical investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct.

rationalism: Belief that knowledge can come exclusively from the mind.

Skepticism: A philosophical system that doubted the possibility of ever discovering real truth through the senses.

Socratic: Having to do with the philosopher Socrates and his method of asking questions of students to develop an idea.

Sophists: A group of traveling teachers in ancient Greece who doubted the possibility of knowing all the truth through the physical senses.

Stoicism: The philosophical system that holds that people should pursue the knowledge of human and divine things through the use of logical systems. It also says that we may not be able to control natural events, but we can control the way we react to them.

method in which the student follows a logical path through questions and answers. Certain Greek scientific findings did prove accurate. For example, the concept of atoms as building blocks of matter, usually thought of as a nineteenth-century discovery, was actually first developed by two Greek philosophers in about 400 BCE.

Other Greek concepts come close to the worldviews of Buddhism and Daoism, which see all things in life as being interconnected. The Greeks attempted to view all aspects of the universe as parts of the same whole. Though often looked down upon in their times, the early Greeks and Romans made many important philosophical advances.

History and development: Greco-Roman religion

The origins of ancient Greek religion go back thousands of years. The Greeks took some of their ideas from the ancient Minoan civilization (c. 3000–c. 1000 BCE), located primarily on the island of Crete, and some from the Mycenaean civilization (c. 2000–c. 1100 BCE), centered primarily on the Peloponnesian peninsula of southern Greece. They also borrowed from Egyptian religions and from west-Asian civilizations. By about 900 BCE these numerous gods and goddesses had begun to be organized into the pantheon, or collection of deities, honored in ancient Greece.

The Religion's rise Two writers are credited with this task of organizing the gods and the myths surrounding them: Homer (born c. 900 BCE), and Hesiod, who lived in about the eighth century BCE. Homer's famous epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* give order to the chaos of all the separate myths that existed at the time. An epic poem is a long narrative poem that relays the story of heroic deeds. Homer explained the family relationships between the various gods, gave each one a title and a specific power or responsibility, such as Zeus, as the supreme god; Poseidon, the god of sea; or Ares, the god of war. He also gave them very human qualities. Homer is held responsible for raising twelve gods over the others and giving them Mount Olympus as their living place. This phase of Greek religion is called Homeric, after the poet.

While Homer's gods could sometimes be cruel or selfish, they all demonstrated a basic moral code, or rules for good behavior. They were loyal to friends and family, honest, and brave. About a century later, the poet Hesiod, in his poems called the *Theogony* (a family tree of the gods) and *Works and Days* established the Olympian gods at the

center of Greek religion. Similarly, two Roman poets created a mixed Greco-Roman mythology and pantheon of gods by adapting the Greek myths. These two writers were Virgil (70–19 BCE) and Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE). Virgil was the author of the *Aeneid*, a kind of sequel to Homer's *Iliad*, which tells the tale of Aeneas and the founding of Rome, while Ovid is best known for the *Metamorphoses*, an epic collection and expansion of Greek and Roman myths.

The Olympian gods remained at the center of Greek culture and religion for several hundred years. The climax of their power came during the middle of the fifth century BCE, in the polis of Athens. In 490 BCE Greece was invaded by the forces of the Persian Empire. Athenians (citizens of Athens) led the resistance to the Persian invaders and defeated their much larger army at the battle of Marathon. When the Persians mounted a second invasion ten years later, Athenian leaders were vital in driving them away. Because of its role in the Persian wars, Athens became the strongest polis in all of Greece, a leader in culture as well as in politics.

The writers Aristophanes (525–456 BCE.), Sophocles (496–406 BCE.), and Euripides (480–405 BCE.) helped clarify the powers and the relationship of the Olympian gods to human beings and to each other in their plays. In much the same manner as Homer and Hesiod before them, the playwrights examined historical and contemporary events and attributed the causes of those events to the gods. Plays like Aeschylus's *The Oresteia*, Sophocles's *Antigone*, and Euripides's *Elektra* emphasize the power of the gods and the uselessness of human effort in the face of divine indifference.

The Religion's decline The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) was one of the most widespread and damaging of the events the Athenian playwrights chose as the subjects of their plays. The war involved almost all of the Greek world in a long and bloody conflict. The primary combatants in the war were Athens and its major rival for power, Sparta. Athens lost this struggle, which brought an end to its Golden Age (c. 460–430 BCE). Warfare continued between other rivals in the Greek world for the next two centuries. When a king from the north, Philip II of Macedon (359–336 BCE), launched an attack on the city-states, the situation for the city-states worsened. Philip's son Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) completed the conquest of Greece. The Olympian gods seemed powerless to help them. Ultimately, the Greek pantheon lost its influence in Greek life, and by the fourth century CE, Christianity had taken its place.

About Greco-Roman Religion

- **Belief.** Greco-Roman religion was polytheistic, believing in many gods. The twelve main gods formed a pantheon, or group. All the gods could involve themselves in human affairs and often acted very much like humans.
 - **Followers.** All Greek and Roman citizens were obliged to follow the religion. This symbolized their obedience and loyalty to the state.
 - **Name of God.** The main god in the ancient Greek religion was Zeus, who was known to Romans as Jupiter.
 - **Symbols.** Images of the gods were often displayed in paintings and sculptures. The gods often carried objects that represented them and their powers. For instance, the arrow was a symbol of Artemis, goddess of the hunt.
 - **Worship.** Ritual sacrifices were a common element of Greco-Roman religion.
- Daily prayers were offered privately in the home.
- **Dress.** Worshippers wore no special attire.
 - **Texts.** The works of Homer, Hesiod, Ovid, and Virgil collected and organized Greco-Roman myths. Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey* remain popular with modern readers.
 - **Sites.** Delphi was a special location to Greeks, who would consult with its famous oracle.
 - **Observances.** Each member of the Greco-Roman pantheon had festival days attributed to him or her, such as the Great Dionysia held each spring in Athens in honor of the fertility god Dionysius.
 - **Phrases.** There is no common word or phrase that was shared between worshippers.

The gods of the Roman pantheon lost their influence in a similar process. From the reign of Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), Roman emperors were worshipped as gods after their death, and the cult of the emperor partly displaced the worship of the traditional gods. Constantine the Great (c. 288–337) became the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, and by the end of the fourth century Theodosius I (c. 346–395), also a Christian, officially banned the practice of the old Roman polytheistic religion.

History and development: Greco-Roman philosophy

Some believe the beginning of early Greek philosophy can be traced to contact with ancient Egypt and Babylonia. By the seventh century BCE Egyptians had allowed Ionian (from the west coast of modern-day Turkey) traders to establish a seaport on a branch of the Nile River

at the city of Naucratis. One theory holds that traders brought ancient Egyptian wisdom and practices home to the shores of Asia Minor. The prosperous center of Miletus, on the Ionian coast, was one place where many of these travelers gathered and distributed their knowledge to other traders throughout the Mediterranean world. Whether indigenous (native) or borrowed, the Ionian, or Milesian, School was the beginning of Greek philosophy.

The Milesian school The thinkers of the Milesian School described the nature of the universe and of change and motion by the use of reasoning. Writers and thinkers such as Thales (c. 636–c. 546 BCE), Anaximander (c. 611–c. 547 BCE), and Anaximenes (sixth century BCE) concentrated on the study of nature. They searched for the *archē*. They believed that this *archē* was the first substance or idea, which predated anything else in the universe. The Milesian philosophers thought that, if they could discover the *archē*, they would understand something important about the nature of the universe.

For Thales, the *archē* was water. Although many of his students rejected his ideas, the Ionian philosopher was still honored for the boldness and innovation of his ideas. Thales is also thought to have introduced geometry (a type of mathematics dealing with angles and lines, and with their measurement) to Greece. An able astronomer, he correctly predicted an eclipse of the sun (when light from the sun is blocked by the moon as it comes between the earth and sun) in 585 BCE. An astronomer is someone who studies the planets and stars.

Thales's pupil, Anaximander, also attempted to give detailed explanations of nature. He defined the primary source of everything as the *apeiron*, or the unlimited and infinite. This concept in some ways is similar to the modern conception of space, in its idea of something without end. Anaximenes, the last of the Milesian School, believed that the primary substance was air or vapor. In his view, the thinning and thickening of air gave substance to life. Heraclitus (c. 535–c. 475 BCE) thought in much the same way as the earlier nature philosophers. He was also from Ionia, though from Ephesus and not from Miletus. Heraclitus believed in fire as the primary element. Therefore, he thought that all things came from and returned to fire. Even though everything was always changing, changes were structured by the Logos, the logic of the universe. The human soul, according to Heraclitus, was but one part of the universal fire.

About Greco-Roman Philosophy

- **Belief.** Reason and rational thought can provide answers about the origin and nature of the cosmos without involving the supernatural or gods.
- **Followers.** Those who turned to philosophy often did so because Greco-Roman religion did not address their questions about nature and existence. As the religion declined in popularity, more people turned to philosophy for answers.
- **Name of God.** Logos, or reason and defining pattern, was used by several Greek philosophers to denote the way matter and all life is organized. Logos was not, however, considered a god, but a concept or ideal.
- **Symbols.** There is no symbol that represents Greco-Roman philosophy.
- **Texts.** Plato's *The Republic* is the most influential single text from Greco-Roman philosophy.
- **Sites.** Athens, Greece, is often viewed as the seat of Greek learning.
- **Phrases.** "Know thyself" might be considered the most important phrase of Greco-Roman philosophy.

A second major school of thought revolved around the mathematician Pythagoras (c. 582–c. 507 BCE), who believed that the universe could be explained in terms of numbers. Pythagoras was a native of the Greek island of Samos. He and his followers formed a religious/philosophical society in southern Italy that practiced secret rites and believed in metempsychosis, the doctrine, or set of beliefs, that states that after death the soul moves from one person to another, or even to an animal or an object. The unity of the world, as far as Pythagoreans were concerned, could be found not in a physical substance but in the relations of numbers, as seen in the regular progress of musical chords and harmonies. Pythagoras, for example, is credited with discovering the numerical relations of tones to divisions of a stretched string. He developed a numerical system to explain the harmony generated by these tones that is still in use in modern music. For the followers of Pythagoras, the aim of human life was to live in harmony with these numerical relationships.

Italy was also home to the Eleatic School, named for the location of its major thinkers in Elea, Italy. Some say the founder of this tradition was Xenophanes (c. 570–c. 480 BCE) of Colophon. Others give credit to Parmenides (born c. 511 BCE). Xenophanes was the first of the

so-called pantheists, who found God in everything. For him, the deities of Greek religion and mythology were misrepresentations of the reality of the universe. God, he insisted, was in no way similar to the humanlike pantheon of Greek deities. Rather, God had no physical being and was eternal and universal. Parmenides, on the other hand, argued that being itself was the one and only constant reality. All changes were simply illusions of the senses. Therefore, only the use of reason, without the use of the senses, could bring humans close to an understanding of the real truth of existence.

Empedocles and the four elements An attempt at compromise was proposed by Empedocles (c. 495–c. 435 BCE). He thought that the four unchanging elements of earth, water, air, and fire all combined to create the harmonious world of movement and variety experienced by the senses. His work led to a basic law of modern physics. His theory of elements remained in use until the modern era. More ideas about the mixing of elements to create all of matter came from Anaxagoras (c. 500–c. 428 BCE). With the rise of Anaxagoras, the center of philosophy moved from the fringes of the empire to Athens, in the heart of Greece. For this philosopher, everything was infinitely divisible into tiny particles of many kinds, which were mixed together by the organizing principle of *nous* or “mind.” This *nous* was not godlike. It did not create matter, but only organized it.

The work of the fifth-century BCE Atomists, who believed that all matter is made up of tiny, indivisible, and indestructible particles, marked a high point in the search for a rational explanation for the existence of the universe. Democritus (c. 460–c. 370 BCE) believed that everything was made up of small primary bodies or elements, called atoms. He theorized that these atoms were in constant motion. Heavier atoms formed Earth, while lighter ones made up the planets and stars. He further stated that the senses see the collective presence (the “big picture”) rather than the separateness and diversity of atoms. Therefore, the senses could not be trusted to understand ultimate reality. Thought and the mind were the instruments to be used for such a goal.

One other important early school of philosophy was formed by the Sophists of the fifth century BCE. The Sophists were teachers in Athens who were skeptical about what the human mind could know. Protagoras (c. 490–c. 421 BCE) was one of the better-known Sophists. He believed that truth is relative, depending on perspective or point of view. He is famous for saying, “Man is the measure of all things.” Rather than rejecting the senses as tools to be used in the search for knowledge and truth, the Sophists believed that all knowledge was necessarily based on information gathered by the senses. Finding truth on both sides of an argument, because all truth depends on perspective, became a cornerstone in Western education.



Atomists such as Democritus believed that all matter was made up of small, indivisible, and indestructible particles. Science later proved that atoms were essential elements of matter, but they could be further divided. PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION.

Socrates and Plato With Socrates (469–399 BCE), Greek philosophy entered a new period. The Sophists had already shifted discussions away from the substance of nature, or natural science, to the realm of morality and society. Morality is a system of acceptable human behavior. Socrates deepened and expanded the trend. He dismissed the material and physical theories of earlier thinkers to focus on the thoughts and opinions of individuals. This led him to inquire into the nature of such virtues as courage, justice, and morality. He developed an ethical system of behavior rather than attempting to explain origins or the afterlife. Socrates wrote nothing down, and what is known of him comes from his pupils, especially Plato (428–348 BCE).

Socrates is understood to have lived by the principles that he created. He famously stated that he knew nothing but the fact that he knew nothing. For him, questions of metaphysics were unimportant. (Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with explanations about what brought the world into being, and the nature of space, time, God, and the afterlife.) He believed that the soul was the source of a person's consciousness and morality, and that true understanding should lead to the living of a good life. He emphasized that one could live a good life by questioning one's own preconceived notions, particularly through a method of self-examination called *elenchus*. This method ultimately led to the well-known Socratic method called the dialectic, or finding the truth through questioning and considering opposing beliefs and then modifying one's own beliefs. Socrates was brought to trial and executed in 399 BCE on the charges of disbelieving in the gods and corrupting the young people of Athens through his teachings.

The teachings of Socrates gave rise to many schools. Perhaps his most important student was Plato, whose teachings and writings, such as *The Republic*, have been among the most influential in Western philosophy. Plato's writings consist primarily of dialogues, or conversations, usually with Socrates as one of the speakers. Plato wrote about moral virtue, how to lead a good life, and the nature of knowledge. He also wrote about the immortality of the soul. In fact, Plato was the first of the Greek philosophers to offer an extensive argument concluding that the soul was immortal. In many ways Plato blended much of the work that had come before. His conception was that humans wanted to become one with the bigger and eternal world of the Idea and the Ideal, of which the waking world was only a shadow.



Aristotle (right) was a student of Plato's school, the Academy. Plato (left) wrote on living a good life, while Aristotle focused on using the intellect to observe nature. © TED SPIEGEL/CORBIS.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was a student at Plato's school, the Academy. Aristotle later opened his own school, the Lyceum, and became the tutor to the Greek king and conqueror Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE). He wrote about politics, art theory, nature classification, physics (the science of matter and energy and their interactions), and speech. For Aristotle, a person's intellect was his or her most important quality. Aristotle did not try to discover any ultimate reality. Rather, his starting point was the world of reality that humans perceive. He taught that the intellect should be used in the observance of nature. In terms of ethics, he taught a balanced path, featuring the avoidance of extremes. The highest good for anything was the realization of its nature and purpose. Hence, for humans, the highest good was to exercise the specifically human skill of rationality (reasoned thought). Aristotle and Plato were perhaps the most influential of the classical Greek philosophers.

Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism Classical philosophy after Aristotle is sometimes called Hellenistic philosophy. The small, independent city-states of ancient Greece were incorporated into the empire founded by Alexander the Great and then later folded into the Roman Empire. New cities and centers of learning were founded, such as Alexandria, Egypt, with a library containing over 700,000 volumes. Indeed, even after the conquest of Greece by Rome in 146 BCE Greek schools of

thought continued to thrive. Alongside the followers of Aristotle, who continued to spread his ideas, three other major schools of thought were later developed: Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism. These lasted until the Roman Empire was dissolved in 476 CE.

Stoicism, founded by Zeno of Citium (c. 340–265 BCE) in about 300 BCE, got its name because the original thinkers met in a *stoa*, or a columned porch. Zeno adapted the Socratic ideas of virtue and blended them with a description of the physical universe as explained by Heraclitus and Aristotle. These ideas were later built upon by Zeno's followers, in particular Chrysippus (c. 280–c. 207 BCE), who incorporated some of Plato's theories. Stoics of the Roman period included Epictetus (c. 50–c. 138 CE) and the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE). Epictetus said that happiness came from freedom from internal turmoil, or *apatheia*, a concept similar to Buddhism's *nirvana*, which is the end of suffering.

Basically, Stoics believed that a moral life should be lived on the principles of physics and ethics. That is, people should pursue knowledge through the use of logical systems of thought. Stoics further believed that all parts of the world were interrelated, part of a huge and unchanging chain of causation (producing an effect). The greatest good was therefore brought about when human and divine will were in harmony and when humans acted in agreement with nature. The ideal virtuous person would approach knowledge from this viewpoint. The Stoics held that although people cannot control what happens to them, they can control how they react to such happenings. In this way, unhappiness is caused, not by the world, but by the individual's reactions to the world. In a sense, Stoicism proposed that people should meet life's challenges with dignity.

The goal of Stoicism was *ataraxia*, or peace of mind. This was also the goal of Epicureanism, a philosophy founded by Epicurus (341–270 BCE). For Epicurus, philosophy was the art of making humans happy. All divine or spiritual elements were made secondary to ethical ones, and pleasure was considered the highest good. This concept of pleasure centered on the avoidance of pain and the attainment of *ataraxia* through intellectual, rather than physical pleasures. According to Epicurus, people were to live simply and not desire the wrong things. Acting justly and honestly was wise not because of some abstract idea of virtue, but because doing so would prevent a person from suffering any retribution from society. Indeed, Epicureans believed that the soul died with the body and, therefore, death was not to be feared.

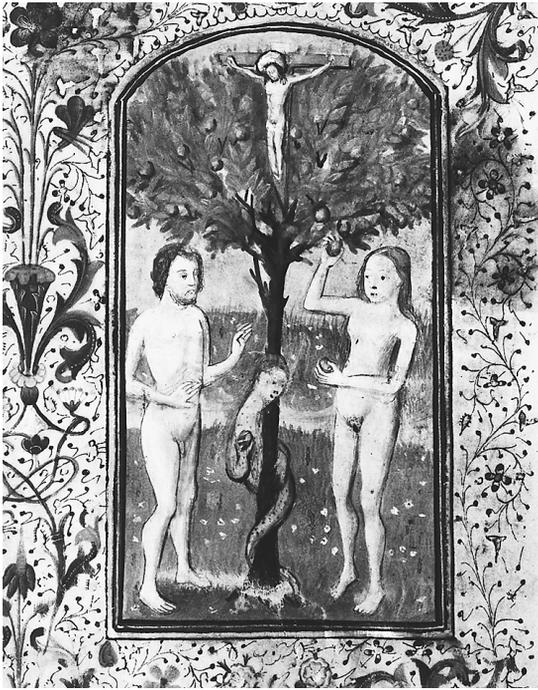
The Skeptics formed another Hellenic school of thought, as founded by Pyrrho of Elis (c. 365–275 BCE) and expanded by the Roman Sextus Empiricus in about 200 CE. The philosophers of this school doubted the possibility of ever discovering real truth through the senses. As a result, they taught that people should reserve judgment on things and thereby gain release from the tyranny of theories. While they held that the nature of absolute ethical values could never be known, the Skeptics taught that living by the customs of society was wise.

The last of the great Greco-Roman philosophical systems, Neoplatonism, was developed by Plotinus (205–270 CE). An Egyptian of Roman descent, Plotinus traveled in the East and borrowed ideas and practices, such as breath control and meditation (focused thought with the goal of gaining spiritual understanding), from Indian religions. Plotinus added these Eastern ideas to the writings of Plato, and developed the idea of emanation. This idea held that the universe was created by a series of radiations that began in a divine source, like the ripples flowing out from a stone dropped in water. Neoplatonists called this original source “the One.” The concept of the One led to the concept of the Logos, or the divine order of things, sometimes called the Divine Mind. Beneath this was the World Soul. All three of these realities were linked together, and Plotinus believed that individuals wanted to return to the Divine Mind and then be absorbed back into the One. Sin was the result of being kept separate from the One. These concepts had a powerful influence on early Christianity. The idea of emanation is very close to the idea developed by Christian theologians to explain the concept of the Trinity, the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three divine persons in one God. Moreover, Plotinus’s concept of sin is very close to the Christian concept. Sin, for Plotinus, came about from humans being separated from the One, just as in Christian theology sin arises from humankind’s separation from God.

Sects and schisms

Greek religion was both a public and private matter. But there were no written rules for the religion, no moral code, no dogma (established opinion) or church teaching. The mystery cults could not properly be called sects, as they were simply another way of honoring various gods. However, what could be called a schism or split in Greek religion came about when the Greek philosophers began to offer counter explanations to the myths about the workings of nature.

There were several instances where philosophy conflicted with religion, but the most famous was the trial and execution of Socrates.



Plotinus's idea of emanation, his belief that people wanted to return to the Divine Mind, can be seen in the Christian story of the Fall, when Adam and Eve were tempted into sin and were forced out of the Garden of Eden. PUBLIC DOMAIN.

When he was seventy years old, he was charged with impiety: corrupting young people, insulting the gods of Athens, and teaching about new gods. Socrates argued that Apollo, god of wisdom, had given him the duty to search for the truth and to encourage others to do the same. A jury of 501 Athenians (large enough to give a cross-section of Athenian society and too many to bribe) finally condemned him to death; the method was by drinking a poison made from hemlock. Socrates, a strong believer in the rule of law, took the poison. While Socrates may have broken the laws of Athens by teaching new ideas, his real crime was that one of his students betrayed the city during the Peloponnesian War and caused its defeat.

When the Romans adopted Greek religion, they took many of the gods and the myths and simply gave them new names. Like the Greeks, the Romans believed in many gods, each with a

different power: some controlled love, others dealt with crops and fertility, and others controlled storms. There were, however, differences in the two religions. The Greeks believed that the gods and goddesses had come to give order to chaos. For Greeks, balance was an important principle. They felt that the gods helped humans to establish a balance between the forces of nature and the forces of law and reason. The Romans, however, were more interested in raw power than in balance. Rome incorporated other foreign gods into its pantheon. Among these were the goddess Cybele from the city of Pessinus in Asia Minor, and Mithra, the ancient Persian god of light and wisdom. Mithra offered the promise of individual salvation through the belief in the immortality of the soul. A mystery cult, Mithraism, grew up around this imported god.

Basic beliefs: Greco-Roman religion

Greek religion was dominated by the Olympian gods, who made their home on Mount Olympus in northern Greece. Even though most sources say there were twelve gods living on Mount Olympus, there are fourteen gods listed next. Hades did not live on Olympus, although most myths about him associate him with the Olympian gods, and Dionysius was a later addition to the pantheon:

Heraclitus

While Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are usually considered the founders of modern Western thought, earlier thinkers also significantly influenced Western civilization. One of the most interesting of these thinkers was Heraclitus, who was born to a noble family in Ephesus in about 535 BCE. Though he came a generation later than the Milesian School, Heraclitus continued their tradition of looking for the fundamental substance of all matter. Unlike the other philosophers of Asia Minor, he claimed that everything came from fire. With such a volatile element as his core substance, Heraclitus went on to argue that change was the only reality in the cosmos and that stability was mere illusion. One of his most famous sayings is “We both step and do not step in the same rivers. We are and are not.” Although the universe was held to be in continual flux, the Logos, literally meaning “word” or “logic,” served as an ordering principle. This concept influenced not only Plato but also the Neoplatonists. According to Heraclitus, the soul

was part of the cosmic fire, and only one universal soul truly existed. Heraclitus’s model of nature essentially underlies all modern physics and metaphysics.

Heraclitus has a dominant position in Greco-Roman philosophy despite the fact that little of his original writings still exist. Indeed, the 120 surviving pieces of his thought, in the form of short quotations, are referred to as the *Fragments* in various modern editions of his work. Because of the brief, mysterious nature of his prose, he was often called the “obscurer” or the “riddler.” His poetic statements have more in common with the lyrical Dao De Jing of ancient Chinese philosophy than with other early Greek philosophy. Many scholars have pointed out Heraclitus’s links with Eastern religions. For example, the idea of permanent flux or change is similar to the Buddhist concept of impermanence. The Logos is often equated with the Dao, or the Way, in Daoist belief.

Zeus was a sky god, but he also represented order. He maintained order in the universe and in the home, protected strangers who arrived asking for hospitality, punished people who broke their sworn word, and served as god of intellectual thought.

Zeus’s wife Hera was the goddess of marriage, childbirth, and women. She was also sacred to herders of cattle; Homer often called her “ox-eyed Hera.”

Aphrodite was the goddess of love and beauty.

Ares was the god of war. In warlike Sparta he was held in high regard, but in Athens he was worshipped in the same building where people were tried for murder.

Athena was the goddess of wisdom. According to Greek myth, she was not born the way that her fellow gods were born, but sprang

directly from Zeus's forehead. Because she was the protector and defender of Athens, she is often depicted as armed.

Artemis, the goddess of hunting and wild places, was also a moon goddess. She was Apollo's twin sister, and young men and girls held her sacred because she was a virgin.

Hermes was the messenger of the gods.

Apollo was the sun god and the god of music and prophesy, or predictions on the future. He also represented law and order, appearing in court in Aeschylus's plays.

Hephaestus was the god of fire and crafts requiring fire, such as metalworking. He was also the god of volcanoes.

Poseidon was the god of the sea, but he was also god of horses and earthquakes.

Hestia was the goddess of the home and hearth. In that role, she served as the protectress of order within the family. Although she was worshipped in households throughout Greece, the center of her cult was at Delphi, where her sacred hearth was kept.

Demeter was the goddess of agriculture and, some critics say, may have been a version of the Earth Mother worshipped by prehistoric Europeans.

Hades was the god of the underworld.

Dionysius was the god of wine, fruit, fertility, and ecstasy (joy). Dionysius's myth is much more complex than that of the other Olympians. As a child, the story goes, he was torn apart by wild women and spent three years in the underworld. The worship of Dionysius played a significant role in the development of Greek drama.

The Romans adopted this pantheon and gave many of them different names. The Roman gods were, in the same order, Jupiter, Juno, Venus, Mars, Minerva, Diana, Mercury, Apollo, Vulcan, Neptune, Vesta, Ceres, Pluto, and Bacchus. (In parts of the Roman Empire, the emperor was also worshipped as a god.) These gods, along with many minor deities who came to Earth to do the bidding of the gods, controlled the fate of humankind. Zeus also appeared in human form, or even in animal form at times, to father children by mortal women. Some of his sons became the heroes of Greek legend.

Protecting and serving the gods For both the Greeks and the Romans, worship of the Olympian gods was both a civic responsibility and a personal choice. Although the gods could be approached by individuals petitioning for divine favor, it was much more important that the city or city-state as a whole benefit from the goodwill of the gods. Each city-state had its own protecting god or goddess. For example, Athens had Athena as its patron goddess. One of the most famous Greek temples, the Parthenon, was built to serve as Athena's seat of power on Earth. Hera was the patron goddess of Argos, and Poseidon the patron god of Corinth. The patron goddess of Rome was Roma Dea, who was not one of the Olympian twelve but was nonetheless a very important goddess for Roman citizens.

Priests and priestesses took care of these temples and supervised the official sacrifices to the gods and goddesses. Some priestesses also served as oracles, persons who acted as a medium or messenger between the gods and humans. Greeks would go to oracles to receive messages from the gods in order to determine what they should do in the future. One of the most famous of the oracles was at the temple of Apollo at Delphi, which is located in central Greece.

The Greeks believed in a soul, which they called *psyche*, but beliefs varied as to whether it survived after death. The traditional belief was that both good and bad souls went to the underworld, Hades, escorted there by the god Hermes. There, those who were evil were punished in a place called Tartaros, while good souls lived in Elysium, a place of eternal happiness and sunlight in a portion of Hades. Others believed that the soul resided in the grave; still others felt that it left the body at death and floated in the sky.

Creation Both Romans and Greeks used myths to explain the creation of the universe and their place in it. For the Greeks, the original gods emerged from chaos and brought order to the universe. The earth goddess, Gaia, and the sky god, Uranus, had children, including Rhea and Chronos. Uranus, however, was afraid of his children's power, and he kept them locked in a cave until finally Chronos challenged him and reestablished order in the universe. Rhea and Chronos then repeated the pattern: they had Zeus, Hestia, Hera, Demeter, Poseidon, and Hades. Chronos, like his father before him, was afraid of his children and swallowed them as they were born. His mother hid the infant Zeus, who later killed his father, cut his brothers and sisters out of the corpse, and then became king of all the gods, creating order from the madness of Chronos's actions.

Though the Romans did not develop a separate myth about the creation of the world itself, they did attach great importance to the founding of Rome. In addition to Virgil's story of the founding of Rome, the *Aeneid*, there is a second major myth that explains the founding of the city. Romulus and Remus were two brothers, sons of the god of warfare, Mars. They were separated from their mother as infants. They were rescued by a female wolf and then was raised by a shepherd and his wife. When they reached adulthood they discovered their true heritage and established a city on the river Tiber where the she-wolf had fed them. Later, though, they became enemies, competing with each other to be the leader of the new city. Romulus killed his brother and became the king, giving his name to the city he founded, Rome.

Mystery cults While the worship of the Olympian gods was a civic duty, there were other forms of worship that gave individuals a direct relationship with the divine. In ancient Greece the Eleusinian and Orphic mystery cults offered people the chance to come face-to-face with the god or goddess. A cult is a religion that is regarded as unorthodox, or untraditional; it usually has a small number of followers compared to other religions. Although their mystic rites were kept secret, it is known that they required elaborate initiations, including purification rites (rituals to clean the new members and make them pure), accepting occult or magical knowledge, and acting out a sacred drama.

Many of these mystery cults celebrated a cycle of death and rebirth. The Eleusinian mysteries, held at the sacred site of Eleusis near Athens, for example, reenacted for believers the myth of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The story tells that Persephone was so beautiful that Hades himself kidnapped her and carried her off to be queen of the underworld. Demeter, mourning for her daughter, caused all growing things to fade. This so alarmed the rest of the gods that they ordered Hades to release Persephone to her mother. Hades could not do so lawfully, however, because Persephone had eaten a tiny amount of food while she was in the underworld, tying her to it. The compromise worked out was that Persephone had to spend six months of the year with Hades in the underworld and six months with her mother. On one level this is a story about the seasons and fertility, but on another it is a story of death and resurrection, or rising from the dead. Historians believe that initiates to the mystery cults were given a chance to symbolically "die" and were then brought symbolically back to life.



The Greek gods and goddesses are shown at their home on Mount Olympus. Greek and Roman mythology had a lasting impact on the arts and literature. © ARTE & IMMAGINI SRL/CORBIS.

The relationship between death and rebirth was also evident in another of the Greek mystery religions: the Orphic Mysteries, centered in Crete. Orpheus, the myth states, was the greatest musician in the world. His wife, Euridice, was killed by a snake bite and her spirit descended into the underworld. Orpheus followed her there, charmed the underworld with his music, and won the right to bring her back to the world of the living, but he was forbidden from looking behind himself on his way back to the surface. Orpheus was unable to keep from looking back and as a result lost Euridice forever. Just like the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Orphic Mysteries celebrated a process of death and rebirth, offering its initiates a chance at life beyond death.

While historians know of other mystery cults active in ancient Greece, such as the Pythagorean Mysteries, details are sketchy or missing. One exception to this was the cult of Dionysius. A fertility god, Dionysius was honored by rituals fully as unique as those of the Orphic or Orphic Mysteries. Dionysius was a relatively new god in the pantheon, not mentioned by Homer. By the fifth century BCE he had become one of the more popular gods. During the festivals honoring him, people sang, danced, and performed sacred plays. These plays later developed into classical Greek drama, which in turn influenced the structure of Western theater. In Rome the mysteries of Bacchus, the god of wine, were also observed in what is called the Bacchanalia. Though these celebrations of Bacchus began as religious celebrations, over time they became simply an excuse for drunkenness and immoral behavior and were banned in Rome in 186 BCE.

Basic beliefs: Greco-Roman philosophy

Three main features are found in all of Greco-Roman philosophy. The first is the attempt to understand the existence and function of the universe in natural instead of supernatural terms. The second is the desire to guide conduct by understanding the nature of reality and the place of human beings and human behavior in the greater scheme of things. The third is critical thinking. This involves a careful examination of the foundations upon which ideas rely.

Ancient Greek philosophy was the first system of thought to propose rational conceptions, or ideas, of how the universe came into being and how it is constructed. Until about 2,500 years ago thinkers attributed the existence of the universe to divine forces, such as gods. Beginning with the Milesian School, Greek philosophers searched for the basic substances that made up the universe and drove it. Early philosophers, such as Thales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, believed that the ultimate basis of reality rested on a single kind of substance. This type of belief is now called monism.

Another question widely considered by the Greeks concerned how knowledge was gained. Some, such as Thales and Aristotle, felt that knowledge was attained through the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste); these thinkers were called empiricists. Others, such as Parmenides and Plato, believed that the mind could gain knowledge without the aid of the senses; these thinkers were called rationalists. Aristotle

attempted to resolve the question of how knowledge is gained by categorizing knowledge based on the objects in question and how certain one could be about those objects.

Mathematics, for example, allows certain definitive truths, while human behavior does not. Aristotle proposed four causes that needed to be addressed: (1) the material cause, regarding the material from which objects are made; (2) the formal cause, regarding objects' patterns of form; (3) the efficient cause, regarding how objects came into being; and (4) the final cause, regarding the goals or purposes of objects. The nature of change and stability were also central concerns of Greek philosophers. While Heraclitus, for example, thought the universe featured eternal change, Parmenides declared change an illusion. According to him, reality was constant and never changed.

Ethics Many of the Greek philosophers also dealt with ethics, a set of moral principles or values about what is right and what is wrong. Among the pre-Socratic philosophers, Heraclitus taught that humans should not attempt to stop change because change is the way of the world. Therefore, it is wise to be able to adapt. Socrates was the first of the Greek philosophers to make ethics a primary concern. For him, all knowledge came at birth, and this knowledge only needed to be discovered by each individual. A human could never perform wrong actions knowingly. Instead, Socrates argued, immoral behavior was the result of ignorance. For Socrates, knowledge was also more essential than behavior. If a person knew about good and bad, then he or she would act for the good. Plato believed that just as a good society is ruled by a just king, so a good person is controlled by reason that has been nurtured by philosophy. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that ethical actions were not preordained or universal concepts. Rather, a moral action was one that had a moral outcome. The best life, according to Aristotle, was one following a moderate course, as guided by reason.

Consideration of the supernatural The question of immortality was also important for Greek philosophers. Heraclitus's notion of the fire-soul comes close to addressing immortality, while the Pythagorean belief in the transmigration of souls (the belief that souls find another body to reside in after death) held that life continued after death, only in different forms. Plato made the first coherent statements about immortality. In fact, through a series of dialogues he sought to prove the immortality

of the soul. In his writings Plato repeatedly refers to the reward of the afterlife as an incentive to performing good deeds in the earthly life.

For Aristotle, on the contrary, the pragmatic world of the senses and the categorization of all things, from animals to the forms of drama, left little room for supernatural discussions. Others, such as the Epicureans, firmly denied an afterlife and said that obtaining pleasure on Earth was the sole purpose of life. Linked to this is the doctrine of eternal return, or the belief that everything that happens has happened before and will happen again, since both the universe and time are cyclical. This was a standard feature of Pythagorean and Stoic thought.

Sacred writings

There were no sacred texts in either Greek or Roman religion, but the works of Homer, Hesiod, Ovid, and Virgil do collect and give form to the ancient myths and also to the relations between the gods and goddesses. Homer, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, tells the story of the Trojan War (c. 1200 BCE), the tale of a war between the people of Greece and Troy, a powerful rival city on Asia Minor. In these works, Homer organizes the Greek pantheon of gods, carefully noting all the relationships between each of the gods and their individual spheres of power. He also gives order to the legends or myths of these gods, blending sometimes contradictory tales into a system of myths that have survived into modern times. The *Homeric Hymns*, thirty-four ancient Greek poems to the gods, have also been attributed to Homer, though it seems these were written over a large span of time by a number of different authors. They were meant to be sung during religious rites.

Hesiod furthered the process of collecting the myths and defining the gods with his *Theogony*, which supplies more information about the relationships between the gods and goddesses. Also, in his *Works and Days*, he provides a history of what he called the five ages of humans, from the Golden Age, ruled by the god Chronos, to the Silver Age of Zeus, the warlike Bronze Age, the Heroic Age of the Trojan War, and ending with Hesiod's own time, the Iron Age.

Virgil and Ovid provided a similar service for the Romans. In his *Aeneid*, Virgil transforms the sometimes bickering and petty couple Zeus and Hera into the thundering and all-powerful Roman god Jupiter and the angry Juno. Ovid, in his fifteen-volume *Metamorphoses*, supplies a

Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Plato created one of the most famous analogies (a comparison in story form) in Western thought with his discussion of how much, or little, humans perceive of actual reality. For Plato, reality was divided into a higher and a lower part. The lower part included the physical universe and whatever was learned and experienced through the senses. The higher part, the Ideal, included all of actual reality, eternal and unchanging. Plato explained the visible and constantly changing world as one that merely resembled the higher Ideal world. He said that there existed Forms, or unchanging megaconcepts. Therefore, truth as perceived by humans only approximated the Ideal, or the Form of Truth. Likewise, what humans may see as good is only truly good insofar as it resembles or comes close to the Form of Good.

Plato explained this theory in *The Republic* by comparing what humans see in their waking lives to what prisoners in a cave might see, the so-called Allegory (symbolic story) of the Cave. These prisoners are chained with their backs to the cave opening. The only images they see are shadows cast upon the wall of the cave by actual objects outside. Thus, what humans, trapped within physical bodies, experience through the senses is only a shadow of actual reality. Plato taught that at death, souls leave their bodies and enter the higher realm of the eternal Forms. There, each soul chooses a new body and life, thus forgetting the lessons learned in the higher realm. Over the course of a lifetime humans are sometimes able to recapture the wisdom hidden within.

history of the world, from creation to Ovid's own age. In doing so, he uses various Greek myths to create his historical survey.

Philosophical texts While many of the early Greek philosophers, up to and including Socrates, either did not record their thoughts or wrote books and essays that were destroyed, the philosophers from the time of Plato onward did leave books of their teachings. These are essential for understanding the principles of the various philosophical schools. Among pre-Socratic philosophers, a part of Parmenides's work is found in his *On Nature*. Heraclitus also left behind writing, usually referred to as the *Fragments* or sometimes the *Cosmic Fragments*. Several other early philosophers, including Empedocles and Anaxagoras, also left behind brief writings.

The first comprehensive works in Greek philosophy come from Plato. Important among Plato's books are *The Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Timaeus*, in which he attempts to connect the soul, the state, and the cosmos. Aristotle wrote *Organum*, dealing with logic. He also wrote *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *De Anima*, *De Poetica*, and other texts on natural science and physics. *The Meditations*, by Marcus Aurelius, deals with practical questions surrounding Stoicism.

Sacred symbols

There is no one powerful symbol that represents either Greek or Roman religion. Instead, various gods and goddesses have symbols attaching to them. Athena, the patroness of Athens, carried a shield, or *aegis*, representing her role as a divine protector of the city. The arrow was the symbol for the Greek gods Apollo and Artemis, as well as for Eros, god of love; for the Romans the arrow was the symbol of Cupid, god of love. The arrow was also used on Roman coins to represent the god Mithra. The lightning bolt was a symbol for Zeus and his Roman equivalent, Jupiter. It would be thrown by these sky gods to punish, water, or fertilize the earth or its creatures.

The Greeks also adapted the Egyptian sphinx, the lion with a person's head. The sign or symbol of the sun was also worshipped by the Greeks and Romans as a life-giving source. This could be simply a circle or a stylized sun with rays. The frog was a symbol for fertility for the Romans, often representing Venus, their version of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

Worship

The major form of worship for both Greeks and Roman was sacrifice and prayer. The Greeks felt that all human actions could be influenced by the gods, and it was important for humans to show their reverence or respect for the gods through their actions. They made daily sacrifices to their family or house god or goddess at a simple altar in the courtyard or at the hearth. These sacrifices were generally food or drink; Greeks and Romans would simply share part of each meal with the gods. Animals such as goats, sheep, and birds might also be sacrificed to the gods and the blood served in goblets. Ribbons of flowers were usually placed over the neck of the animal as it was led to the altar and then struck on the head before its blood was drained by cutting its throat. Both Greeks and Romans thought that the larger the offering, the more attention the gods would pay to their needs.

Sacrifices were also made at temples dedicated to the patron god or goddess. These sacrifices were not made inside the temple, but outside, usually on the eastern wall, at altars. These public sacrifices were conducted by priests or priestesses, who were not dedicated experts but officials carrying out their civic duties, like mayors presiding over modern cities. There were no regular services in Greek or Roman religion.

There were, however, many regular religious festivals, and then the priests would conduct ritual sacrifices. The highest religious officials in Rome were six women known as the Vestal Virgins. Their name comes from the goddess Vesta, spirit of the hearth and home, whom they served. It was their duty to keep the sacred fire lit in the temple of Vesta.

The daily religion of the people of Greece and Rome was largely conducted in private. Each person could pray to his or her personal god, asking for good health, riches, success, or good luck. Prayers were made standing up with the hands raised and the palms pointing toward the sky. If a person wanted to talk to one of the gods of the underworld, then he or she might stamp on the ground or point his or her hands toward the ground to get the god's attention. In Rome the oldest man in the house usually led the family prayers. Flour and salt would be thrown into the cooking fire each day to keep the household gods happy. Janus, the Roman god of the door, was the most powerful of the household gods. He had two faces: one looking into the house and the other looking out. He let friends in and kept enemies out.

Both Greeks and Romans consulted specialists to learn about the future, priests or priestesses who acted as messengers between humans and the gods. In Greece these priestesses were called oracles, and the most famous of these was the oracle of Delphi. Even military leaders consulted the oracles to see what the future would hold for them. In Rome there were two types of these reporters or interpreters, of the future. The *augurs* were priests who could read the evidence of a god's will by the flight of birds or by the way sacred chickens ate. Another group of interpreters were called *haruspices* (literally "gut-gazers"); they read signs of the will of the gods in the organs of sacrificed animals.

Observances and pilgrimages

In Greece, every city-state had its own patron god or goddess and its own schedule of religious festivals and celebrations. In Athens, for example, where Athena was most honored, there were seventy religious holidays each year. These were times for public displays of respect for the gods. There would be religious plays, music, dancing, parades to the temple, sacrifices at the sacred altars, athletic contests, and huge feasts. One the most important annual festivals in Athens was the *Anthesteria*, which was held in February and honored Athena. Even more important, however, was the *Panathenaea*, held every four years in honor of Athena. This

Plato's Dialogues

Plato is considered one of the founders of modern Western thought. Most of his writings use Socrates's method of seeking truths through questions and answers of opposing beliefs. This question-and-answer style is known as the Socratic method. In the passage below, Plato's train of thought seeks to reason out how states and societies began. He begins with the question of whether humankind was destroyed in a flood and then tries to determine how survivors would have then ordered their lives to create a new society.

Laws was written in the fourth century BCE. It is interesting to note that Plato references a flood as being responsible for the destruction of humankind. This is similar to the biblical story of the Flood, in which Noah is warned that God will destroy humankind and builds an ark to house two of each animal. All of them survive a flood of forty days and forty nights. Another flood story is referenced in the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In this story the Mesopotamian gods decide to destroy humankind, but Utnapishtim is warned in advance and is able to build a great ship, on which he allowed humans and animals. The flood of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is said to have lasted six days and seven nights.

• • •

Laws

If a man wants to know the origin of states and societies, he should behold them from the point of view of time. Thousands of cities have come into being and have passed away again in infinite ages, every one of them having had endless forms of government; and if we can ascertain [determine] the cause of these changes in states, that will probably explain their origin. What do you think of ancient traditions about deluges [floods] and destructions of mankind, and the preservation of

a remnant [remainder]? "Every one believes in them." Then let us suppose the world to have been destroyed by a deluge. The survivors would be hill-shepherds, small sparks of the human race, dwelling in isolation, and unacquainted [unfamiliar] with the arts and vices [bad behaviors] of civilization. We may further suppose that the cities on the plain and on the coast have been swept away, and that all inventions, and every sort of knowledge, have perished [been destroyed]. . . . After the great destruction we may imagine that the earth was a desert, in which there were a herd or two of oxen and a few goats, hardly enough to support those who tended them; while of politics and governments the survivors would know nothing. And out of this state of things have arisen arts and laws, and a great deal of virtue and a great deal of vice; little by little the world has come to be what it is. . . . In those days they were neither poor nor rich, and there was no insolence [disrespect] or injustice among them; for they were of noble natures, and lived up to their principles, and believed what they were told. . . . May we not suppose that government arose out of the union of single families who survived the destruction, and were under the rule of patriarchs [respectable men], because they had originally descended from a single father and mother? "That is very probable."

Plato. *Laws*. In *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 5. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. London, England: Oxford University Press, 1892. Available online at *The Online Library of Liberty*. http://oll.libertyfund.org/Home3/HTML.php?recordID=0814#toc_lf0131-5_head_006.

lasted six days and included music, dancing, feasts, athletic contests, and a huge procession on the sixth day to the Parthenon for sacrifices to the goddess. People from all over Greece might attend one of these gatherings. These were both religious festivals and also times for the Greeks to enjoy themselves. Each spring in Athens the Great Dionysia was held. This was in honor of the fertility god, Dionysius, and dramatic contests were held at the theater named for him. A spring festival, it represented rebirth and new life.

Additionally, there were larger festivals held at various locations throughout Greece that honored the major gods and attracted people from not just one city-state, but from all over Greece. The largest and best known of these was the games at Olympia that celebrated the major god, Zeus. These have evolved into the modern-day Olympic Games. There were other similar religious athletic contests. The Pythian Games were held at Delphi and were dedicated to Apollo. These included musical competitions in addition to athletic ones. The Isthmian Games were held at Corinth and dedicated to Poseidon. Each of these festivals included sacrifices and prayers to the gods.

Initially, the number of religious holidays in Rome were small, but later in the Roman Empire so many festivals were adopted that there were more holidays than workdays per year. Among the more important of the Roman religious festivals were the Saturnalia, Lupercalia, Equiria, and Secular Games. The Saturnalia was celebrated for seven days, from December 17 to 23, during the period in which the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, occurred. All business was suspended, slaves were given temporary freedom, gifts were exchanged, and people generally enjoyed themselves with food and drink. The Lupercalia was an ancient festival originally honoring Lupercus, a country or agricultural god of the Italians. The festival was celebrated on February 15 at the cave of the Lupercal on the Palatine Hill, where the legendary founders of Rome, Romulus, and Remus, were supposed to have been nursed by a wolf. The Equiria, a festival in honor of Mars, god of war, was celebrated on February 27 and March 14, traditionally the time of year when new military campaigns were prepared. Horse races marked this celebration. The Secular Games, which included both athletic spectacles and sacrifices, were held at irregular intervals, traditionally once only in about every century, to mark the beginning of a new era.

Pilgrimages For Greeks, a visit to Delphi constituted a form of pilgrimage or holy journey. This was the site of the temple of the Delphic oracle,

the famous priestess who sat on a stool over a deep chasm. She would go into a dream state and begin to speak the words she heard from the gods. Only men, however, were able to approach her. Delphi may also have been the source of the Delphinios cult of Apollo.

Major festivals also served as pilgrimages, such as the Panathenaea, the Olympic Games, and the Isthmian Games. There were additionally numerous healing sanctuaries and caves throughout Greece where people would go to pray for good health. Similarly, attendance at events such as the Equiria and the Secular Games were forms of pilgrimage for the ancient Romans.

Everyday living

Religion, more so than the words of the philosophers, influenced the structure of the daily lives of the citizens of ancient Greece and Rome. The daily prayers and sacrifices gave routine and schedule to their lives. No major decisions would be taken in life without first consulting an oracle or other priest who was trained to interpret the future.

Rites of passage The large cycles of life, or rites of passage, including birth, marriage, and death, were marked by religious observances. Though there were no official baptism or marriage ceremonies, these major rites of passage were celebrated by giving offerings to the gods in hopes for a good future. Various hymns were sung for rites of passage in ancient Greece. A wedding hymn would be sung by the guests before a bride and groom went to their room for the night.

In ancient Greece funerals were especially important. Greeks believed that without a proper funeral, the soul of the dead person would wander forever by the River Styx, which separates this world with the Underworld. At funerals, everyone wore black, and relatives cut their hair short to show respect. The body was washed by family members and dressed in white, and a coin would be placed in the body's mouth: this was the cost of passage on the mythical ferry run by Charon across the River Styx. After a short period of mourning at the house, the body was placed in a coffin and carried by cart or on the shoulders of family members to the graveyard, where it was either buried or burned. If burned, there would be a large fire, and afterwards ashes and bits of bone would be gathered and placed in urns or containers to be put in the family burial place. If buried, the coffin was

accompanied by belongings of the dead person to prevent him or her from returning to claim these possessions. The burial was usually in a family plot just outside the walls of the city, and graves were marked by marble columns or slabs. Female members brought offerings of perfume to the grave for several weeks after the funeral.

In Rome, at the birth of a child, men would hit the threshold of the house with tools to keep the wild spirits away. At puberty, or when a young boy started to mature, he would put away the *bullā*, or protective charm of childhood, and replace his boyhood toga or robe for the toga of manhood. The modern tradition of the bridal veil goes back to the Roman practice of veiling a young woman who was leaving the protection of her father's home for that of her new husband. Similarly, the modern custom of the groom carrying the bride over the threshold of their house comes from ancient Rome. There she would be carried into her new home to avoid the bad luck that was supposed to come if she tripped over the threshold.

When someone died in a house, the corpse was removed feet-first to discourage the ghost from returning. At the Roman religious festival of the Parentalia, in February, the members of a family would make offerings of flowers, corn meal, and wine on the graves of their family's dead. Funerals were major ceremonies for the Romans, with hired mourners and large tombstones erected. Sad songs were sung and played on instruments as the body was put into the ground. Later in Roman history, however, these funerals were held only at night so as to discourage too many people from attending. The souls of the dead were called *lares*, and the Romans believed that they watched over and protected the household.

Greco-Romanism's influences

Greek and Roman mythology has had a lasting effect in the modern world, especially in literature and art. Without these sources, such works as the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) or the *Faerie Queen* by Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599), or even the works of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) would be unthinkable, for all of them borrowed themes from mythology. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the founder of psychoanalysis, or the study of the unconscious mind, borrowed the Oedipus tale from Greek mythology for one of the central principles of his new science. In this myth, an abandoned son unknowingly kills his own father and marries his mother. Likewise, Renaissance

painting, such as *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli (1444–1510) would have lacked for inspiration. Mythical themes were the subject for painters from the fourteenth through the nineteenth centuries. The myths of ancient Greece and Rome have inspired operas, novels, and cartoons for children. The first superhero, Hercules, was a Roman adaptation of the Greek hero Herakles. From computer games using mythical characters, to company names such as Nike (named for the Greek goddess of victory), Greek myths continue to have an impact on modern life.

The philosophy that came out of ancient Greece and Rome had a resounding impact in all spheres of thought, not only in the West but also in the Near East, where Muslim scholars preserved the tradition after the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. It was largely through Arabic texts that the Greek philosophers were re-discovered during the Renaissance, beginning in about the fourteenth century. Greco-Roman thought established the foundations of critical thinking and reasoning characteristic of Western philosophy.

Influences on religion The Greeks and Romans greatly affected Christianity as well, especially the work of Plato, with his higher and lower realities. His Ideal is compared to the Christian notion of heaven. Plato was also extremely influential in early Christianity in defining the role and power of God. Before Platonic beliefs were blended into early Christianity, the role of God was not clear. With the mixture of Platonic belief, however, God became all-powerful and able to know everything. It was also from the Greeks that the Christian concept of geocentrism arose. This concept holds that the earth is the center of the universe, and that the sun, moon, and stars revolve around it. It was developed by the Greek mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy, who lived in the second century CE.

The Christian apostle, or follower, of Jesus, Paul (died 67 CE; also known as Saint Paul), was well trained in Platonic and other forms of Greek philosophy. Neoplatonism was also a strong influence on Christianity in its concept of Original Sin and the Trinity. Additionally, as Greek was the common language for much of the Middle East at the time of the beginnings of Christianity, early forms of the Bible appeared in Greek translation. Paul, writing in the Bible, at times warned against the dangers of free-thinking and philosophy. He also rejected the schools of Epicureanism and Stoicism, with their emphasis on the material world.

Later Christian leaders, however, blended the two schools of thought further. For example, the writings of Plato and Aristotle influenced such Christian writers and scholars as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in the creation of his influential *Summa Theologica* (a summary of theology or religious writings). Here he talks of God as being “infinite,” just as Plato and Aristotle had centuries before.

Influences on science Further, modern Western science would not exist without the foundation laid by Greek thinkers. The Atomists anticipated modern atomic theory, and biology is highly indebted to Aristotle and his classification systems. Many Greek philosophers, including Thales and Anaximander, made significant contributions to astronomy. Anaximander was also an early evolutionist, noting from a study of fossils that animals tend to develop from simpler forms into more complex ones. Mathematics was profoundly changed by the Pythagoreans’ work with numbers, such as the Pythagorean theorem. Likewise, physics owes much to the work of thinkers such as Empedocles.

The Greek desire to offer rational explanations also contributed to theories of atheism (the rejection of God), and agnosticism (the belief that humans cannot know if God exists or not). Anaxagoras, for example, was the first to present a systematic explanation of the origin and nature of the universe without using supernatural devices. The Skeptics also gave the modern world a distrust of absolute knowledge and a critical viewpoint when examining supposed facts. Much of Greco-Roman philosophy is, in fact, remarkably modern.

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Michael J. O'Neal and J. Sydney Jones
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Hinduism

Hinduism, the most common religion of the Indian subcontinent, is a South Asian religion based on traditions that emerged around 1500 BCE and whose followers are called Hindus. In India, Hinduism is called Sanatana Dharma, which means “eternal religion” or Vaidika Dharma, which means “religion of the Vedas,” a set of Hindu scriptures (holy writings). Hinduism differs from many of the world’s major religions because it does not have a standard theology (discussion about the nature of God or gods), a specific founder or prophet, a systematic moral code, or an organizational structure. Hinduism can be thought of as a loose association of religions, each differing from the others but all sharing a common set of core beliefs. Hinduism is also commonly regarded as a way of life or a philosophy (a search for a general understanding of values and reality) rather than a formalized religion.

Nonetheless, it is the world’s third largest religion, following Christianity and Islam. Estimates of its size range from 850 million to 1 billion (the highest estimate is 1.4 billion) followers, or approximately 14 percent of the world’s population. The country with the largest number of Hindus is India, with about 751 million, representing 79 percent of the nation’s population. The country with the highest share of Hindus is Nepal, with 89 percent, or about 17.4 million. Other countries with significant Hindu populations are Bangladesh (11 percent; 12.6 million), Indonesia (2.5 percent; 4 million), Sri Lanka (15 percent; 2.8 million), and Mauritius (15 percent; 400,000). In the United States about 0.5 percent of the population, or about 2 million people, are Hindus, a sharp increase from 1980, when the number was only about 387,000. Significant numbers of American Hindus are concentrated in the state of New York. Canada estimates that it is home to about 157,000 Hindus. In Europe, the country with the highest percentage of Hindus is England, with about 1 percent, or 410,000 people.

WORDS TO KNOW

artha: Prosperity and success in material affairs.

aum: Often spelled om, the sacred syllable and symbol of Hinduism; a symbol of the unknowable nature of Brahma.

Bhagavad Gita: A Sanskrit poem regarded as a Hindu scripture; part of the epic *Mahabharata*, which means “Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty”; examines the nature of God and how mortals can know him.

bhakti: Devotion.

Brahma: The creator-god.

Brahman: The pantheistic (including all gods) principle that sees all of reality as a unity.

dharma: Righteousness in one’s religious and personal life.

kama: Gratification of the senses.

karma: Literally, “action”; the principle that the consequences of a person’s action determines how that person will live his or her next life.

moksha: Salvation; liberation from *samsara*.

murti: Image of a god.

nirvana: The escape from the cycles of life and death to achieve salvation.

nivritti: People who choose to withdraw from the world to lead a life of renunciation and contemplation.

pravritti: People who choose to live in the world rather than withdraw from it.

puja: Worship.

purusharthas: The four aims of Hinduism or “the doctrine of the fourfold end of life.”

Rig Veda: The central scripture of Hinduism, a collection of inspired hymns and songs.

samsara: The ongoing cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

Sanskrit: An ancient Indo-European language that is the language of Hinduism, as well as of much classical Indian literature.

Shiva: The destroyer god, embodying the erotic and sexual.

Shivaism: A major sect of Hinduism, which sees Shiva (“the Destroyer”) as the central god.

swastika: A pictorial character that symbolizes the eternal nature of Brahma because it points in all directions.

Upanishads: The core of Hindu philosophy; collections of texts, originally part of the Vedas, that explain such central Hindu beliefs as karma, reincarnation, nirvana, the soul, and Brahma.

Vaishnavism: A major sect of Hinduism, which sees Vishnu (“the Preserver”) as the central god.

Vedas: The chief sacred scriptures of Hinduism; meaning knowledge, wisdom, or vision.

Vishnu: Also called Krishna; the preserver-god.

Membership in Hinduism requires no specific instruction or ritual. A person who rejects the teachings of the Vedas (Hindu sacred texts) is not a Hindu, but anyone who accepts them can properly be called a Hindu.

History and development

Scholars (those who study a particular subject) debate the origins of Hinduism. Because some of the principles and practices of Hinduism dates back thousands of years, before written records, it is difficult to attach dates to its founding and development. In the nineteenth century the so-called classical theory of the origins of Hinduism was developed. According to this view, the roots of Hinduism lay in the Indus Valley civilization and date back to 4000 BCE, perhaps even earlier. Then in about 1500 BCE the area was invaded by Aryans, or Indo-European tribes from Central Asia. At about this time, according to the theory, the Indus Valley civilization disappeared. The invading tribes brought with them a religion called Vedism. The theory held that Hinduism developed out of a mingling of Vedism and the Indus Valley culture.

More recently many scholars have rejected the classical theory. Using newer historical evidence, they believe that there was no Aryan invasion and that Hinduism evolved directly out of the beliefs of the Indus Valley culture. Astronomers, or scientists who study the regular movements of the stars and planets, point to a specific date for the “founding” of Hinduism, noting that one of Hinduism’s sacred texts describes the position of the stars when Krishna, a Hindu god, was born; the stars were in this position in 3102 BCE. Another significant date is 600 BCE, when one of Hinduism’s most sacred texts, the Rig Veda, was formalized.

In the early centuries of the common era, a number of Hindu sects, or subgroups, began to emerge. Each of these sects was dedicated to a specific god or goddess. In the early twenty-first century most Hindus, especially those in urban areas, are followers of one of three major divisions within Hinduism. One is called Vaishnavism, which sees Vishnu, “the Preserver,” as the central god. The second is called Shivaism, whose followers see Shiva, “the Destroyer,” as the central god. The third division consists of the Saktis, who worship Devi, “the Divine Mother” or the mother aspect of God. Saktis recognize Devi as the mother of all things and a representation of God’s greatness. In rural areas, many Hindus worship a village god or goddess who influences such matters as fertility and disease.

Scholars generally recognize four major periods in the history of Hinduism: the Vedic Period, the Epic and Classical Period, the Medieval Period, and the Modern Period. The first was the Vedic Period, extending roughly from 2000 BCE to about 400 BCE. During this period most of the Hindu holy texts, including the Vedas, were written down, and most of

the basic beliefs of Hinduism were formed. The second is called the Epic and Classical Period, extending roughly from 400 BCE to about 600 CE. This was the period when Hinduism's two great epic poems, the *Mahabharata* (which contains the Rig Veda) and the *Ramayana*, were composed. It was also during this period that the Hindu caste system was created. (The caste system was and still is a hereditary social class system that identifies the duties and obligations, but also restricts the occupations, of Hindus.) The third major period was the Medieval Period, roughly from 600 to 1800. During this period Hinduism experienced a great deal of debate and developed numerous schools of thought.

During the Modern Period, from 1800 to the present, Hinduism has had increased contact with Western cultures and ways of thinking, primarily because India was a British colony during much of this time. It began to have more appeal to non-Indians after Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) appeared and spoke at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois, in 1893. His paper presented there, “What Is Hinduism?,” exposed many Westerners to Hinduism for the first time. Aiding this spread of Hinduism is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which has helped establish Hinduism around the world. Early in the Modern Period, Hinduism began to fall into some disfavor in India, but during the twentieth century the religion underwent a revival.

The challenge for Hinduism in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been adaptation to modern life. Modern Hindus have made efforts to lessen emphasis on ritual (a formal ceremony or way of doing things) and difficult-to-understand points of theology, to include modern approaches to education, to see religion in more worldwide terms, and to accommodate a growing role for women.

Sects and schisms

Hinduism is a remarkably tolerant, open, and elastic religion, meaning that it incorporates numerous and diverse sects (branches or schools of thought) without conflict or division. Hindus believe that because people have different temperaments, philosophies, and ways of looking at the world and the universe, religious faith should accommodate their views. In addition, because people change over time, they achieve salvation by taking different paths. The Upanishads, one of Hinduism's sacred texts, declares that all paths lead to the same goal, just as cows of different colors all yield the same white milk. In the Bhagavad Gita, another

About Hinduism

- **Belief.** Hindus believe that all reality is a unity, expressed by the concept of Brahman. They also believe in the transmigration of the soul, or reincarnation (rebirth), and that the quality of a person's next life is determined by his or her character in the present life.
- **Followers.** Hinduism is the third-largest religion in the world, with about 850 million to 1 billion followers. Most Hindus live in India, but there are significant Hindu populations in other countries of South Asia.
- **Name of God.** Hindus worship many aspects of the supreme being, Brahma, as separate gods or goddesses. Two of the most prominent are Vishnu, the preserver-god, and Shiva, the destroyer-god.
- **Symbols.** The two most prominent symbols in Hinduism are *aum* (or *om*), which represents the sacred syllable that Hindus intone to become one with the unknowable Brahma, and the *swastika*. The swastika is a cross with branches bent at right angles that symbolize the eternal nature of Brahma, pointing in all directions.
- **Worship.** Hindu worship does not have a formal structure. Worship is often conducted alone or with family in the home. When Hindus attend a temple, individual worship is aided by priests, though communal worship consists of prayers and readings from the Vedas.
- **Dress.** The traditional dress of Hindu men is the *veshti*, a long cloth, similar to a sarong, wound around the waist and stretched to the ankles. The traditional dress for women is the *sari*, a single, long, flowing piece of cloth, draped so that one end forms a skirt and the other covers the shoulders and possibly the head.
- **Texts.** The major scriptures of Hinduism include the Vedas, especially the oldest, the Rig Veda; the Upanishads, which are discussions and comments on the Vedas; and the Bhagavad Gita, which examines the nature of God and how mortals can know Him.
- **Sites.** There is no single site that is sacred to Hindus, though the festival of Kumbh Mela occurs four times every twelve years in the Indian cities of Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik. All Hindus regard the Ganga (Ganges) River as holy.
- **Observances.** Hindus have a great many festivals and other observances. Three of the most common are Diwali, the festival of lights; Navratri, "nine nights," the celebration of the triumph of good over evil and of the feminine principle in the world; and Kumbh Mela, a pilgrimage that is held four times during a twelve-year cycle.
- **Phrases.** One commonly used word is *namaste*, a greeting offered with the palms of the hands placed together at chest level and accompanied by a slight bow. It literally means "I bow to you."

sacred text, Vishnu says, “Howsoever men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine.”

Members of the various Hindu sects, rather than rejecting the viewpoints of other sects (and even other religions), embrace them, believing that each sect simply emphasizes one or more different aspects of the same central faith. Accordingly, the history of Hinduism has been without the violence that has characterized religious disputes in other faiths such as Christianity and Islam. At the same time, Hinduism is a complex religion, with numerous sects and subsects.

Vaishnavas, Saivas, and Saktis Overall, Hinduism can be divided into three broad sects or classes: Vaishnavas, who worship Vishnu; Saivas, who worship Shiva; and Saktis, who worship Devi, or the mother aspect of God, a feminine principle that gives birth and nurtures. Other major sects include the Sauras, who worship the sun-god; the Ganapatyas, who worship Ganesh; and the Kumaras, who worship Skanda as the supreme God.

The first major sect in Hinduism is Vaishnavism, whose followers are called Vaishnavas. This sect itself covers a number of branches. The oldest one is the Sri Sampradaya, which was founded by Ramanuja (c. 1017–1137) some time in the middle of the twelfth century. The followers of Ramanuja worship Vishnu and his wife, the goddess Lakshmi. Some of the followers of Ramanuja (called the “Southern School”) believe that self-surrender is the only way to salvation. The image they use to describe this is a kitten that surrenders itself to its mother and is carried around without any effort on its part. Others (called the “Northern School”) believe that there are many other paths to salvation. The image they use is of a young monkey that has to cling to its mother as it is being carried about.

One branch of Vaishnavas that is likely to be familiar to Westerners is the Caitanyas, otherwise known as the Hare Krishna Movement. In India, this branch is prominent in Bengal and Orissa. This branch was founded by Caitanya Mahaprabhu (or Lord Gouranga; 1485–1533). The Caitanyas worship Krishna as the supreme being, and members constantly repeat Krishna’s name. In the twentieth century Swami Prabhupada founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a movement with branches all over the world. The movement asks its members to recite with devotion and faith the Hare Krishna mantra: “Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare.” Rama refers to Krishna’s brother,

Balarama. The word *bare* has no specific meaning, but is rather part of the mantra, a call to Krishna's divine energy.

The second major sect of Hinduism is the Saivas, but once again, this sect includes a number of branches. Chief among them are the Smartas, most prominent in the Tamil region of India. Smartism is an ancient tradition formed by Sankara (c. 788–c. 820) in the ninth century. It is regarded as a liberal sect of Hinduism and emphasizes a life of meditation and the study of philosophical truths. Smartas worship six forms of god, allowing each member to worship a “preferred deity,” or god, although each deity is regarded as a reflection of one supreme god. According to the Smartas, “It is the one Reality which appears to our ignorance as a manifold [diverse] universe of names and forms and changes. Like the gold of which many ornaments are made, it remains in itself unchanged. Such is Brahman, and That art Thou.” Chief among the gods of the Smartas is Shiva. The Smartas, however, are extremely diverse and include at least forty-two different branches, many of them associated with different regions of India.

The third major sect is the Saktis, or Saktism. Saktism is followed by hundreds of thousands of Indians, primarily in the Bengal region. Its chief characteristics are its view of God as a destroyer, its emphasis on the feminine, mother aspect of God, and its emphasis on ceremony and ritual. The word *sakti* means “energy,” and Saktis see force or power as the active principle of the universe, personified by Devi, the mother goddess. The chief goal of Saktism is moksha, achieving salvation through the bliss that comes with total identification with the supreme being. Another major goal is good works. There are at least four different branches of the Saktis.

These are just a handful of Hindu sects. There are many more, each emphasizing a different aspect of Hinduism. No one of these sects believes that its doctrines or practices are more valid than those of other sects. Since Hinduism sees all humans as an aspect of the divine, and the variety of beliefs and practices is a manifestation, or demonstration, of the complexity of divine principles that fill the universe.

Basic beliefs

Hindu beliefs are complex and sometimes difficult to understand. Indeed, many Westerners hold mistaken beliefs about Hinduism. Chief among these is that Hinduism is “polytheistic,” meaning that Hindus

Hinduism



There are numerous Hindu gods and goddesses, but all are considered to be manifestations, or forms, of the one God, Brahma.

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believe in more than one god. (Polytheism stands in contrast to monotheism, or the belief in one supreme god; Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are the world's major monotheistic religions.) This belief is only partially true, for while Hinduism recognizes a variety of gods and goddesses, all are seen as aspects, forms, or manifestations of a single supreme god, Brahma (in Sanskrit, Brahman). This type of religion is termed henotheistic.

Another way of thinking of Hinduism is to see it as “Trinitarian,” meaning that there is one supreme god with three “persons” or forms. The supreme god is Brahma, the creator-god who continues to create new realities. In Hindu belief Brahma refers to a pantheistic principle that sees all of reality as a unity. (“Pantheism” is defined as any belief system that equates God with the forces of nature or with natural principles.) The universe, then, is not a collection of parts but a single thing that is divine throughout. Brahma simultaneously is the universe and

transcends (rises above or goes beyond the limits of) the universe. In addition to Brahma is Vishnu, or Krishna. Vishnu is the preserver-god, who preserves the creations of Brahma. Whenever *dharma* (defined as law, order, righteousness, duty, and religion) comes under threat, Vishnu takes on one of ten incarnations, or physical forms, and travels from heaven to Earth to set matters right. Finally, Hinduism recognizes Shiva (often spelled Siva), the Destroyer. Shiva embodies the erotic, or sexual, and is alternately compassionate and destructive. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva can be thought of as the trinity of Hindu gods.

Reincarnation and karma A core belief of Hinduism has to do with the transmigration of the soul, what in the West is often called reincarnation. Hindus believe that after death, one's soul is transferred into another body. Thus, life consists of an ongoing cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth, continuing through many lifetimes, a cycle called *samsara*. During one's lifetime, a person accumulates *karma*, which is the principle that determines how the person will live his or her next life. (The word *karma* has entered the Western vocabulary to refer to a similar notion, perhaps expressed best by the phrase "what goes around comes around," meaning that a person's good or bad deeds can be repaid in kind.)

A person whose acts, devotion, and thoughts are pure accumulates good karma and can therefore be reborn at a higher level of creation; one guilty of evil thoughts and deeds will be reborn at a lower level of creation, even as an animal. A person who accumulates good karma throughout several lifetimes can eventually escape *samsara* and achieve enlightenment. This is a state called *nirvana* (another word that has entered the Western vocabulary to indicate generally a blissful or happy state, though the word has a more specific meaning to Hindus similar to the Christian idea of heaven). Hindus believe that the world's inequalities of wealth, suffering, and prestige are the result of karma. They are the inevitable result of previous acts, both in one's current life and in previous lives.

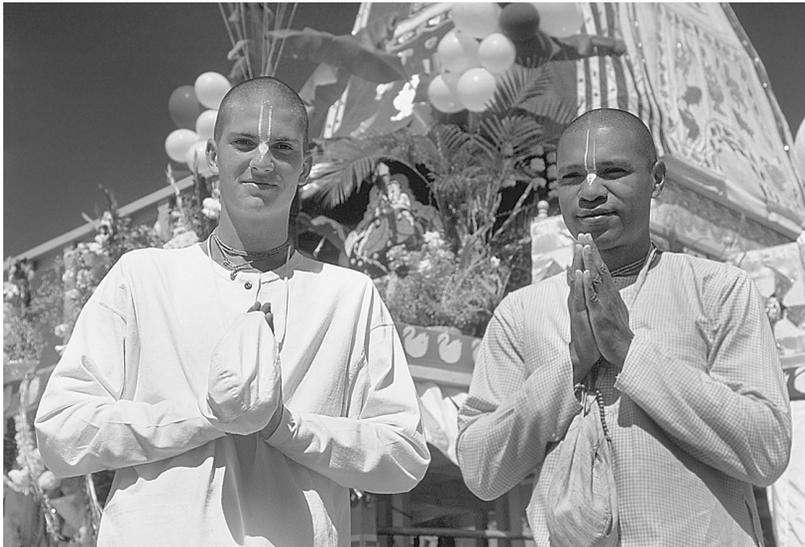
Verses from the Upanishad, a sacred text, ask whether there is an end to the cycle of reincarnation. They maintain that the human soul ("atman") is supreme and is responsible for all that it experiences. The chief topic of the Katha Upanishad explains using the analogy of a chariot, where the soul rules the chariot, which is the body; the reins are the

mind, the horses are the senses, and the paths the chariot takes are the objects of the senses. One who lacks discipline never reaches his or her goal: reincarnation at a higher level, ultimately leading to wisdom and enlightenment and becoming one with Brahma.

Guidelines for living Another key belief of Hindus has to do with how one's life should be organized, referred to as *purusharthas*. These activities are often called the “four aims of Hinduism” or sometimes “the doctrine of the fourfold end of life.” The first three aims are *dharma*, referring to being righteous (obeying divine and moral laws) in religious and personal life; *artha*, or achieving prosperity (wealth) and success in material affairs, a sign of God's blessings; and *kama*, referring to gratification (rewards or pleasures) of the senses (that is, sexual, sensual, and mental enjoyment). These three aims are pursued by *pravritti*, or people who choose to live within the world. The fourth aim of Hinduism is that of the *nivritti*, or those who choose to renounce, or give up, the world. This aim is called *moksha*, sometimes spelled *moksa*, meaning liberation from samsara, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This is considered the highest goal of all of humankind.

A related belief has to do with the four stages of life, referred to as *asbramas*. The first of the four stages is Brahmacharya, roughly the first one-quarter of life, when a person remains unmarried and contemplates Brahma with the help of a guru or teacher. The second is Grihasthya, called the householder stage, when a person marries and takes on a professional career. The third is Vanaprastha, as a person ages, begins to withdraw from the affairs of the world, and turns duties over to his or her children. The final state is Sanyasa, when the person withdraws into seclusion, contemplates Brahma, and begins to give up the body in preparation for the next life.

As an aid to achieving these goals, Hindus practice meditation (focused thought aimed at attaining greater spiritual understanding). Yoga is the most common form of meditation, but others include daily devotions and various public rituals. Yoga is a physical and spiritual practice that tries to prepare the body and the mind to receive spiritual truths. Because one of the chief goals of Hinduism is the attainment of enlightenment and wisdom, Hindus have always been willing to consider and even incorporate other beliefs, so Hindus are tolerant of other religions and religious practices. A common saying among Hindus is *Ekam satava vipraba babudha vandanti*, which means



One branch of Hinduism is the Hare Krishna Movement, founded by Caitanya Mahaprabhu in the sixteenth century. Hare Krishnas worship the god Krishna as the supreme being. © JOSEPH SOHM; CHROMOSOHM INC./CORBIS.

“The truth is One, but different sages ‘wise people’ call it by different names.”

Hindus accept five basic theological (religious) principles. These principles are:

1. God exists. There is one absolute ultimate reality. There is one trinity of gods (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) but these take several divine forms.
2. All humans are divine.
3. Unity of existence is achieved through love.
4. All Hindus should strive for religious harmony.
5. All Hindus should have knowledge of the three Gs: Ganga (the sacred river), Gita (the sacred scripture), and Gayatri (the sacred mantra, or mystical formula that aids contemplation and meditation).

Additionally, Hindus accept ten commandments or “disciplines”:

1. *Satya*, truth;
2. *Abimsa*, nonviolence;
3. *Brahmacharya*, avoidance of adultery (being unfaithful to one’s spouse);
4. *Asteya*, no desire to possess or steal;
5. *Aparighara*, not being corrupt;

6. *Shaucha*, cleanliness;
7. *Santosh*, contentment;
8. *Swadhyaya*, reading of scriptures or holy writings;
9. *Tapas*, austerity, perseverance, penance; and
10. *Ishwarpranidhan*, regular prayers

Sadhus and *sannyasins* are the ascetics, or holy men and women, of Hinduism. An ascetic lives a solitary life of divine contemplation and rejection of the material world, meaning the world of pride of ownership in possessions and the need for material goods such as cars and large homes. They, too, place emphasis on the performance of good works, healing the sick, nursing people who are bedridden, and comforting people who are upset or without hope.

Paths to salvation Hindus believe that there are three possible paths to salvation, or moksha, with each following a different yoga. Yoga to a Hindu is far more than the exercise, stretching, and relaxation techniques many non-Hindus practice to improve their health. Yoga is a spiritual path, a form of discipline that enables a person to achieve oneness with the divine. The first of these is called the “way of work,” or *karma yoga*. This path emphasizes fulfilling duties to the family and to society and doing good deeds for others. It enables a person to, in effect, cancel out any bad karma accumulated in present or former lives.

The second path to salvation is called the “way of knowledge,” or *jñana yoga*. The explanation of this path is that ignorance binds people to the cycle of rebirths. The chief form this ignorance takes is the belief that a person is an individual and not part of Brahma, the ultimate divine reality. This belief gives rise to bad acts and therefore bad karma. One can reach salvation by reaching first a state of awareness that allows one to recognize an identity with Brahma. This is done through meditation and other intellectual pursuits, such as studying or reading the sacred texts.

The third path of salvation is called the “way of devotion,” or *bhakti yoga*. The majority of Hindus in India favor this path to salvation. It tends to be a more personal, more emotional view of religion. Through this path, the person surrenders him or herself to a personal Hindu god or goddess, usually through worship, pilgrimages, and rituals. In this way, a person can be absorbed into the divine reality, losing any sense of individual existence and becoming one with Brahma.

Sacred writings

The major sacred scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas. The word *veda* means “vision,” “knowledge,” or “wisdom,” and the Vedas are thought to be manifestations of God’s wisdom in human speech. In fact, it is believed that humans did not write the Vedas, but that they were revealed to sages and seers who handed them down orally over time until they were compiled by Vyasa Krishna Dwaipayana. The Vedas, the original scriptures of Hinduism, encompass all spiritual knowledge and regulate the religious, legal, social, and domestic duties of Hindus. Because Hindus kept few written records of the development of the religion, scholars are left to debate when they were written, but most historians put the date at somewhere around 1500 to 1200 BCE.

There are four Vedas: the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda, collectively known to Hindus as Chaturveda. The major text is the Rig Veda. Each Veda consists of four parts: (1) Samhitas, or hymns; (2) Brahmanas, or rituals, including general rules of action for the religious duties of all Hindus; (3) Aranyakas, or theologies; and (4) the Upanishads, or philosophies. The Upanishads are the concluding portion of each Veda and are therefore called the Vedanta, or “end of the Veda.” There are 108 Upanishads, and together they form the essence of the teachings of the Vedas. The Aranyakas, literally meaning “forest texts,” are objects of meditation for monks and others who live in the forests and who study Hinduism’s symbols and mystical beliefs.

The last of the Vedas, the Atharva Veda, is very different from the first three. The hymns contained in it use language that is simpler than that of the Rig Veda. It also includes spells and charms that reflect many of the folk beliefs of early Hindu society. It is more useful as a historical text than as a religious text. In fact, some Hindu scholars do not regard the Atharva Veda as a true Veda. They group the first three Vedas under the term Traya Veda, meaning “threefold knowledge.”

Hindu vs. Hindi?

The words *Hindu* and *Hindi* are easily confused. The first refers to a person who practices Hinduism, though in the past the word was often used to refer to all natives of India. The second refers to a language, the literary and official language of northern India.

The origin of the word *Hindu* is uncertain. One theory is that it came from a translation of an ancient inscription that identified a region between the Himalayan Mountains and Bindu Sarovara called Hindusthan, with *Hi-* in “Himalayan” combined with *-indu* in “Bindu.” A second theory is that it is derived from a Persian word for Indian. A third is that it is a Persian misspelling or mispronunciation of *Sindhu*, or the river Indus. A final theory is that it was a word invented by the British when India was a British colony (from the eighteenth century to 1947).

Upanishads In reality, few people read the Vedas in the twenty-first century, largely because of their complexity. Hindus are more likely to turn to the Upanishads for day-to-day wisdom, for they form the core of Indian and Hindu philosophy, and while they are part of the Vedas, they are thought of, in a sense, as separate from the Vedas. The Upanishads are a collection of texts handed down through oral tradition. The Upanishads include such basic concepts as karma, reincarnation, nirvana, the soul, and Brahma. They also describe meditation and self-realization.

Many authors wrote the Upanishads. Some were priests, but others were poets whose goal was to guide their students to spiritual wisdom. In fact, the word *upanishad* means “sitting down near” or “sitting close to.” It suggests the notion of a student listening to the teachings of a guru or spiritual master. It suggests a past time when students listened to their masters in ashrams, that is, hermitages (solitary places) in the forest. One of the oldest is the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which states the following:

From the unreal lead me to the real!
From darkness lead me to light!
From death lead me to immortality!

If Hinduism could be said to have a core belief, it is expressed in these lines. The state described in these lines can be achieved by meditating, by being aware that one’s soul is one with all things, and that Brahma is “all,” that is, the universe.

The Upanishads are important not only as religious documents but as documents in the history of ideas and the history of philosophy. They give modern readers insight into the workings of the minds of early Hindu thinkers. They also introduce modern readers to Indian culture, not only that of early centuries but that of today as well. Quite a bit of Indian thought has been influenced by the Upanishads, with their effort to penetrate the mysteries of the universe and humankind’s place in it. The Upanishads show modern readers a time when people asked fundamental questions about the nature of the universe and struggled to understand their inner world.

Bhagavad Gita Although there are numerous texts that are sacred to Hindus, the most important one is undoubtedly the Bhagavad Gita. Many readers find the Bhagavad Gita, which consists of seven hundred

Sanskrit verses in eighteen chapters, the most beautiful of Hindu scriptures. It is part of Book VI of the long epic poem the Mahabharata, which means “Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty.” It was likely written in the first or second century CE.

The Bhagavad Gita is written as a conversation between a warrior prince, Arjuna, and his companion and charioteer, Krishna, who is an incarnation of the god Vishnu. The dialogue occurs on the battlefield, just as a war is about to begin. As the two armies line up, each sees relatives and friends on the other side. Arjuna hesitates and wonders whether it would be better for all to give up their weapons rather than take part in a cruel war. Krishna, however, tells the prince that he is obligated to perform his duty and to maintain his faith in God. The Bhagavad Gita goes on to examine the nature of God and how humans can come to know him.

Sacred symbols

Hinduism is characterized by two major sacred symbols: aum and the swastika. These symbols have been a part of Hinduism for thousands of years and represent both peace and harmony. A third important symbol is the color saffron, which represents the supreme being.

Passages in Hindu sacred scriptures point to the significance of aum, often spelled om in English. One, from the Kātha Upanishad, states:

The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence . . . is OM. This syllable OM is indeed Brahman. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whosoever knows this support is adored in the world of Brahma.

Another is from the Mandukya Upanishad:

Om is the one eternal syllable of which all that exists is but the development. The past, the present, and the future are all included in this

Do Hindus Worship Cows?

The short answer to this question is no. Cows are considered sacred, or holy, in Hinduism, but they are not worshipped. The cow can be seen as similar to the lamb in Christianity, which is associated with Jesus Christ. The longer answer to the question reflects the depth and complexity of Hindu thought. When Krishna appeared in human form, it was as a cowherder. One of the Hindu scriptures states, “I offer repeated obeisances [respect, submission] unto Lord Krishna, who is the protector and well-wisher of the cows and the brahmanas [bulls]. He is also the protector of the entire society. Unto that Lord, who is always satisfying the senses of the cows, I offer my obeisances again and again.”

Hindus believe that all creatures, not just cows, are sacred and should be protected, which may explain why most Hindus are vegetarians. The cow is a symbolic representation of that sacredness. For Hindus, the cow represents life and sustenance. It provides butter, milk, and cream and thus sustains human life. Its dried manure also provides cooking fuel. It is also a gentle creature that asks little of humans. For these reasons, the cow holds a sacred place in Hindu culture.

one sound, and all that exists beyond the three forms of time is also implied in it.

The Taittiriya Upanishad also emphasizes the importance of aum and the chanting of *Shanti*, or “peace” (preceded by the thought “May we never hate”).

Aum is of great significance in Hinduism. It is a sacred symbol that represents Brahma, the absolute and the source of all existence. Because Brahma cannot be understood, a symbol is needed to help humans know the unknowable. Aum, therefore, is a symbol for both the aspects of God that humans can perceive and those humans cannot perceive.

Aum is part of a Hindu’s daily life. A devout Hindu will begin a journey or work by intoning aum. The symbol is often written at the head of letters, and students often write it at the top of exams. Many Hindus wear the aum symbol as a pendant, and the symbol can be found at any Hindu temple or shrine. Newborns are brought into the world with the symbol: After the child is born, it is ritually cleansed, and aum is written on its tongue with honey.

Aum is not a word. Rather, it is an intonation, uttered with a musical lilt, similar to humming. It is made up of three Sanskrit letters, represented in English by aa, au, and ma. Combined, these letters produce the sound aum. Thus, aum is a prayer or mantra, and when it is repeated over and over, it vibrates through the body and penetrates to the core of a person’s being, the soul. Intoning aum creates a feeling of bliss and peace. It directs the mind to the abstract and unknowable, at the same time making the unknowable absolute more tangible. For many Hindus, aum creates a virtual trancelike state.

The other major symbol of Hinduism is the swastika. Like aum, the Swastika has great meaning to Hindus. It is not a letter or syllable, but rather a pictorial character. The word *swastika* is believed to be a combination of two Sanskrit words, *su-* meaning “good,” and *asati-*, meaning “to exist.” Put together, the meaning is something like “may good prevail.” The swastika is in the shape of a cross, but all four of the branches of the cross are bent at right angles and face clockwise. The swastika symbolizes the eternal nature of Brahma because it points in all directions. Thus, it represents the notion that the Absolute is present everywhere. Many historians believe that in ancient times, forts were built in the shape of a Swastika. In this way, the symbol became associated with protection, and from there evolved into a religious symbol.



The swastika is a sacred symbol in the Hindu religion. Its four branches, pointing in the four directions, represent the eternal nature of Brahma in all things. © AJAY VERMA/REUTERS/CORBIS.

Unfortunately, the swastika was used by the Nazi regime in Germany before and during World War II (1939–45). The Nazis used the symbol in their flag and on their military uniforms. Since the Nazis were responsible for the horrible deaths of millions during World War II, the swastika they displayed so widely became a hated symbol in the West. It represented the cruelty of the Nazis, particularly to Jews and other people they considered undesirables. The Nazi use of the symbol, though, has nothing to do with its use in Hinduism, where it remains a representation of peace and harmony.

One additional symbol bears mentioning: the color saffron, which is close to orange or orange-yellow. For Hindus, saffron is the color of fire, which symbolizes the supreme being. One of the most well-known hymns in the Rig Veda glorifies fire, and in ancient times, when sages moved from one ashram to another in the forest, they carried fire with them. This carrying of fire came to be symbolized by long, forked, saffron-colored flags, which in modern times may be seen flying outside

Hindu temples. Hindu monks wear saffron-colored robes, which symbolize their abandonment of material life.

Ganga, the sacred river The Ganga (in English, Ganges) River is considered sacred to all Hindus. The river starts in the Himalayas and empties into the Bay of Bengal 1,560 miles (2,511 kilometers) away. A legend tells how Brahma caught the sweat from Vishnu's feet and poured it onto the land to form the river. Because Ganga waters came from and were touched by the gods, Hindus believe the waters are holy and are able to wash away one's sins. Even the dead are believed to benefit; if a person's ashes are thrown into the Ganga, that person's next life will be better, or he or she may reach moksha sooner and become one with the divine.

Devout Hindus begin their day by throwing offerings of flowers or grain into the Ganga. They may float small oil lamps on the waters. Some hold water in their hands and then release it back into the river as an offering to their ancestors and the gods. The offerings are accompanied with folded hands and prayers. Since not all Hindus are able to go to the Ganga every day, they may place water in jars and return with these to temples.

Hindu folk belief says that the waters of the Ganga make possible the dead's passage to the world of the ancestors, Pitriloka. Pouring the water on a person's ashes allows that person to pass on from this life. If this is not done the person is doomed to an afterlife of suffering and may cause trouble for those still living.

Worship

Worship in Hinduism is neither formalized nor standardized. For most Hindus, worship consists of *bhakti*, or devotion, to one or more personal gods or goddesses. Each Hindu is free to choose, often focusing attention on one or a small group of gods with whom the person feels a strong relationship.

Puja, or worship, includes ritual offerings and prayers. These are offered daily or, in some cases, on special days. Before beginning puja, the devotee must prepare by cleansing the body and dressing in fresh clothing. This may be done while chanting a mantra or singing an *aarti*, or hymn, silently or out loud. If it is close to a mealtime, food should not be consumed until after the puja. Other preparations include freeing

Prayer Beads

Prayer beads are used by followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Though prayer beads are called by different names in the different religions, their purpose is the same: to guide prayer.

In Hinduism, prayer beads are called Rudraksha beads. The beads are strung onto strands and are worn by Hindus to remind them of God's compassion for humanity and love for all. Praying with Rudraksha beads is thought to help one eliminate sin, improve knowledge and virtue, and achieve the reward of living in Shiva's kingdom after death.

Rudraksha beads are made from a tree called the Rudraksha, or Blue Marble. *Rudra* comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "to cry." *Aksha* means "eye." Rudra is another name for Shiva. Rudraksha beads, then, are known as Shiva's Tears. Hindu texts tell the story of Shiva who, after meditating for many years on the well-being of all living creatures, opened his eyes and cried tears onto the earth, where they formed Rudraksha trees.

Mala beads are used by Buddhists (followers of Buddhism) as a tool to aid in meditation. Their

purpose is to help one focus during meditation and to attain enlightenment by driving away evil and filling one with peace and happiness. A strand of mala beads may contain as few as 30 or as many as 108 beads. They are often made of wood but can also be composed of semi-precious stones.

The prayer beads used in Christianity are called a rosary. A rosary is a string of 59 beads that Christians can use when they pray. The beads represent a series of fifteen meditations on events in the lives of Jesus Christ, Christianity's founder, and Mary, his mother. These events include three sets of "mysteries," The Joyful Mysteries, The Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Glorious Mysteries. Each series of ten beads on a rosary is known as a decade.

A *sibbah*, or string of prayer beads, is used by Muslims, followers of Islam. There are 99 beads on a strand, and they can be made from wood, stone, or gems or may even be knots in cords. Muslims pray with the beads to keep track of how many times they have recited a prayer to Allah, or God.

the mind from worldly concerns, such as worry about all the things to be done that day, and gathering offerings for the deity. Footwear must be removed before entering the temple, and a bell is rung.

In its more elaborate form, puja is conducted in stages. The first is personal purification through washing and calling on the god. The next stage includes prayers, accompanied by offerings of food, flowers, water, incense, or other objects. These rituals are often performed daily in the home, where a shrine can consist of anything from a separate room to an image of the deity, called a *murti*. Family members worship together, and strict Hindus worship three times a day. Many Hindus worship wearing the sacred thread, a garment that hangs over the left shoulder to the

right hip. Brahmins, the highest caste consisting of priests, wear a thread made of cotton, while rulers wear hemp and merchants wear wool.

Often, however, worship is performed at shrines and temples, either alone or with the help of priests, who often lead groups of worshippers by reading from the Vedas. A typical temple, or *mandir*, consists of a sacred shrine, which represents the heart of the worshipper, and a tower, which represents the elevation of the soul to heaven. Gifts that are offered become sacred because of their contact with the gods at temples or shrines, and they come to represent the grace of the divine. Thus, for example, people often make ritual offerings of sacred ash or saffron, which is then distributed so that people can smear it on their foreheads.

Not all worship involves ritual objects. Very often, worship takes the form of a brief private prayer, often said while the person goes about his or her daily business and passes a roadside shrine. Large numbers of these small shrines can be found throughout Hindu countries, each devoted to a personal god or goddess that the individual Hindu has elected to worship. In all cases, prayer is likely to consist of incantation of the sacred *aum* and other mantras.

The religious rites of Hindus fall into three categories. *Nitya* rituals, which take place daily, are performed in the home, and focus on family gods and goddesses. *Naimittika* rituals take place only at certain times of the year, such as festivals. Finally, *Kamya* rituals are regarded as optional but desirable. Making a pilgrimage is a good example of a *Kamya* ritual.

Observations and pilgrimages

Some observers describe Hinduism as a religion of “feasts, fasts, and festivals.” Indeed, a glance at the Hindu religious calendar reveals a large number of festivals and other religious observances. The dates for these events typically differ from year to year because their dates are based on astronomical events such as the new moon. Two of the most important Hindu holidays are Diwali, the festival of lights, and Navratri, the festival of “nine nights.” in which aspects of the Divine Goddess are worshipped. In addition, many Hindu pilgrims attend the Kumbh Mela, a pilgrimage that is held four times during a twelve-year cycle.

Diwali, or the festival of lights, can be thought of as somewhat like the West’s celebration of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s. It is an eighteen-day festival. In 2005 it began on November 1. Diwali is a celebration of the autumn harvest and is dedicated to several gods and



A Hindu couple engage in puja at their home shrine. Hindus will cleanse the body, dress in clean clothes, and remove their shoes before they worship. Traditional clothing for women is the sari and for men, the veshti. © ARVIND GARG/CORBIS.

goddesses. It also marks the last day of Lord Rama's fourteen-year-long exile, when the people lit thousands of lamps to guide Rama (the ideal man), his wife, and his brother home.

Three goddesses are the focus of the Diwali season. Two days before Diwali, the goddess Lakshmi is celebrated for bringing prosperity, fruitfulness, and peace. The day before Diwali is dedicated to Kali, who provides mental and spiritual strength. Diwali itself celebrates Sarasvati, who provides knowledge and enlightenment.

Diwali is a time of gift-giving and feasting. Hindus cook festival foods, formally worship the goddesses, and watch fireworks. Diwali day itself is marked by a great feast, including sweets. The day after Diwali marks the beginning of the new year and is a celebration of the

return of Lord Rama from exile. Again, the day is marked by prayer, feasting, visiting friends and relatives, and fireworks. The second day of the new year is dedicated to the love between sisters and brothers and is based on the legend of a visit Lord Yama, the god of death, made to his sister. In her kindness, the sister asked Yama to spare people from the tortures of hell and to reunite brothers and sisters in their next life if they bathed in the waters of Mathura, India. Hindus believe that the fifth day of the new year is special. According to Hindus this day is auspicious, meaning that any task or project can be undertaken without bad results. So, too, is the eleventh day of the new year, which celebrates Lord Vishnu's ascent to heaven. The Diwali season closes on the twelfth day of the new year, just before the mid-autumn new moon appears.

A second major festival is called Navratri. Once again, the purpose of the festival is to give thanks to the major goddesses of Hinduism over a period of nine nights. Navratri, which literally means nine nights, is celebrated twice each year, once at the start of summer, again at the start of winter. The purpose of Navratri is to celebrate the universal mother, referred to as Durga, who removes unhappiness from life. The festival is divided into three sets of three days each. During the first three days, the universal mother is called on as Durga to help people rid themselves of their defects, impurities, and vices. During the next three days, Lakshmi is celebrated and called on to provide material prosperity. During the final three days, the mother as goddess of wisdom, called Saraswati, is called on to provide success in life.

A third major festival is called Kumbh Mela, or "Urn Festival," possibly the world's largest religious pilgrimage. Kumbh Mela occurs four times every twelve years in the Indian cities of Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik. The dates of Kumbh Mela are determined astrologically, based on the position of the sun, the moon, and Jupiter. Once during the twelve-year cycle, the Maha Kumbh Mela, or "Great Urn Festival," is held at Prayag and is attended by millions of people.

The Kumbh Mela, which features ritual baths on the banks of the cities' rivers, spiritual discussions, singing of devotional aartis or hymns, and mass feeding of holy persons and of the poor, is based on a legend that dates back thousands of years. The legend is that demons and gods agreed to cooperate to make and share *amrita manthanam*, the nectar of immortality (the Ganga waters). But the demons stole the *kumbh*, or urn, in which the amrita was held. The gods chased the demons for twelve days and twelve nights, the equivalent of twelve human years.

As the two sides fought over the urn, drops of the amrita fell on the four cities. Accordingly, the festival is held at these four cities in a twelve-year cycle. It is believed that the largest gathering of people in history occurred at the Kumbh Mela in Hardiwar in 2004, when 70 million people attended the pilgrimage.

Everyday living

As in many parts of the world, traditional ways in Indian/Hindu culture have been replaced by more Western ways. One example is dress, especially for men. In the twenty-first century most Hindu men wear Western-style clothing, except perhaps on ceremonial occasions. However, the traditional form of dress for Hindu men was the *veshti*, a long cloth, similar to a sarong, that was wound around the waist and stretched to the ankles. The cotton of the traditional veshti was hand spun, the cloth was hand woven, and the veshti itself was unstitched. The color tended to be saffron, the symbolic color of Hinduism. In the twenty-first century the veshti is commonly worn on everyday occasions only by the men of the city of Jaffna in India as a way of preserving Hindu tradition.

The traditional dress for women is the *sari*. Historians date the sari back as much as 3,500 years. The sari, like the veshti, consists of a single, long, flowing piece of cloth, draped in such a way that one end forms a skirt and the other covers the shoulders and possibly the head as well. The sari was traditionally made of cotton, but today colorful synthetic fabrics are also used. Many twenty-first century women adopt Western-style dress, but the sari is still a common item of dress among Hindu women. In fact in the twenty-first century the wearing of the sari has undergone a revival.

A woman's wedding sari is a particularly valued item that she preserves for the rest of her life. Tradition holds that the pleats of the sari have to be tucked in so the Vayu, the god of wind, can whisk away evil influences. Colors are likely to emphasize yellow, green, and red, which are festive colors that bring good fortune. In the twenty-first century the wearing of beautiful saris has become something of a fashion statement for Hindu women. Additionally, many Hindu women wear the *tilaka*, a red spot on the forehead, typically made of sandalwood paste. This spot on the forehead is thought to be the seat of wisdom and concentration. The mark will differ depending on the sect of Hinduism to which the woman belongs. Male Hindu scholars also sometimes wear the tilaka.

Hindu Deities

There are a large number of deities, or gods and goddesses, that Hindus can choose to devote themselves to when they worship and ask for blessings from Brahma, the creator of all things. These deities, in turn, can take several forms, or manifestations. The central deities are the Hindu Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) but there are many more gods and goddesses that also represent important aspects of Hindu beliefs.

Brahma: Part of the Hindu Trinity. Brahma is the God of Creation. He created Earth and the universe. Brahma is usually represented with four heads and four arms. He is often depicted sitting on a lotus.

Devi: The Divine Mother. Devi is the mother of life and is present in all women. She takes many forms, including that of Durga and Kali. Devi is represented with eight arms and holds a sword in one hand.

Ganesh: The God of Knowledge. Ganesh is the son of Shiva and Parvati and is known to remove obstacles and cast blessings. He is shown with an elephant's head, a large belly, and four arms.

Hanuman: Known for his courage and bravery. Hanuman is loyal to Rama and represents devotion and hope. Hanuman is depicted as a monkey and holds a mace (staff) in one hand.

Kali: The Goddess of Destruction. Kali is a dark-skinned goddess with eight hands, usually shown atop the corpse of a demon. She is a form of Parvati.

Krishna: A manifestation of Vishnu, Krishna is a popular figure of worship. Krishna is

known for his bravery and fight against evil. He is often depicted in images as playing a flute, sometimes accompanied by his friend Radha.

Lakshmi: The Goddess of Beauty, Prosperity, and Good Fortune. Lakshmi emerged from the Milk Ocean and is married to Vishnu. She has four hands, one of which is always extended in blessing.

Parvati: Also known as Durga or Kali. Parvati is wife to Shiva and is depicted as having eight arms, with either dark or very light skin. When Parvati is shown with dark skin, she is in the form of Kali, the Goddess of Destruction. Parvati is worshipped for having a happy family life.

Rama: Considered to be the ideal man, Rama is the hero of the epic story the *Ramayana*. He is shown with a bow and arrow or with his wife and brother.

Sarasvati: The Goddess of Knowledge. Sarasvati is Brahma's wife and holds the powers of speech, learning, and wisdom. She is shown with four hands and dressed in white.

Shiva: The destroyer god of the Hindu Trinity. Shiva has the power to both create and destroy life. He has long hair, through which the waters of the Ganges River flow, and a serpent is coiled around his neck.

Vishnu: The preserver god of the Hindu Trinity. Vishnu preserves the universe and existence. He is shown with four hands and dark blue skin.

Because Hinduism is as much a way of life as it is a religion, its principles and beliefs can be found in everyday life. The core of Hinduism's influence on everyday living is expressed by the notion of karma. Hindus believe that the effects of their deeds can have major consequences for their life after death. Furthermore, Hindus recognize three types of karma that are the results of actions: The first is *Sanchita Karma*, which is accumulated through previous births. The second is *Prarabdha Karma*, referring to the portion of previous karma that accounts for the nature of the current birth; it cannot be changed. Finally, *Kriyamani* or *Agami Karma* (sometimes called *Vartamana Karma*) is the karma being accumulated in the present that will affect future births, much like an insurance policy for the future.

In India, another feature of Hindu life is the caste system. The caste system tends to be misunderstood in the West. For many Westerners, "caste" is thought of as similar to "social class," but this comparison is only partly true. Caste is fundamentally a sense of the duties that one owes to society. Essentially, there are four main castes, although there are numerous subcastes, and the details of caste can differ from region to region. The four major castes are Brahmins, consisting of priests, teachers, and intellectuals; Ksatriyas, or warriors and rulers; Vaisyas, or merchants and landowners; and Sudras, or laborers and farmers. There is a fifth caste, the "untouchables," who perform "unclean" work such as the removal of waste and of dead animals. Religious justification for the caste system is found in the Bhagavad Gita. Many Hindus have spoken out against the caste system, wanting to see it play less of a role in social relations. The concept of "untouchability" was abolished by Article 17 of the Indian constitution, which was passed by the Indian parliament in 1949 and took effect in 1950.

The ancient caste system has collided with modern life in the Indian constitution. The Indian constitution directly addresses individual rights, such as the right to equality, the right to freedom, the right to be free of exploitation (for example, forced labor), the right to freedom of religion, the right to property, cultural and educational rights, and others. This notion of individual rights, though, clashes with traditional emphasis on duties. Many Hindus accept the concept of individual rights and seek justification for them in Hindu scripture. They conclude that two principles exist at the same time: that the individual has rights because others have duties, and others have duties because the individual has rights. The caste system becomes less a system of rights available to

Hinduism



Hindu pilgrims engage in the festival of Kumbh Mela, which occurs four times every twelve years in four locations in India. Drops of the nectar of immortality are said to have fallen on these four cities during a fight between the gods. © REUTERS/CORBIS.

members of a caste and more a system of duties that a member of a particular caste is obligated to perform for others.

This modern view of castes in terms of the duties individuals owe to society relates directly to beliefs fostered by Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), the Mahatma (“Great Soul”). Gandhi fought for what he felt were basic national needs for his country: freedom from the British colonial rulers, equality for women, removal of persecution of the untouchable caste, and unity between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi believed it was irrational to use violence to form a peaceful society, so he protested passively and nonviolently for what he believed. The nonviolent protests and sit-ins that were led by Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s were learned from the tactics of Gandhi’s passive resistance.

One final characteristic of Hinduism should be noted: Most Hindus are strict vegetarians. A number of reasons are given for vegetarianism. One is that killing any creature for meat would violate dharma, or the need for righteousness in one’s personal life. Another is that killing animals would create bad karma because it is an act of violence. Many

Hindus also avoid eating meat for health reasons. Gandhi believed that one should be a vegetarian by choice rather than by religious obligation or vow. He felt it was the right thing to do, to cause no harm to another living thing (ahimsa). Some Hindus believe as he did in causing no harm, but eat prepared meat because they feel they have not directly caused harm to the animal.

Hinduism's influences

Because it reflects an ancient culture, Hinduism has made its mark in such areas as law, medicine, and the arts. Hindu law was compiled more than two thousand years ago in a book titled *Dharma-sastras*. The *Arthashastra*, or “Treatise on the Good,” written in about the third century BCE, was a discourse on law and social obligations that still influences Hindu society in India. Similarly, medical research dates back more than two thousand years with medical treatises written by Charaka and Sushruta. Yet it is in the area of literature that Hindu culture has had its greatest impact. Some of the world’s oldest literature is written in Sanskrit, and the Vedas, especially the Rig Veda, are among the world’s oldest texts. In the centuries just before the common era, Hinduism gave rise to two of the world’s great epic poems, the *Mahabharata* (the world’s longest epic poem, written sometime around 300 BCE) and the *Ramayana* (first written down in about 200 BCE).

This literary tradition continued in the centuries that followed. Around the year 150 the Tamil Sangam, an academy of philosophers and poets, was founded. The Sangam led a resurgence in the writing of poetry and plays, many of them written in Sanskrit. In the Medieval period Hindu poets, playwrights, philosophers, and logicians produced an outpouring of work, and Hinduism produced two of its greatest poets: the Princess Mirabai (1498–1546) and Kabir (1440–1518). Meanwhile, handbooks written in Sanskrit laid out rules for the production of Hindu statues, temples, and paintings.

Namaste

“Namaste” is used to greet friends and to pay respect to elders, holy people, and temple deities. While saying “namaste,” one places the two palms of the hand together and bows to the one being greeted. This greeting shows respect and welcome and means, “The God in me greets the God in you; the Spirit in me meets the same Spirit in you.” This is an acknowledgement of the Hindu belief of the presence of God in everything.

The position of the joined hands during namaste is called the *anjali mudra*, or reverence gesture. A mudra is a positioning of the hands intended to express certain energies or thoughts. The alignment of the fingers of each hand represents a symbolic union between karma and knowledge and reminds one to think and act properly. When greeting someone with the anjali mudra, one places the hands before the chest to greet a friend or other equal, at eye level when greeting a guru, and above the head when making a greeting to God.

Gandhi's peaceful protest movement The method of peaceful protest by spiritual and national leader Gandhi was developed in large part from Hindu teachings of respect for life and all living beings. Gandhi's protest methods inspired people around the world to try to follow in his footsteps and bring about change in a peaceful manner. His methods of peaceful social action are still practiced around the world in the early twenty-first century.

Gandhi based his methods of social action on principles he called *satyagraha*, which include courage, nonviolence, and truth. This method hinges on the belief that the way an individual behaves is more important than what he achieves, or the end result. By following *satyagraha*, Gandhi formulated his ideas for nonviolent resistance. These forms of resistance often included peaceful protests, marches, fasting, or refusal to cooperate with a law. Gandhi would also compromise with his opponents to avoid violence and to reach a peaceful conclusion. Unfortunately, not everyone agreed with Gandhi's decision to compromise, and he was assassinated in 1948 by a fanatical Hindu for negotiating with Muslims.

Hinduism's spread Westward Gandhi was not the first Hindu to bring the world's attention to India and Hinduism. At the end of the nineteenth century, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) captured the attention of the western world when he spoke at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois. Vivekananda captivated the audience with his talk of Hinduism and support for religious tolerance. Shortly after his speech, Vivekananda moved to the United States to continue to spread his message of love and tolerance in the western world. He influenced many and encouraged greater understanding of people across all religions.

In 1900, shortly after Swami Vivekananda gave his speech in Chicago, there were approximately 1,700 Hindus in the United States. By the early twenty-first century, that number had grown to around 2 million. There are many Hindu centers and temples operating in the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas). In 1994, in the United States alone, there were more than 800 temples open. Hundreds of temples are also available to Hindus in Europe.

The growing influence of yoga As more Hindus from India ventured west, and as those in the west ventured to India, more than people



The physical and spiritual practice of yoga, which is a part of Hinduism, has gained increasing popularity in the West. Teachers such as B. K. S. Iyengar and Sri K. Pattabhi Jois have helped spread the practice beyond its traditional Indian borders.

AP IMAGES.

and their ideas came to be exchanged. Yoga, most commonly known in the West as a practice in which one puts one's body through a series of physical poses to attain greater harmony between body and mind, is a practice that has become incorporated into the lifestyles of many non-Hindus in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Many people practice yoga purely for its physical benefits. It strengthens and tones the body. Many more, however, gain both physical and spiritual benefits from the practice.

The number of people practicing and teaching yoga in the West continues to rise dramatically. In a 2005 study conducted by the North American Studio Alliance (NAMASTA), an organization for mind-body professionals, the number of yoga practitioners in North America has grown from 28 million in late 2003 to 30 million. NAMASTA also estimates the number of yoga teachers in North America to be 70,000. The appeal of yoga, which means “union,” for many in the West is that it allows for individual practitioners to focus on any one of its many benefits, whether spiritual, physical, or psychological. Serious yoga students will venture to India to learn directly from Indian yoga teachers, such as Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (1915–), or seek out Indian yoga teachers who have come to teach yoga in the West, such as B. K. S. Iyengar (1918–).

The science of Ayurveda Ayurveda is a Sanskrit term meaning, “The Science of Life.” Ayurveda is an ancient science that encourages health and well-being through creating a balance between one’s lifestyle, body, and diet. It provides instruction on understanding one’s unique constitution (health) and how to maintain or reestablish this balance. Ayurveda has been practiced in India for more than 5,000 years.

Ayurveda recognizes three main categories of energy, which are a combination of the five elements of space, air, fire, water, and earth. These are present in everyone and everything. The Rig Veda, a Hindu holy text, discusses these three energies and how to use herbs and other methods to keep these energies in balance and live a longer, healthier life. The three energies are called *doshas*. According to Ayurveda, the changing levels of the doshas in a person’s body can affect how he or she feels. Among the methods used to keep energies in harmony are food, exercise, colors, scents, and yoga. The three doshas are:

vata, the energy of movement. The elements of vata are air and space. People with a lot of vata may be very active and creative. Too much activity or too much dry food can unbalance vata.

pitta, the energy of digestion. The elements of pitta are fire and water. People with dominant pitta enjoy challenges and like to lead. To keep pitta in balance, a person should eat cool, fresh foods.

kapha, the energy of lubrication or structure. Kapha is the energy of the earth and water. Kapha personalities like to explore one subject very deeply and dislike change. Heavy foods can imbalance kapha, but spicy foods and physical activity can keep kapha steady.

Although everyone and everything has characteristics of all three doshas, one is usually dominant in a person. Understanding Ayurveda and how one’s dominant energy works with the other energies is the key to maintaining the right body and mind balance. It is intended to be a preventative system of medicine, meaning that by practicing it, a person can avoid developing medical problems.

Current challenges The chief issue that contemporary Hinduism faces in India concerns whether India will remain a secular state (that is, a state that does not formally incorporate a particular religion) or become more of a Hindu state. The secular constitution of 1949, as a result of Gandhi’s work, attempted to create a nation in which the rights of minority religions, as well as members of lower castes, would be protected.

Many Indians, however, would like the nation to become officially a Hindu state. This movement informally is called “saffronization,” referring to the color saffron, the symbolic color of Hinduism. At its extreme, this movement has led to the persecution of minority Christians, Muslims, and other groups in India.

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Indigenous Religions

The word *indigenous* refers to anything that is native to a particular geographical region. This includes people, cultures, languages, or species of plants or animals. The Aborigines of Australia, for example, are an indigenous people, in contrast to the European settlers who arrived on the continent long after. Similarly, American Indians are the indigenous peoples of North America. A synonym often used for indigenous is “native,” but the word *native* in connection with peoples and their cultures is potentially offensive. It could be considered a stereotype, suggesting that they are primitive or backward.

Scholars (those who research and study a subject in-depth) often distinguish between two types of indigenous religions. One type has been practiced by tribes of people that have lived in the same region of the world for perhaps thousands of years. These religions would be indigenous to that region of the world. The other type includes indigenous religions that were carried by people to other regions of the world. People continue to practice those religions, often in combination with more dominant religions such as Christianity, but they are not indigenous to their new homes. These religions are formed from a synthesis, or combination, of indigenous and nonindigenous beliefs.

Examples of synthetic religions can be found in the Caribbean. During the time of the slave trade, Africans were transported to these regions, bringing their religious beliefs with them. At the same time, Spanish colonists and slave merchants carried Catholicism to the New World, where it became the dominant religion. The interaction between African religions and Christianity gave rise to at least two new religions: Vodou, which is dominant in Haiti, and Santería, which is widely practiced in Cuba. Strictly speaking, these religions are not “indigenous” to either Cuba or Haiti, but they have many of the characteristics of an indigenous religion and are based on indigenous practices in Africa.

WORDS TO KNOW

animism: The worship of trees, rocks, mountains, and such, which are believed to have supernatural power.

Bon: An indigenous religion of Tibet.

Candomblé: A South American religion with many similarities to Santería, often used synonymously with Santería.

Ha-ne-go-ate-geh: The “Evil-Minded,” the evil spirit of the Iroquois nation.

Ha-wen-ne-yu: The Great Spirit of the Iroquois nation.

Ho-no-che-no-keh: The Invisible Agents, or lesser spirits, of the Iroquois.

indigenous: A word that describes a people, culture, or religion that is native to a particular geographical region.

Olódùmarè: The name of the supreme god in Santería.

orishas: Name given to the lesser gods of Santería.

Regla de Ocha: The formal name for the Santería religion.

Santería: The “way of the saints”; an African-based religion practiced primarily in Cuba and other Central and South American countries.

Santero: A practitioner of Santería.

shaman: A priestlike person in an indigenous religion who is thought to have special powers to communicate with the spirit world; often used as a synonym for a traditional healer.

shamanism: A term used generally to refer to indigenous religions that believe in an unseen spirit world that influences human affairs.

supernatural: That which is beyond the observable world, including things relating to God or spirits.

Vodou: An African-based religion practiced primarily in Haiti and in other Central and South American countries.

Vodouisant: An uninitiated practitioner of Vodou.

Wakan tanka: The world’s motivating force for the Sioux.

Wakan: The incomprehensibility of life and death for the Sioux.

The number of indigenous religions in the world, as well as the number of their practitioners, is nearly impossible to calculate. Even asking the question “How many?” implies that an indigenous religion exists as a formal, defined institution whose members can be counted with some degree of accuracy. The reality is that indigenous religions, rather than being formal institutions, tend to be an undefined part of everyday life. Many indigenous cultures do not even have a word for “religion.” Many of these religious systems do not have a name other than the name attached to the tribal group itself.

The best estimate of the number of practitioners of indigenous religious beliefs is about 300 million. If that figure is accurate, it would make this group, taken together, the seventh-largest religious group in the world. In all likelihood, however, this number is inexact, in part because the lines between indigenous and imported religions are not always distinct. In Tibet, many people who are officially Buddhist continue to practice the folk religion called Bon. A folk religion is a system of beliefs shared by the common population. In Africa many people practice a blend of indigenous religious beliefs and more widespread religions, such as Christianity and Islam. When asked, these people very often identify themselves as Christians or Muslims or Buddhists, though they continue to practice indigenous beliefs.

Characteristics of indigenous religions

While the world's indigenous religions show remarkable variety, they also tend to show important similarities. These similarities appear not in the specifics of the belief system but rather in its overall nature. Some features that characterize indigenous religions include the following: geographic location, the use of ritual and artifacts, community participation, a fluid structure, and belief in a supreme God or other divinities (gods).

An indigenous religious group tends to live within a specific bioregion, or a region with a relatively uniform environment and ecology (mountain, desert, rainforest, or plains). Because of characteristics of this environment (for example, a short growing season in mountainous regions, drought in a desert, heavy rains in a rainforest region, and so on), indigenous religions develop explanations of the world and its origins based on the characteristics of their region. Most such religions have strong ecological beliefs as people try to live in harmony with the natural order.

Indigenous religions rarely have written sacred texts. Rather, their beliefs focus on dances, costumes, masks, ritual traditions, and sacred artifacts (material objects). These practices are part of a people's cultural identity and help them forge a sense of connection with their world. Indigenous religions transmit wisdom, cultural values, and history, not through formal education but through myths, storytelling, drama, and art.

They tend not to rely on silent meditation or individualized experiences but on ritual activities that bind people to the community. Many of these rituals mark important occasions, such as planting or gathering a harvest. Yet in many indigenous religious traditions, people seek wisdom of their own through vision quests and similar private rituals. Some

Indigenous Religions

Indigenous religions, such as that of the Aztec, mixed with religions like Christianity, which moved into native areas. The indigenous faiths often adapt and take on aspects of other religions. It is not unusual for a person to practice both an indigenous faith and one that came to their region later. © DANNY LEHMAN/CORBIS.



religions rely on hallucinogenic substances (mind-altering drugs), as well as chanting and ritual, to create a trancelike state in which they can experience the spiritual.

Indigenous religions are not bound by formal theologies. They tend to evolve and change as the conditions of life change. Sometimes the term *traditional* is used to refer to these religions. Many modern religious scholars, however, avoid this word because it suggests something old and unchanging rather than something living and adaptable.

Most indigenous religions believe in some sort of great spirit, a god, whether male or female, who created the world and is responsible for the way the world works. Some believe in multiple gods. Such religions also tend to believe that the natural world is full of spirits who control such things as the weather, the harvest, the success of a hunt, and illness. Shamans and diviners are believed to be able to read the signs of the natural order, communicate with the spirits, and understand the future and the will of the god or gods. Shamans are priests or priestesses who have

strong connections to the spiritual world and use that connection to help others. Diviners are people who can read signs in nature to determine things such as the location of scarce water or future events.

African indigenous religions

In many fundamental ways, African indigenous religions are little different from many of the world's more dominant religions. They believe in the concept of God and the supernatural. The supernatural is anything that is beyond what is observable, including things relating to God or spirits. This belief is part of their everyday lived experience. As they go about their daily activities (hunting, farming, traveling, giving birth, working, treating illness and injury, getting married, and burying the dead), they remain aware of the presence of the supernatural and its effect on the success or failure of their activities and on their relationships with the community.

African indigenous religions provide people with a way of seeing the world and of understanding their place in it. Like Judaism or Islam, these religions give people a system of values, beliefs, and attitudes from the time they are children. An outsider could adopt the religion of an African culture only to the extent that he or she could come to see the world in the same way that the culture does.

The religions also promote a system of morality (values) and good behavior. Such a moral code may not be as formalized as Jewish law as it is developed in the Torah (one of Judaism's sacred texts), for example, but all children grow up learning right from wrong. This knowledge of right from wrong becomes part of the world view of members of the group.

As in other religions, African indigenous religions recognize the importance of ritual, which is a way of carrying out a ceremony or event. These rituals are often associated with important events, such as planting or harvesting crops, as well as with birth, marriage, and death. These rituals are important because they serve as a way of binding the members of the community to one another, in much the same way that Jews or Muslims find a sense of community in attending worship services at temples or mosques.

The supernatural world Most African indigenous religions believe in a supreme God. The names of the supreme God are many and differ with the many language groups of Africa. To cite just a few examples,

About Indigenous Religions

- **Belief.** Indigenous religions have a strong connection to nature and have worship practices that bring the community together. They usually do not have any formal teachings, but seek to live in harmony with nature.
- **Followers.** There are about 300 million followers of indigenous religions, though they may also practice other faiths.
- **Name of God.** Indigenous religions have many different names for their God or gods, including Olódùmarè, Gran Met, the Great Spirit, Nzambi, and Dagpa.
- **Symbols.** There is no symbol that represents all indigenous religions. They each may have objects special to their beliefs. For instance, the Sioux hold the hoop, or circle, as a sacred symbol of unity.
- **Worship.** Indigenous worship is primarily nature-based, with ceremonies using objects from nature or occurring outdoors.
- **Dress.** Dress for worship may vary across indigenous religions, but often there are no requirements.
- **Texts.** Written texts are a distinct non-feature in indigenous religions.
- **Sites.** Sacred sites may vary from religion to religion.
- **Observances.** Each indigenous religion has its own special observances, often-times surrounding periods of seasonal change.
- **Phrases.** Some indigenous religions may have a common phrase that unites their followers, but many do not.

in the Congo, the supreme God is variously called Akongo, Arebati, Djakomba, Katshonde, Kmvoum, Leza, and Nzambi. In Kenya, it has the names Akuj, Asis, Mulungu, Mungu, Ngai, and Nyasaye. In Nigeria, the supreme God is called Ondo, Chuku, Hinegba, Olódùmarè, Olorun, Osowo, Owo, and Shoko.

The supreme God shares many characteristics with the God of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. God is seen as the creator of all things who sustains (maintains), provides for, and protects creation with both justice and mercy. God rules over the universe. He (or She) is all-knowing and all-powerful. African indigenous religions believe that it is not possible for human beings to know God directly. God is often seen as a parent: in some instances, a father; in others, a mother.

In contrast to the major monotheistic (believing in one god) religions, African indigenous religions tend to believe that God, after creating the world, withdrew and is not involved in the day-to-day affairs of humans. That task is left to a group of lesser spirits. These spirits are similar to the angels and demons of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. They communicate directly with people and act as intermediaries between God and humans.

These lesser spirits can be either good or bad. Good spirits provide humans with a host of benefits. They protect crops and livestock, ensure success in hunting, and provide such benefits as good health and long life, life-giving rains (especially in dry climates), and children. People can win and keep the favor of these spirits through good behavior. If a person or community offends the spirits, the spirits can withdraw their favor. It is in this way that African indigenous religions explain such misfortunes as drought, failed crops, and illness.

Good spirits can be divided into two categories. One consists of ancestral spirits that continue to play a role in human affairs. Some of these ancestral spirits are those of the recently dead. They help the community and the family remain prosperous and healthy, although they can also send illness or failed crops as a warning against bad behavior. Other ancestral spirits are those of the long dead, particularly those of rulers or very wise people. These spirits can ensure that the community survives for a long time and enjoys prosperity.

Because of this emphasis on the wisdom of ancestors, African indigenous religions tend to conduct elaborate funeral rites for the dead. They also continue to honor the dead by compiling genealogies (family trees) and offering symbolic food and drink to the ancestral spirits.

Living with spirits Many African indigenous religions, though not all, also recognize nature spirits. These spirits are believed, for example, to inhabit the sky to control rain and weather or to inhabit streams to control fish. Others inhabit the trees, mountains, and rocks. This belief in nature spirits is often referred to as animism. Strictly speaking, however, the term *animism* implies that people worship natural objects themselves. African indigenous religions do not worship the objects but the spirits they believe animate, or enliven, these forces of nature. An important characteristic of these religions is that they see little if any distinction between the natural and the supernatural worlds.

African indigenous religions, like many Western religions (the religions of countries in Europe and the Americas), believe in evil spirits as well. These evil spirits cause disruption and chaos in response to bad behavior on the part of people. Just as an ancestral spirit can cause a drought as a warning to the community, evil spirits can cause drought as a form of punishment or simply because they are evil.

Helping to ward off the influence of these evil spirits is a class of shamans, priests, and diviners. (Sometimes the word *shamanism* is used

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An African Shaman Speaks

Human beings never feel that they have enough of anything. Ofttimes what we say we want is real in words only. If we ever understood the genuine desires of our hearts at any given moment, we might reconsider the things we waste our energy pining [wishing] for. If we could always get what we thought we wanted, we would quickly exhaust our weak arsenal [supply] of petty desires and discover with shame that all along we had been cheating ourselves.

Love consumes its object voraciously [hungrily]. Consequently, we can only experience its shadow. Happiness does not last forever because we do not have the power to contain it. It has the appetite of a ferocious [violent] carnivore [meat eater] that has been starved for a long time—this is how much love and bliss and happiness there is in nature, in the place that was there before we existed in it.

Somé, Malidoma. *Of Water and Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994: page 222.

to refer to any religion that believes in an unseen world of spirits that continue to play a role in the affairs of the living.) An individual shaman is believed to have special wisdom and insight and can communicate with this spirit world, including ancestors, to heal the sick. In decades past, the term “medicine man” was used to refer to these people. In the twenty-first century the preferred term is “traditional healer” or “traditional doctor.” Indigenous religions see sickness as having a spiritual cause, so they seek spiritual remedies. Many people also rely on herbalists, that is, those who learn through training and experience the medicinal properties of fruits, berries, roots, leaves, bark, and other extracts from plants.

Priests serve a function similar to that of priests, ministers, and rabbis in Western religions. They conduct religious rituals that serve to bind the people into a community. In many African religions the priest is responsible for the rituals surrounding a particular spirit or group of spirits. In other cases priests maintain a shrine to an important ancestor and conduct rituals to honor that ancestor.

Influences of African indigenous religions Historically, African indigenous religions had little contact with the rest of the world, so their impact on world affairs was minor. This began to change with the spread of Christianity and Islam into Africa. Both of these religions were founded in the Middle East (Christianity in Palestine, Islam in modern-day Saudi Arabia). As they spread, they moved into nearby northern Africa. In time, Islam came to dominate such North African countries as Libya and Egypt. Later, Christianity became more dominant in other parts of Africa as a result of colonization by European countries that sent Christian missionaries to win converts. Missionaries are people who seek to grow their religion by converting others to the faith.

Both Islam and Christianity were accepted with relative ease by many indigenous African communities for two reasons. First, they shared with Christianity and Islam a belief in a creator-god, so they found these systems of belief compatible with their own. Second, indigenous religions tend to be flexible and adaptable. They have no fixed set of teachings and readily absorb the beliefs of other religious systems. The result has been a blend of religious traditions. It is not unusual for a person to, for example, attend a Christian service and then immediately afterwards attend an indigenous ritual. African indigenous religions have influenced Christianity and Islam in Africa by making them more mystical, reflecting Africans’ strong belief in an unseen spirit world.



Shamans are believed by many to be able to communicate with spirits and understand the future. They have a strong connection to the spiritual world. © LINDSAY HEBBERD/CORBIS.

For instance, African shamans who practice Christianity alongside indigenous beliefs will often say that they have mystical powers that come from the Holy Spirit, which enable them to channel the spirits of others.

In contemporary life, the indigenous religions of Africa have enjoyed a revival. Many Westerners are exploring the belief systems of indigenous religions around the world because of dissatisfaction with Western religions. They are also attracted by the strong environmental component of many indigenous religions.

From Africa to the New World: Vodou and Santería

Two religions in Central America have their roots, at least partially, in African religious beliefs. These religions, Vodou and Santería, emerged in Haiti and Cuba, respectively, when the beliefs of African slaves blended with those of indigenous peoples and other migrants to these islands. The result of this cultural contact was the merger of two dominant religions that attracts many followers in modern times.

The number of practitioners of Vodou and Santería, however, is virtually impossible to calculate. Most of the people who practice these religious beliefs also practice other religions, particularly Catholicism, and they are most likely to identify themselves as Catholics. Further, both religions are extremely loosely organized. In the case of Santería, the religion goes by different names in different regions, including Candomblé in Brazil. It has been suppressed in Cuba, so arriving at an accurate head count is difficult. Some sources estimate that about three million people practice Vodou. The number of Santerians includes about eight hundred thousand in the United States, one million in Brazil, and three million in Cuba.

Vodou A proper understanding of Vodou, sometimes spelled vodun or vodoun, requires distinguishing it from the Western stereotype. In the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas), particularly in the United States, “voodoo” (as it is usually spelled) is associated in the popular mind with witchcraft, black magic rituals, zombies, and other beliefs that are regarded as superstitious, such as sticking pins into voodoo dolls to bring bad luck to another person. While practitioners of voodoo can be found in the United States, voodoo is a stereotype that has little to do with the religion of Vodou as it is practiced.

Vodou is practiced primarily in Haiti, the western portion of the Central American island of Hispaniola, which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic. It can also be found in Cuba and in parts of South America. Vodou is a blend of three different religious traditions. The first is that of the indigenous Taino and Arawak Indians who inhabited the island until it became a Spanish colony following the voyages of exploration of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506). The Spanish colonists, however, virtually exterminated these peoples. The survivors developed close cultural contacts with African slaves who were brought to the island by the Spanish, and later by the French, to work on Haitian agricultural plantations. The third group that contributed to the development of Vodou included immigrants from Europe, particularly France and the British Isles, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These people brought Catholicism with them.

The dominant influence on the development of Vodou, however, was that of the various African tribes. These tribal influences led to the development of at least three sects, or subgroups or denominations, of Vodou. Orthodox Vodou reflects the traditions of the Dahomean and

Nigerian tribes. Makaya, another branch, shares many of the beliefs of orthodox Vodou but differs in its ceremonial practices. The third denomination reflects the traditions from the Kongo tribe. Each branch dominates in different regions of the country.

These denominations share a number of core beliefs. One is a belief in a single, supreme God, called *Gran Met*, meaning “Great Master,” or Bondye. Practitioners of Vodou also believe in lesser ancestral spirits called *lwa* (sometimes spelled *loa*). These spirits are accessible to those who have been initiated into Vodou through spirit possession. While “possession” is often associated with demons and Satan, in Vodou, possession is a highly desirable state that allows the person to make contact with his or her ancestors. Practitioners of Vodou also believe that spiritual energy can be manipulated to perform magic.

The differences between Vodou denominations are differences in the nature of one’s participation. The general term used for practitioners of Vodou is *vodouisants*. These people attend ceremonies, receive counseling and medical treatment, and generally take part in Vodou activities. In orthodox Vodou the main ritual is that of initiation, called *kanzo*. Initiates can be either men or women. Males are referred to as *Houngan*, while females are referred to as *Mambo*. These initiates receive the sacred *asson*, or rattle, and thereby become the chief organizers of Vodou ceremonies. During these ceremonies, the Houngan or Mambo is the one most likely to be possessed by a *lwa*, though in principle anyone can become possessed. While these ceremonies can take place in homes, they often take place in privately owned peristyles (open spaces surrounded by columns), which serve the same purpose as churches or temples.

In the Makaya tradition the leader of a congregation (group of worshippers) is nearly always a man, called a *Bokor*. He achieves this position not as a result of an initiation ceremony but as a result of having a strong *pwen*, that is, a powerful *lwa*. He becomes the leader of his congregation because he protects them, assists them with business dealings, and cures their physical and spiritual illnesses. In the Kongo tradition the leaders of congregations are called *serviteurs*, or “servants” of the *lwa*.

Orthodox Vodou recognizes four levels of participation. The first includes the uninitiated vodouisant, called a *bounsi bossale*, which literally means something like “untamed (or wild) bride of the spirit.” This person is in effect in training for initiation. An initiate is then referred to as a *bounsi kanzo*. His or her status becomes similar to that of a Christian

Vodou, Zombies, and Voodoo Dolls

One of the stereotypes associated with “voodoo” is the existence of zombies, the “walking dead.” This stereotype has been fostered by horror movies that feature zombies. The word *zombie* has entered the English vocabulary to refer to a person who is “spaced out” or whose behavior is unconnected to the world.

The zombie, though, does have a place in Vodou. The zombie is a person whose soul has been broken and part of it stolen. According to Vodou the soul comprises three parts. One part is shared by all beings; one part allows the individual body to stay alive; and one part is the seat of the personality and spirit. It is the last part that has been stolen from a zombie.

The stereotype of voodoo dolls also has a basis in Vodou belief. Africans made ritual carvings of the *lwa* and carried them to the New World on slave ships. They were forbidden to keep their carvings, but they were allowed to keep dolls, called poppets, that had been part of European folk tradition. Soon, the Africans began to use these dolls as a substitute for their carvings of the *lwa*. In time, some practitioners of Vodou believed that the dolls could be used for magic. They stuck pins into “voodoo dolls” to bring misfortune to an enemy. Most practitioners of Vodou, however, place little stock in this belief.

who has received confirmation, the rite that allows a person to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. At the next level, the person is considered *si pwen, sur point*, meaning that he or she enjoys the patronage of a *lwa* and can receive the sacred rattle. This person is similar to a priest or minister in Christianity. At the final level of initiation, a person is referred to as *asogwe*, similar to the position of a bishop in Christianity. Such a person can initiate others.

Santería Discussions of Santería can be confusing for several reasons. First, “Santería” is the popular name for the religion. More properly the religion is referred to as Regla de Ocha, or sometimes just Ocha, meaning “The Rule of the Orisha,” referring to the gods of Santería. Other names given to the religion include Lukumi, an African Yoruba word that means “friend,” and La Regla Lucumi. Yoruba is an African language spoken primarily in Nigeria and in parts of Togo and Benin. Further complicating matters is that worship of the *orishas*, or lesser gods, is also a feature of Candomblé, a Brazilian religion very similar to Santería. African religious beliefs were carried to the New World and evolved into different religious traditions in different geographical regions.

Santeros (those who practice Santería) themselves sometimes regard the name “Santería” as offensive. The word, meaning “the

way of the saints,” was an insulting term that Spanish colonists applied to the religion practiced by their African slaves. When these slaves were brought to Central and South America in the 1700s, they were immediately baptized into the Catholic Church, meaning they were made a member of the Church. Practice of their African religious beliefs was forbidden. The slaves, however, quickly discovered that they could continue to practice their religion by disguising it with Catholic images and symbols. Many of the *orishas* were worshipped as if they were

Catholic saints. For example, the orisha Babalz Ayi became Saint Lazarus, the patron saint of the sick. Oggzn became Saint Peter, and Shangs became Saint Barbara. For this reason, the Spanish coined the term *Santería* to suggest that the Africans worshipped saints at the expense of God. Although the term can be potentially offensive and hurtful, many who practice the religion have accepted it. It continues to be widely used.

Santería blends the beliefs of the traditional Yoruba and Bantu peoples of West Africa with Catholicism. A principal belief of Santeros is that the universe is motivated by *ashe*, a growth and movement forward to divinity. Ashe, often translated as “energy,” is the cosmic force that binds all of creation into a web. Santeros believe that this ever-changing force leads to a principal deity called Olódùmarè, the “owner of heaven” or sometimes the “owner of all destinies.” Olódùmarè, the supreme creator-god, is the object of ashe, the direction in which the energy of the universe moves.

In addition, Santeros honor a number of orishas. The orishas are spirits that represent the forces of nature. Each of the orishas is associated with a Christian saint, as well as with an important number, a principle (such as sensuality, war, money, roads and gates, illness, or thunder and lightning), a dance posture, an emblem, a color, and food. It is believed that for an orisha to remain effective, it must be offered animal sacrifices, as well as prepared food dishes. Orishas are not distant from or inaccessible to humans. On the contrary, they are intimately involved with human life, acting as messengers for Olódùmarè.

Accordingly, Santeros take part in animal sacrifices. These sacrifices are an important part of Santerian religious rituals. The most commonly used animals are chickens, which are generally cooked and eaten after the ritual. Sacrificing the animal is believed to please the orishas, which brings good luck, forgiveness of sins, and purification. This belief in animal sacrifice has caused a number of animal rights groups to oppose the practice

Orisha of Candomblé

Like Central American Santeros, practitioners of Candomblé worship *orishas*, or lesser gods. A few of the important orishas include the following:

Èsù: The messenger of the orisha, an intermediary between the orishas and humans.

Ògún: The god of war, battles, metal, roads, agriculture, and justice.

Orúnmilà: The witness to the destiny of each person. His symbol is the seed of the oil palm. Practitioners use these seeds to communicate with him to learn a person's destiny.

Osányin: The god of herbs.

Òsùmàrè: The rainbow.

Osun: The goddess of fresh water, beauty, and health, in contrast to Nàná, the goddess of swamp mud and stagnant water.

Shàngó: The god of fire and thunder.

Osòosi: The god of the hunt, who lives in the forest.



A Santería altar may contain candles, flowers, and offerings of food. Animal sacrifice, most commonly chickens, is an element of the religion. This practice is criticized by some, but is a protected religious right in the United States. © DANIEL LAINE/CORBIS.

of Santería. Santeros counter that the animals are sacrificed humanely and that they are eaten afterwards. The conflict has led to court cases, including one heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the animal sacrifices of Santería are a legally protected religious belief.

Santeros also believe in spirit possession. An important part of Santería rituals is dancing, which leads to the possession of the dancer by the orishas. Finally, ancestor worship is an important part of Santería, just as it is for Vodou, and the names of ancestors are often recited at Santería rituals. Ancestor worship is based on the belief that the dead live on in some form of afterlife and are able to influence the lives of their still-living family members. The living family members exercise great respect for their ancestors and may ask them for favors.

The Santería Eleven Commandments Just as Christianity and Judaism follow the Ten Commandments delivered to the Jewish people by Moses (c. 1392–1272 BCE), Santeros follow the Eleven Commandments of

Olódùmarè, who handed them down through the orisha Obatala, the father of the orisha:

1. You will not steal.
2. You will not kill, except in self-defense and for your sustenance.
3. You will not eat human flesh.
4. You will live in peace among yourselves.
5. You will not covet your neighbor's properties.
6. You will not curse my name.
7. You will honor your father and mother.
8. You will not ask more than I can give you and you will be content with your fate.
9. You will neither fear death nor take your own life.
10. You will teach my commandments to your children.
11. You will respect and obey my laws.

Santería rituals Many of the rituals and practices of Santería are kept as secret as possible. A person can gain full and accurate information about Santería only by being initiated into the religion. Such a person is called an “ab’orisha.” Santería, unlike such religions as Christianity and Judaism, does not have a sacred book or formalized set of teachings. Traditions are maintained orally (by word of mouth) through the generations.

A typical Santería ritual begins by invoking Olódùmarè, while drums beat in traditional African rhythms. These rhythms, called *oru*, change to one associated with a particular orisha. Dance and animal sacrifice are important parts of the rituals. Priests in Santería are called *babalochas*. Priestesses are called *hialochas* or *santeras*. *Olorisha* can refer to a priest of either gender. All receive many years of training in the oral traditions of Santería. They also undergo a period of solitude following their training. One visible feature of Santería is the presence of stores called *botánicas* that sell charms, herbs, potions, musical instruments, and other objects associated with Santería.

The New World: Native American religious beliefs

The phrase “Native American religion” implies that all of the tribes inhabiting the North American continent for the past ten thousand years or so share common religious beliefs. While all have in common a reliance on oral rather than written traditions and a lack of boundaries

between the spiritual and physical worlds, there are marked differences as well. These differences represent each tribe's response to the physical conditions of the environment in which they lived. The religious beliefs of three nations, the Iroquois, the Dakota, and the Apache, illustrate how environmental factors can at least partially shape religious beliefs.

Iroquois The eastern woodlands of North America were dominated by the Iroquois tribe, who developed one of the most advanced and organized civilizations on the continent. The Iroquois occupied most of what is now the state of New York, as well as part of Canada. The Iroquois were surrounded by forest wilderness. While they survived by hunting and fishing, they also relied on agriculture. The Iroquois owed much of their success to the region's fertile soil, to forests with plentiful game, and to the many rivers and streams filled with fish.

Because the conditions of life were relatively easy, the Iroquois nation had the opportunity to develop a complex system of religious beliefs. At the center of Iroquois religion was belief in an all-powerful creator called Ha-wen-ne-yu, or the Great Spirit. They believed that they lived under the constant care of the Great Spirit, who ruled the world and especially the affairs of the Iroquois nation. The Iroquois did not develop a detailed description of the Great Spirit. He was an all-powerful ruler, beyond their comprehension.

The Iroquois further believed in a class of lesser spirits who administered to the material world. While the nature of the Great Spirit remained undefined, the Iroquois developed detailed descriptions of these lesser spirits, called Ho-no-che-no-keh, or Invisible Agents. These spirits owed their power to the Great Spirit's enormous power. Some had names, while others were associated with a natural force or object. One example was He-no, to whom the Great Spirit gave the thunderbolt. He-no controlled the weather.

The Great Spirit was regarded as benevolent (kind). The Iroquois did, however, note the existence of evil, represented by the Great Spirit's brother, Ha-ne-go-ate-geh, or the Evil-Minded. The Evil-Minded existed independently from the Great Spirit and controlled his own lesser spirits. People could choose whether to obey the Great Spirit or to give in to the temptations of the Evil-Minded. At death the Great Spirit would judge a person's immortal soul and punish those who had failed to obey him. For this reason, the Iroquois developed a moral code that contributed to the nation's success.

The ritual practices of the Iroquois were passed down through generations. Rituals were associated with the seasons of the year, reflecting the relationship between seasonal changes and agriculture. Great festivals were held in connection with agricultural periods to thank the Great Spirit for His protection and gifts. Leading the ceremonies were Ho-nun-den-ont, or Keepers of the Faith, a loose council of tribal members who maintained the ritual practices of the Iroquois.

Dakota In contrast to the Iroquois, who inhabited the dense woodlands of eastern North America, the Dakota (or Sioux, as they are popularly called) inhabited the northern Great Plains (present-day North and South Dakota and Minnesota). Because the Sioux occupied a much larger geographical region, they were less organized than the Iroquois. The tribe included a number of subtribes, such as the Oglala Sioux. Also unlike the Iroquois, the survival of the Sioux depended almost entirely on the hunting of buffalo. The buffalo provided the Sioux with virtually all the necessities of life. The hides provided clothing and shelter; the meat provided nourishment; and the horns provided utensils and cutting tools. Even the sinews were used for bow strings. For this reason, the Sioux were much more nomadic than the Iroquois, meaning that they moved from place to place as they followed the buffalo herds. The Sioux had no permanent settlements.

The chief characteristic of Sioux religious belief was a sense of oneness and unity between the natural and the supernatural worlds. This sense of unity was expressed in a number of ways. One was the prominence in Sioux life of the hoop, or circle, which symbolized the unity of the people. The people were imagined as united in a circle, just as the four directions of the compass were seen as part of a vast circle that

Symbolism in Religion

A common feature of a religion is an object or objects that serve as symbols of the faith. These objects are often inspiring to the religion's followers and may be used by them to focus their prayer or announce their faith, such as if worn as jewelry. Just as the *assan*, or rattle, is a symbol in Vodou and the hoop is sacred to the Sioux, Christianity, Hinduism, and Jainism have objects that are special to their followers. A prominent symbol of the Christian faith is the cross. It represents to Christians the sacrifice that the religion's founder, Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE), made for them when he died on the cross. The cross is a reminder of Jesus's sacrifice, love, and forgiveness. This symbol appears outside and within churches, on the rosary (Christian prayer beads), and even on jewelry.

Both Hinduism and Jainism share sacred symbols: the *aum* and the *swastika*. The *aum*, or *om*, in Hinduism represents a sacred sound that stands for all of God that is knowable and unknowable. It represents the past, present, and future. In Jainism, the *aum* is used as a repeated prayer that can take one to a trancelike state. The word *swastika* is Sanskrit for "may good prevail." It has the shape of a cross with all four of its branches bent at right angles and facing clockwise. For Hindus, the *swastika* is a reminder that God is present in all things. Jains understand the *swastika* to symbolize the four forms of existence held by souls that have not been freed. It reminds them of their goal of freeing the soul from worldly existence.

Indigenous Religions



An Apache girl wearing traditional dress is painted white for the Sunrise Dance, a rite of passage for young women. The staff in her hand symbolizes longevity. The Apache religion was less concerned with the supernatural than it was with matters that would aid their survival. © ANDERS RYMAN/CORBIS.

has no beginning or ending. This symbolism was used in Sioux living arrangements. The people lived in tepees that were circular at the base, and tepees in a village were arranged in a circle. Another symbol was the Sacred Pipe, which symbolized the unity of the Sioux people with the earth, of which the pipe is made. It was believed that when people prayed with the Sacred Pipe, the spirits would come. Care of the Sacred Pipe, also known as the Calf Pipe, was given to the Sioux by a spirit called White Buffalo Woman. The Pipe remained in the hands of a keeper.

The Sioux believed that ultimately the world, including life and death, was not able to be understood. The word *wakan* is used to suggest this mysteriousness and unpredictability. Within the world was a motivating force, an energy, called *wakan tanka*. This force created the universe. The physical world was made up of manifestations of *wakan tanka*, so nothing in the physical world was regarded as real. Everything in the

physical world only appeared to be real. “Wakan people,” such as the White Buffalo Woman, interacted with the world and controlled humans’ lives.

Sioux holy men were called *wicasa wakan*. Their function was to help the Sioux make sense of the world. These men did not develop a set of dogmas or beliefs but tried to help the Dakota people understand their place in the world.

Rituals centered on the buffalo. The Sioux believed that a bond existed between themselves and the buffalo as part of the interconnectedness of the world ruled by the force of *wakan tanka*. Most Sioux worship focused on personal mystical experiences rather than rituals conducted by a class of priests. These experiences were most often expressed in the form of a dance inspired by the tribal member’s personal vision.

Apache The Apache lived in the Southwest, including present-day Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and portions of Mexico. Like the Sioux, they were a nomadic tribe. Unlike the Sioux, they were gatherers rather

than hunters. The harsh desert climate of the Southwest did not support herds of game, nor did it support agriculture. Accordingly, living conditions for the Apache were difficult. Most of the tribe's energies were devoted to the search for scarce resources. Under these conditions, the Apache gave little thought to religious matters. They did not recognize gods and goddesses such as the Wakan people. The Apache belief system instead focused on the "supernaturals," or cultural figures that were responsible for the Apache's mode of life. These supernaturals had little to do with the day-to-day activities of the Apache, although an individual could call on them for help if necessary.

Religious ritual played little role in Apache life, again because so much attention was devoted to survival. Because the southwestern deserts lack seasons that are as noticeable as those of the Northeast or the Great Plains, the Apache did not celebrate seasonal events. Furthermore, the Apache had little in the way of formal ceremonies for such events as marriage and death. Marriage was regarded merely as the absorption of the couple into the Apache extended family, and death was seen as a failure of survival, not an event in any way to be celebrated. The Apache did not give much attention to the concept of an afterlife.

Because of the demands of survival, the tribe did not devote much time to religion. Each tribal member was encouraged to find a relationship with the supernatural powers through individual quests. What organized religious activity existed was led by shamans, who derived power from their ability to heal illness. The skilled shaman could become a powerful figure in the tribe by his ability to link the healing powers of the supernatural world to the Apache people.

Indigenous religions in Asia: Bon

Asia is home to a large number of indigenous religions. One that has attracted increasing attention is Bon, found in Tibet. Interest in this religion has grown as Tibet has become a more popular tourist destination. Bon is believed to have originated in Olmo Lungring, a land to the west of Tibet. It was introduced to Tibet by Tonpa Shenrab Miwo, who was born a prince about 18,000 years ago.

The Bon believe in a heaven occupied by three gods who control the world: Dagpa, who controls the past; Salba, who controls the present; and Shepa, who controls the future. Tonpa Shenrab Miwo claimed to be these gods' earthly incarnation or human form. Bon was once a flourishing religion in Tibet. But beginning in the eighth century, when a

unified Tibet was formed, Buddhism was chosen as the official religion. Bon went into decline. Later in the eighth century CE the beliefs of Bon and of Buddhism merged to form a religion unique to Tibet.

Buddhism was regarded as the religion that dealt with otherworldly concerns. Bon was more of a folk religion (the beliefs of the common people) that dealt with the affairs of this world. Tibetans historically have believed that their harsh, mountainous country is inhabited by spirits and supernatural forces that have a direct effect on people's lives. A class of shamans communicates with these spirits and predicts the influences of the spirits on people. The shamans help people perform rituals either to enlist the help of the spirits or to overcome the harmful effects of spirits.

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Islam

Islam is the dominant religion of the Middle East, North Africa, and much of Southeast Asia. Its reach extends worldwide, and its followers are called Muslims. The term “Muslim” comes from the Arabic phrase *bianna musliman*, meaning roughly “submitted ourselves to God.” Islam was founded in the early seventh century in Mecca, a city in the Arabian peninsula in modern-day Saudi Arabia. According to Islamic belief, in 610 Islam’s prophet, Muhammad (c. 570–632), began receiving revelations and prophecies from the archangel Jabra’il (Gabriel). These revelations, which continued until his death, were recorded by Muhammad’s followers and preserved to become Islam’s sacred scripture, the Qur’an. In older texts Islam is sometimes called “Muhammadanism,” but Muslims find this term offensive because it suggests that Muhammad was divine rather than simply God’s messenger or prophet.

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning that its followers believe in one supreme God. The God of Islam is called Allah, a name that comes from the Arabic phrase *al-ilah*, meaning “the One True God.” Core beliefs of the religion include belief in one God, Allah, and in Allah’s messengers, the angels. Muslims believe in Allah’s many prophets, which include Muhammad, Moses (c. 1392–c. 1272 BCE), Abraham (c. 2050–c. 1950 BCE), Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE), and others. Islam also contains as its core beliefs a last day, when the world will end; Allah’s judgment of human affairs; and life after death.

It is the world’s second largest religion, with approximately one to 1.3 billion members. While Islam is thought of as a predominantly Middle Eastern religion, the country with the largest number of Muslims is Indonesia, with 130 million, representing 90 percent of the nation’s population. Other countries with large Muslim populations include India, with 80 million (13 percent of the population); Pakistan, 73 million (97 percent); Bangladesh, 72 million (85 percent); Turkey, 56 million (98 percent); and Iran, 35 million (98 percent). Muslims also make up

95 percent or more of the populations of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, and Oman. In all, approximately 760 million Muslims live in Asia and the Middle East.

In addition, there are some 301 million African Muslims, with the largest numbers in Egypt (38 million), Morocco (21 million), and Algeria (20 million). About 32 million Muslims live in Europe, with the largest number in Russia, where Muslims comprise 19 percent of the population. It is unknown how many Muslims live in the United States. Islamic organizations put the number at a minimum of six million, while independent polling organizations put the number variously at one to three million. Canada's roughly 580,000 Muslims represent about 2 percent of that nation's population.

Becoming a Muslim requires no formal rituals or ceremonies, such as baptism in Christianity. To become a Muslim, a person has to recite the *Shahadah*, or Declaration of Faith, in front of two witnesses. This declaration consists of the words "*Ashabadu an la ilaha ill Allah wa ashabadu ann Mubammadar Rasulullab,*" or "I declare there is no god except God, and I declare that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

History and development

In the late sixth century CE the religion of Mecca was based on idolatry, or the worship of physical objects, such as statues, as if they were gods. These idols were kept in special houses or temples called shrines. The most famous of the shrines of Mecca was the *Ka'aba*, which at that time housed idols dedicated to the gods of the city. Mecca was an important stop in the east-west caravan trade route in the seventh century. Meccans had a financial interest in maintaining this idolatry because it was a way of getting money from wealthy merchants and traders who traveled through the city. Muhammad, however, did not accept idol worship. As a member of one of the most prominent families of the city, and as a widely traveled merchant, he had an interest in maintaining the tourist trade in Mecca. Instead, he launched a movement that became one of the world's most significant monotheistic religions.

Receives revelations from Allah In 610, when he was about forty years old, Muhammad had his first visitation from the archangel Jabra'il. According to Islamic tradition, he was meditating in a cave on Mount Hira, outside Mecca, when a voice spoke to him. His wife's cousin, a Christian monk, told him that the voice was that of a holy messenger

WORDS TO KNOW

Allah: The name of God in Islam, derived from the Arabic word *al-ilah*, meaning "the One True God."

caliph: One of Muhammad's successors as leader of the faith.

fitrah: An inborn tendency to seek the creator.

Five Pillars: The core of Islamic belief referring to declaring faith, daily prayer, charitable giving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

hadiths: The sayings of the prophet Muhammad recorded by his followers.

Haj: Pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca.

halal: Permissible activities for Muslims.

haram: Prohibited activities for Muslims.

jinn: Evil spirits that tempt a person away from dedication to Allah.

Ka'aba: The shrine built by the prophet Abraham in the holy city of Mecca and the focal point of pilgrimages to the city.

Mecca: A city in present-day Saudi Arabia, the holiest site of Islam, where the religion was founded.

muezzin: The person who issues the call to prayer.

Muslim: A follower of Islam, from the Arabic phrase *bianna musliman*, meaning "submitted ourselves to God."

Qur'an: The sacred scriptures of Islam; contain the revelations given to the prophet Muhammad revealed to him beginning in 610.

ra'kah: A unit of prayer.

salat: Daily prayer.

saum: Fasting.

Shahadah: The Islamic declaration of faith. It consists of the words "*Ashhadu an la ilaha ill Allah wa ashhadu ann Muhammadar Rasulallah*," or "I declare there is no god except God, and I declare that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

shari'ah: Islamic law.

Shiite: One of the main sects of Islam; from the phrase *Shi'at Ali*, or the party of Ali.

Sufism: A trend in or way of practicing Islam; characterized by an ecstatic, trancelike mysticism.

Sunnah: The example of the prophet Muhammad, containing the hadiths, or sayings; provides guidance to everyday questions of faith and morality.

Sunni: One of the main sects of Islam.

sura: Any chapter in the Qur'an.

tawba: Repentance.

zakat: Annual charitable giving.

and that Muhammad had been selected as a prophet of God. Soon Muhammad began to preach his new religion in Mecca. He attracted a number of followers, but Meccan leaders saw Islam as a threat. They persecuted (mistreated) Muhammad and his followers, often beating them or hurling garbage at them. A key event took place eleven years later, when

Muhammad made a startling announcement to his followers. He told them that the archangel Jabra'il had transported him to the city of Jerusalem. From there, he had been miraculously taken to heaven, where he was given a tour of paradise. The Dome of the Rock marks the spot in Jerusalem from which Muslims believe that Muhammad made his ascent to heaven. It still exists and is regarded as a holy site for Muslims.

After thirteen years of hostility from Meccans, Muhammad discovered a plot to assassinate him. He and his followers left Mecca for the city of Yathrib to the north. The residents of Yathrib gave Muhammad a warm welcome. Soon they changed the city's name to Medina, from the Arabic phrase *Madinat al-Nabi*, or "city of the Prophet." As Muhammad oversaw the construction of the first Muslim mosque (place of worship) and created an Islamic state, the Muslims in Medina successfully repelled at least three invasions by Meccan armies. In time they conquered Mecca, destroyed idols, and converted Mecca into a Muslim community. Mecca today is the world's holiest site to Muslims, who are expected to make a pilgrimage there at least once during their lives.

In the seventh century the lands of Arabia were peopled by competing nomadic (wandering) clans and tribes. These clans had until this time remained largely within their own boundaries. After Muhammad spread the message of Islam, however, the people were inspired with a sense of unity and purpose that lasted long past the Prophet's death in 632. They gathered under the banner of Islam, seeing themselves as God's chosen people.

Spreading the faith: The Muslim empire By 634 Islam had spread throughout Arabia. Muslim armies confronted the Byzantine Empire (named for the empire's capital city, Byzantium, also named Constantinople; it is now Istanbul, Turkey) and seized the province of Palestine, where Jerusalem was located. They also seized Syria, Persia (roughly modern-day Iran), and much of Egypt. In 638 the second *caliph*, or successor to Muhammad, Umar, accepted the surrender of the city of Jerusalem from the Byzantines.

By the beginning of the eighth century Muslims ruled a vast empire that stretched from North Africa through the Middle East and into central India. In the early 700s Muslims invaded the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula (containing the countries of Spain and Portugal). From there they crossed the Pyrenees Mountains into France. In 732, however, they were driven back by a French army led by Charles Martel (c. 688–741) at the Battle of Tours. In the 800s Muslims captured the

About Islam

- **Belief.** The core belief of Muslims is total allegiance to the one God, Allah, who controls every aspect of people's lives and to whom people owe total submission.
- **Followers.** Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with about one to 1.3 billion followers. Most Muslims live in the Middle East and in such Asian countries as India and Indonesia.
- **Name of God.** The God of Islam is Allah, from the Arabic term *al-ilah*, meaning "the One True God."
- **Symbols.** Because it forbids any kind of worship of physical representations, Islam has no real physical symbols. Acts of prayer or devotion can be considered symbolic.
- **Worship.** The core of Islamic worship is daily prayer (*salat*), conducted either individually, in the family, or at a mosque with other Muslims. Muslim men are also required to attend a Friday sermon at a mosque.
- **Dress.** Muslim men are required to avoid tight clothing, cover the area between the knees and the navel, and grow a beard, if possible. Many wear a loose gown and/or a turban. Women are required to wear loose-fitting clothes and to cover themselves to the ankles and wrists. A veil is worn to cover the hair, and excessive makeup and perfume are discouraged.
- **Texts.** The major text of Islam is the Qur'an, the word of God revealed to the prophet Muhammad. Many Muslims also rely on the Sunnah, or the life example of the Prophet that includes the *hadiths*, or sayings, for guidance in matters of faith and morality.
- **Sites.** The holiest site for all Muslims in Mecca, a city in present-day Saudi Arabia, where Islam was founded. Also considered holy is Medina, Saudi Arabia, to which Muhammad and his followers fled to escape persecution in Mecca.
- **Observances.** The primary observance of all Muslims worldwide is *Ramadan*, a month of fasting.
- **Phrases.** The most commonly used phrase by Muslims is *Allahu Akbar*, meaning "God is greater." The sentence is left incomplete because Allah is infinite and unknowable, and therefore greater than anything that could be named.

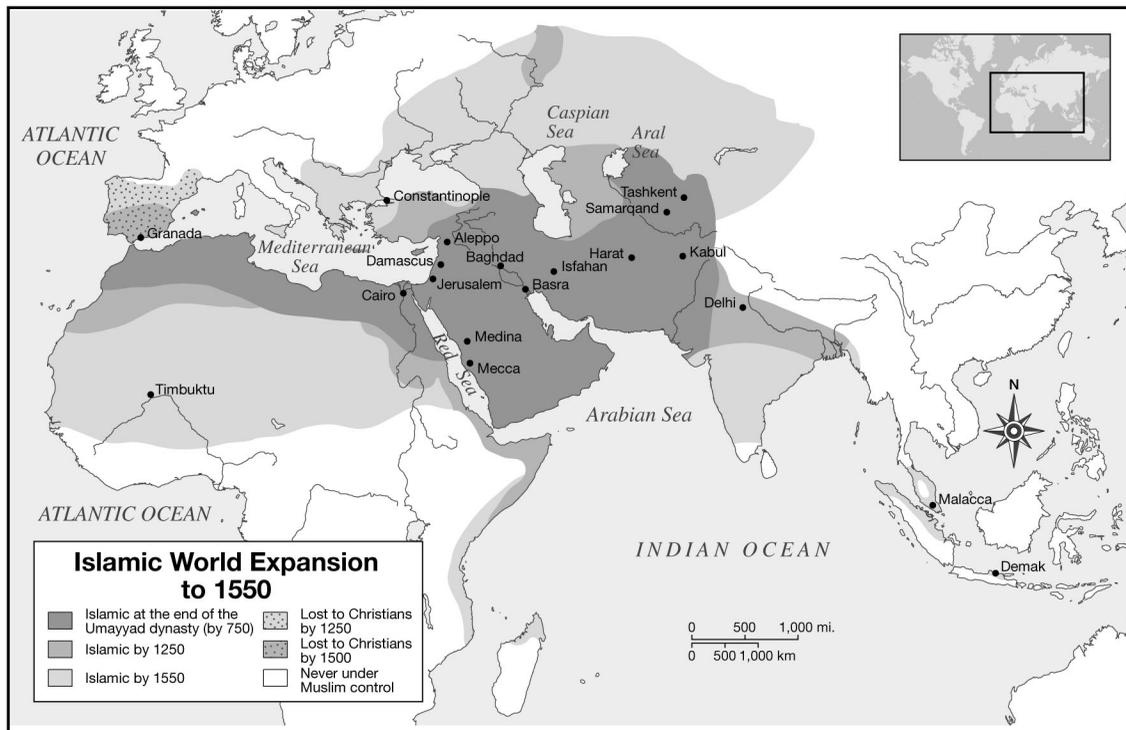
Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and Corsica. In 902 the island of Sicily was added to the empire. In the 800s Muslims attacked cities in southern Italy and even advanced on Rome, though they were driven back in the 900s and 1000s by armies led by the popes (religious leaders) of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Iberian peninsula was one of the first regions where Muslims and western Christians came into contact. By the end of the eighth century Muslims occupied most of the southern regions of Iberia, limiting Christians to the northern regions. On the peninsula they established the

Umayyad caliphate in the city of Córdoba, Spain. A caliphate is a region or domain ruled by a caliph; “Umayyad” is the name of a family dynasty. Spanish Christians were determined to reclaim their country. They defeated the Muslims at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, and by 1225 the Muslim empire held only the area around the city of Granada, in the far south. They were driven out of Granada in 1492, completing what the Spanish called the *Reconquista*, or “Reconquest.” However, the influence of Muslims, or the Moors as they were called, remains evident in southern Spanish architecture and within the Spanish language itself.

The Popularity of Islam Within fifty years of Muhammad’s death Islam had spread across Africa and Asia from the Mediterranean to the borders of China. Historians have identified three reasons that they believe were important in the wide and rapid advancement of Islam in the seventh century.

1. *Trade.* Historians note that Islam spreads by following established trade routes around the world, from Africa to southeast Asia. They believe that Islam made trade easier by creating trust relationships based on a common set of religious beliefs. Traders outside the community of Islam had to create ties between people of different faiths and different backgrounds, which was much more difficult. Because Islam requires knowledge of Arabic, Muslim traders also shared a common language. Islam, this theory states, made trading much easier and gave Muslim traders an advantage over their non-Muslim counterparts.
2. *Alienation from other religions.* People in general were unhappy with other religions, including Christianity and Judaism, the two other major monotheistic religions. Judaism at the time was an ethnic religion, and membership was open only to people who were born Jews. Christianity promised peace and love, but the equality promised by the early Church was hard to come by. In many cases Church leaders (priests and bishops) used their religion to maintain their own social positions. In contrast, Islam had no priesthood, and membership was open to anyone who would recite the *Shahadah* in front of witnesses.
3. *Taxes and tolerance.* Although Muslim rulers imposed additional taxes on their non-Muslim subjects, in many cases those taxes were lighter than those gathered by local rulers. In addition, the Qur’an calls on all Muslims to respect Christians and Jews (whom the Prophet



At its height, the Islamic empire reached from the Middle East to North Africa and parts of Europe. The influences of the religion on these cultures can be seen in architecture, words within local languages, and other areas of these regions. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

called “the people of the Book”). Sometimes the relationship between members of different religions was so close that they shared places of worship. In Syria, for instance, Christians and Muslims shared the Church of St. John the Baptist (an old Christian church). Muslims used the church as a mosque on Saturdays, while Christians used it on Sundays.

The rapid and widespread growth of Islam as both a community of faith and a social community created a world-state that stretched from China to Europe. It brought people from different cultures together and gave them a common set of values. In that sense, Islam has been a major force for global understanding.

Internal arguments and divisions Despite its early successes Islam was weakened by political and religious factions, or subgroups. The chief

division, between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, rose over the question of who would succeed Muhammad. When he died in 632, Muhammad left no instructions about who would follow him. Shiite Muslims believed that Muhammad's successor needed to be a direct descendant of the Prophet. Sunni Muslims did not share that belief. This central difference led to the split. The majority of Muslims are Sunni.

What followed the election of Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law, was a long period of conflict in Islam. When the second caliph, Umar, was murdered in 644, a power struggle developed among several possible successors. Out of this struggle Uthman (d. 656), another early convert to Islam, became the third caliph. Uthman, though, came from a powerful, aristocratic Meccan clan called the Umayyads and was resented by the Shiites. Their resentment grew when he moved the capital of the Islamic empire from Mecca to Damascus, Syria. When Uthman was assassinated by Shiites in 656, 'Ali finally became the fourth caliph.

The disputes between Sunnis and Shiites, however, were not put to rest. After a civil war between the two parties, 'Ali was assassinated in 661. This allowed the Umayyads, whom the Shiites believed were corrupt and unfaithful to the teachings of Muhammad, to regain control of the empire. Civil war broke out again in 680, when 'Ali's son, Hussain ibn Ali, led the Shiites against the Umayyads. The war ended when he and his family were killed in a historic battle at Karbala, south of Baghdad (in present-day Iraq).

'Ali's death still did not end the civil wars. As conversions (changes of religious belief) spread throughout the Islamic world, many new Muslims began to resent the Umayyad control on power and their unfair taxes. To oppose the Umayyads, yet another rebel group formed: the Abbasids, named after Muhammad's uncle, Abbas. In 750 the Abbasids launched a civil war, capturing the Muslim capital of Damascus and massacring the Umayyad caliph and most of his family. One Umayyad, abd-er-Rahman, escaped his family's destruction and fled to Spain, where he established a rival caliphate at Córdoba. The Abbasids moved the capital to Baghdad, where they ruled until 1258.

Even in the twenty-first century tensions continue to divide Sunni and Shiite Muslims. In the Middle East nation of Iraq, the early 2000s saw increasing violence between Sunni and Shiite Muslims as the people attempted to form a new government after a U.S.-led invasion ousted leader Saddam Hussein (1937–). Many factors contributed to this violence, with long-held differences between the two groups being one of them.

Muslims and the Crusades A major series of events affecting Islam began to unfold when Europe, which largely followed Christianity, launched the Crusades in the 1090s. The Crusades were a series of military campaigns by the Europeans against the Muslims of the Middle East. The stated purpose of the Crusades was to reclaim the Holy Land, the country then called Palestine and particularly the city of Jerusalem, from the Muslims. From the perspective of Europe, the First Crusade was successful. The Crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, beginning a two-century-long period of occasional warfare between Muslims and the “Franks” (so-called because many, though not all, of the Crusaders were Franks, or French). The major Crusades ended in 1291, when Muslim forces drove the Crusaders out of their last stronghold at Acre in Palestine. During the Crusades, one of the great heroes of Islam emerged. This was Saladin (1137–1193), the name commonly used to refer to Salah al-Din, a general who was able to unite Muslim forces and oppose the Franks during the Third Crusade (1189–92).

Throughout this period, the Muslim response to the Crusaders was weakened by internal fighting and rivalry. The Egyptian Muslims, a Shiite dynasty called the Fatimids (who believed that they were the descendants of Muhammad’s daughter Fatima), hated Turkish Sunni Muslims. The Turkish Muslims themselves were divided into two factions or clans, the Seljuks and the Danishmend. Many Muslim leaders in Palestine and throughout Arabia were more interested in maintaining control over their small domains than they were in loyalty to the caliphate in Baghdad, so at various times they cooperated with the Crusaders.

In 1090 a rebel group called the Ismailis formed to oppose the Abbasid Baghdad regime. This group, which came to be called the Assassins (a Western term possibly from the word *hashish*, the drug that members used before carrying out their missions), vigorously opposed Sunni Islam. They were also enemies of the Shiites in Egypt, who had expelled them and driven them underground. To undermine (weaken or ruin) Sunni Islam, the Assassins frequently cooperated with the Crusaders and assassinated Muslim leaders.

From the 1600s to the 2000s From the mid-seventeenth century to about 1950, many Muslim countries were colonies of European nations, including Britain, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Russia, and Belgium. This colonization was responsible in part for much of the spread of Islam. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Great

Saladin

By the time of the Third Crusade, Saladin (1137–1193) was the *sultan*, or ruler, of Syria and Egypt. He was the most widely known Muslim warrior in Europe, and his very name struck fear in the hearts of Europeans. His victory at the Battle of Hattin on the night of July 3–4, 1187, was a turning point in the history of the Crusades. His army wiped out the entire Crusader force that stood between him and Jerusalem to the southwest. Jerusalem eventually fell to Saladin's forces without a fight on October 2, 1187.

A number of legends grew up around Saladin. During the Battle of Hattin a captured Crusader leader was brought to his tent. By the rules of Arabic hospitality Saladin was obliged to offer his personal protection to the prisoner if he ate or drank with him. Saladin had little interest in doing so, however, because the prisoner had kidnapped and ransomed his sister in the past. Instead, Saladin knocked a bowl of water from the Crusader's grasp, led him from the tent, drew his sword, and promptly cut off his head.

Another story concerns his relationship with Richard the Lionheart (1157–1199), the English king who led the Third Crusade in response to the defeat at the Battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem. In one battle, Richard's horse was killed. Saladin believed that no king should have to suffer the indignity of fighting on foot, so he called a truce and had two horses delivered to the English king. On another occasion, when he learned that Richard was sick, he sent his own personal physician to Richard, as well as gifts of fruit and even snow from the top of Mount Ascalon to cool him. Richard recovered and returned to the field of battle.

Britain transported many thousands of Muslims from India to work on plantations in South America. These Muslims carried their faith with them, and their descendants continue to practice it. Thirty percent of the population of Suriname, a country just north of Brazil, is Muslim, descendants of these plantation workers. In the United States, African slaves carried Islam with them, and many of their descendants continue to practice the religion. In the mid-twentieth century Islam experienced a revival in the African American community. Many prominent African American leaders, such as Malcolm X (1925–1965), as well as such sports legends as boxer Muhammad Ali (1942–) and basketball player Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1947–), converted to Islam and made it more visible in the United States.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries Islam and the countries of the Middle East have dominated newspaper headlines. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 replaced the regime of the *shah* (ruler) of Iran with an Islamic government run under the *shari'ah*, or Islamic law. Many of the countries of the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas) rely on resources from Islamic countries, particularly oil and natural gas. As a result, developments in these nations are followed closely by Western leaders.

Muslims in all nations face a new challenge to their faith in the early twenty-first century. Some groups of Islamic religious extremists have used terrorist tactics against civilian populations, most notably the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people. Religious extremists are people who take a strict view of their religion and are willing to act violently to create the changes around them that will bring

out their religious ideal. Because Muslim extremists were responsible for these and later attacks, many in the Muslim community have experienced mistreatment or persecution by others who have connected Islam with terrorism. Extremists from all religions, however, can and are willing to carry out violence to achieve their vision. Islam is a peaceful religion, and many Muslim groups have organized to combat the image of fear and misunderstanding that has resulted from these violent attacks.

Sects and schisms

Throughout the history of Islam, about two dozen sects, or subgroups, have emerged. Some have disappeared over time, while others remain part of Islam. The first sect to emerge was the Kharajites, a small political faction that was part of the army of ‘Ali, the fourth caliph. This group withdrew loyalty from ‘Ali because they thought that his efforts to negotiate peace with his enemies were a sign of weakness. The sect never gathered a large following, though a small number of Kharajites live in the country of Oman, where their version of Islam is called “Ibadiism.”

Sunni and Shiite Islam The major sects of Islam in the twenty-first century, the Sunnis and the Shiites, have their roots in disagreements that date back nearly to the founding of the religion. The division arose over the question of who would succeed Muhammad after his death. Sunni Islam is the major sect and accounts for perhaps 85 percent of Muslims worldwide. *Sunni* means “orthodox.” The name comes from the word *Sunnah*, or “traditions,” referring to writings that contain Muhammad’s teachings. Sunnis accepted the appointment of Abu Bakr (c. 573–634), Muhammad’s close associate and the father of his second wife, as first caliph to succeed Muhammad.

Immediately after Abu Bakr’s appointment, however, a party formed in opposition. This group believed that Muhammad’s successor had to be a blood descendant of the Prophet. They favored ‘Ali ibn Abī Tālīb, or simply Ali (c. 600–661), who was Muhammad’s cousin and the husband of his daughter Fatima (c. 616–633). This group became known as the *Shi‘at ‘Ali*, or “party of ‘Ali,” from which the name *Shiite* (often written as Shi‘ite) comes. Shiites comprise about 10 percent of Muslims in the twenty-first century.

The differences between Sunni and Shiite Islam grew over time. Over the centuries the Shiites developed slightly different interpretations of the Qur’an and the hadiths. Moreover, differences emerged in rituals

and prayers. For example, Shiites are called to prayer only three times each day rather than five. Shiites also celebrate certain holidays that Sunnis do not, particularly those remembering and honoring the life of 'Ali.

The major source of division, however, concerns the leadership of Islam. While Sunnis believe that any qualified adult male can serve as a successor to Muhammad, Shiites believe that only a blood descendant of Muhammad can do so. Shiites believe that 'Ali and his descendants were and are blessed with secret wisdom by virtue of their descent from Muhammad. Shiites use the term *imam* as a title to refer to these people, who are believed to have a special relationship with God. In contrast, Sunni Muslims use the title *imam* as one of respect, with no religious significance.

Throughout Islam's history the Sunnis and the Shiites have struggled for power and leadership. In Islam's early history, only Egypt established a Shiite dynasty, the Fatimids, named after Muhammad's daughter. In the twenty-first century only Iran is dominated by Shiites, although significant Shiite minorities live in India, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Iraq. These minorities are often persecuted (mistreated) by Sunnis and tend to be poorer than the majority Sunnis.

Sufism Another important sect of Islam is that of the Sufis. Sufism is less a sect than a movement, or a way of approaching Islam. Sunnis or Shiites, for example, can also be Sufis. Sufism is an mysterious branch of Islam that relies on mystical knowledge held by a small, initiated circle of people. Sufis can often be recognized by their long robes and the turbans they wear around their heads. They emerged during Islam's early years, when Islam was expanding and wealth was flowing into the empire. They believed that Islam placed too much emphasis on worldly concerns, rituals, and legalities. They wanted a form of religion that led to inner ecstasy.

The primary beliefs of Sufis are:

A devoted Muslim can experience God only through consistent chanting, meditation, love for other people, self-discipline, and self-denial.

The way to achieve spiritual wealth is through frugality (not spending too much money). Excessive worldly possessions can corrupt the soul. Sufis are well known for their charitable work.

Sufi Muslims follow the dictates not only of the Qur'an and the hadiths but also those of Sufi masters, often contained in stories



Islamic calligraphy praises Allah with the words Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim, meaning “In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate.” © WORLD RELIGIONS PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY.

and songs. In fact, some of the world’s best-selling poets and novelists have been Sufis. The poetry of Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī (1207–1273) continues to be read by Muslims and non-Muslims alike for its ecstatic, or blissful, vision of a loving God.

Some Sufis, known as Whirling Dervishes, follow the teachings of Jalāl by spinning rhythmically and chanting the ninety-nine names of God.

Sufis practice patience, a total reliance on God’s knowledge of the future, and thankfulness to God.

Basic beliefs

There are seven core beliefs in Islam: belief in God, the angels, the revealed books of God, God’s many prophets, the last day, divine judgment, and life after death. Muslims believe that God, or Allah, is the same God that revealed himself to Jews and Christians. (Arab Christians even use the name Allah when referring to God.) This belief in the same God is expressed in the Qur’an, where Muslims are told to tell Christians

and Jews, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it’s to Him we surrender.”

Allah One of the most memorized passages of the Qur’an, called the *Ayatul Kursi*, or Verse of the Throne, expresses the Islamic concept of God:

Allah! There is not god but He, the Living, Who needs no other but Whom all others need. He is never drowsy [sleepy] nor does He rest. Space and the Earth belong to Him; who can intercede [intervene] without His consent? He knows everything people have done and will do, and no one can grasp the least of His knowledge, without His review. His throne extends over the heavens and the Earth and He doesn’t tire in their safekeeping. He alone is the Most High, the Lord Sovereign Supreme.

Another frequently memorized passage in the Qur’an is a chapter called “Sincerity” that states: “Tell people that He is One God; Allah, the Eternal Absolute. He neither gives birth nor was He ever begotten, and there is nothing equal to Him.”

Allah, in other words, is the only true reality. He is eternal and uncreated, and everything that exists does so because of Allah’s will. Muslims even regard the physical universe as “Muslim,” for in following natural law as created by Allah, everything in the universe submits to Allah’s will. Allah has no form or substance and can be known only by his characteristics, expressed by the “Ninety-nine Names of God,” such as the Strong, the Loving, the Everlasting, the Caring, the Merciful, and so on. Allah is an abstract concept rather than a “person.”

The word “he” is used to refer to Allah because Arabic does not have a word for “it.” Like many European languages, nouns in Arabic have grammatical gender, so that, for example, the word for fork might be masculine, referred to as a “he,” while the word for spoon might be feminine, referred to as a “she.” In Arabic, the *-ah* ending in Allah is a feminine form. But when “Allah” is paired with the word *boowa*, meaning “he is,” the masculine “he” and the feminine ending “-ah” cancel one another out, suggesting to the Arabic ear that Allah has no gender.

Submission to Allah According to Muslim belief, each individual is given free will, including the opportunity to submit to Allah’s will. The process

of submitting is not easy because of the efforts of evil spirits that lead people to forget their creator and give in to evil temptations. Among these spirits, called *jinn*, a word that means “hidden” (and that is the source of the stereotypical “genie” in a bottle), is one in particular called Shaytan. This name is remarkably close to the Western word *Satan*, or the devil.

Shaytan and other evil jinn corrupt people by playing on their desires, emotions, and fears. In doing so, they persuade people to forget their *fitrah*, an inborn tendency to seek their creator. A person who sins is required to go through a process of repentance (atonement or shame) called *tawba*, which consists of feeling remorse or guilt, repenting by saying, “My Lord forgive me,” making restitution (that is, compensating or paying back an injured party); and promising Allah never to sin again.

The Pillars of Islam Central to Islamic religious practice is a system called the *Arkan al Islami*, meaning “Pillars of Islam.” The purpose of the Five Pillars is to remind Muslims of their duty to God and to help them avoid complacency (being unconcerned or self-satisfied) and temptation. The Five Pillars are:

1. The *shabadah*, declaration of allegiance to God;
2. *salat*, daily prayer;
3. *zakat*, annual charitable giving;
4. *saum*, fasting; and
5. *Hajj*, pilgrimage.

The Shahadah is the Declaration of Faith that a person recites before witnesses to become a Muslim. In addition, however, each Muslim is expected to recite the Shahadah at least seventeen times each day. It serves as a daily reminder

Islam and Christianity

Islam and Christianity are the two largest religions in the world. Both trace their roots back to the Jewish patriarch, Abraham. Both recognize one God. They each identify sites in the city of Jerusalem as holy. For Muslims, Jerusalem is the site of the *Haram al-Sharif*, or the Dome of the Rock, the location from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven and toured paradise. Christians believe that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is the site where its founder, Jesus Christ, died on the cross. Both religions teach messages of love, compassion, and charity.

Islam recognizes Christianity's founder as a messenger of Allah. Some scholars believe that the Christian holy book, the Bible, references Muhammad. In one instance, from the book of Isaiah, chapter 29, verse 12, the Bible states: “And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying read this, I pray thee, and he saith I am not learned.” “I am not learned” means that one cannot read or write. These are the words that Muhammad spoke to the angel Jabra'il when he was commanded to read the words of Allah. This accounting is relayed in the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an.

In turn, the Qur'an mentions Jesus Christ as it acknowledges the validity of the messengers and faiths that came before it and notes their unity. This passage is from the Creed of Islam, chapter 2, verse 136.

We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them, and we bow to Allah (in Islam).

to Muslims that there is only one God and that Muhammad is God's messenger.

Daily prayer, or *salat*, is crucial in the life of Muslims. Daily prayer follows a number of rituals and traditions. Depending on what subgroup of Islam a Muslim belongs to, he or she may pray three or five times a day. The prayer requirements are designed to remind one of Allah's presence throughout the day. Prayer can be done in a mosque (the Islamic house of worship), at home, or anywhere.

The third Pillar of Islam, *zakat*, refers to charity, but the word actually means "to purify." Islam requires each Muslim to give up a portion of his or her wealth each year for the benefit of the poor. Islamic governments have the power to tax their citizens for this purpose. *Zakat* is a form of purification, for it forces Muslims to "purify" themselves by giving up part of their greed.

The fourth Pillar of Islam, *saum*, refers to fasting, or not eating. The purpose of fasting is to discipline the mind and body. The primary fasting period for Muslims is Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, when Muslims are expected to observe a strict fast from dawn to dusk for the duration of the month.

The fifth Pillar of Islam is the Haj, or the annual weeklong pilgrimage to Mecca. The Haj takes place during the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (a calendar set according to the phases of the moon). Each Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during his or her life. To remind Muslims that they are in Mecca to renew their commitment to God, strict rules of behavior, dress, and ritual are enforced. Non-Muslims are not allowed to enter Mecca, the holiest place in the world for Muslims, at any time.

Sacred Writings

Islam relies on two sacred texts. The first is the Qur'an, which contains the revelations from Allah given to the Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Jabra'il. The second is the Sunnah, or life example of the Prophet, which contains Muhammad's sayings, called hadiths, recorded throughout his life.

The Qur'an The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an. Muslims believe that the Qur'an, from an Arabic word that means "the recitation," is the literal word of Allah. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the

archangel Jabra'il (Gabriel) over a period of twenty-three years, beginning in 610 and lasting until his death in 632. The Qur'an (often written as *Koran* in English) consists of 114 *suras*, or chapters, and totals just over 6,200 *ayat*, or verses. While Western translations of the Qur'an number the *suras*, Muslims refer to them by name, such as "The Adoration."

The *suras* (often written as *surrab*) are arranged roughly according to size rather than chronological order (the time order in which they were written). The longest ones tend to appear early in the Qur'an, while the shortest ones, some consisting of just a handful of lines, appear at the end. Muslims also distinguish between two groups of *suras*. One group is called the Meccan *suras* because they were written in the city of Mecca. These "Meccan revelations" were the earliest ones. Their main theme was Muhammad's opposition to idolatry and superstition (a belief or fear based on the unknown), as well as the suffering and hardships endured by past prophets. These *suras* were recorded in the earliest years of Islam, before Muhammad and his followers fled Mecca for Medina. Later *suras*, called the "Medinan revelations," focus on how to build an Islamic society. These contain laws pertaining not only to religious doctrine (set of beliefs), philosophy (thought), and morality (good behavior) but also to inheritance, marriage and divorce, criminal punishments, statecraft, and numerous other topics.

The Qur'an is written in a combination of different literary styles, including prose and rhymed poetry. The language, classical Arabic, continues to be used as a literary language, a standard of poetic expression for writers in Arabic. All Muslims memorize at least a portion of the Qur'an and are familiar enough with the language to understand the meaning and to be able to participate in daily prayers. A Muslim who memorizes the entire Qur'an is known as a *Hafiz*, or "Guardian."

Muslims consider translations of the Qur'an as not being the true or actual Qur'an. Allah's word was revealed in Arabic, so Muslims believe that translations are more in the nature of commentaries or interpretations. For this reason most translations are given a title such as *The Holy Qur'an* or some other variant to distinguish them from the true Qur'an.

The Qur'an that is read and recited in the early twenty-first century differs little from the Qur'an as it existed in the seventh century and the years after Muhammad's death. Muhammad himself could neither read nor write, so his followers, who acted as secretaries, recorded his



A Muslim woman holds up a copy of the Qur'an in Arabic. The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Jabra'il over a twenty-three year period in the seventh century. © MABIL MOUNZER/EPA/CORBIS.

revelations as the Prophet recited them. At that time, however, little importance was attached to writing down the Qur'an and compiling it in book form, for the goal of all Muslims was to memorize it.

This changed during the rule of Abu Bakr, the first Muslim caliph, when numerous Muslims who had memorized the Qur'an were killed in a rebellion. Concerned that the Qur'an could be lost, Abu Bakr had it recorded on paper, an innovation newly introduced from China. Later, the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, learned that many non-Arabs were recording their own versions of the Qur'an, with variations in pronunciation and spelling. Uthman, concerned that among all these competing versions the true Qur'an would be lost, ordered production of an official version, with one copy sent to every major Muslim city. Scribes in those cities produced additional copies for use in that city, and faulty copies were ordered burned. Two of these official

copies, called the Usmani Qurʾans, are preserved in museums in Turkey and in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. They are the source of the text used in the twenty-first century.

The Qurʾan contains the core beliefs of Islam. The most prominent is belief in a single supreme God, Allah, who created the heaven and the earth in six periods: “The Adoration” (sura 32) states in part: “Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods, and He mounted the throne (of authority).” The Qurʾan is the basis of the Islamic belief in angels, including Jabraʾil (Gabriel), who revealed the Qurʾan to Muhammad; Mikaʾil, the angel who controls the weather at Allah’s command; Israfil, the angel who will blow the horn to signal the end of the universe; and Azrail, the Angel of Death. Further, the Qurʾan requires Muslims to believe in the revealed books of Allah; in Allah’s many prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ; acceptance that the world will end and that Allah will measure and judge human affairs; and in a belief in life after death.

The Sunnah and the hadiths While the Qurʾan is the central scripture, or holy text, of Islam, Muslims also turn to the hadiths, or collections of Muhammad’s sayings, for guidance in matters ranging from law to personal behavior. The hadiths were recorded to show how to practice Islam in daily life. While the Qurʾan is written in a poetic, literary style, with emphasis on repeated sounds and other poetic devices both to inspire the reader and to make memorization easier, the hadiths are written in a simpler, more everyday style. One example is “Learning is a duty on every Muslim, male and female.”

The hadiths were written down by Muhammad’s followers. Early on, Muhammad forbade his followers to write down his sayings because he was afraid that they might get confused with the true Qurʾan. He later allowed them to be recorded after it became clear that a large number of people had memorized the Qurʾan. The most famous compiler of hadiths was Muhammad ibn Ismaʿil Bukhari (810–870), who gathered

Muslim Women in the Seventh Century

Women played a prominent role in the rise of Islam during Muhammad’s life and after his death. One was Umm Salamah, who escaped from Mecca to Medina, even giving up custody of her children to her family, to become one of Muhammad’s staunchest supporters. Umm Ammarah, wielding a sword and spear, protected the wounded Muhammad when he and a group of his followers were being attacked by the Meccans. Aʿishah, the daughter of Abu Bakr, the first caliph, was Muhammad’s wife. She was a leader and teacher of both women and men. Barakah, an African woman, was Muhammad’s caretaker when he was a child. She faced great danger carrying messages between secret Muslim meeting places in Mecca.

some 600,000 sayings of the Prophet but was able to confirm the authenticity of only about 2,600. The hadiths form the basis of another text that is important to Islam, the *Sunnah*, or “the Way of the Prophet,” used to refer to Muhammad’s life example.

Muslim doctrine is interpreted by Islamic scholars called *ʿulema*. Their function is to interpret and organize Islamic teachings. In doing so, they rely on four sources, in descending order of importance: the Qur’an; the *Sunnah*; the *sahaba*, or the earliest followers of Muhammad; and independent reasoning. The *ʿulema* do not formulate new doctrines. They apply existing Islamic thought to new situations in modern life, such as organ donations, the buying and selling of investments, and whether loud-speakers can be used for the call to prayer.

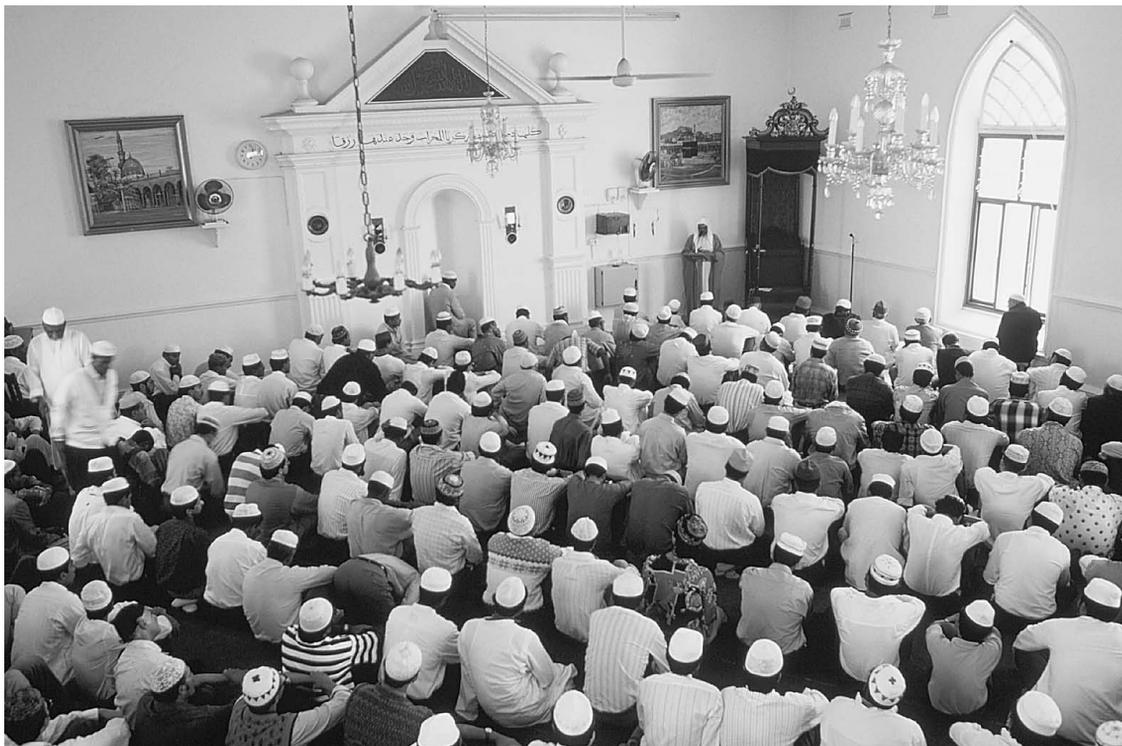
Sacred symbols

Islam has little in the way of symbolic objects, icons, and the like, primarily because the religion was founded as a reaction against idol worship. Islamic law forbids the depiction of living things, so there are no statues. This is also why traditional Islam does not depict the Prophet Muhammad in any media, although artists from other faiths and cultures have made likenesses of him. Islamic art, to the extent that it includes living things, tends to be highly abstract rather than realistic. Some people believe that the star and crescent flag is an Islamic symbol, but it has no connection with Islam. Rather, its roots lie with the Ottoman Empire, which used the star and crescent on its flag.

The primary symbols in Islam are behaviors rather than objects. For example, when Muslims pray, they turn in the direction of Mecca and the Ka’aba, a cube-shaped shrine in the city that the prophet Abraham is believed to have built. This act of turning toward Mecca symbolizes the unity of Muslims throughout the world. Before prayers, or before handling a copy of the Qur’an, Muslims engage in a ritual cleansing to symbolize purity of heart in praying to Allah. Making a pilgrimage is also thought of as symbolic of efforts to renew one’s commitment to Allah.

Worship

Central to the life of Muslims worldwide is daily prayer, called *salat*, the second of the Five Pillars of Islam. Prayer can be conducted in a mosque. More frequently it is conducted anywhere as Muslims go about their daily lives. Muslims make a sharp distinction between supplication and prayer.



Muslims are called to prayer five times a day. They may pray in a mosque, at home, or wherever they are able, and must face in the direction of Mecca, the most holy city in Islam. While at prayer, both men and women cover their heads as a sign of modesty.

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Supplication involves asking Allah for something, such as guidance, forgiveness, or relief from illness. In contrast, true prayer, or *salat*, is a reminder to Muslims that they are the servants of Allah.

The Qur'an is specific about the times of day when people are to pray. The five prayer times, all based on the position of the sun, are:

1. *fajr*, before sunrise.
2. *zuhr*, shortly after noon.
3. *ʿAsr*, late afternoon.
4. *maghrib*, after sunset.
5. *ʿisha*, at night.

These times are flexible depending on the season of the year. For example, during the summer, when the sun rises early, *fajr* may take place as early as 4:00 AM, but in the winter it might take place as late as 6:30 AM.

Pregnant women, travelers, and women who are nursing children are allowed to combine the two afternoon and the two evening prayers.

Salat requires seven preconditions:

It must be time for prayer. Prayer is not to begin early, and late prayers are recorded by the angels in the person's book of deeds.

The hands, face, and feet must be washed to achieve ritual purity.

The process is called *wudu*, and it can be done in a fountain in a mosque or in a sink, wherever there is clean water. A cleansing lasts until the worshiper must use the toilet, after which wudu must be conducted again; otherwise, a wudu can potentially last for several prayer times.

Clean clothing must be worn. However, no shoes are worn in the prayer area of a mosque.

Prayer must be conducted in a clean place. To ensure cleanliness, Muslims typically use prayer rugs.

The body must be covered. For men, this includes pants, a shirt, and/or a robe. Women cover their bodies with appropriate clothing and their heads with a veil or scarf.

Those who pray must turn in the direction of Mecca, an act that symbolizes the unity of Islam worldwide. Mosques all have a feature that helps orient worshipers to Mecca.

The mind must be in a proper condition for prayer, meaning that the worshiper must approach daily prayer with humility, or modesty.

The Islamic "call to prayer" (*azan*) takes place five times each day. The practice originated at a time when there were no clocks or watches to inform the people that it was time for them to come together in prayer. The call to prayer is issued by a *muezzin*, usually a man with a loud but pleasant voice. In the modern world, calling through loudspeakers is not uncommon. The call to prayer is similar to the Shahadah, with repeated calling of *Allahu Akbar* ("God is great"), "I declare there is no god but God," and "I declare Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Prayer itself follows a set ritual, accompanied by specified postures or positions. When Muslims pray with other Muslims, one member of the group usually leads the prayers. All prayer begins with the phrase "Allahu Akbar," with the hands placed over the ears. This is followed by recitation (saying) of the first chapter of the Qur'an with the hands folded over the chest. Each person then recites a second passage from the Qur'an of his or her own choosing, followed again by "God is

great,” then “Glory to my great Lord,” then “God hears those who praise Him,” all while bowing forward at the waist. The worshiper then stands upright, says “God is great,” then, on hands and knees with the forehead to the ground, says “Glory to My Lord, Most High” three times. Again, the worshiper says “God is great,” before rising to a sitting position. After saying “God is great” again, the worshiper bows forward with the forehead touching the ground. This ritual is a “unit” of prayer, or a *raʿkab*. A second unit would follow the same pattern, except that a different, second passage from the Qurʾan would be recited. Early morning prayer consists of two units. The two afternoon prayers and the night prayer consist of four units. The prayer at sunset consists of three units.

The focus of Islamic community life is the mosque, where people congregate, or gather, for reflection and prayer. All Muslim men over the age of puberty are required to attend a Friday sermon called the *Salat ul-Jumuʿah*, or “prayer of gathering.” Women are encouraged to attend, but those with domestic responsibilities are allowed to pray at home during this time. There are approximately two thousand mosques on the North American continent. Many of these mosques also function as Islamic centers, where meetings are held, homeless people are given shelter, and children attend weekend schools in Islam.

Observances and pilgrimages

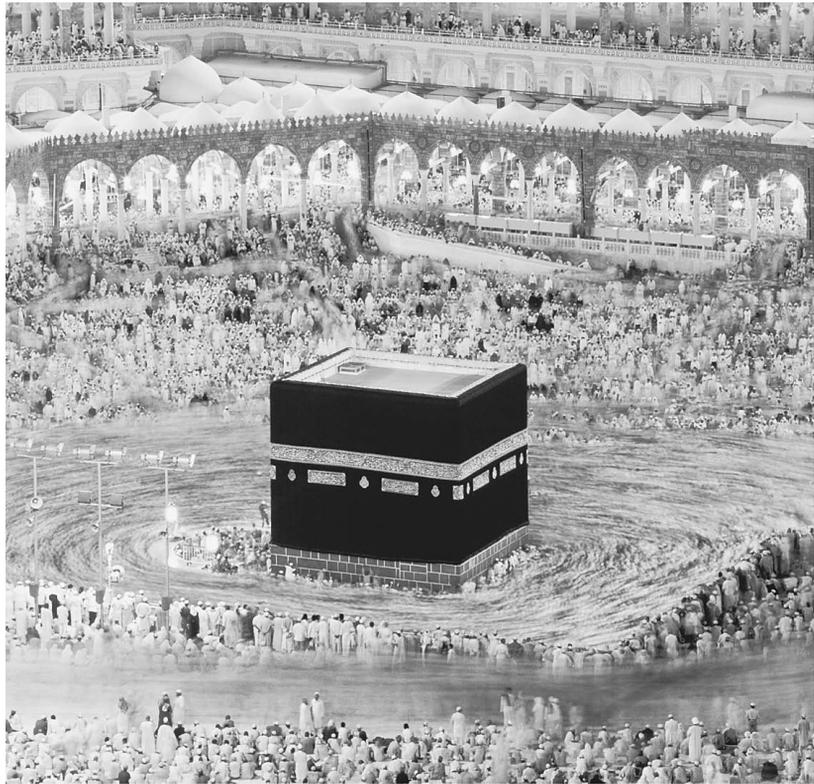
Islamic observations and pilgrimages are so important that they constitute two of the Five Pillars of Islam. The fourth Pillar, saum, refers to fasting. The fifth Pillar, Haj, refers to making a pilgrimage.

Fasting Fasting, the fourth Pillar of Islam, takes place primarily during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Ramadan begins with the new moon. Each day throughout the month, Muslims take a small early-morning breakfast, called a *saboor*, before the sun rises. During the day Muslims are expected to refrain from all foods, including liquids, as well as from nutritional supplements, nonessential oral medicines, and the like. Because the lunar calendar is used, Ramadan takes place about a week earlier each year, so this daytime fast becomes more difficult during the longer days of summer, less so during the shorter days of winter. After the sun sets the day’s fast is broken with another small meal, called an *iftar*. At the end of the month, Muslims gather to celebrate the *Eid ul Fitr*, or Festival of Fast Breaking, a two-day celebration with parties, dinners, carnivals, fairs, and family excursions.

Islam

The fifth Pillar of Islam is the Haj, or pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The central event of the Haj is to walk counter-clockwise around the Ka'aba, or Cube, seven times.

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Pilgrimage The fifth Pillar of Islam, Haj, refers to making a pilgrimage, specifically a pilgrimage to Islam's holiest site, the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The Haj takes place during one week in the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. During this week, more than two million people gather in Mecca, making it among the largest gatherings of people in the world. Each Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during his or her lifetime.

The most important site in Mecca is the Ka'aba, or Cube, the focal point of the week's activities, which include prayer and other events that teach lessons or commemorate (remember) the life of the Old Testament prophet Abraham. The history of this site reaches back to Abraham, along with his wife, Hagar, and their son, Ishmael, who traveled to the site from Palestine. There, Abraham and his son built a shrine dedicated to God. In later centuries, when Mecca was an important stop on the international caravan route from the East to Europe, the Ka'aba became a place where many idols and statues were worshipped. It was this idol

worship in Mecca that led Muhammad, a descendant of the prophet Abraham, to found Islam.

The Haj to Mecca imposes a number of requirements on pilgrims. No sexual relations are allowed. Neither are shaving, fingernail cutting, or the use of perfumes, colognes, or scented soaps. No living thing can be killed, and such behaviors as fighting or arguing are strictly forbidden. One ritual is for men to cut their hair off, signifying a rebirth into the true faith. Women symbolically cut off just a lock of their hair.

Everyday living

Daily activities in Islam are classified according to whether they are sinful or not. The term *halal* is used to refer to activities that are allowed, while *haram* is used to refer to activities that are not allowed. All actions are evaluated according the Islamic halal and haram.

Muslims follow strict dietary practices. Animals to be eaten have to be ritually slaughtered, or killed by a certain method with required actions, either by a Muslim or according to Jewish kosher standards. Pork is forbidden, as is meat from any animal with fangs. All intoxicants, including all forms of alcohol and mind-altering drugs, are strictly haram.

Islam forbids gambling and games of chance. They are regarded as temptations from Shaytan that distract people from their religious faith. Any winnings are regarded as unfairly received. Games of skill that offer prizes, however, are allowed. Certain forms of music, too, are regarded as causing temptation. Women are not allowed to sing alone, but group singing is allowed. The rule in Islam is that any music or singing that is sexually suggestive is haram.

Muslims adhere to a number of restrictions in monetary practices. Any kind of interest-based lending or borrowing is forbidden. People can buy or sell stocks in companies that do not produce forbidden items. However, futures contracts (that is, purchasing the right to own a quantity of a commodity, such as wheat or oil, in the hope that the price will rise and the ownership right can be sold at a profit) are forbidden, for only Allah can know the future. Muslims are expected to conduct business through written contracts, and they are expected to be honest in their business dealings.

Muslims generally follow a number of rituals in connection with important life events. For example, when a baby is born, the father whispers the Muslim call to prayer into the baby's right ear. Usually within seven

days, babies are given a name, and male babies are circumcised. Muslim wedding rituals vary widely by culture, but marriages tend to be regarded less as “love matches” and more as contracts that spell out the legal rights and responsibilities of the bride and groom, who in many cases have been brought together by parents and family. Divorce is allowed. The Muslim wedding ceremony, called a *nikah*, is generally a simple affair, and Islamic law does not even require the presence of a cleric. One major requirement, however, is that the marriage be declared publicly; secret marriages are forbidden. One way to make the marriage public is through a wedding feast called a *walimah*, where the couple declare their marriage.

Dress codes among Muslims also vary widely by culture and nationality. The Qur’an dictates that the body be covered adequately. For men, this means covering from the navel to the knees. It also means wearing a head covering as a sign of submission to Allah during prayer, but since prayer is conducted so frequently in daily life, head coverings are worn most of the time. For women it technically means covering the entire body, including the face and hands. In some countries women will wear a *burqa*, which may cover the entire head and face or may leave the eyes uncovered. In other countries, however, this custom is not fully followed. Rather, Muslim women in those places will wear a head covering called a *hijab*, which covers the head but leaves the face exposed. Clothing is meant to identify the wearer as a Muslim, and all showiness is to be avoided.

Death is regarded as the will of Allah, and so it is something to be met with dignity and courage. After a person dies, mourners recite passages of the Qur’an, and the body is washed and wrapped. It is generally taken to a mosque, where prayers are recited. The mourners then form a procession, and the body is carried to a cemetery as the mourners recite prayers. The bodies of Muslims are buried on their right sides, with the deceased facing Mecca.

Islam’s influences

Islam’s influence on the world has been enormous. In historical terms, from about the year 500 to 1000, Islamic scholars were responsible for keeping alive much of the knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome. This period in European history is sometimes known as the Dark Ages because of the lack of cultural and scientific advances during the period. Muslims preserved much of the knowledge of the ancient

Greeks in libraries (Damascus alone had seventy libraries) and passed that knowledge on to the Europeans. The Europeans themselves, in the centuries after the Crusades, often traveled throughout the Islamic empire, gathering knowledge about science, medicine, and more.

Contributions to science Muslim scientists laid the foundations for the scientific method (the systematic investigation of a problem, including formulating the problem, gathering data and evidence, and testing theories through experimentation) and systematized the study of chemistry (the science of the composition of substances). They also invented algebra, which is from the Arabic word *al-jabr*, meaning “the reduction.” Muslim scientists made great strides in astronomy (the study of the stars and planets) and gave the world such tools as the astrolabe, a device used for navigation and time-keeping at sea by plotting the position of the sun and stars. Without such tools, the European explorer Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) would not have been able to make his voyage to the New World in 1492.

Islamic countries were also the source of many words and concepts in English. *Alchemy*, *alcohol*, *alcove*, *algebra*, *algorithm*, *alkali*, *amalgam*, and *arsenal* are just some of the *a* words that came from the Middle East. Other borrowings, both of concepts and words, include *bazaar*, *benzene*, *borax*, *camphor*, *candy*, *chemistry*, *cotton*, *cipher*, *elixir*, *guitar*, *lemon*, *lilac*, *magazine*, *mascara*, *retina*, *sequin*, *soda*, *sugar*, *talisman*, *tariff*, *zenith*, *zero*, and many more occur from the work of Arab scientists, geographers, poets, and astronomers. Islamic scholars established the science of optics (the branch of physics dealing with the behavior of light), measured the circumference of Earth, and compiled books on medical practice.

Art and architecture Islam forbids the depiction of living things. As a result, the art that grew out of this religion is more abstract, meaning

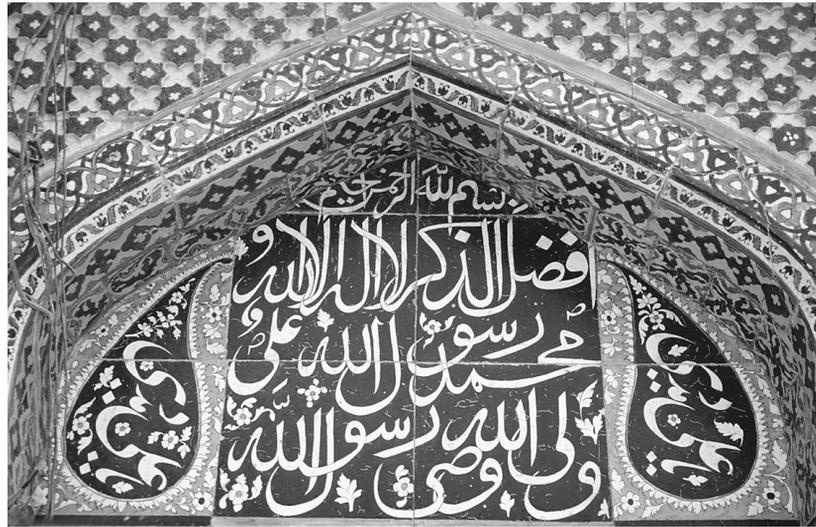
Terms in the News: Fatwa and Jihad

Two Islamic terms appear frequently in the news. The first of these is *fatwa*, which refers to a legal pronouncement by an Islamic law specialist, called a *mufti*. Some fatwas have gained much media attention, such as the one against author Salman Rushdie for his 1989 book, *The Satanic Verses*, which was said to have blasphemed, or showed contempt for, Allah. The ruling called for Rushdie's death, but has not been carried out. Most fatwas, however, are rulings over minor legal matters or deal with more day-to-day concerns.

Another term seen frequently in the news is *jihad*, which means something like “to strive” or “to struggle.” Muslims most often use the term to refer to an internal or spiritual struggle. Striving to memorize the Qur'an, for example, or to overcome temptation or to discipline the self can be thought of as forms of jihad. Often, especially in the West, the word is translated as “holy war” and is used to refer to the motive behind acts of terrorism.

Islam

The shahadah, or call to prayer, is inscribed in calligraphy on a mosque. Islam does not allow for the depiction of living things so the artwork of Islamic culture uses geometric patterns and calligraphy. Plant motifs or decorations, called arabesques, are commonly used. © WORLD RELIGIONS PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY.



that it attempts to depict the meaning or spirit of things rather than their physical forms. It appeals to people beyond those who follow the faith. Geometric patterns, crafts, and calligraphy are among the forms of popular Islamic art. Calligraphy is a stylized form of writing, often done with a brush and ink.

The circular patterns in Islamic geometric art, such as those that may appear in vibrantly colored mosaics, are a reminder to Muslims that Allah is endless. The circle is without beginning or end and continues on forever, as does Allah. The repetition of a design also is a reminder of the infinite, or never-ending. Plant motifs or decorations, called arabesques, are also commonly used. Mosques are often decorated with displays of geometric art, and the art form may also appear in paintings, books (such as the Qur'an), pottery, jewelry, and textiles. Crafts were designed and decorated in daily life to help make the everyday beautiful. Calligraphy often repeats passages from the Qur'an in a stylized script that may employ arabesques or geometric patterns as borders or other embellishments to the artwork.

Islamic artists also consider their physical surroundings when they seek to create art that makes daily life more beautiful, and this includes the architecture, or physical structure, of the buildings in which they live. Traditional Islamic homes are constructed around a courtyard, with only a wall showing to the outside street. This style of architecture was meant to protect the family inside from those outside, including from

what could often be a harsh climate. The more artistic design is reserved for the interior of the home.

One prominent symbol of Islamic architecture is the dome, a semi-circle that sits atop the mosque as part of the roof, and the minaret, a tall, thin column that extends up from the dome. The dome symbolizes the land of heaven and the dominance of the divine, Allah, over the faithful. Domes can be large or small and are a component of many mosques, particularly in the Middle East. The minaret is the location from which the call to prayer would be announced by the muezzin. It symbolizes the Shahadah, or declaration of faith, that Allah is the greatest.

Literature In the field of literature, Islam has produced a number of world-famous poets, and their work has grown in popularity in modern times. Perhaps the most famous is Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī, often referred to as simply Rumi (1207–1273). Rumi, who wrote in Persian, is best known for his mystical poems. His major work is the *Masnawi*, a title that means “Spiritual Couplets” (a couplet is a two-line poetic verse). Written in three volumes, the book contains more than 25,000 lines of poetry. It includes folktales, fables, parables, philosophy, and lyrical poetry. His subjects include the saints of Islam, commentaries on the Qur’an, and mystical interpretations of a wide range of subjects, both religious and nonreligious. The *Masnawi* is the most widely read poem among Muslims. In fact, among Muslim texts, it is regarded by some as second in importance only to the Qur’an. It is sometimes even called the *Qur’an-e Farsi*, meaning “The Qur’an in Persian.”

Another poet who gained some fame in the Western world is Omar Khayyam (1048–1131), a Persian astronomer and mathematician who also wrote a long series of four-line poems called *rubaiyat*, usually written as “rubaiyat” in English. These poems covered a range of topics, including history, law, medicine, astronomy, and mathematics. They are best known in the West from their translation and adaptation by the English poet Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883), who in 1859 published them under the title *The Rubaiyat of Omar Kaysam*.

Likely the most famous work of Islamic literature in the West is *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, often popularly referred to as *A Thousand and One Nights* or sometimes just *Arabian Nights*. The stories contained in this long poem were first composed in Persian by various unknown authors in the eighth century, then compiled and translated into Arabic in the ninth century. Together, the stories are framed by

the story of Queen Scheherazade, who puts off her execution by telling them to her evil husband, the king. Each ends with the “cliff-hanger,” so the king preserves her life for one more night (over a thousand and one nights) because he wants to hear the outcome of the story. Some of the famous stories contained in the work include “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” and the “Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor.”

Politics As the world’s second-largest religion, Islam continues to exert an important influence on international affairs. In 1988 the Muslim nation of Pakistan was one of the first modern countries in the world to elect a woman prime minister, Benazir Bhutto (1953–). Indonesia, another predominantly Muslim nation, elected its first female president, Megawati Sukarnoputri (1947–), in 2001. Muslim nations in the Middle East, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, play an important role in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, who have been engaged in violent conflict since the mid-twentieth century.

The country of Turkey sits at a geographical crossroads between Europe and the Middle East. Since the end of the twentieth century Turkey has been preparing for membership in the European Union (E.U.), an organization that unifies economic markets and other policies across Europe for ease in trade, travel, and employment. When Turkey did not make the E.U. membership list for 2004, some in the country speculated that the divide between the European continent and Turkey was too great, in terms of both geography and culture, for the relationship to work. Some Turks worry that joining the European Union would lead to greater Westernization in the country, meaning the replacement or devaluing of Islamic historical, cultural, and social values with Western ones, which can be quite different. Islamic culture, for instance, emphasizes modest dress for both men and women, while Western culture allows for a wide variety of acceptable dress that many may not consider to be very modest.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to Islam in the early twenty-first century is to combat the negative image of Muslims that many non-Muslim people developed after a series of terrorist attacks beginning in 2001. Terrorism is violence carried out by an individual or group to instill fear and insecurity in a populace. It is often done to force change or to achieve a certain effect from a government, although the targets of terrorist actions are usually civilians not connected to the government. In September 2001 terrorists attacked the United States and killed nearly

3,000 people. The U.S. government traced responsibility for the attacks to an Islamic extremist group called al-Qaeda. Extremists are people who are so dedicated to their beliefs that they are willing to carry out violence to achieve their goals. Among the goals of al-Qaeda is to remove Western influences from Islamic countries, which the group perceives as responsible for many of the problems in these nations. Other attacks linked to the same group or supporters of the group followed, including bombings in Indonesia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Spain, and England.

For people who are not very familiar with Islam, these violent attacks became their reference for Islam and Muslims. They developed negative opinions about the religion and those who follow it. In their fear and insecurity, some people acted poorly towards Muslims, even behaving violently against them. These attacks, by the terrorists and by those who fear them, have strained relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslim community struggles to improve the education and understanding of non-Muslims about Islam. At the same time, many Muslims search for a way to respond to the attacks of these Islamic extremists, who do not represent the outlook or wishes of the majority of Muslims.

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Jainism

Jainism, often referred to as Jain Dharma, is an ancient religious tradition from India. Because written records are scarce, it is difficult to attach dates to much of early Jain activity. Some scholars believe that the earliest evidence of Jainism dates to about 850 BCE, but other scholars place it later. Jains (sometimes spelled Jainas) themselves believe that their faith has always existed.

Jainism was founded by one of the central figures in Jain history, Mahavira. Jains would say that Mahavira did not “found” Jainism but rather rediscovered Jain principles that had always existed. The dates that Mahavira lived are uncertain, but evidence shows that his life overlapped that of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama; 563–483 BCE). Mahavira was probably born in about 599 BCE and died in about 527 BCE.

Jains do not believe in a creator-god. In this respect Jainism has often been described as more of a philosophy of life or a guide to conduct than as a religion. The core of Jainism is obedience to the five Great Vows. These include:

1. *ahimsa*, or not killing and not injuring all living things;
2. *satya*, or speaking only the truth;
3. *asteya*, or not taking, stealing, and being greedy;
4. *brahmacharya*, or celibacy (not having sex), and giving up all sensual pleasure;
5. *aparigraha*, or detachment and not being either delighted or disturbed by any outward experience.

Another core belief of Jainism, one related to *ahimsa*, is that all creatures contain living souls, and therefore all deserve to be treated with respect.

The number of Jains in the world is uncertain. Some estimates range as high as 12 million. Others put the number at about 7 million, and still others at about 3.3 to 3.6 million. The 1991 Indian census calculated the number of Jains at about 3.35 million, most of them concentrated in the

WORDS TO KNOW

ahimsa: The principle of nonviolence, or not doing harm to any living creature.

ajiva: All that is not soul.

Akaranga Sutra: One of the sacred texts of Jainism, which contains the teachings of Mahavira.

arihant: An enlightened person.

ascetic: A person who practices rigid self-denial, giving up all comforts and pleasures, as an act of religious devotion. Jain monks and nuns are ascetics.

caste: A system of social class divisions in India.

Digambara: Literally, “sky-clad”; one of the two major sects of Jainism.

householders: Laypeople; Jains who are not monks or nuns.

jinn: Literally, “conqueror”; the great teachers of Jainism who have conquered their earthly passions.

jiva: The soul.

karma: The principle that determines how a person will live his or her next life; in Jainism, an actual physical substance.

kevalnyan: Enlightenment.

mantra: A formula repeated over and over to create a trance-like state.

monastery: A building that houses a community of monks.

Mahavira: (c. 599–527 BCE) the twenty-fourth *tirthankara*, often regarded as the founder of Jainism.

Mahavira jayanti: Mahavira’s birthday, an important holy day for Jains.

moksha: Salvation; liberation from rebirth.

namaskar: The basic prayer of Jainism, recited each morning and at night before bedtime.

Offering of Eightfold Puja: An important Jain temple ritual in which the worshipper makes eight offerings to the *tirthankara*.

om: Often spelled aum; the sacred syllable and symbol of Jainism (and Hinduism), used for purposes of meditation.

Parshva: The twenty-third *tirthankara*, who lived about 250 years before Mahavira.

Paryushana: An eight-day festival, the most important holy observance for Jains during the year.

Purva: The original Jain sacred texts, now lost.

sadhana: Ascetic person.

Samyak charitra: Right conduct; one of the Three Jewels of Jain ethical conduct.

Samyak darshana: Right faith, or right perception; one of the Three Jewels of Jain ethical conduct.

Samyak jnana: Right knowledge; one of the Three Jewels of Jain ethical conduct.

saint: A deceased person who has been recognized for living a virtuous and holy life.

Svetambara: Literally, “white-clad”; one of the two main sects of Jainism.

Three Jewels: The Jain code of ethical conduct, consisting of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct.

tirthankara: Literally, “makers of the ford”; those souls who have attained enlightenment and have been freed from the cycle of death and rebirth; the twenty-four leaders of Jainism.

Indian states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Karnataka. An estimated 100,000 Jains live outside India, with about 25,000 to 30,000 living in the United Kingdom (where a new Jain temple in London was consecrated in August 2005). Somewhere between 25,000 and 75,000 live in the United States, and some 1,400 live in Canada. The largest concentration of Jains living outside of south Asia is found in eastern Africa. According to one source that estimates a total figure of 4.2 million Jains, Jainism is the fourteenth-largest religion in the world, slightly larger than Shinto in Japan.

History and development

Jainism has no single founder, although Mahavira is often referred to as the religion's originator. Jains believe that at different times, truth has been revealed to figures called *tirthankara*, a term meaning "maker of the ford." A tirthankar has crossed the metaphorical "ocean" of life and has thus been freed from the cycle of death and rebirth. Another word used to refer to these great teachers is *Jina* (from which the word *Jain* is derived). This word means "conqueror." A Jina or tirthankar has conquered inner enemies such as greed, deceit, pride, and anger to achieve enlightenment. A tirthankar is similar to a saint among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. (A saint is a deceased person who has been recognized for living a virtuous and holy life.)

Concept of time Jain history is closely related to the Jain concept of time, which is cyclical. The Jain model of time can be pictured as a rotating wheel with an ongoing series of upward movements (*utsarpini*) and downward movements (*avarsarpini*). A complete cycle, or turn of the wheel, is called a *kalpa*. Each of these cycles is divided into six ages, which can be pictured as spokes on the wheel. The first three spokes of the downward cycle represent a golden age in which Jainism thrives, followed by a decline until Jainism dies out in the sixth spoke. Then, as the wheel turns upward, the process begins again. Jains believe that in the current time cycle, the world has passed through the first four spokes and is currently in the fifth (with a sixth and final age to come). Each complete kalpa is long enough for twenty-four tirthankara or prophets to live.

The present cycle has witnessed all twenty-four of these teachers, with Mahavira the last of the twenty-four. Each of these teachers is believed to have led a life of self-denial to achieve enlightenment. There is no historical evidence for the existence of the first twenty-two

About Jainism

- **Belief.** Jains believe that all living creatures have a soul. The goal of a Jain is to achieve a state of liberation and enlightenment, to escape the cycle of birth and death, and to live in bliss.
- **Followers.** Jainism is the world's fourteenth-largest religion, with approximately 3.5 million followers, most of them living in India.
- **Name of God.** Jains do not believe in a single creator-god. Jains worship the twenty-four tirthankara of the present cycle of time, the last of whom, Mahavira, is often regarded as the founder, or, more properly, the rediscoverer, of the principles of Jainism.
- **Symbols.** Major symbols of Jainism include three dots, signifying the Three Jewels of ethical conduct; the *swastika*, whose four sides represent the four forms of earthly life; the crescent moon, signifying the abode where liberated souls live; and the wheel of *dharmā*, containing twenty-four spokes that represent the religion preached by the twenty-four tirthankara.
- **Worship.** Jain worship consists of daily prayers and meditation and temple worship, where people meditate, pray, and engage in religious discussions. Jains place little emphasis on formal, prescribed worship.
- **Dress.** Jains have no distinctive dress. Monks of the Digambara sect go naked, although they cover themselves when in public.
- **Texts.** The chief sacred texts of Jainism are the Purvas, but fourteen of these texts are now lost. Jains regard a wide range of texts, both those written more than two thousand years ago and commentaries that have been written in recent times, as sacred. One widely read text is the Akaranga Sutra, which contains the teachings of Mahavira.
- **Sites.** Among the most sacred sites for Jains is Parsvanath Hill in Bahar, India, named after the twenty-third tirthankara and regarded as the place where all twenty-four tirthankar achieved enlightenment.
- **Observances.** The chief yearly observances for Jains are Mahavira Jayanti, or Mahavir's birthday; Paryushana, an eight-day festival of fasting and prayer; and Diwali, a festival that commemorates the date on which Mahavira offered his final teachings.
- **Phrases.** No particular phrases or sayings are used by Jains.

of these tirthankara. Yet some evidence suggests that the twenty-third, Parshva, did exist and lived about 250 years before Mahavira.

Mahavira's life Mahavira established Jainism in its present form. Mahavira, whose name means "Great Hero," was born Nataputta Vardhamana and grew up surrounded by luxury as the son of a local king, Siddhartha (not

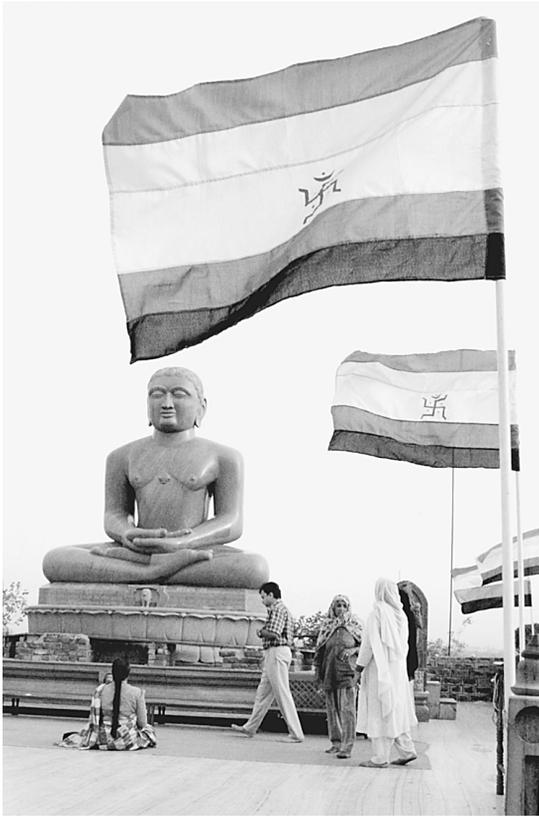
the same Siddhartha who would later become the Buddha), and queen, Trishala. As such, he was a member of the *kshatriya*, or warrior caste. (Caste refers to social classes and duties in India.) When Mahavira was about thirty years old, his parents died. He left his home as a result and gave up all his possessions. During his lifetime, his followers recorded his teachings in the Akaranga Sutra, one of the main sacred texts of Jainism.

Mahavira was an ascetic, or a person who practices rigid self-denial, giving up all comforts and pleasures, as an act of religious devotion. Jain monks and nuns are ascetics. As an ascetic, or *sadbana*, Mahavira lived a life of poverty and contemplation in a monastery. (A monastery is a building or collection of buildings that house a community of monks.) At first his only possession was a single robe, but eventually he gave up even that and went naked. For years he wandered throughout India, never staying in one village for more than a day at a time and refusing to shelter himself from either cold or heat. When he walked or sat, he was careful never to injure any life-form. He did stay in one place for longer periods of time during the rainy season because the paths he walked would have been full of creatures he did not want to injure. Because of this refusal to injure any form of life, Mahavira was a strict vegetarian, even to the extent of straining his drinking water to ensure that no creature was living in it.

Mahavira lived by the five Great Vows, which continue to form the central belief system of Jainism and which all Jain monks and nuns continue to fulfill. The Great Vows include nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, celibacy (not having sexual intercourse), and nonattachment to things or people. Four of these vows were instituted by Parshva, but Mahavira added celibacy to the list. In practice, these vows are followed strictly only by Jain ascetics, but Jains who continue to live in the world follow these vows as much as their way of life and circumstances permit.

Mahavira spent the final twelve years of his life fasting (not eating and/or drinking) and in meditation. This enabled him to achieve *kevalhyan*, or enlightenment, and *moksha*, or final liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth leading to a life of eternal bliss. According to Jain tradition, by the time of his death, Mahavira had established a community of some 14,000 monks and 36,000 nuns.

In the centuries that followed, Jainism spread throughout central and western India. However, its numbers and influence began to decline with the growth and spread first of Hinduism, then of Islam. During the



Worshippers gather near a statue of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, in India. Mahavira was born a prince but became dissatisfied with his life and sought out greater meaning. He lived by the five Great Vows, which form Jainism's central beliefs.

AP IMAGES.

medieval period (500–1450), Jains constructed a number of large temple complexes, such as the one at Ranakpur, India, in 1441. By the nineteenth century Jainism was in danger of being virtually extinct, but it was revived by reformers such as Atmaramji (1837–1896), a highly respected teacher who was invited to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 (though he did not attend, sending a deputy in his place).

Sects and schisms

Jains, in general, all believe in the same basic principles. There are, however, two main sects, or divisions, within Jainism. These are the Digambara (which means “sky-clad”) and the Svetambara (meaning “white-clad”) sects. The differences between the two sects are relatively minor and affect monks and nuns much more than they affect the daily lives of ordinary Jains.

Scholars dispute when the split between the two groups occurred. Some say it happened during the first century of the Common Era; others say that it happened earlier, in about the third century BCE. Part of the reason behind the split is geographical and cultural. Most of the members of the Digambara sect live in southwest India, primarily in the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Most Svetambaras, in contrast, are found in the northwest, primarily the states of Madhya, Rajasthan, Pradesh, and Gujarat.

The division between the two sects originated with disputes over the teachings of Mahavira. Disagreements arose over which of Mahavira’s teachings were true ones, and how those teachings that were regarded as true should be interpreted. This problem occurred in part because Mahavira’s teachings were not written down until long after his death, so there was no authoritative text to settle disputes. The two sects disagree as to which texts are to be considered Jain scripture.

The two sects also have different views about the position of women. Unlike the Svetambaras, the Digambaras do not believe that

women can achieve liberation until they have been reborn as men. The Digambaras are the most austere, or strict sect of Jainism, so its monks go naked. Because it would be impractical for women to go naked, they have to be reborn as men to lead a completely austere life.

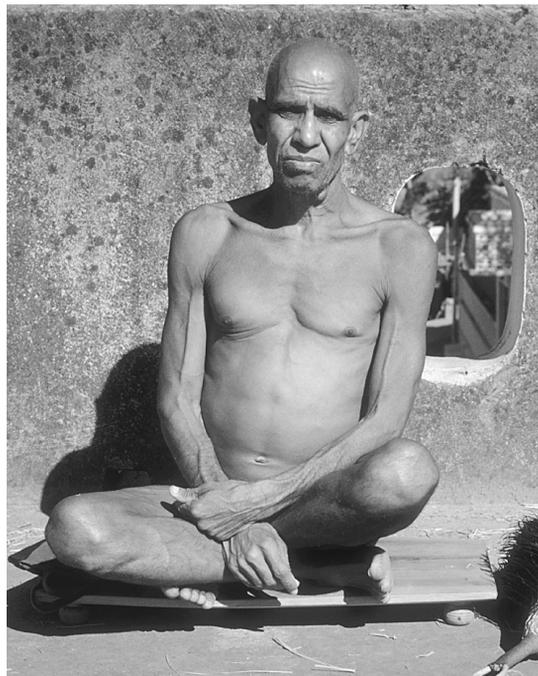
A second difference has to do with the nature of tirthankara or Jinas. Digambaras believe that the tirthankara do not require food, nor do they have bodily functions. Also, they do not carry out any functions in the world.

The religious images of the two sects also differ. Digambara images of the tirthankara always have eyes that are downcast (signifying meditation), and the figures are always plain and naked. The most famous example is the fifty-seven-foot-tall statue of Bahubali at Maharashtra, India, depicted with ivy growing on it and anthills around the feet to signify the length of the time he spent in quiet meditation. In contrast, the images of the Svetambaras are always ornately decorated, and the statues of the tirthankara have wide, staring eyes (signifying preaching).

Finally, the two sects differ in how they view worldly possessions. Digambaras believe that a person can achieve freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth only by completely giving up worldly possessions. Thus, Jain monks go naked to signify living a life without shame, though in modern times they cover themselves when they are in public. They are not allowed to own even so much as a bowl for eating, and all gifts they accept have to be taken in the hands. Svetambara monks are allowed to wear a simple, plain white robe, own a begging bowl and a broom to sweep insects from their paths, and own writing implements. Nuns in both sects are clothed.

Basic beliefs

Jains do not believe in a single creator-god, as monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Judaism do. Nor do they believe in a pantheon (officially recognized list) of gods, as do some other religions, such as the ancient Greco-Romans. Rather, they believe in the tirthankara, who



The Digambara sect of Jainism is the most strict. Digambar monks go naked so that they may harm as few living beings as possible. © ROBERT HOLMES/CORBIS.

were able to achieve a divine perfection and are therefore worthy of devotion and worship. Jains, in fact, reject the idea that there could be a single creator-god who is completely good and all-knowing. For Jains, the existence of evil in the world, explained simply by the failure of people to achieve a divine perfection, is proof that a creator-god cannot exist.

The tirthankara are perfectly happy and eternal, so they are worshipped as gods. But each person can become a god because each has the ability to achieve perfection.

While these individuals are thought of as gods, they differ from the usual concept of God. They neither create nor destroy, so they did not create the laws of the physical universe and humans do not exist because of their actions. It is not possible for humans to have any kind of relationship with them, for they do not meddle in the affairs of humans. They make no demands on people, nor do they reward people for good actions or forgive their sins. Humans regard them only as a source of inspiration. Because of these characteristics, Jainism is sometimes called atheistic, showing no belief in god, but this is true only in a limited sense.

The soul Jains believe that everything has a soul, or *jiva*. This soul, which lives forever, has a number of characteristics. Each soul is fully independent in Jainism (unlike Hinduism, which believes that all souls are part of a single divine reality). The soul is responsible for and experiences the results of its actions. The soul can be freed from the ongoing cycle of death and rebirth. Although not all souls can be liberated, all can evolve in the direction of liberation by following the principles of correct behavior.

Jains have a complex system of beliefs that explain the natural order of the universe. Jains see the world as composed of categories of souls, including *jiva*, the soul of living things, and *ajiva*, (that is, non-*jiva*), to include motion, rest, atoms, space, and time. *Jiva*, in turn, manifests itself in six forms, categorized according to the number of senses each form possesses:

1. *Ekendriya*, or beings with just one sense, touch. These are beings that are generally thought of as inanimate. “Earth-bodied” beings include sand, metal, and clay. “Water-bodied” beings include ice, rain, and fog. “Fire-bodied” beings include lightning and fire. “Air-bodied” beings include gases and wind. Finally, “Plant-bodied” beings include trees, grass, and flowers.



The largest concentration of Jains in the world is in India, where the religion was founded. Though the total number of the religion's followers is uncertain, there are more than three million Jains in India. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

2. *Beindriya* are beings with two senses, touch and taste. Included in this category are such creatures such as worms.
3. *Treindriya* are those with three senses (smell, taste, and touch) and include such creatures such as moths, beetles, and ants.
4. *Chaurindriya* have four senses, adding sight to touch, taste, and smell. These include somewhat higher creatures such as scorpions, locusts, and wasps.
5. *Panchendriya* are beings with all five senses, adding hearing. Included in this category are higher animals, such as human beings, heavenly beings, and infernal beings, or souls that suffer in hell.

Reincarnation Like several other Eastern religions, the concept of reincarnation is a central part of the Jain belief system. According to Jains, when a person dies, the soul is immediately transferred to another body. This could be the body of another person, an animal, or even an inanimate object. The principle that determines how a person lives his or her next life is called *karma*.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism believe in karma as a force created by a person's actions. The Jain conception of karma, however, differs slightly from that of Hindus. According to Jain belief, the soul attracts karma to itself, but this karma is a physical substance, like dust, that exists everywhere in the universe. Some of this karma does no harm. This nonharmful karma produces feelings, a person's physique (body type, including gender), life span, and social status. Four additional types of karma, however, are harmful. Delusory karma causes attachment to false beliefs; knowledge-obscuring karma interferes with understanding; perception-obscuring karma interferes with sensory perception; and obstructing karma leads to a loss of faith, knowledge, and energy.

Jains believe that karma, as a physical substance, actually sticks to the soul, and harmful karma is attracted by such negative characteristics as greed, pride, and anger. A person who leads a life of self-discipline is able to ward off and wear away these bad forms of karma and eventually, perhaps, reach a state of knowledge and freedom. This is not the same as enlightenment. A person who is enlightened, called an *aribant*, is free of all bad karma and cannot do anything bad, but he or she is still subject to the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. A person who has achieved deliverance, though, called a *siddha*, has broken the cycle, moves to the roof of the universe, and lives there in a state of pure knowledge, bliss, and energy. This state, however, can be achieved only through self-denial. Jains believe that in the present cycle of time, no person has achieved this state. Siddhas are different from tirthankaras. The tirthankaras create order and steer humans as the cosmic cycle turns downward.

Jains believe that the universe has always existed; it was not brought into being by a creator-god. For Jains, the universe consists of five parts. At the bottom of the universe is the base, inhabited by the lowest forms of life. Above the base is the lower world, consisting of seven hells where beings torment one another. The middle world is where human beings live. Celestial beings live in the upper region, and liberated beings, such as the *siddha*, live in a supreme abode.

The Three Jewels At the center of Jain belief is the desire to free the soul from the cycle of death and rebirth. Liberation is accomplished through the “Three Jewels,” an ethical code that consists of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. The first of these, right faith, or *samyak darshana*, means seeing clearly, so it is sometimes translated as “right perception.” Right faith involves avoiding superstition and being determined to discover the truth. The second, right knowledge, or *samyak jnana*, calls for an understanding of the universe. The third, right conduct, or *samyak charitra*, refers specifically to the way people lead their lives. An ethical person avoids doing harm to living things and is free from impure desires, attitudes, and thoughts.

Sacred writings

To identify a fixed, accepted body of Jain sacred scriptures is difficult. Other religions rely on a single, authoritative sacred text. Jews, for example, turn to the Tanakh; Christians, to the Bible; and Islam to the Qur’an. In contrast, Jainism has a large number of texts that are regarded as sacred. Many of these documents are more than two thousand years old, but scholars have no real way to date them. In addition, little is known about when the Jain scriptures were originally compiled.

It is believed that originally about sixty texts were accepted as sacred Jain scriptures. Only forty-five of these texts have survived. These texts are divided into three groups: the Purva, the Anga, and the Angabahya. However, fourteen of the Purva texts, plus the last Anga text, are now also lost. From references in other, later texts, the Purva texts are believed to have been compiled about 250 years before Mahavira lived, during the time of Parshva from roughly 650 to 700 BCE. These texts outline Jain beliefs about such matters as astronomy, the nature of the universe, the soul, and karma. The Anga texts, which by default have become the central texts of Jainism, summarize the teachings of the Purva texts and include a traditional history of Jainism down to the time of Mahavira.

All of these texts were passed down orally by generations of monks who memorized them. Scholars believe that they were finally compiled at

Bhadrabhanuswami

During times when paper and writing implements were not nearly as common as they are in modern life, scriptures had to be memorized. Islam, for example, placed great emphasis on memorization of its sacred text, the Qur’an, writing it down only after it was in danger of being lost.

Jainism is no exception. In the centuries before the Common Era, the goal of Jain thinkers and scholars was to memorize all of Jain scripture. It is believed that the last Jain to have done so was Bhadrabhanuswami, who died about 170 years after Mahavira. His death created fear that Jain scripture would be lost, so a conference was organized at that time to record and organize the Jain sacred texts.

a Jain council held at Valabhi, India, in about 450. They were written in Ardha Magadhi, a vernacular language (that is, a language spoken by common people) of the Magadha region along the Ganges River in India. Later, they were recorded in Sanskrit, the literary (formal, written) language of India. The core of these texts, and the oldest of them, are the Anga texts, which explain Jain doctrine and the Jain way of life, discuss religious and moral questions, and provide regulations for Jain nuns and monks.

The word *anga* means “limbs,” and the Anga texts are collectively referred to as the Twelve Limbs. There are twelve Anga texts because it is believed that Mahavira assigned the task of compiling eleven of the books to his followers, while he himself compiled the twelfth.

One of the most important Jain texts is the Akaranga Sutra, which contains the teachings of Mahavira himself, passed down by one of his followers. The Akaranga Sutra is important because it describes how a person can lead a sin-free life of self-denial. For Jains, part of living a sin-free life involves not harming living creatures and one portion of the sutra, for example, explains the presence of life in fire, wind, water, the earth, and so on.

In addition to the texts that survive from the age of Mahavira and before, Jain scholar-monks have produced learned texts called the Expositions. The dates of most of these texts range from the first century through the medieval period (c. 500–c. 1500), although some were written even later. They are arranged into four categories, including biographies, scientific treatises, treatises on discipline, and philosophy. (A treatise is a book that discusses a particular subject.) In addition, Jain scholar-monks have produced a large number of hymns of praise to the tirthankara. These hymns, too, are regarded as sacred texts.

Sacred symbols

Jains have a number of sacred symbols, some of which are held in common with Hinduism. One sacred symbol is the three dots, symbolizing the Three Jewels of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. The three dots also symbolize the three regions where people who are not liberated are born, suffer, and die: hell, Earth, and heaven. Another symbol is the crescent of the Moon, which represents moksha. Moksha refers to liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

A key symbol in Jainism is the swastika, a cross with each of the four sides bent at right angles. In Germany during the 1930s, the Nazi political party adopted the swastika as its official symbol. During the next fifteen

years the Nazis murdered millions of Jews and others, thus making the swastika a hated symbol in the West. The use of the swastika by Jains (and Hindus) has nothing to do with the Nazis.

For Jains, the swastika's four sides represent the four forms of existence of souls that have not been liberated: heavenly existence, worldly existence, the existence of nonhuman life, and existence in hell. The swastika serves as a reminder of Jainism's goal: escape from worldly existence and achievement of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. By escaping birth, life on Earth, and death, a person can escape suffering.

Like Hindus, Jains chant the sacred om, often spelled aum, as a mantra (a formula repeated over and over to create a trance-like state). For Jains, the syllable consists of five sounds, each of which has significance. The first sound is that of *a*, representing *aribants*, or those souls who have conquered their worldly passions. The second sound prolongs the *a* and represents *a-shareeri*, or those "without body" who have achieved liberation. The *a* sound continues to be prolonged into an *aa* sound signifying the *acharya*, or ascetics who lead Jain congregations. The *u* sound represents *upadhaya*, or Jain ascetic teachers. Finally, the *m* sound represents *muni*, monks who practice Jain principles. Together, these sounds constitute a kind of prayer.

Another important symbol is the wheel of dharma. The wheel consists of twenty-four spokes, each spoke representing one of the tirthankara. The symbol focuses the attention of Jains on the virtues preached by the tirthankara.

A final symbol is an outline figure of a person standing with his feet apart and his hands on his hips. Underneath the symbol are the words *Parasparopagrabo Jivanam*, meaning "Living beings render service to one another." The figure conveys the Jain belief that right conduct and service to others can lead to the liberation of the soul.



The om, or aum, symbol represents a mantra, or chant, that is sacred in the Jain religion. The chant can be repeated over and over to create a trance-like state.

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Worship

The central Jain prayer is called the *Namaskar* or the *Namokar Mantra*. Its purpose, as with all Jain prayer, is not to ask for anything but rather

to help the worshipper achieve a state of detachment and right conduct. It reads as follows:

Namo Arihantanam
Namo Siddhanam
Namo Airiyanam
Namo Uvajjhayanam
Namo Loe Savva Sahunam
Eso Panch Namokaro
Savva Pavap Panasano
Mangala-nam-cha Savvesim
Padhamam Havai Mangalam

The meaning of this prayer is roughly:

I bow down to those who have reached omniscience in the flesh and teach the road to everlasting life in the liberated state.

I bow down to those who have attained perfect knowledge and liberated their souls of all karma.

I bow down to those who have experienced self-realization of their souls through self-control and self-sacrifice.

I bow down to those who understand the true nature of soul and teach the importance of the spiritual over the material.

I bow down to those who strictly follow the five great vows of conduct and inspire us to live a virtuous life.

To these five types of great souls I offer my praise.

Such praise will help diminish my sins.

Giving this praise is most auspicious.

So auspicious as to bring happiness and bliss.

This is the first prayer that Jain children learn. Jains typically recite the prayer first thing in the morning and last thing before going to bed at night.

In addition to this prayer, Jains regularly recite a number of *sutras* to ask for forgiveness, confess their sins, and ask for universal peace. For example, the prayer for forgiveness reads:

I grant forgiveness to all living beings.

May all the living beings please forgive me.

I have friendship with all the living beings.

I have no hostility towards anyone.



Many Jains worship in temples, where they make offerings, read from holy texts, and give alms. A temple contains a room with images of the tirthankara. Offerings include water, incense, and flowers. STEPHEN EPSTEIN/PONKAWONKA.COM

Temple worship It is estimated that roughly 80 percent of Jains regularly attend temples, where they celebrate the lives of the tirthankara, read sacred scriptures, hold religious discussions, give alms (charitable donations), and take vows to control their earthly passions. At the center of Jain worship are the statues of the tirthankara. Many of the temples are marked by intricate architecture and ornate artwork, though some temples are plain meeting rooms.

A well-known religious ceremony of the Svetambara Jains is the Offering of Eightfold Puja, in which the worshipper makes eight offerings to a tirthankara. Because Jains do not believe in a creator-god who involves himself with human affairs, the offering is made not to please a god but to demonstrate a spirit of giving. The ceremony begins with a ritual cleansing in which the worshipper puts on clean clothing. When the worshipper enters the temple, he or she says *nibisi*, which means “giving up.” The worshipper then enters the room that contains

the images of the tirthankara and walks three times clockwise around the images, symbolizing the Three Jewels.

The worshipper then makes eight offerings: (1) water, to symbolize purity; (2) sandalwood and saffron paste (which is rubbed on the image), which symbolize the cooling of human passions and are believed to cool fever; (3) flowers, which symbolize faith in the teachings of the tirthankara; (4) incense, to symbolize the burning away of bad karma; (5) light, offered by swinging a lamp, to symbolize eliminating the darkness of ignorance; (6) rice; (7) sweets; and (8) fruit. The rice is arranged in the form of the symbolic swastika. Three dots made with the food items above the swastika symbolize the Three Jewels. And finally, a crescent with a dot above it symbolizes the liberated beings who dwell in the roof of the universe. The ceremony concludes with time for meditation and prayer.

The essence of Jain worship, however, takes place primarily in daily life rather than in public rituals. Each day, Jains perform six observances, which differ slightly for Digambaras and Svetambaras. The six daily rituals for Digambaras are:

1. *Devapuja*, or praying to the twenty-four tirthankara.
2. *Gurupasti*, or devotion and service to ascetics (leading a life of self-denial).
3. *Swadhyay*, or studying scriptures.
4. *Samyam*, or practicing self-restraint and self-discipline.
5. *Tap*, or penance.
6. *Dana*, or charity and alms giving.

For Svetambaras, the six daily rituals are:

1. *Samayik*, or remaining calm and undisturbed for forty-eight minutes.
2. *Chauvisattbo*, or praying to the tirthankara.
3. *Vandana*, or devotion and service to ascetics.
4. *Pratikraman*, or repentance.
5. *Kayotsarg*, or sitting motionless for a period of time to signify nonattachment to the body.
6. *Pratyakhan*, or taking vows to give up certain activities or foods to discipline the self.

Observances and pilgrimages

Jain religious observances are based on a 354-day lunar calendar, so the exact dates vary from year to year. In 2005 the holy day of Mahavira Jayanti, or the birthday of Mahavira in 527 BCE (according to Svetambara tradition), was celebrated on April 21. Both Svetambara and Digamabar Jains celebrate this holiday. On this day each year, Jains gather in temples to hear the teachings of Mahavira, and images of him are carried in procession through the streets. Ancient shrines in Grinar and Palitana, in Gujarat, India, are particularly popular sites for pilgrims to travel to on this day. In keeping with Jain tradition, however, observances are largely quiet and solemn.

A second major holiday is Paryushana, celebrated in 2005 for eight days beginning on August 31. The word *Paryushana* means “to stay in one place,” signifying that this is a time for reflection and meditation. Originally, only monks and nuns observed these holy days. However, they are now are observed by all Jains, who undergo eight days of fasting and prayer. Similar observances are also practiced on the holy day of Mauna Agyaras, which, in 2005, fell on December 12.

A final important observance is Diwali, a religious festival held throughout India that, in 2005, began on November 1. For Jains, the date has special significance, for it is believed that on this date in 527 BCE Mahavira offered his final teachings. During this festival, parents give sweets to their children, and lamps are lit throughout India. Many Jains follow the example of Mahavira and fast for two days.

Pilgrimages A popular Jain pilgrimage is made to Parsvanath Hill in Bahar, India. It is named after the twenty-third tirthankara, Parshva, and it is believed that all twenty-four tirthankara achieved liberation and enlightenment on this hill. The largest crowd of pilgrims visits the site on Mahavira Jayanti, the birth date of Mahavira. Another popular pilgrimage site is Mount Girnar, located near the city of Junagadh in Gujarat. Some Jains believe that the twenty-second tirthankara, Nemi (or Neminatha), achieved enlightenment and liberation on this hill instead of on Parsvanath Hill.

These sites are located in the north of India. The only major pilgrimage site in the south is at Shravana Belgola, near the city of Mysore. This site features two hills, Indrabetta and Chandragiri, where pilgrims gather for spiritual renewal. Indrabetta is the site of a statue of Gomatesvara, a Digambara saint. The statue is 57-feet (17.3-meters) tall, and the figure is nude.

Jains and the Caste System

Jains in India are surrounded by the far more dominant religion, Hinduism. Although there are many similarities between the two religions, one distinctive feature of Hinduism is its incorporation of the Indian caste system. Caste refers to a social class into which one is born. The castes are associated with occupations, so that the highest castes perform the most noble duties, while the lowest caste, the “untouchables,” performs such labor as hauling away waste and dead animals.

Mahavira was born into India’s warrior caste, but in his teachings he never mentioned caste. Nevertheless, a caste system developed among Jains, primarily over the last one thousand years. Unlike most Indians, including many Hindus, who recognize four castes, Jains recognize dozens, some of which consist of as few as five hundred members. While the Jain caste system has little influence on day-to-day life, it does have a major effect on marriage. Marriage between castes is discouraged. Because some castes are so small, many men live as bachelors since a suitable wife is simply not available.

In addition to these sites, Jains often make pilgrimages to temples. Many of these temples have pilgrim centers. Some of the most popular sites are Jain temples in such states as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat.

Everyday living

The five Great Vows of Jainism (nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, celibacy, and nonattachment) apply to monks and nuns, who wish to give up worldly possessions totally and live lives of contemplation and service. Of course not all Jains are monks and nuns. Many, generally referred to as householders, live ordinary family lives and work in familiar jobs. Jain householders normally commit themselves to the twelve vows of Jain living.

The twelve vows are divided into three categories. The first category consists of the five Great Vows. Householders, however, adapt these vows for everyday living. For example, monks and nuns take a vow of nonviolence, which prohibits them from killing any living creature, even accidentally, as much as possible. Householders might not be able to avoid killing

living creatures in, for example, farming, but their vow demands that they avoid such killing as much as possible. Similarly, monks and nuns take vows of celibacy, which means that they do not have sex. Married Jains, of course, are not celibate, but they avoid allowing physical passions to rule their lives. While monks’ and nuns’ vows of total nonattachment mean that they own no or very few personal possessions, householders practice the vow by giving to charity.

In addition to the five Great Vows, Jains adhere to three merit vows. The first of these vows has to do with limiting one’s area of activity. Householders may not be able to avoid violating some of the Great Vows in their everyday lives, but they can define areas where they feel able to keep the vows and areas where they know they will not be able to do so. Within that limited area, householders practice the first five



Jains believe that Mahavira offered his final teachings on the date of the Diwali festival in India in 527 BCE. Lamps are lit in celebration, and Jains fast for two days during this period. © AJAY VERMA/REUTERS/CORBIS.

vows as described above. Outside the area of activity, the vows become Great Vows, and householders practice them as if they were monks or nuns. The second merit vow requires Jains to make limited use of both consumable items such as food and nonconsumable items such as appliances and furniture. The third merit vow involves the avoidance of purposeless sins. These include thinking or speaking ill of others, acting inconsiderately or carelessly, and reading improper literature. The third vow also includes not taking part in the manufacture of weapons that are not to be used solely for defensive purposes.

The final four vows are called disciplinary vows, and their purpose is to encourage Jains to fulfill their religious duties. The first of the four requires Jains to engage in quiet meditation each day. This period can also include reading religious books and praying. The second requires Jains to limit their activities. Thus, during certain periods of time, Jains avoid any kind of travel, business activity, and work outside their limited

area of activity. The third requires Jains to live the life of a monk or nun for a day, while the fourth requires donation of food, clothing, medication, and other items to monks, nuns, and other devout persons.

Jainism and vegetarianism Jains are vegetarians in conformity with the vow of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence. The emphasis on vegetarianism in Jain life has led to development of what is called a “Jain menu,” which defines suitable dishes to be served both in the home and at restaurants.

Some Jains are more strict than others. Many, for example, do not eat root vegetables such as onions, garlic, and potatoes because they are likely to hide other life-forms that would be killed during cooking or eating. At religiously important times, others do not consume green leafy vegetables for the same reason. Others fast extensively during the monsoon season and are likely to avoid roots at this time. Jains typically avoid eating after dark, again because of the possibility of accidentally harming another life-form that cannot be seen.

Devout Jains point out that vegetarianism is an important part of practicing *ahimsa*, but that the vow of nonviolence goes much deeper than just the avoidance of eating life-forms. For devout Jains, nonviolence includes such diverse practices as not teasing people, turning off lights to avoid wasting electricity, and not wasting such things as food and paper. All of these practices are part of the respect for life, all life, that lies at the heart of Jainism.

Jainism’s influences

As a relatively small religion limited primarily to certain regions of India, Jainism has not had the same impact on world affairs as such major religions as Islam or Christianity. This limited impact is a result of the Jain belief in detachment and noninvolvement. Jains believe that activity increases the risk that a person’s soul will attract bad karma.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the pacifist political activist who led India’s independence movement, was greatly influenced by Jainism. Gandhi was born in a part of India (Gujarat) that was dominated by Jains, and he was exposed to Jain teachings. His philosophy of nonviolence and quiet resistance to British rule reflected the strong influence of *ahimsa* on his life.

Jainism’s influences, too, are limited because the number of followers is decreasing. Jains themselves are not troubled by this decline. They believe

it is part of the normal cycle of time, during which the number of Jains will dwindle until the religion becomes nearly extinct. At that time a new cycle will begin when the religion is rediscovered by the first of a new cycle of twenty-four tirthankara.

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Judaism

The term *Judaism* is used to refer both to a religion and to a nation of people with close cultural ties. Throughout history Jews have often been seen as members of a “race,” but the existence of white, black, and Asian Jews makes clear that unlike race, being Jewish is a matter of choice. Jews prefer to think of themselves not as a race but as a people or a nation. *Nation* is used not in the political sense of a country with political boundaries but in the social sense of a people with a shared history and a common vision of the future. Being Jewish, then, is not necessarily a matter of practicing a set of religious beliefs as it is belonging to a culture. Even secular, or nonreligious, Jews think of themselves as Jews.

There are great differences in beliefs across the various communities of Jews. All, however, share some core beliefs. These include the belief in one, eternal, nonmaterial, supreme God who knows people’s thoughts and deeds and passes judgment on them. Additional beliefs include belief in the accuracy of the Hebrew Bible (also called the Tanakh), Judaism’s chief sacred text; belief in the prophets, particularly Moses (c. 1392–c. 1272 BCE); belief that a Messiah, or savior, will come; and belief in the resurrection of the dead. Some Jews, though, dispute even some of these core beliefs.

Estimating the number of Jews in the world is difficult. Because of Judaism’s history of persecution (harassment or injury), many Jews do not openly acknowledge their Judaism. In addition, many countries do not gather information about the religious beliefs of their citizens. Estimates suggest that there are about thirteen to fourteen million Jews in the world, with about five million in the United States, and an equal number in Israel. Europe is home to about two million Jews. Four hundred thousand live in Latin America, and three hundred and fifty thousand live in Canada. About 90 percent of Africa’s Jews live in the nation of South Africa. Judaism ranks as the twelfth largest religion in the world.

History and development

At the time that Judaism developed, the people in the region that is now called the Middle East had historically worshipped many gods, a practice called polytheism. Judaism arose during the Bronze Age, from roughly 4000 to 3000 BCE. This religion differed from the others of its day in that it called for the worship of only one God, a practice called monotheism. As a result of its being a new religion and challenging the accepted beliefs of the day by promoting only one god, Judaism's early history experienced many challenges. This early history is recorded in the first five books of the Tanakh; these five books are collectively called the Torah. The key event was God's appointment of the prophet Abraham (c. 2050–c. 1950 BCE) as the leader of the Israelites, God's chosen people. Another key event was the bondage, or enslavement, of the Jews in Egypt and their exodus, or escape, under the leadership of the prophet Moses, who received from God the Ten Commandments (religious laws) and gave them to the Jewish people. Judaism became more structured and organized under kings Saul (c. 1020–1000 BCE), David (d. 962 BCE), and Solomon (tenth century BCE), who constructed a magnificent Temple (the First Temple) in Jerusalem in the tenth century BCE. There, in a room called the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This cabinet contained the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were carved. Jews soon came to regard the Temple and the city of Jerusalem as their most holy sites.

In 586 BCE the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple and drove the Jews into exile (the Babylonian exile). The Jews returned and rebuilt the Temple, the Second Temple, in 515 BCE after the Babylonians were defeated by the Persian Empire. In 175 the king of Syria desecrated (violated and damaged) the Temple and passed laws in an effort to eliminate the Jews. In 164 BCE the Jews revolted, a revolt still commemorated on the Jewish festival of Hanukkah (sometimes spelled Chanukah), which recreates the rededication of the Temple.

In 63 BCE Jerusalem and the surrounding nation of Palestine fell under the domination of the Roman Empire (c. 31 BCE–476 CE), which persecuted the Jews and forced them to pay high taxes. To persecute someone is to mistreat them because of differences. This mistreatment often includes violence. At about the beginning of the Common Era a Jewish group called the Zealots formed to oppose the Romans. In 66 CE the Zealots launched a revolt, known as the Great Revolt, which

WORDS TO KNOW

Ark of the Covenant: A cabinet in which the Ten Commandments were kept in the First Temple of Jerusalem.

Ashkenazic: Term used to refer to Jews of France, Germany, and eastern Europe.

bar mitzvah: The coming-of-age ceremony for boys.

bat mitzvah: The coming-of-age ceremony for girls.

conservative: A movement in modern Judaism that tries to strike a balance between Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

Diaspora: The scattering of the Jews throughout the world.

Hanukkah: The Festival of Lights commemorating the rededication of the First Temple.

Holocaust: The systematic slaughter of Jews by the Nazi regime in Germany before and during World War II (1939–45).

kosher: Dietary laws, referred to in Hebrew as *kashrut*.

Magen David: The so-called Star of David, a symbol of the Jewish faith and nation.

menorah: A seven-branched candelabrum; at Hanukkah, a nine-branched candelabrum is used.

mezuzah: A small case containing Torah passages that observant Jews attach to the doorposts of their houses.

midrashim: Stories that expand on incidents in the Hebrew Bible.

Mishnah: The written text of the Talmud.

mitzvot: The laws of Judaism contained in the Torah.

Moshiach: The expected Messiah in Jewish belief.

Oral Torah: Interpretations of the Torah and ways to apply their laws.

orthodox: The name of one of the sects of Judaism, generally referring to traditional Jews who are conservative in their outlook.

Pesach: The feast of Passover, commemorating the flight of the Jews from Egypt.

reform: One of the sects of Judaism, generally used to refer to the less traditional branch of the faith.

Rosh Hoshanah: The Jewish “New Year.”

Sephardic: Term used to refer to Jews of North Africa, the Middle East, Spain, and Portugal.

Talmud: Traditions that explain and interpret the Torah.

Tanakh: The chief Jewish scripture; the Hebrew Bible.

Torah: The first five books of the Tanakh: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Yahweh: One of the names for God in the Tanakh.

Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement.

Zionism: A movement that began in the nineteenth century to find a permanent home for Jews.

ended in 70 CE when Roman troops occupied the city, massacred the Jews, and destroyed the Temple. A second revolt took place in 132 CE when hundreds of thousands of Jews were massacred or enslaved, and their survivors were banished from (forced to leave) Jerusalem.

Despite these setbacks Judaism grew in the centuries that followed. A major center of Jewish influence was Spain, where scholars made strides in such areas as theology (the study of religion) and science. Although Judaism continued to grow and spread, Jews throughout Europe faced many challenges. In 1086 unsuccessful efforts were made to convert Spanish Jews to Islam, the religion of Muslims. The Islamic leadership was called the Umayyad caliphate, or domain. The Umayyad at that time controlled large areas of Spain. At the end of the century many Jews in Europe, particularly those in Germany, were slaughtered by Christian Crusaders who were on their way to Palestine to reclaim it from Islam. In 1290 Jews were expelled from England. In 1492 they were expelled from Spain. In the 1700s Jews faced persecution in central Europe and Russia, and, although they were allowed to return to such countries as England, they faced discrimination (mistreatment) and exclusion from public life.

By the end of the nineteenth century many of the restrictions that had been placed on Jews were lifted. For example, Jews could hold public office or attend universities. These changes, however, did not end discrimination and prejudice. Beginning in about the mid-nineteenth century many Jews began to dream of a safe, permanent homeland in Palestine, the land where Judaism historically originated. This became a movement called Zionism.

The dream seemed to have been realized in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration, Great Britain's agreement to form a Jewish state in Palestine after World War I (1914–18; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States and their allies defeated Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their allies). This agreement was complicated, however, by the fact that the British had made identical promises to the Arabs living in Palestine. (At the time, large areas of the Middle East were British colonies.) Arabs are predominantly Muslim, although many are Christian. This plan was disrupted by the growing tensions in Europe that led to World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan). During these years, roughly from the mid-1930s to the end of the war in 1945, Germany's

About Judaism

- **Belief.** The core beliefs of Judaism include belief in one God, belief in the accuracy of the Hebrew Bible, belief in the prophets, belief that a messiah will come, and belief in the last judgment and resurrection.
- **Followers.** Judaism is the twelfth largest religion in the world, with some thirteen to fourteen million believers.
- **Name of God.** Jews use the name God, although common names for God found in the Hebrew Bible include Yahweh and Elohim.
- **Symbols.** Judaism has a number of symbols, including the Magen David (Star of David), the mezuzah, the menorah, and such articles of clothing as the yarmulke.
- **Worship.** Jews worship in synagogues, or temples. The Jewish liturgy includes prayers and blessings, but the center of Jewish worship is reading from the Torah.
- **Dress.** Jews have no particular dress, though women are expected to dress modestly. Some Orthodox men keep their heads covered. Others wear the *peyos*, or long locks of hair at their sideburns.
- **Texts.** The chief text of Judaism is the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, especially the first five books, collectively called the Torah. In addition, the Talmud contains interpretations and applications of the Torah.
- **Sites.** The most important site for Jews is the nation of Israel, especially the city of Jerusalem.
- **Observances.** The Jewish calendar includes many observances. Some of the most important are Passover (Pesach), Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hanukkah.
- **Phrases.** Judaism has many widely used phrases, including *Shabbat shalom* ("good Shabbat," used as a greeting on Shabbat, or day of worship), *mazel tov* (meaning "good luck," but referring to past rather than future luck and used as a form of congratulations), *shalom* (peace), and *l'chayim* ("to life," usually used as a toast).

Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) systematically exterminated, or killed, six million European Jews. The Holocaust, as it is called, is perhaps the single defining event in modern Jewish history.

After the war the Jewish nation of Israel was created as a result of a 1947 United Nations declaration. It was indeed located in Palestine, on land formerly occupied by Great Britain and populated by Arabs. At Israel's creation, thousands of Arabs moved to areas of Palestine that were not part of the new nation. Some, however, stayed. Tensions between the two groups were high. In the years that followed, however,

Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews

The differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews are based principally on geography. Ashkenazic Jews are the Jews of eastern Europe, France, and Germany. The word *Ashkenazic* comes from the Hebrew word for Germany. Sephardic Jews come from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East. This group is often subdivided into Sephardim from Spain and Portugal and Mizrachim from North Africa and the Middle East.

Most Jews in the United States are Ashkenazic, for they are the descendants of Jews that immigrated from northern and eastern Europe. Interestingly, though, the very first Jewish

congregation in the United States, founded in New York City in 1684 and still in existence, is Sephardic. Jews in Israel are a mix of the two traditions, consisting of the descendants of the original Sephardic Jews of the area and immigrants from Ashkenazic countries. Most of the differences between the two traditions have to do with language and culture rather than basic beliefs; these differences translate into minor differences in services, prayers, and the like. Historically, a chief distinction between the two is that Sephardic Jews tended to be more integrated into the surrounding non-Jewish culture. Ashkenazic Jews tended to live separately from, and in a state of tension with, the surrounding culture.

Israel faced hostility from its neighbors and became involved in wars in 1949, 1967, and 1973. Although Israel signed a peace agreement with Egypt in 1979, hostility from Arab neighbors, particularly the Palestinians, continues in the twenty-first century.

Sects and schisms

After the revolt in 164 BCE, the first significant divisions in Judaism began to appear with the emergence of three distinct groups: the Essenes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The Essenes were ascetics (meaning that they lived lives of poverty) and held more mystical views. The Sadducees were the aristocrats and priests of Jewish society, conservative, or traditional, in matters of law but socially more liberal, or open to change. They did not believe in the authority of the Oral Torah. For the Sadducees, the center of Jewish life was the Temple and the sacrificial rites conducted there. In contrast to the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed that God gave to Moses both the Oral and the Written Torah. Both were open to interpretation, so it was the Pharisees who promoted a strong tradition of education and biblical scholarship (study) in Judaism.

The next movement to develop, in the early years of the Common Era, was the Zealots. The Zealots were less a religious movement than

a nationalistic one, meaning they believed in promoting their culture and interests above all others. They “zealously” (fiercely) opposed domination by the Roman Empire and launched a revolt to Roman rule in 70 CE. The Zealots are most famous for holding out against Roman legions at their stronghold at Masada, where they ultimately committed mass suicide rather than surrender.

The Zealots and Essenes were nearly all killed by the Romans. The Sadducees lost their influence with the Roman destruction of the Temple. The only group to survive this period was the Pharisees. For many of the following centuries there was no significant division in Judaism. There were minor differences in culture and ritual between the Ashkenazic Jews of eastern Europe, France, and Germany and the Sephardic Jews of Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East. Yet Judaism remained remarkably unified until about the ninth century.

In the 1700s yet another movement emerged. Traditionally, Jews believed that education was the best way to know God. A movement known as Hasidism (sometimes spelled Chasidism), founded by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (c. 1700–1760), emerged that took a more mystical, or spiritual, view and relied more on personal experience than on formal education. The movement was considered quite radical at the time, and those who opposed it were called *mitnagdim*, meaning “opponents.” In the twenty-first century a number of Hasidic sects continue to exist. They are now considered conservative, however, rather than radical. Hasidic Jews are unified with more Orthodox (traditional) Jews in their opposition to modern liberal movements.

Modern divisions In modern life Judaism is represented by three major groups: Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism, and Conservative Judaism. There is also a fourth, smaller group, called Reconstructionist. Orthodox Judaism, generally regarded as conservative, is a coalition (partnership) of a number of groups that have in common the belief that God gave Moses the entire Torah, including both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. They believe that the 613 *mitzvot*, or commandments or



A Hasidic, or Orthodox, Jew stands on a street in Jerusalem, Israel. The Hasidic movement was founded by Israel ben Eliezer in the eighteenth century. Its followers strictly follow the Torah's teachings.

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laws contained in the Torah, remain binding on Jews. It is estimated that about 7 percent of American Jews are Orthodox. Orthodox Judaism is the only recognized form of Judaism in Israel, though most Israeli Jews do not identify themselves with a movement as much as American Jews do.

Reform Jews, in contrast, do not accept that God gave Moses the Torah. They believe that the source of the Torah was several different authors and that the Torah represents a compilation of these texts. They do not adhere to the 613 mitzvot, but they do retain many of the values, ethics, practices, and culture of Judaism. Many Jews regard Reform Judaism as the movement that is the most open-minded or accepting of change. About 42 percent of American Jews identify themselves as Reform.

Conservative Judaism was an attempt to heal the rift between Orthodox and Reform Judaism by striking a middle ground. Conservative Jews believe, for example, that God did reveal the Torah to Moses but that it was recorded and transmitted by human authors, so it contains human elements. Conservative Jews also believe that Jewish law should change and adapt to the culture that surrounds it. Some observers find great variation in the practices of Conservative Jews. Some practices are barely distinguishable from Orthodox Jews; others, from Reform Jews. In the United States about 38 percent of Jews identify themselves as Conservative.

Reconstructionist Judaism is a very small movement, consisting of only about 1 percent of American Jews. Some observers believe that it is the most liberal branch of Judaism. In some respects, this is true. Reconstructionists, for example, do not believe that the Jews are the chosen people of God, nor do they believe that God has been active in human affairs throughout history. On the other hand, Reconstructionists give more emphasis to Jewish observances than do Reform Jews.

Basic beliefs

Many efforts have been made to outline the core beliefs of Judaism. Few of these efforts are universally accepted. Many Jews, however, accept a list of thirteen core religious beliefs as outlined by Maimonides, one of the great scholars in Jewish history.

1. God exists. Jews rarely offer any proof that God exists. The first line of the first book of the Torah, Genesis, states, "In the beginning,

God created heaven and Earth.” God, therefore, existed before the universe did, and he created everything in it, including evil.

2. God is one. Unlike some religions, which believe in the concept of a god that manifests, or appears, in various ways or through various figures or minor gods, Jews believe that God is a single entity that cannot be described by his attributes. He exists everywhere, is all powerful, and all knowing (“omniscient”).
3. God is incorporeal. This means that God does not have a body or any physical attributes, including gender. God is a “he” primarily because Hebrew, the ancient language of the Jewish people, does not have neuter words, that is, words whose grammatical gender is neither masculine nor feminine.
4. God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end.
5. Prayer is to be addressed to God and to no other being. Prayer is central to Jewish life, and devout Jews pray at least three times each day.
6. The words of the prophets in the Tanakh are true. Jewish scripture identifies fifty-five prophets, including seven women. These prophets spoke for God and helped to define the relationship between God and His people.
7. A related belief is that Moses was the greatest prophet and that his words are true.
8. The words of the Written Torah, or the first five books of the Tanakh (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), are true and were given to Moses by God. Similarly, the words of the Oral Torah, which includes the Talmud, or traditions that interpret and explain the scriptures, are accepted as true. In the second century of the Common Era the Talmud was written down in a text called the Mishnah. Orthodox Jews believe that God taught it to Moses and that it was handed down orally until then.
9. There will be no other Torah.
10. God knows the deeds and thoughts of people.
11. God will reward the good and punish the evil. Some people regard Judaism as a strict religion that emphasizes a “God of wrath.” They believe that Judaism emphasizes the “justice” of God at the expense of mercy. Many Jews dispute this belief, pointing out that of the two names used most frequently in the Hebrew Bible to

Maimonides

One of the greatest scholars in the history of Judaism was Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), also known as Rambam and as Moshe ben Maimon. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain, where he was a doctor. Throughout his life he fled persecution (harassment) to live in many different places, including North Africa and the Middle East. In addition to developing the thirteen principles of faith, he was also the author of the *Mishnah Torah*, an extensive code of Jewish law written in simple and easy-to-understand language, which made it accessible to more people. He also wrote the *Guide for the Perplexed*, which discusses difficult theological (religious) ideas from the perspective of the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE).

refer to God, the name that refers to His mercy is used just as often as the other.

12. The Messiah will come. The word *messiah* is an English version of the Hebrew word *moshiach*, which means “anointed.” Jews believe that God will appoint a messiah who will end evil, rebuild the Temple, and return exiles to Israel. (Jews frequently refer to the Diaspora, or the scattering of Jews throughout the world. The Diaspora began with the Babylonian exile and continues to this day.) Judaism’s split with Christianity came about primarily because of this belief. Christians believe that Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE) was the Messiah, while Jews do not.
13. The dead will be resurrected in the “Time to Come,” or in Hebrew, *Olam Ha-Ba*, the afterlife.

Sacred writings

Jewish tradition recognizes Tanakh, also called the Hebrew Bible (mainly by non-Jews), as its core sacred scripture. The Tanakh, in turn, comprises three parts. The first part is the Torah, or Law, which contains the first five books of the Tanakh: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The second part is called *Nevi'im*, or Prophets, and includes twenty-one books, including I Kings, II Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. These books, as the names suggest, record the life and teachings of many of the major prophets of Judaism. The third part is called *Ketuvim*, or Writings, and includes a number of the more “literary” books of the Tanakh, including Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and others.

Many, but not all, Jews believe that Moses was the author of the Torah, which contains the account of creation and the earliest days of Judaism. Modern biblical scholarship, however, has determined that the book’s authorship is unknown, and even many Jews accept that the Hebrew Bible was the work of many authors, written down, compiled, and edited by others. For centuries, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible dated to the ninth century CE. Then, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls,

which include books of the Hebrew Bible, were discovered by a shepherd boy in a cave near Qumran, Israel, near the northwest coast of the Dead Sea. These scrolls were hidden by clerics (priests), probably Essenes, to protect them from invading Romans. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest manuscript versions of the Hebrew Bible known to survive date to the first century BCE.

The Torah is central to Jewish belief because it outlines at least four important themes in Jewish history. The first is the concept of “election,” or the belief that God chooses special people to carry out His work on Earth. A key event in the book of Genesis is God’s election of the Israelites as His chosen people, with Abraham as their father. The second major theme is the concept of “covenant,” which refers to agreements between God and man. This sense of covenant governed all human relationships and made both moral and ritual demands on the Jewish people. The third theme is “law,” including the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, but the Torah contains numerous other laws, including the 613 *mitzvot*. The final theme is “exodus,” the most prominent example of which is contained in the second book of the Torah, Exodus. The escape of Jews from bondage in Egypt and their return to the Promised Land is a key event in Jewish history, an event still commemorated in the yearly Feast of Passover.

In a Jewish temple, the Torah is handwritten in beautiful calligraphy (stylized handwriting) on parchment scrolls rather than in book form. The scroll itself is not to be touched; instead a pointer in the shape of a hand with a pointing index finger is used. This pointer is called a *yad*. The scrolls are covered in ornamental cloth and stored in a cabinet called an ark.

These scrolls make up the Written Torah. In addition to the Written Torah is the Oral Torah, or interpretations of the Torah and ways to apply their laws. These interpretations are referred to as the Talmud.

Mitzvot

The *mitzvot* are a comprehensive list of laws contained in the Tanakh. Some of these are “affirmative” laws, meaning that they are obligations that Jews are required to carry out. Others are “negative” laws, referring to practices that are not allowed. Still others are applicable only to Jews living in Israel.

One of the difficulties with the *mitzvot* for modern Jews is that while some are common-sense laws that remain applicable in modern life, others are a reflection of cultural biases or the material and physical conditions of life at the time they were written. Thus, Jews (and others) have no difficulty with such laws as praying to God, honoring fathers and mothers, not striking a parent, not cheating others in business dealings, or treating the poor and widows with kindness and respect. Similarly, other laws detail forbidden practices, and these prohibitions remain strong cultural taboos. Other laws, however, do not seem to apply to modern life, such as not to eat the flesh of an ox that has been condemned to be stoned, not to sell a Hebrew maid to another person, or not to leave the dead body of an executed criminal hanging overnight.

(Use of the term *Torah* can be ambiguous. Depending on the context, “Torah” can mean the Written Torah or both the Written and Oral Torah. In connection with the Written Torah, it is sometimes used to refer to the entire Hebrew Bible.) In the centuries that followed, further commentaries, called the Gemara, were written, both in Jerusalem and in Babylon. So there are actually two Talmuds: the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud is more complete and comprehensive. It is usually this version that Jews mean when they refer to “the” Talmud.

The Mishnah, or written text of the Talmud, consists of six sections, or *sedarim* (orders):

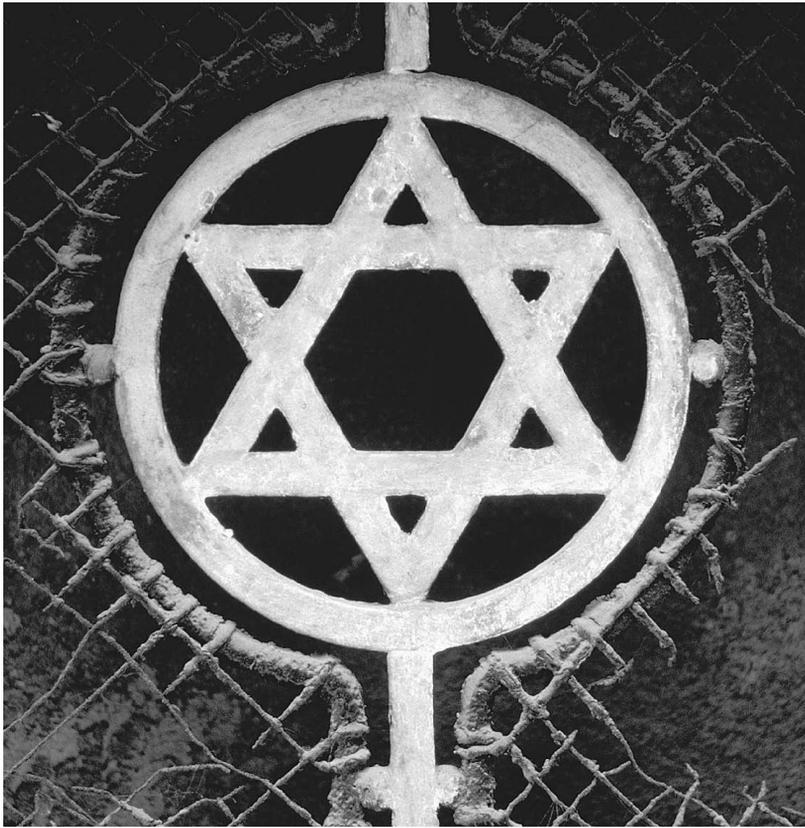
1. Zera'im (Seeds), dealing with agricultural laws.
2. Mo'ed (Festival), dealing with festivals as well as Sabbath (the period from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday) observances.
3. Nashim (Women), dealing with such issues as contracts, marriage, and divorce.
4. Nezikin (Damages), dealing with laws pertaining to financial matters and torts (wrongful acts that injure or harm another).
5. Kodashim (Holy Things), dealing with temple worship and sacrifices.
6. Toharot (Purities), dealing with laws pertaining to ritual purity.

Each of the *sedarim* includes further divisions called *masekhtots*, or tractates. The total number of *masekhtot* is sixty-three. These tractates deal with specific issues in Jewish law.

In addition to the Torah and the Talmud, Jews consult two additional sources for insights into the faith. The first is the *midrashim*, which are essentially stories that expand on incidents in the Hebrew Bible. The other is an immense body of commentary called the *responsa*. These consist of answers to questions about Jewish law that were written down by respected rabbis (the leader of a Jewish congregation), usually with detailed reference to the Torah. These *responsa* continue to be written and compiled.

Sacred symbols

The most recognizable symbol of Judaism is the five-pointed Star of David, more accurately referred to as the Shield of David or the Magen David. It appears on Jewish synagogues (houses of worship), on the flag of the nation of Israel, and as the symbol for the Israeli



The Magen David, or Star of David, is a five-pointed star. The symbol is often used by synagogues and appears on the flag of the nation of Israel.

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Magen David, the equivalent of the Red Cross. It is thought traditionally to have been the symbol on the shield of the Jewish king David.

The star consists of two interlocking triangles. Many attempts have been made to read some religious significance into the design of the Magen David. Some people have argued, for example, that one of the triangles points up, toward God, and the other points down, toward Earth, suggesting the unity of God and his people. None of these theories, though, can be proved. The Magen David began to appear relatively recently, perhaps in about the fifteenth century, when Jews in some places were required to wear a badge to identify themselves, as they did later in Nazi Germany. In the seventeenth century the Magen David began to appear on synagogues to identify them as houses of worship, much in the same way Christian churches use the cross. It gained popularity in the late nineteenth century as a symbol of the Zionist movement, which consisted of Jews calling for a separate homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people.

Judaism



There are an estimated thirteen to fourteen million followers of Judaism around the world. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

Menorah, mezuzah, and tzitzit A second recognizable symbol of Judaism is the *menorah*, a seven-branched candelabrum (a decorative holder of candles). At the time of the Second Temple, the menorah was lit every evening and cleaned out every morning. The menorah was significant because it symbolized the united nation of Israel and, according to the book of Isaiah, Israel's role as "a light unto the nations." During Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, a nine-candle menorah is lit on each of the festival's eight nights (eight of the candles represent the eight nights of the festival, the ninth is used to light the other eight).

A third common symbol of Judaism is the *mezuzah*, from a Hebrew word that means "doorpost." The mezuzah is a small case, placed on the

doorposts of houses. In the book of Deuteronomy, God commands Jews to keep his words constantly, and to do so, “you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” This verse is from a Jewish prayer called the Shema, and the words of the Shema are handwritten on a small scroll contained within the case. The case is affixed at an angle for the simple reason that early rabbis could not decide whether it should be affixed horizontally or vertically, so they compromised. When passing through the door, a person is to touch the mezuzah with the fingertips, then kiss the fingertips.

Moreover, the Torah commands Jews to wear *tzitzit*, or fringes, on their garments as a way of reminding them of God’s commandments. In modern times Jewish men fulfill this commandment by wearing the *tallit*, a four-cornered shawl with fringes, at morning prayers. Finally, when Jewish men attend temple, they wear one of the most recognizable signs of Judaism, the *yarmulke*, or skullcap. The yarmulke, which fits over the man’s head, has no particular significance in Judaism and is more a custom than a commandment. It reflects the Eastern belief that covering the head is a sign of respect.

Worship

Daily prayer is at the heart of Jewish life. Observant Jews attend formal prayer services three times each day. The evening prayer service is called Ma’ariv, the morning service Shacharit, and the afternoon service Minchah. (The Jewish day is considered to run from sundown to sundown. Accordingly, the Jewish Sabbath, or Shabbat (day of rest), begins at sundown on Friday and continues to sundown on Saturday.) Shabbat commemorates God’s “resting” on the seventh day after six days of creation, as recounted in the book of Genesis. The seventh day of creation is regarded as the first celebration of Shabbat, and the obligation to celebrate Shabbat is one of the Ten Commandments. All of these daily prayers are gathered in a book called the Siddur.

The oldest Jewish prayer is the Shema, which consists of passages from two books of the Torah, Deuteronomy (chapter 6, verses 4 through 9) and Numbers (chapter 15, verses 37 through 41). Another important prayer, one that is at the center of every Jewish service, is the *Shemoneh Esrei*, which means “eighteen” and refers to eighteen blessings. (The prayer is also called the *Amidah*, which means “standing,” since the congregation stands when the prayer is recited, or *Tefilah*, meaning “the

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Jews attend worship in a synagogue. Devout Jews are expected to pray at least three times a day. Jewish men wear a tallit, or four-cornered shawl with fringe, and a yarmulke, or skullcap, to their morning prayers. AP IMAGES.

Prayer.”) The Shemoneh Esrei consists of three groups of blessings. The first group praises God; the second group makes thirteen requests for such blessings as redemption (salvation), forgiveness, and health; and the third group expresses gratitude.

A crucial part of a Jewish prayer service is reading from the Torah, which is divided into sections so that the entire Torah is read in the span of a year. Also read is a passage from the twenty-one books of the Prophets (Nevi'im). These readings are accompanied with great ceremony, as the Torah is carried around the room and then set on a *bimah*, or podium, where a member of the congregation (group of worshippers) is often given the honor of reciting a blessing over it.

Many non-Jews believe that a Jewish prayer called the Kaddish is recited only by mourners (those grieving for a loss). While there is a variation of the Kaddish that is used for mourning, the Kaddish, which

echoes the language of the book of Ezekiel (chapter 38, verse 23) is recited more generally in praise of God. One reason for its significance is that it is written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic (a southwest Asian language related to Hebrew and spoken by Jews during the Babylonian exile). Yet another prayer, which is recited at the end of every prayer service, is the *Aleinu*, which also praises God. A portion of it, as reproduced on the Jewish Virtual Library, reads:

May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified [holy] in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire family of Israel, swiftly and soon. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever. Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, mighty.

These are some of the components of daily prayer services, including services conducted on Shabbat. The composition of each service, though, differs, depending on the time of day and, in some instances, the day of the week. For example, evening prayer consists of the *Shema*, the *Shemoneh Esrei*, and the *Aleinu*. The morning service adds other prayers and includes the reading from the Torah. The afternoon service includes a reading from the book of Psalms, the *Shemoneh Esrei*, and the *Aleinu*. Further, the Jewish service can differ for Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews, and it also differs for Jews from the Ashkenazic and Sephardic traditions. While there are differences, however, the core of the service (blessings, praise of God, readings from the Torah) remains the same.

Observances and pilgrimages

Jewish holidays can be confusing for non-Jews (referred to by Jews as Gentiles) for two principal reasons. First, the date of Jewish holidays is determined by the Jewish calendar, so holidays fall on different days each year in the secular (nonreligious) calendar. Second, Jewish holidays can last for different lengths of time, depending on the tradition from which a particular Jew or Jewish family or congregation comes. While the Jewish calendar contains a large number of holidays and observances, the four most prominent are Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hanukkah.

Passover The feast of Passover, called *Pesach* in Hebrew, is perhaps the most important Jewish holiday. Most Jews observe this holiday to some

extent, even those who are not otherwise religious. Passover, which begins on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Nissan, commemorates the Jewish escape from Egypt after many years of slavery. The name refers to God “passing over” the homes of Jews when the firstborn sons of Egypt were slaughtered, as recorded in Exodus, Chapter 12.

At the center of Passover is the *seder*, a ceremonial dinner held in the home or the community on the first or first and second evenings of Passover. One of the most recognizable features of Passover and the seder is that Jews avoid any breads or grain products that contain leaven, the substance that makes bread rise. This observance commemorates the fact that when the Jews fled from Egypt, they did not have time to allow their bread to rise. Accordingly, a common food item served during Passover and the seder is matzo, a bread made with just flour and water and no yeast. Under strict Jewish law, during Passover a person may not even own any product with leaven in it, including pet food or even food given to cattle.

According to strict Jewish law, all work, including school, is forbidden on the first two and last two days of Passover (or just the first and last days in some traditions). In the United States most Jews do not adhere strictly to this law. It is customary for most Jews to take some time off from work or school to prepare for seder, a long and complicated process of cooking food and cleaning the home, especially the stove and refrigerator that come into contact with leavened products. The seder dinner itself is a complex ritual consisting of at least fifteen parts, including a variety of blessings. At the center of the seder meal is the *maggid*, a retelling of the story of Exodus, and the youngest person in the group asking the Four Questions (*Mah Nishtanah*) to prompt the story.

Rosh Hashanah Rosh Hashanah is typically referred to as the Jewish New Year. It takes place on the first and second days of the Jewish month of Tishri. Tishri is the seventh month of the Jewish calendar (Nissan is the first month), but Tishri marks the “new year” because that is when the number indicating the year is increased by one.

Rosh Hashanah is typically a time for reflection and making resolutions for the new year. Work is not permitted. Observant Jews spend most of the day in a synagogue. Some of the rituals associated with Rosh Hashanah include the blowing of the *shofar*, a ram’s horn trumpet, as a call to repentance; eating apples dipped in honey to signify hopes for

a sweet new year; and *Tashlikh*, or “casting off,” when Jews walk to a body of flowing water and empty their pockets into it, suggesting a casting off of sins.

Yom Kippur Yom Kippur, in combination with Rosh Hoshanah, is part of what are called the High Holy Days of Judaism. Yom Kippur, which falls on the tenth day of Tishri, is generally regarded as the most important day on the Jewish calendar. The name means “Day of Atonement.” Yom Kippur is a day set aside for Jews to atone for their sins against God. One who has sinned against another person is to seek forgiveness from and reconciliation with that person before Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a day of strict fasting, which lasts for twenty-five hours, beginning an hour before sunset the evening before and continuing until sunset the following day. During this period Jews not only abstain from all food and beverages, even water, but also avoid “anointing” themselves (that is, wearing cosmetics or deodorant), washing and bathing, wearing leather shoes (canvas sneakers are often worn by Orthodox Jews), and having sexual relations. Young children, the elderly, and women who are giving or have just given birth to a child, however, are not permitted to fast so as not to endanger their health. Older children are allowed to break their fast if it becomes necessary.

Observant Jews treat Yom Kippur as Shabbat. No work is done, and much of the day is spent in the synagogue. Services typically last from midmorning to midafternoon, then resume in the evening. The liturgy (religious practice) that is followed is much more complex than that followed on other occasions and requires a special prayer book, the *machzor*. During the services Jews confess their sins (in the plural, emphasizing communal responsibility for sin) and make vows for the future.

Hanukkah Hanukkah, sometimes spelled Chanukah, is regarded by Gentiles as the Jewish Christmas, for it occurs during the Christmas season in the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas), beginning



The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah is also called the Festival of Lights. It is in remembrance of a Jewish revolt that took back control of the Temple in Jerusalem. One candle is lit for each night of the festival, until all eight candles are burning. AP IMAGES.

on the twenty-fifth day of the Jewish month of Kislev. While Hanukkah is perhaps the most visible Jewish holiday to Gentiles, who often send Hanukkah cards to Jewish friends in place of Christmas cards, Jews do not regard it as a major holiday.

Hanukkah is also called the Festival of Lights. Its significance in Jewish history dates back to the rededication of the Temple in the second century BCE. Antiochus IV (215–164 BCE), who ruled Syria from 175 to 164 BCE, oppressed the Jews in Palestine and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah Maccabee led a revolt, which ultimately proved successful. The Temple was rededicated. At the time of the rededication, however, little oil for the menorah remained in the Temple, just enough for one day. Miraculously, the menorah burned for eight days, until new oil could be prepared. Accordingly, Jews celebrate an eight-day festival to commemorate the event.

Hanukkah is a time for gift giving, although typically only children are given gifts. The chief religious observance is the lighting of the menorah, a nine-branched candelabrum, beginning with one candle on the first night and adding a candle each successive night. Because of the role of oil in the rededication of the Temple, it is traditional for the season to feature fried foods, especially potato pancakes, or latkes. Also common during Hanukkah is playing with a dreidel, a square top. During the reign of Antiochus, reading the Torah was illegal, but gambling games were not. Jews of the time who had gathered to read the Torah often played with the dreidel to hide what they were actually doing.

Pilgrimages The holiest place on Earth for Jews is Israel, especially Jerusalem. Much of Jewish law is applicable only to Jews who live in Israel. Any Jew who wants to can automatically gain citizenship in Israel. Many Jews who live elsewhere make it a point to visit Israel at some point in their lives.

Israel is filled with sites that are considered sacred to Jews. One of the most famous sites is in Jerusalem. It is the Western Wall, sometimes referred to as the Wailing Wall. This wall was a retaining wall built around the Second Temple and later became part of a wall built around the city of Jerusalem by the Ottoman emperor, Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566). Since that time, Jews from around the world have traveled to Jerusalem to spend time at the Western Wall. Many elderly Jews move to Jerusalem so that they can spend their last years near the

wall. The wall became known as the Wailing Wall after Westerners observed many Jews in tearful prayer at the wall.

Everyday living

Being Jewish is as much a cultural as a religious matter. In many areas, particularly in larger cities, some Jewish people can be recognized by their dress and head coverings. This is especially true for Orthodox men, who dress in black and keep their heads covered. Throughout the world, however, Jews have been fully integrated into the surrounding culture and are often not recognizable by dress or daily observances. Gentiles are likely to be roughly aware, though, of three prominent elements of Jewish life: kosher food, wedding rituals, and the bar mitzvah for boys and bat mitzvah for girls.

Kosher *Kosher* is the word commonly used to refer to the dietary laws of Judaism, called *kasbrut*. In the larger community kosher is often used to refer generally to Jewish-style cooking. Yet kosher does not refer to a style of cooking but to prohibitions on the types of food items that can be eaten and to ways of storing and preparing food. Some Jews follow these dietary laws strictly, while others do not follow them at all. The National Jewish Population Survey estimates that about 25 to 30 percent of American Jews adhere to the dietary laws to some extent, and that about 17 percent adhere to the regulations regarding meat all the time.

Kosher encompasses seven regulations. The first is that only animals with cloven hooves and that chew their cud can be eaten. Commonly, pork is forbidden because pigs do not chew their cud. Second, animals that are eaten must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law. This is primarily to ensure that the animal's death is painless and quick and that the blood drains from the animal, which is the third law. The fourth law prohibits eating certain parts of the animal, including certain nerves and fats. The fifth is that meat and dairy products may not be eaten together. The sixth is that utensils that have come into contact with dairy may not be used to cook meat, and vice versa. Finally, grape products, including wine and juices, produced by non-Jews may not be consumed.

Weddings Jewish weddings tend to be elaborate affairs. Customarily, the bride and groom avoid any contact with each other for a week before the wedding. On the Shabbat that falls during the week of the wedding, it is customary for the groom to be given the honor of reciting the blessing

over the Torah (*aliyah*). On the day before the wedding, the groom and the bride both fast.

During the wedding ceremony the bride wears a veil. The bride approaches the groom and circles around him. Then, after two blessings are recited over wine, the groom places a ring on the bride's finger and recites the words "Be sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel." Jewish law does not require a rabbi to be present, but one normally is for civil rather than religious reasons. During the marriage ceremony the couple stand beneath a canopy called a *chuppah*, which symbolizes their home together. The couple then recites seven blessings (*sheva brakhs*), which they must do in the presence of ten adult Jewish men. After the couple drinks wine, the man smashes his glass, or sometimes a small symbolic piece of glass, with his right foot, in commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. The wedding ceremony is traditionally followed by a feast and a repetition of the seven blessings.

Bar and bat mitzvah The Aramaic word *bar* means "son," and in both Hebrew and Aramaic, the word *mitzvah* means "commandment," and *bat* means "daughter." The bar mitzvah ceremony for boys at age thirteen and the bat (or sometimes "bas") mitzvah ceremonies for girls at age twelve are regarded as similar to confirmation in the Christian tradition. These ceremonies mark the passage of the child into adulthood. Until these ages, Jewish children are not required to obey Jewish law, although they are encouraged to do so as much as possible. Afterwards, however, they acquire all the rights and responsibilities of Jewish adults. For example, a boy who has been "bar-mitzvahed" can be one of the ten adult men required to be present during a Jewish wedding.

In contemporary life the bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies tend to be elaborate. This is a modern innovation and is not required by the Torah. A boy, for example, becomes a "son of the commandment" automatically upon reaching thirteen. It has, however, become customary to mark the event in a number of ways. The young man recites the blessing over the Torah, chants numerous prayers, and makes a speech that traditionally begins with the words "Today I am a man." It has become common for the Temple service to be followed with a celebration and feast that is as elaborate as that found at weddings.

Judaism's influences

Jews have accomplished many great things throughout their history. Jews have won 22 percent of the world's Nobel Prizes, including forty-five in



Moses received the Ten Commandments from God and gave them to the Jewish people. The commandments were carved onto tablets and stored within the Ark of the Covenant. Upon his thirteenth birthday, a Jewish boy automatically becomes a “son of the commandment.” © ISRAEL

IMAGES/ALAMY.

physics (the study of energy and motion), twenty-eight in chemistry (the science of structures and substances), fifty-two in medicine, twenty-one in economics, and twelve in literature. These are astonishing numbers, considering that Jews represent less than 1 percent of the world’s population. In addition, nine Jews have won the Nobel Peace Prize.

One of the most prominent Jews to win a Nobel Prize was physicist and mathematician Albert Einstein (1879–1955). A physicist studies energy and motion. He won the Nobel Prize in physics in 1921 for his work on the photoelectric effect. Einstein went on to write several papers that gained him fame in the scientific community, including his famous one on the theory of relativity. His work laid the foundation for several other fields of inquiry within the physics community. His name, and even his face, are familiar to people around the world.

Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952) was instrumental in the planning for a Jewish state in Israel. A native of Russia, he studied biochemistry (the study of chemical compounds and processes that occur in organisms) and worked with the Allies (the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and others) during World War I. Weizmann made many connections with British leaders through his work and was influential in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which Britain announced its support for a

Jewish state in Palestine. Additionally, the British appointed him to advise on the formation of such a state. During World War II, when Jews were being targeted for extermination by Nazi Germany, Weizmann tried to prevent the restriction of Jewish immigration into Palestine, though he was unsuccessful. After the war he was involved with partition plan presented before the United Nations, which established boundaries for the proposed Jewish state in Palestine. The state of Israel was declared in 1947, and Weizmann served as its first president, a position he held until his death.

Literature One of the world's most identifiable and influential literary works is Jewish in origin. The Bible, which contains both the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian New Testament, has been translated into more than two thousand languages and dialects. A survey of Bible sales up to 1992 revealed that an estimated six billion copies of the book have been sold, making it one of the bestselling books of all time. The stories of the Tanakh, such as that of Creation, the Flood, and the Exodus from Egypt led by Moses, are familiar to millions of people around the world, many of whom are not Jewish. These stories have been reproduced in television and in movies, including *Moses* (1975) starring Burt Lancaster (1913–1994), *The Ten Commandments* (1956) with Charlton Heston (1924–) and Yul Brynner (1920–1985), and *Samson and Delilah* (1956), produced by Cecile B. DeMille (1881–1959).

Scenes from the stories told in the Tanakh have also been portrayed in paintings throughout time, including Johann Liss's well-known *Judith in the Tent of Holofernes* (painted c. 1622). This painting depicts a scene from the Book of Judith, in which Judith, after having suffered at the hands of the Assyrians, sneaks into the camp of Assyrian general Holofernes. She offers assistance with the general's seize of the city of Bethulia. After having gained his trust, she comes upon him while he is drunk and cuts off his head.

The "Prayer of Judith" from the Book of Judith (chapter 9, verses 7 through 10) relays her words to God before she set out for the Assyrian camp:

Here now are the Assyrians, a greatly increased force, priding themselves in their horses and riders, boasting in the strength of their foot soldiers, and trusting in shield and spear, in bow and sling. They do not know that you are the Lord who crushes wars; the Lord is your name. Break their strength by your might, and bring

down their power in your anger; for they intend to defile [corrupt] your sanctuary, and to pollute the tabernacle [residence] where your glorious name resides, and to break off the horns of your altar with the sword. Look at their pride, and send your wrath [anger] upon their heads. Give to me, a widow, the strong hand to do what I plan. By the deceit of my lips strike down the slave with the prince and the prince with his servant; crush their arrogance by the hand of a woman.

Some universities offer courses in the literature of the Bible. In these courses, students from a variety of faiths read and analyze the stories of the Bible, illustrating that the book's appeal goes beyond the purely religious.

The Arts American composer George Gershwin (1898–1937) had a significant influence on the world of music. Along with his brother Ira, Gershwin wrote several musicals that became true classics. He is, however, probably best known for his work *Rhapsody in Blue*, which was the first time that elements of jazz, blues, and classical music were woven together. Gershwin was posthumously (after death) awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for his many accomplishments in music.

Painter Marc Chagall (1887–1985) is considered one of the most notable painters of the twentieth century. He was born to a Jewish family in Russia and raised in the Hasidic tradition of Judaism. Chagall's paintings hang in museums around the world, particularly in the museum named after him, the Musée Chagall, in Nice, France. His style incorporates aspects of several artistic styles, such as Cubism (portraying images as fragmented) and Surrealism (a style that is dreamlike or fantastic), and uses vibrant colors. Among his paintings is the well-known *I and the Village*, which shows a cubist influence in the way parts of the painting appear to fracture like stained glass. He also worked in sculpture, ceramics, and stained glass. Among his stained glass creations is *The Twelve Tribes of Israel*, which appears in the synagogue of the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem.

The long course of Jewish history has resulted in numerous historical contributions from Jews, as well. The fact that being Jewish also has social and cultural aspects attached to it means that Jewish influences can be found in virtually all areas of life. Sikhs, for instance, follow Jewish kosher laws for food. The religion of Sikhism was founded in the Punjab region of India. This ancient religion will likely remain an influential force in the twenty-first century.

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Neo-paganism

Neo-paganism encompasses several religious traditions. It does so in the same way that Christianity refers to a diverse body of sects, or subgroups, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, Methodism, and many others, that share certain fundamental beliefs. The prefix *neo-*, meaning “new,” implies that an ancient belief, practice, or custom has been rediscovered and adapted to the modern era. The word *pagan*, though, is harder to define. It generally refers to any ancient, pre-Christian set of religious beliefs, gods, symbols, rituals, and practices. Neo-paganism, then, is not the name of a specific religion. Instead, it is a descriptive term applied to any modern religious movement that tries to reconstruct ancient religious practices, primarily those from northern and western Europe.

One complication with the word *pagan* is that it is open to many different interpretations. Linguists, scholars who study the history and development of language, even debate the origins of the word. Most believe that it comes from the Latin word *paganus*, generally thought to mean a person who lives in a rural area, outside the city walls. City dwellers in the Roman Empire (31 BCE–476 CE) used the word to refer to unsophisticated rural people. After the Roman Empire converted to Christianity in the fourth century, the term was applied to people in the countryside who continued to follow religious beliefs that were regarded as backward and superstitious.

Some scholars, or researchers, believe that the word meant something more like “civilian,” referring to those who were not “soldiers of Christ,” or Christians. Still others argue that the term more generally referred to “outsiders,” those who were not part of the body of Christian believers. Whatever the origins of the word, by the time Christianity had spread throughout Europe, it branded any religious belief that was not Christian as “pagan.” In addition, pagan practices were regarded as the work of Satan. (In Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions Satan is

WORDS TO KNOW

Asatru: A neo-pagan religion based on worship of the Norse (Scandinavian) gods.

Beltane (Beltaine): Neo-pagan holiday on May 1 to celebrate spring flowerings and births.

Celtic: A term referring to an ethnic group that spread throughout Europe, particularly the British Isles, and is the source of many modern neo-pagan movements.

coven: A group of neo-pagans, such as Wiccans. Alternately referred to as circles, groves, kindreds, garths, hearths, and other terms.

druidism: A neo-pagan religion based in the Celtic region of the British Isles.

equinox: Either of two points during the year when the Sun crosses the equator and the hours of day and night are equal. The spring, or vernal, equinox occurs generally on March 21 and the autumn equinox occurs on or about September 23.

Esbat: Wiccan celebration of the full Moon.

Goddess worship: Term that refers generally to any neo-pagan practice that elevates the status of goddesses over that of gods.

Imbolc: Neo-pagan holiday generally held on February 2 to mark the lengthening of the days and the emergence of the world from winter.

Lughnasadh: Neo-pagan harvest festival on August 1.

Mabon: Neo-pagan celebration of the autumn equinox; the completion of the harvest season.

magick: The ability to focus mental and physical energies to affect the natural world or to achieve a goal.

mythology: The collected stories of a culture or religion, especially those dealing with the origins, heroes, gods, and beliefs of a group of people.

Neo-paganism: A term referring to modern religions based on ancient pagan religions.

Ostara: Neo-pagan holiday held at the time of the spring equinox.

Sabbat: Holidays practiced by Wiccans throughout the year, including the summer and winter solstices, the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and four additional holidays between these four.

Samhain (Samhuinn): Neo-pagan holiday celebrated on October 31.

solstice: The points in the year when the day is longest (the summer solstice, generally on June 21) and the shortest (the winter solstice, generally on December 21).

Wicca: The name of a neo-pagan religion that generally worships the God and the Goddess.

considered the chief spirit of evil.) In time many Christians came to regard any non-Christian religion, including the religions of Asia, such as Buddhism, Shinto, and Hinduism, as pagan.

In the modern era *pagan* continues to be used as a negative and insulting term, implying something backward and vaguely evil. Pagans are sometimes thought of as Satanists, members of secretive cults who take

part in bizarre rituals involving blood sacrifice and “black magic,” or magic practiced for selfish and bad purposes. Neo-paganists, however, use the word *pagan* freely to refer to their religious beliefs. They resist stereotypes and emphasize that theirs is an Earth-centered religion whose members find fulfillment in the cycles and rhythms of the natural world.

Estimating the number of neo-pagans is difficult. The groups tend to be loosely organized. They avoid the structure and hierarchy (chain of command) of more formal mainstream religions, making it nearly impossible to count their members. A further complication is that many people who take part in neo-pagan activities also profess belief in other religions such as Christianity. One group of neo-pagans called Wicca, estimated that in 2000 there were some 768,000 neo-pagans, including 750,000 Wiccans, in the United States, which would make it the nation’s fifth-largest religion, as well as one of the nation’s fastest-growing religions. Another estimate places the number of neo-pagans in the United States and Canada at anywhere between one-half million and “several” million.

Characteristics of neo-paganism

Neo-pagan religions are known by different names, depending on the specific religious tradition from ancient times that a particular group has reconstructed. Some of the terms used to refer to these groups overlap, making discussions of neo-paganism confusing. For example, three terms often used in discussing neo-paganism are Wicca, witchcraft, and magick. (While the everyday word *magic* suggests parlor tricks and stage shows, *magick* emphasizes the neo-pagan belief that humans can focus their energies to influence natural forces.) Magick refers to a practice that many neo-pagans follow. Witchcraft, or the ability to communicate with past ancestors or use charms and spells to influence natural events, is a generic word often attached to a subcategory of neo-paganism. Wicca, on the other hand, refers to a specific group. While Wiccans practice witchcraft and magick, not all Wiccans are witches, and not all witches are Wiccans.

Despite this complex mix of terms and labels, neo-pagan groups tend to share a number of important characteristics:

Neo-pagan religions are reconstructed from ancient, pre-Christian religions. Wicca, for example, was reconstructed from the beliefs of the ancient Celts (pronounced “Kelts”), an ethnic group found

in western Europe and the British Isles. Celts worshipped the goddess of fertility and the god of the hunt. Other neo-pagans identify themselves specifically as followers of Asatru, a god from ancient Norse (Scandinavian) mythology, or as druids, another religion based on ancient Celtic practices. (Mythology is the collected stories of a culture or religion dealing with the origins, heroes, gods, and beliefs of a group of people.) While many neo-pagan religions have their roots in Celtic traditions, others have their origins in the gods and goddesses of the Roman Empire (c. 31 BCE–476 CE). Sometimes the Central and South American religions Vodou and Santería, which each combine aspects of ancient African religion and Roman Catholicism, are classified as neo-pagan religions.

Neo-pagan religions are Earth-centered. Their followers seek salvation, or deliverance from sin and evil, and happiness by following the cycles of the natural world. For this reason neo-pagan religions have attracted many people who have lost faith in mainstream Western religions. These people see Western religions as part of a broader set of Western beliefs that have led to exploitation of the natural world and damage to the environment. Neo-paganism, for many, is a way to embrace a simpler, more natural way of life that does not depend on the tools of modern technology and that respects the natural world.

Because neo-pagans feel close to the cycles of nature, holy days tend to include the first day of each of the four seasons: the summer and winter solstices and the spring and autumn equinoxes. (The solstices are the points in the year when the day is the longest and shortest; the equinoxes are the points of the year when the hours of day and night are equal.) This emphasis on seasonal changes reflects the geographical origins of many neo-pagan religions.

Neo-pagan groups tend to have similar beliefs. They follow a belief system that is either duotheistic (meaning belief in a god and a goddess, or two deities) or polytheistic (meaning belief in many deities).

Many neo-pagans are solitary practitioners. Alternatively, they may practice in small groups, variously referred to as covens, circles, groves, kindreds, garths, hearths, and other terms.

Neo-pagan groups have little, if any, hierarchical structure. That is, no ruling body has authority over members. There is no class of priests that enforce uniformity of belief. There is no officially authorized text, sacred scripture, or body of teachings.

About Neo-paganism

- **Belief.** Most neo-pagans trace their religious views back to traditions used by Celts and other European peoples before missionaries brought Christianity into the area. In general, they are polytheistic, believing in more than one god and/or goddess. They also generally respect the divine in nature.
- **Followers.** Estimates suggest that there may be more than one million neo-pagans around the world today, with the majority in Europe and North America.
- **Name of God.** The divinities of neo-paganism are called by a variety of names. Prominent among them are the Goddess (worshipped in many different aspects) and the God (also worshipped in many different aspects). Other neo-pagan groups worship the pantheon, or group, of ancient Norse mythology or the forces of nature.
- **Symbols.** The Goddess's symbols include the Moon and many other objects representing the feminine: the cup, flowers, mirrors, seashells, and jewels. The God's symbols include the hunt, the Sun, the sword, horns, the spear, the knife, the magic wand, the arrow, the sickle (a curved blade), and precious metals.
- **Worship.** In general, forms of worship are left to the individual believer or practitioner.
- **Dress.** Neo-pagans have no standard costume or form of dress, although some dress in robes and others worship naked.
- **Texts.** Asatruars honor the sagas that relate ancient Norse myths, but neo-pagans as a whole have no defined texts or scriptures.
- **Sites.** Neo-pagans have no particular sites sacred to their religion. Alternatively, because many celebrate the divine in nature, all sites may be considered holy.
- **Observances.** In general, neo-pagans observe four festivals taken from Celtic tradition that mark the seasons of the year: Samhain, Imbolc, Beltaine, and Lughnasad.
- **Phrases.** Neo-paganism has no particular phrases associated with its system of worship.

Most neo-pagans prefer to practice their rituals outdoors when they can, consistent with their emphasis on nature. In the past many practiced in secret, largely because many people associated neo-paganism with Satan worship and accordingly persecuted or discriminated against them. As of the early twenty-first century this situation has improved, and neo-pagans feel somewhat freer to openly acknowledge their beliefs.

All neo-pagans follow a code of behavior based on not doing harm to others. Neo-pagans do not practice black arts, blood sacrifices, or

Satan worship. They do not take part in bizarre sexual rituals. Some groups have been accused of this because they practice rituals “skyclad,” meaning naked. This practice, however, is not widespread.

Neo-paganism includes a wide range of religious traditions. Other religious groups, such as Native American and African shamanism, hold beliefs similar to neo-paganism. The term *neo-pagan*, however, generally refers to religious traditions that originated in pre-Christian northern and western Europe. Some of these traditions include Asatru, druidism, Goddess worship, and Wicca.

Asatru

Asatru (often written as Ásatrú) is generally considered a neo-pagan religion, although its practitioners, called Asatruars, refer to themselves as heathens rather than neo-pagans. (*Heathen*, like *pagan*, is a word that has strong negative connotations, suggesting someone who is uncivilized. The word, however, is related to the words *beath* and *beather*, referring simply to an open field and to the low vegetation that covers it.) They see themselves as part of a tradition separate from neo-paganism, or, in their words, not a branch of the tree but a separate tree. Unlike such religions as Wicca, Asatru is based on a surviving historical record. The religion’s followers try to follow the beliefs contained in that record as much as possible.

Asatru is a Norse religion, meaning that it is of Scandinavian origin. (Scandinavia is a region that includes modern Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.) In the modern era the religion goes by a wide number of names: Forn Sior, meaning “ancient way or tradition”; Forn sed, or “old custom”; Hedensk sed, or “pagan custom”; and Nordisk sed, or “Nordic custom.” Other names that appear in writings about the religion include Norse heathenism, Germanic heathenism, the Elder Troth, the Old Way, Vor Sior (“our way”), Odinism, and Folkish Asatru.

Little is known about the origins of Asatru. The Scandinavian religion on which it is based was practiced in northern Europe during the first millennium (a period consisting of one thousand years) of the Common Era, meaning the years from 1 through 1000 CE, until the countries in the region converted to Christianity. Its last major stronghold was Iceland, which did not convert to Christianity until the start of the second millennium. In the modern era Asatru was officially recognized as a religion in Iceland in 1972. Since then it has grown rapidly in Scandinavian countries, as well as in the rest of Europe and in North America.

In the twentieth century some of the beliefs of Asatru were corrupted by the Nazi regime in Germany. (The Nazi Party was the ruling political group in Germany from the 1930s to 1945. It was responsible for the murder of millions of Jews and other groups.) Nazis such as Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) and Rudolf Hess (1894–1987) seized on the idea of a religion that predated Christianity (which they regarded as corrupted by Judaism) and that was ethnically German in origin. They used concepts from Asatru to support their beliefs in a racially pure Aryan group. Some modern-day neo-Nazis claim to practice the religion. Asatru firmly rejects these corruptions, and to counter them developed a list of “Nine Noble Virtues”: Courage, Truth, Honor, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance (determination). Asatruars reject any form of racism, sexism, or other forms of discrimination that divide people into categories.

Asatru beliefs and practices Asatru is a polytheistic religion, meaning that it believes in more than one god. Specifically, Asatru believes in three classes of gods. The first are the Aesir, the gods of the clan or tribe. These gods represent such concepts as order and rule. The second are the Vanir, which are the gods of fertility and the forces of nature. The third are the Jotnar, or giants that are in constant conflict with the Aesir and represent destruction and chaos. Within these classes are a number of specific gods and goddesses:

- Thor, the Thunderer, who races across the sky in his chariot to create thunder. Thor wields the divine hammer, called Mjollnir. He is the god of weather and crops.
- Odin, the one-eyed god, who gave up an eye to drink from the fountain of wisdom. Odin is the wise one, the magician, who acquired the secrets of the northern European runic alphabet (also called runes) by hanging for nine nights from the tree Yggdrasil.



The Celtic goddess Brigit, or Brigit, was made a saint by the Catholic Church. As older religions in Europe encountered newer ones like Christianity, they each would change and adapt to one another. Christianity's influence often left the older religions with much smaller followings. © WERNER FORMAN/CORBIS.

- Frey is the god of Yuletide (a celebration of the winter solstice) because he was born on that day, which usually falls on December 21. Frey is the god of plenty and of peace. He provides prosperity and fertility.
- The goddess of love, sexuality, and beauty is Freya, or Freyja. She is the leader of the Valkyries, the maidens of Odin who choose the greatest warriors slain in battle and conduct them to Odin's hall, Valhalla.
- Frigg, or Frigga, as Odin's wife, is the patroness of married women and of the household and hearth.
- Skadi is the goddess of skiing, hunting, death, and independence.
- Ostara is the goddess of fertility who is honored at the spring equinox. A variation of her name is Eostre, from which the word *Easter* is derived. Her symbols include the egg and the hare (rabbit), common symbols of Easter in the West.
- Asatru also honors the Landvaettir, or the land spirits that inhabit the streams, Earth, and forests.

Asatru belief says that the universe was created when Muspelheim, or the Land of Fire, and Niflheim, or the Land of Ice, moved toward each other over an empty space called Ginnungigap. When they collided, the universe was born. The earth was created when three brothers, Odin, Vili, and Ve, killed a giant, whose body became the earth. These brothers then created humanity from two trees. Another god, Rig, came to Earth to create the social classes. The gods granted humans *Od*, or ecstasy, to separate them from the animals and to provide them with a connection to the gods. Asatruars believe that when they die, evil people are sent to a realm of torment called Hifhel (or Hiflhel), while those who have lived well are sent to a place of peace called Hel (which, oddly, is the word from which the word *hell* is derived).

Asatru rituals are conducted by priests (Gothi) or priestesses (Gythia). They can be conducted in permanent or temporary sites, as long as the space is consecrated, or blessed. There is no canon, or official group, of texts, although many Asatruars read the ancient Norse sagas for their stories about the gods and goddesses. (Sagas are lengthy poems about heroic and legendary figures in Scandinavia.) Holidays include celebration of the vernal equinox and the summer solstice; the Charming of the Plow in February; Fogmoon, a celebration of the dead in November; and the Blot ritual, a sacrificial offering to the gods that consists of such items as fruit or grains. Sacred symbols include the axe, Thor's hammer, and the horns of Odin.

Druidism

Historical information about druidism is very slight. While the religion is often thought of as Celtic, some scholars believe that it was being practiced in northern and western Europe before the arrival of the Celts, who spread throughout Europe over a period of thousands of years. The original Celts may have come out of the region around the Black Sea some time around 4,000 BCE. From there, they migrated to southwestern Europe to contact the cultures of ancient Greece and Thrace and to northwestern Europe to form the Celtic cultures.

Evidence suggests that around 1,000 BCE a group of loosely linked Celtic tribes occupied modern-day Slovakia. Over the next millennium these tribes moved into Spain, northern Italy, central Turkey, then on to much of France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and, in 200 BCE, the British Isles. Other than these broad generalizations, however, little is known about the ancient Celts and druidism. Druidism survived mainly through oral rather than written traditions until Christianity absorbed, modified, and finally stamped out Celtic beliefs. Celtic gods and goddesses were often transformed into Christian saints. (A saint is a deceased person recognized for having led a virtuous and holy life.) The Celtic goddess Brigid (or Brigit), for example, was canonized (made a saint) by the Catholic Church. Brigid is a goddess of poetry, healing, and fertility. She continues to be honored at thousands of springs and wells in Ireland. Further, Catholic cathedrals were built on many Celtic religious sites. By the seventh century of the Common Era the druid religion practiced by the Celts had been destroyed, and the few surviving practitioners were driven into hiding.

Ancient druids organized their society around three classes of people. The Bards were given responsibility for the arts and philosophy. They were the keepers of the people's traditions and preservers of the tribes' memories. The Ovates were the healers, the ones responsible for the processes of death and regeneration, or renewal. They were also prophets because they could speak with ancestral spirits. Finally, the druids and druidesses (who gave the religion its name) were the society's professional class and included teachers, priests, astronomers, musicians, scientists, and judges. These were the specialists who conducted public rituals. The word *druid* comes from the Indo-European words *drus*, meaning "oak," and *wid*, meaning "to know." So a druid was one who "knew the oak," that is, could understand the mysteries of the ancient forests and could lead people in outdoor religious rituals.

Neo-paganism

Druids celebrate Midsummer's Day, the start of summer, with a ritual at Stonehenge, England. Neo-pagan religions are closely linked to nature, and their holy days often include the first day of the start of the four seasons.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES.



Druid beliefs and practices Druidism was a polytheistic religion practiced in many countries. Druids were never organized into a single group but practiced their religion at the local, tribal level. The archaeological record shows that at least 374 different gods and goddesses were worshipped. At least three hundred were probably local tribal gods. The main group of gods and goddesses number perhaps thirty-three (a sacred number among ancient Celts) and include Arawn, Brigid, Cerridwen, Danu, Herne, Lugh, Morgan, Rhiannon, and Taranis.

Modern druids work to reconstruct the myths and practices of ancient druidism, but they have few records from which to work. They have determined that the ancient Celts had a ritual similar to baptism, an initiation ceremony also found in Christianity, though some scholars believe that references to this ritual were forgeries created by Christian monks. The druids believed that the god Bile (also known as Bel or Belenus) transported the dead to the Otherworld, where life continued in much the same way that it did on Earth. Believing that the soul was immortal, druids believed that after death the soul was reincarnated, or reborn, into the body of another living thing. After a soul learned what it could from the ongoing cycle of reincarnation, it moved to a higher realm, eventually arriving at the Source, the flame of existence of which humans represent sparks.

Current practitioners of druidism have also reconstructed several ancient practices and symbols. They know that the ancient druids practiced divination, or techniques designed to read into the future. Some of these techniques included interpreting dreams, examining the flights of birds, meditation, and reading the pattern of sticks scattered on the ground. They have also rediscovered the Awen symbol (*awen* is Welsh for “inspiration”), consisting of three pillars with the outer two sloped toward the one in the center. Druids were fascinated with the number three. Many goddesses were triune goddesses, represented as three sisters. Brigid is one of these triune goddesses. Another important symbol is the triskele, consisting of three curved branches, arms, or legs radiating from the center.

The chief practice of druidism, both ancient and modern, is the celebration of seasonal days. These celebrations, which begin at sunset and continue for three days, usually feature large bonfires. The four festivals are:

1. Samhain (or Samhuinn), the “end of the warm season.” This festival, which begins on November 1, later evolved into the secular (nonreligious) holiday of Halloween.
2. Imbolc, or “in the belly,” celebrates the return of light and the first evidence of new life in the ground. It evolved into the secular Groundhog Day.
3. Beltaine (or Bealteinne), celebrated on May 1, was the equivalent of the modern May Day. It is a time to celebrate the blossoming of flowers and the birth of domesticated animals.
4. Lughnasad (also Lughnasadh and Lamma), celebrated on August 1, is the “Feast of Lugh,” the god of light, and marks the start of the harvest season.

There are a number of modern druidic movements, primarily in Great Britain and North America. The Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD) was formed in the eighteenth century under the name Ancient Order of Druids. This original group separated into

The Druids and Stonehenge

About 2 miles (3 kilometers) west of the town of Amesbury, Wiltshire, in southern England stands a cluster of stone, wood, and earth structures called Stonehenge. Both archaeologists (scholars who study the physical remains of ancient civilizations) and millions of tourists stand before these structures in awe, wondering who built them, when, and why. They also wonder how the structure was built, given that some of the massive stones were transported from as far away as Wales.

Some people believe that the druids built Stonehenge, likely as a religious shrine. The fact is, though, that construction on Stonehenge began some time around 2,900 BCE and was completed some time around 1,600 BCE, more than one thousand years before the arrival of the Celtic druids.

Neo-paganism

A broom is used during neo-pagan weddings, called handfastings. The newly married couple will jump over a broom, which represents a threshold. The couple often has their hands bound with a cord, explaining the term "handfasting." © DAVID

HOFFMAN PHOTO LIBRARY/
ALAMY.



factions, of which one, the British Circle of Universal Bond, survived to become the OBOD. Another movement is the British Druid Order, founded in 1979 and claiming three thousand members. In the United States the Reformed Druids of North America were formed in the late 1950s or early 1960s (the date is uncertain), and this movement gave rise to a number of others, including Ar nDraiocht Fein, a movement that emphasizes scholarly research and that has forty-three groves in the United States and two in Canada. In Australia, the Druids Friendly Society offers a health insurance plan to its members.

Goddess worship

The phrase *Goddess worship* does not refer to a particular religious group. It refers to a set of religious beliefs that celebrate feminine characteristics generally associated with women, like nurturing, child-bearing, sensitivity, and gentleness. Some goddess worshippers are members of specific religious groups such as Wicca. Others worship goddesses independent of any specific group.

Throughout history many cultures, including the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, worshipped goddesses. The names of some of these goddesses include Anat, Aphrodite, Aradia, Arianrhod, Artemis, Astarte, Brigid, Ceres, Demeter, Diana, Eostre, Freya, Gaia, Hera, Ishtar, Isis, Juno, Kali, Lilith, Maat, Mary, Minerva, Ostare, Persephone, Venus, and Vesta. Some historians of religion would add Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE), to this list because Mary has been venerated, or highly respected, by many Christians throughout history. In modern times the feminist movement has renewed interest in Goddess worship. Feminists want equal rights and treatment for women. They believe that Western culture and civilization have for too long been dominated by masculine principles, characteristics associated with men, such as aggression. Feminism and Goddess worship restore a balance by placing greater emphasis on feminine principles.

Many anthropologists (scholars who study human cultures and behavior) and archaeologists believe that the earliest humans may have worshipped goddesses more often than they worshipped gods. They believe that early people did not have a good understanding of men's role in procreation (reproducing; having children). While these tribal peoples worshipped male gods, such as those associated with hunting, they also worshipped female gods associated with birth, fertility, and procreation. To ensure that the tribe survived, these people may have believed that the goddesses required their worship in exchange for children (as well as the birth of wild and domesticated animals and the emergence of new crops in the spring). Many of these earliest cultures were matrilineal, meaning that the family tree was traced through the mother's, rather than the father's, ancestors.

Adaption and absorption of Goddess worship Goddess worshippers and feminists believe that monotheistic religions (those that believe in one God), such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, suppressed feminine values and elevated masculine ones. Gods, kings, priests, and fathers grew in importance at the expense of goddesses, queens, priestesses, and mothers. In some branches of Judaism and Christianity, for instance, women are not allowed to serve as priests. The merger of masculine and feminine in time gave rise to a number of pagan religions in Europe, religions that absorbed the new male gods but continued to include goddesses.

The modern world has reinvented some of these religions. Modern believers in these movements value the balance between masculine and

feminine that such religions provide or they value the promotion of feminine deities over masculine ones. In elevating goddesses, neo-pagans tend to see the Goddess in three aspects, represented by the waxing moon, the full moon, and the waning moon. The waxing (or growing) moon is the Goddess in her youth and vitality. She is the Maiden whose sexuality is just emerging. The Mother, represented by the full moon, symbolizes nurturing, procreation, and feminine power. The Crone, represented by the waning moon, symbolizes wisdom and experience. It is the Crone who guides humans toward death and the afterlife.

Wicca

Wicca is one of the most prominent neo-pagan religions, and one that elevates the Goddess to a stature equal to that of the God. It is a form of modern witchcraft. Not all people who call themselves witches are Wiccans. The word *witchcraft* causes confusion because in the Judeo-Christian tradition, witchcraft is usually associated with Satan. Over the past two thousand years the Christian church has persecuted many people for witchcraft and for practicing “black arts.”

Modern practitioners of witchcraft, though, strongly deny that they worship evil or engage in strange practices. They maintain that witchcraft as practiced by Wiccans and other groups sees the divine in the natural world, including the cycle of the seasons and the phases of the Moon. Most such groups have a strict code of behavior based on not doing harm to others. Wiccans also obey the Law of Threefold Return, meaning that anything one does, such as a good deed (or a bad deed) will return to them threefold (multiplied by three).

The emergence of Wicca as a modern religious movement can be traced to the 1950s in England and the efforts of a British civil servant and amateur anthropologist named Gerald Gardner (1884–1964). Gardner wrote extensively on witchcraft in two widely read books, *Witchcraft Today* and *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. Practitioners of Wicca as Gardner described it are often referred to as Gardnerian Wiccans. Considerable controversy has surrounded Gardner and his writings. He claimed that the religion had been revealed to him by a woman named Dorothy Clutterbuck, a well-known local witch in England. Later students of Wicca have disputed this claim, arguing that Gardner formulated the religion on the basis of nineteenth-century occult practices combined with

Magic in Wicca



It's common knowledge even among the masses that Witches practice magic. They may have misguided ideas concerning the *type* of magic performed, but the Witch is firmly linked in popular thought with the magical arts.

Wicca is . . . a religion that embraces magic as one of its basic concepts. This isn't unusual. In fact, it's often difficult to discern [determine] where religion ends and magic begins in any faith.

Still, magic plays a special role in Wicca. It allows us to improve our lives and return energy to our ravaged [damaged] planet. Wiccans also develop special relationships with the Goddess and God through magic. . . . Through working with the powers which the God and the Goddess embody [represent], we grow close to them. Calling upon their names and visualizing their presence during spells and rites creates a bond between Deity and human. Thus, in Wicca, magic is a religious practice. . . .

Magic is the projection of natural energies to produce needed effects.

There are three main sources of this energy—personal power, Earth power and divine power.

Personal power is the life force that sustains our earthly existences. It powers our bodies. We

absorb energy from the Moon and Sun, from water and food. We release it during movement, exercise, sex and childbirth. Even exhaling releases some power, though we recoup [get back] the loss through inhaling. . . .

Earth power is that which resides within our planet and in its natural products. Stones, trees, wind, flames, water, crystals and scents all possess unique, specific powers which can be used during magical ritual. . . .

Both person power and Earth power are manifestations [expressions] of *divine power*. This is the energy that exists within the Goddess and God—the life force, the source of universal power which created everything in existence.

Wiccans invoke [call upon] the Goddess and God to bless their magic with power. During ritual they may direct personal power to the deities, asking that a specific need be met. This is truly religious magic.

And so, magic is a process in which Wiccans work in harmony with the universal power source which we envision as the Goddess and God, as well as with personal and Earth energies, to improve our lives and lend energy to the Earth.

Cunningham, Scott. *Wicca: A Guide for The Solitary Practitioner*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1999: pages 19–20.

elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and his own imagination. Some Wiccans credited Gardner with keeping the ancient religion alive. Others accused him of revealing secret wisdom that should have been kept secret among initiates into the religion.

Wiccan beliefs and practices In 1974 a number of Wiccans gathered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where they drafted a statement containing the

principles of Wiccan belief. The following list summarizes some of the most important principles.

Wiccans practice rites attuned to the “natural rhythm of life forces.”

Its rituals follow both the astronomical year, marked by the movement of the Sun, and the waxing and waning of the Moon.

Because they believe that the divine manifests itself in all creation, Wiccans advocate responsibility toward the environment. Many are involved with environmental protection activities and oppose destruction of the natural world.

Wiccans believe that a great depth of power exists in the world that is not noticeable to the average person. Although Wiccans take part in formal rituals, they regard the natural world, such as the blossom of a flower or a fertile field, as having the power to instill feelings of awe and mystery.

A key belief of Wiccans has to do with the nature of the divine. Wicca is a duotheistic religion (a religion of two gods) that emphasizes the creative power of both the masculine and the feminine deities. The (usually unnamed) Goddess is the mother, the source of fertility, abundance, love, and growth. Her chief symbol is the Moon. Her other symbols include the cup, flowers, mirrors, seashells, and jewels. The God is associated with the hunt and is regarded as the source of all life. His symbols include not only the life-giving Sun but also the sword, horns, the spear, the knife, the magic wand, the arrow, the sickle, and precious metals. Note that these symbols have marked sexual connotations, suggesting the merger of male and female into one to create and affirm life. One branch of Wicca, however, called Dianic Wicca after the Roman goddess Diana, places nearly all of its emphasis on the Goddess.

Wiccans do not recognize a hierarchy of authority, or chain of command. Every practitioner can be his or her own priest or priestess, performing rituals without the assistance of a class of specialists. When they do participate with groups, Wiccans believe that the ideal size of a coven is thirteen members. When a coven grows larger than thirteen, it splits, or “hives,” into two or more covens. The covens remain associated as a larger unit called a grove.

Wiccans have the freedom to develop a number of ritual practices. They start by accumulating ritual tools, which serve the same purpose as ritual objects in other religions. They focus and guide the worshipper’s



The pentacle is a popular symbol of the Wiccan religion. The five-pointed star's geometric shape represents wisdom and and balance. The circle surrounding it symbolizes unity. © REBECCA MCENTEE/CORBIS SYGMA.

thoughts and energies. These tools are used in rituals conducted on altars positioned within a sacred circle. Some common Wiccan tools include:

The broom, typically used at the beginning of rituals to both physically and spiritually cleanse the place where rituals will be conducted. At Wiccan weddings, called handfastings, the newly married couple often leaps over the broom. The broom has become a stereotype of witchcraft, but it is a stereotype based on an element of fact.

The magic wand, which can be made of any material, gives the worshipper a sense of energy and power.

The censer, or incense burner, and the incense burned in it represent the element of air. Watching the smoke curl into the air can sometimes create a trancelike state.

The cauldron is seen as a vessel in which magical transformations take place. It is a clear symbol of the Goddess, representing fertility and femininity, and a symbol of water, inspiration, and reincarnation. During springtime rituals it is often filled with flowers and water. In wintertime rituals fires are built within the cauldron to symbolize the heat and light of the Sun. Related to the cauldron is the cup, which contains beverages drunk during rituals.

The crystal sphere is used in divination (predicting the future) and promotes contemplation. As a sphere, it is symbolic of the Goddess.

The bell is a feminine symbol used to invoke, or call, the Goddess during rituals.

The Book of Shadows is the closest thing that Wicca has to a sacred scripture, though it is more in the nature of a workbook or manual. Each Book of Shadows is compiled by the individual practitioner, but such books are often passed from Wiccan to Wiccan. They contain not rules but suggestions about Wiccan practice, including invocations and rituals.

The pentacle is one of the most visible symbols of Wicca. It consists of a five-pointed star surrounded by a circle. Contrary to popular belief, it is not a Satanic symbol. Rather, the star's geometric shape symbolizes wisdom and balance, while the circle symbolizes unity and eternity.

The Wiccan calendar is quite similar to that of other neo-pagan religions, especially druidism. It follows the cycles of the Moon, the Sun, and the natural world. Wiccans celebrate thirteen Esbats, or full Moons, each year. Wiccans also mark a number of days called Sabbats throughout the cycle of the year. Four Sabbats mark the beginning of seasons, and four more occur about midway between the seasonal days. The cycle begins with Yule, the shortest day of the year and the start of winter, when Wiccans ask the Sun to return. Imbolc, on February 2, marks the lengthening of the days and the emergence of the world from winter. It is a time when many people are ritually initiated into covens. Ostara, around March 21, is the spring equinox, when light overtakes darkness (at the moment of the equinox, the hours of day and night are precisely

Duality in Religion

Male and female representations can be found in all religions. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima plays an important role in the early development of Islam, just as Mary, the mother of Christianity's founder Jesus Christ, has a special place in Christianity. Additionally, there are many female goddesses that are worshipped in Hinduism. In some religions, the male and female elements make up a central belief or understanding about the religion. This is the case both for some neo-pagan religions, such as Wicca, and for faiths like Daoism.

Neo-pagans may believe in one Supreme Being or in many gods and goddesses. One of the central teachings of many neo-pagan religions is that the divine is a part of all things. Some worship both the God and the Goddess, a duality of male and feminine aspects. The male aspects are represented by certain characteristics, such as power, ripe harvests, and wild animals. Female aspects are represented by other characteristics, such as fertility, wisdom, and love. The Goddess in Wicca, for example,

is associated with the Moon, while the God is associated with the Sun.

The same is true in the religion of Daoism. Male and female forces are represented by yin and yang. Yin is the feminine. It is dark, open, flexible, and soft. Yang is the male. It is light and controlling, hard, unbending. These characteristics are opposites of each other, yet each are needed to create a balance in existence. The Daoist depiction of yin and yang is of two halves of a circle. One half is white and one is black. Each of the sides are curling into the other and each contain a speck of the other.

Yin and yang work in harmony, or agreement, together. Dark and light, or female and male, are constantly adjusted between the two to keep these elements in balance. One does not operate without the other. Similarly, Wicca considers its dual aspects of the God and the Goddess to be equal and part of one whole. Both religions believe that the divine, whether it is God, Goddess, or Dao, is present in all things at all times.

equal). This observance marks the beginning of spring, of planting, and of reproduction.

The next Sabbat is Beltane (or Beltaine) on April 30. By now spring is well under way. Beltane marks the return of vitality and passion into the world, a process that continues through the summer solstice, around June 21. During this period the world has been filled with the creative power of the God and Goddess, concluding on August 1 with Lughnasadh, the harvest festival. On about September 21, Wiccans celebrate the Mabon, the autumn equinox, and the completion of the harvest season. Again, the hours of day and night are equal, but at this point in the cycle darkness is overtaking the light. Finally, at Samhain, on October 31, Wiccans bid the Sun goodbye and engage in a period of reflection about the past year. With the new Yule, the cycle begins again.

Neo-pagan observances: Samhain and Halloween

Halloween as celebrated in the United States is a blend of Christian and pagan traditions. The word itself refers to the evening of the day preceding All Hallows' Day, or All Saints Day as it is commonly called, a Christian feast first celebrated by the Catholic Church in the seventh century. (The word *hallow* means "holy.")

In addition to these Christian roots, Halloween also has deep roots in Celtic pagan practices. Modern Halloween corresponds with the pagan/Wiccan holiday of Samhain (often spelled Samhuinn and pronounced "sow-in"). Samhain marks the beginning of the cold season, just as Beltane six months earlier marks the beginning of the warm season. Samhain is particularly important to pagans for at least two reasons. One is that it was believed that at Samhain the boundary dividing this world from the next was the thinnest. They saw this season as a time when a "crack" opened between the two worlds and it was possible to make contact with ancestors, who could return and share their wisdom with the living.

Samhain was also important because it was believed that during the Samhain season it was possible to foretell the future. This emphasis on being able to see into the future was important to people living in the extreme cold of the north, where life promised to be uncertain during the cold months of a long winter. Of particular concern was whether food supplies for both humans and domesticated animals would last until the following spring or summer.

Modern neo-pagans such as Wiccans have attempted to recreate the observances surrounding Samhain as accurately as possible. Ceremonies typically begin with a ritual bath. Wiccans then consecrate ("cast") a sacred circle in which rituals are conducted. The altar within the circle is decorated with gourds, pumpkins, pine cones, and autumn flowers. Rituals are performed to foretell the future and to make contact with ancestral loved ones. After participants have shared food, such as cakes and wine or cider, the sacred circle is "banished" (or "grounded"), and the ritual ends.

Neo-paganism in the modern world

Neo-pagans acknowledge that as more people have become familiar with their religious beliefs, discrimination and incidents of outright persecution (mistreatment) have sharply reduced. In 1984 a district court in Virginia ruled that Wicca was a legally protected religion, a ruling that was affirmed in 1985 by a Federal Court of Appeals. Nonetheless, neo-pagans

are still often ridiculed. The term “fluffy bunny” has entered the language to refer to members of neo-pagan religious groups. It suggests a belief that neo-pagans emphasize emotion and the more soothing, uplifting aspects of religion. Many neo-pagans refer to themselves as “fluffy bunnies” as a tongue-in-cheek way to acknowledge this perception and to persuade other neo-pagans not to take themselves too seriously.

In the view of many people, neo-paganism is not a serious religion but rather a form of “feel-good” social protest, especially among the young. According to this view, people adopt neo-pagan beliefs as a way of rejecting the values of modern technological society. The beliefs of neo-pagan religions, however, have endured through ancient times and retain their appeal. Neo-paganism continues to attract believers around the world in the twenty-first century.

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Shinto

Shinto, sometimes called Shintoism, is a religion native to Japan. The word *Shinto* comes from two Chinese characters, *shin*, meaning “god,” and *to*, meaning “the way.” So the word *Shinto* can be translated as “the way of the gods.” (The Japanese language incorporated into its vocabulary many words from the Chinese.) From the late nineteenth century through 1945, Shinto was the state religion of Japan. Most of its followers continue to live in Japan. It would be difficult for a non-Japanese to “convert” to Shinto, and Shinto does not actively seek members.

In many respects Shinto is not a formal religion. Rather, it is a reflection of Japanese culture and history, to which many elements of folk belief are added. Folk beliefs are those held by the common people of a country. Unlike many other world religions, Shinto was not founded by a prophet who spread the message of God, and it has no central religious center. In many respects, Shinto is more a life philosophy, a set of beliefs and guidelines on living life. Shinto’s main belief is to live in harmony with all things. The gods of the religion are called *kami*, which may be translated as “spirits of nature” or “life forces.” Kami are believed to exist everywhere in the physical world, from rocks and trees to the wind and sky, and live side-by-side with humans. The spirits of ancestors who have died are also considered to be kami.

Counting the number of Shinto followers is not easy. The religion evolved as part of an effort to unite the Japanese people under their ruler, the emperor. It used the commonality of Shinto practice to bind people who otherwise may have little in common together in a shared cause: the Japanese state. Additionally, Shinto is a very tolerant religion that absorbed the influences of Buddhism and other religions with which it interacted. Many Japanese who follow Buddhism, for instance, may also have some Shinto aspects to their practice. Such factors make it

WORDS TO KNOW

Amaterasu: The sun goddess.

Folk (*Minzoku*) Shinto: Shinto that emphasizes folk beliefs, or common beliefs, of rural agricultural laborers.

Four Affirmations: A code of conduct by which Shintoists live, including emphases on tradition and family, nature, cleanliness, and worship of the kami.

Izanagi: The male figure in the Shinto creation myth.

Izanami: The female figure in the Shinto creation myth.

jinja: Shrine.

kami: The gods or divinities of Shinto; the life force or spirit associated with places, natural objects, and ancestors.

kami-dana: A “kami shelf” or altar in a private home.

Kojiki: The chief text of Shinto, a work that combines history, myth, and folk belief.

matsuri: Festival.

Nippon: The “Land of the Rising Sun”; the Japanese name for Japan.

norito: Prayers to the kami.

Oshogatsu: The Shinto new year.

Sect (*Kyoha*) Shinto: Shinto as it is practiced by a number of sects, or groups, formed primarily in the nineteenth century.

Shinbutsu bunri: The separation of Shinto and Buddhism when Shinto was declared the official state religion.

Shinbutsu shugo: The combination of Shinto and Buddhism.

Shinto: Literally, “the way of the gods” or “the way of the kami.”

Shrine (*Jinja*) Shinto: The traditional, mainstream practice of Shinto, with emphasis on the local shrine.

State Shinto: Shinto as it was practiced after it was declared the official state religion in the late nineteenth century until 1945.

Susano-o: The Shinto god of violence and the ruler of the oceans.

tori: The gate that marks the entrance to a shrine. Its shape is regarded as a symbol of Shinto.

Tsukiyomi: The Shinto moon god and the ruler of night.

ujiko: A “named child” whose name is entered at birth at the local Shinto shrine.

difficult to determine with any certainty just how many Shinto followers exist. Some polls show that about 3.3 percent of Japanese people identify Shinto as their primary religious affiliation. Other polls give much higher percentages, up to 40 percent. The best estimates are that about four million people are Shinto, making it the fifteenth-largest religion in the world.

History and development

The origins of Japanese civilization, and of Shinto, are shrouded in legend and history. Historians believe that around 35,000 to 30,000 BCE humans first migrated to the Japanese islands, probably from Mongolia or Siberia through Korea, or possibly from Polynesia. Historians date the formation of a more stable civilization to some time around 10,000 BCE, the start of the Jomon period, which extended to about 400 BCE. It is believed that Shinto beliefs emerged in Japan late in the Jomon period.

During this period the concept of the kami originated. Japanese society was divided into separate clans. These clans were not connected by a central government or by a sense of national identity. Each clan was headed by a chieftain, and each worshipped a divinity, a kami. Part of the chieftain's job was to oversee the ceremonies devoted to the kami.

These clans were often in conflict with one another. When one clan overran another, the kami of the defeated clan became subject to that of the conquering clan. In this way the hierarchy, or order, of the kami constantly shifted. Later, when the Japanese began to form a more centralized government with a supreme emperor at its head, this belief in kami was used to give authority to the emperor. Because the emperor claimed direct descent from Amaterasu, the sun goddess, the emperor's clan was more powerful than any other clan and possessed the right to rule Japan.

Two historical events had a major impact on the development of Shinto. One was the introduction of writing in the fifth century of the Common Era. The other was the arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century. By the seventh century Japan had fallen under the influence of its much larger neighbor, China. Many elements of Japanese culture at this time reflected the influence of the Chinese, including Buddhist beliefs. The Chinese wrote about and documented their history. Under this influence Japanese writers began to do the same. (None of their seventh-century works survive.) Their goal appears to have been to establish the divine right of Japanese emperors to rule.

The Divine right to rule In 673 the emperor Tenmu seized the throne of Japan. His rule was shaky because he continued to face opposition from rival ethnic groups and clans. Tenmu ordered that a history of Japan be compiled that would legitimize his rule by showing that he was descended from the gods. This history was transmitted orally. In 712 it was written down as the *Kojiki*, a text that further cemented the imperial court's

dominance over Japan. In 720 a second text called the *Nihonshoki* was also written down. These two books are the earliest surviving texts written by the Japanese.

Shinto at this time was still regarded as a folk religion, filled with superstitions and myths. A superstition is a belief or practice based on the fear of the unknown, while a myth is a story of historical events that claims to explain a practice or belief. In the centuries that followed, Shinto and Buddhism coexisted and joined in a process referred to as *Shinbutsu shugo*, a phrase formed from the written Japanese characters for “Shinto,” “Buddhism,” “learn,” and “join together.” The mingling of Shinto and Buddhist beliefs is a natural development when two religions exist side-by-side. They often adapt to and take on aspects of one another. Over time, one religion will usually become dominant. This state of affairs lasted until 1867, although in the eighteenth century various Japanese scholars tried unsuccessfully to separate Shinto beliefs from those of Buddhism.

These efforts paid off in 1867 at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration (1869–1912), the end result of a civil war. During this war the emperor of Japan fought to take power away from the Japanese *shoguns*. Shoguns were powerful military governors who had wielded more power than the throne for centuries. At this time Shinto was made the official state religion of Japan, and, in a process called *Shinbutsu bunri*, Shinto and Buddhism were separated. In fact, efforts to join them were outlawed.

Becomes state religion Japanese leaders thought that making Shinto the national religion would help to unify the country. They believed that the people had to unite behind their emperor and the Japanese empire because of the shocks of civil war. Leaders felt the need to modernize and industrialize (or modernize through the development of business and technology) the country, but they also feared that foreign powers would invade and colonize the Japanese islands. Adding to this fear of colonization was the arrival in 1853 of the “Black Ships,” four American vessels under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858). Perry negotiated a trade agreement with Japan, ending two hundred years of Japanese isolation from most of the rest of the world. Later that same decade Japan established formal diplomatic ties with the United States and other Western nations (the

Shinto

The sun goddess, Amaterasu, peers from her cave at the other gods as they tempt her to bring light back to the world. The Japanese emperor declared himself to be a direct descendent of Amaterasu.

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countries of Europe and the Americas). Japanese leaders believed that since Japan was going to enter into the modern world, it had to have a strong national identity. One way to forge such an identity was to have a national state religion that was unique to Japan. Shinto was that religion.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Shinto became a way of gaining the support of the people and creating a sense of intense patriotism, or devotion to one's country. In 1871 the Ministry of Divinities was formed to establish a hierarchy, or structure of authority, of Shinto shrines. At the highest level was the Ise Shrine to Amaterasu that became a national symbol for the divine rule of the Japanese emperor. At the base of the hierarchy were smaller shrines throughout the country.

In 1872 the Ministry of Divinities was replaced by the Ministry of Religion, which required people to register at local Shinto shrines (rather than at Buddhist temples). The ministry required that the nation's young people be taught an official history of the nation's origins and to respect the emperor as divine. Further, the government enacted the "Imperial Rescript on Education," which required students to recite an oath saying that they were willing to give up their lives for the emperor. Portraits of the emperor were distributed, and people were encouraged to worship them.

Emperor worship, and the presumed divinity of the emperor, justified aggressive expansion of the Japanese empire throughout the Pacific region in the 1930s and after the outbreak of World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan). However, U.S. military might proved too much for the Japanese. By 1945 it was clear to most Japanese that their nation would be defeated, although the nation refused to surrender until August 1945. Some historians believe that Japan would have surrendered earlier if the United States and its allies had assured Japanese authorities that the emperor could remain on the throne.

In the final months of the war, Shinto was enlisted to encourage patriotism and willingness to die for the emperor. A prominent example was the *kamikaze* pilots, who deliberately crashed their bomb-laden planes into enemy ships. Note that *kami* forms a portion of the word *kamikaze*, which literally means "divine wind" or "wind from the gods."

Popular decline The period of Shinto as state religion abruptly ended in 1945 with the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II. The Japanese emperor abandoned his claim that he ruled by divine authority, or that he was a living god. Many people became unhappy with Shinto

About Shinto

- **Belief.** Shintoists believe that spirits called *kami* surround humans and provide them with the knowledge and wisdom necessary for leading a peaceful and full life.
- **Followers.** Shinto is the fifteenth-largest religion in the world, with four million followers. While most live in Japan, many have settled in countries throughout the world.
- **Name of God.** The Shinto term for a god is *kami*, although *kami* are understood to be spirits closely associated with nature and ideas.
- **Symbols.** Prominent symbols of Shinto include the *tori*, or gate leading to a Shinto shrine; any image of the sun, representing the sun goddess, Amaterasu; and the emperor's ceremonial dress, consisting of a mirror, a jeweled necklace, and a sword.
- **Worship.** Religious services are held in shrines, but many Shintoists also worship in their homes. Religious services can be conducted by any Shintoist, although priests and priestesses assist worshippers. The primary responsibility of the priesthood is to care for the shrine.
- **Dress.** Shintoists do not wear any special attire, but they do remove their shoes before entering a shrine.
- **Texts.** Shinto does not have a sacred scripture. Two important works, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, contain myths, or stories, that have played an important role in Shinto and Japanese culture.
- **Sites.** No particular site is considered more sacred than any other by Shintoists, who believe that all of Japan is sacred. Many pilgrims, however, climb the nation's mountains, such as Mount Fuji, believing them to be the home of *kami*.
- **Observances.** Shinto festivals are highly significant. They include the Spring Festival, the Harvest Festival, and the New Year Festival. In addition, each locale is likely to have its own annual festival.
- **Phrases.** Shinto has few characteristic phrases. One common word used by many Shintoists is *itadakimasu*, which means "I humbly partake," and is said before eating.

because it had been used to justify the government's desire for territory before and during the war. The number of people who identified themselves as followers of Shinto fell sharply.

At the same time, many Japanese continued to practice Shinto rituals. In the postwar period Shinto reverted to more of a folk religion. People visited Shinto shrines, for example, as a way of improving their lives by remaining on good terms with their ancestors and the *kami*. New religions have developed in Japan, many of them

incorporating Shinto beliefs. Shinto has become not a religion enforced by the state but a set of cultural values that in large part defines Japanese culture.

Sects and schisms

Four main varieties of Shinto can be identified. One is State Shinto. State Shinto was officially banned after 1945, but a small minority of Japanese nationalists who want to return Japan to its place as a major world power continued to advocate it. The other three varieties include Shrine Shinto, Sect Shinto, Folk Shinto.

State Shinto developed in 1869. Japan's emperor Meiji wanted to restore Shinto as the nation's national religion. He demanded that Shinto ceremonies be conducted for Japan's leaders and set up a government department to oversee the religion. The emperor also established himself as the head Shinto priest. The Japanese people were required to express their respect and loyalty to the emperor through Shinto ceremonies. It is this form of the religion that was used to encourage Japanese support for war during World War II (1938–45; a war in which the United Kingdom, France, the United States and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan).

Shrine, or *Jinja*, Shinto is the main form of the religion practiced in the early twenty-first century. It refers to the local shrine as the focus of Shinto life and practice. Shrine Shinto follows the religion's traditional practices.

Sect, or *Kyoba*, Shinto began in the nineteenth century and contains thirteen sects, or subgroups. These sects do not have shrines but worship in meeting halls. Each has a different focus. Mountain-worshipping sects worship such mountains as Mount Fuji. Others include faith-healing sects, purification sects, sects that practice Confucianism, and so-called Revival Shinto (a sect that has tried to separate Shinto from Chinese Buddhist and Confucian beliefs).

Folk, or *Minzoku*, Shinto refers to a variety of Shinto practices that reflects Japan's early history, with emphasis on such folk practices as divination (predicting the future), spirit possession, and faith healing conducted by shamans, religious professionals that control various spiritual forces, can look into the future, and can cure the ill with magic. Folk Shinto is generally practiced in small rural villages.

Tenrikyo One of the chief branches of Shinto that emerged in the nineteenth century is *Tenrikyo*, a name that means “Teaching of the Divine Reason.” In 1838 a peasant woman named Nakayama Nike began to experience religious visions. She later became known as Oyasama, meaning “Honored Parent.” The sect she founded claims as many as two million members worldwide. While Tenrikyo can be thought of as a religion, many people regard it as a life philosophy. Many Japanese Christians, for example, also take part in Tenrikyo rituals.

The focus of the religion is the concept of *yoki yusan* or *yoki gurashi*. These words are formed from the characters *yo*, meaning “positive”; *ki*, meaning “spirit” or “energy”; and either *yusan*, meaning an “excursion” to imply an outgoing life, or *gurashi*, referring to everyday life or “livelihood.” Unlike other Shintoists, followers of Tenrikyo believe in a single creator-god, Tenri-o-No-Mikoto, a name that means Lord of Divine Reason.

It should be noted that another Japanese religious movement, *Aum Shinrikyo*, is not in any way affiliated with Shintoism, but rather combines Buddhist and Hindu beliefs. Aum Shinrikyo, now called Aleph, gained worldwide attention in 1995, when several members of its leadership carried out a gas attack on Tokyo’s subway system, killing twelve people and injuring thousands.

Basic beliefs

Contemporary Shinto beliefs are often blended with other religions in Japan, such as Buddhism. The funeral rites for many practicing Shintoists, for example, are likely to be Buddhist. (A common expression is “Shinto marries and Buddhism buries,” meaning that marriage rituals tend to be based on Shinto rituals, while funeral ones are based on Buddhist beliefs.) This makes it difficult to identify the religion’s practices or beliefs as strictly Shinto. Identifying basic beliefs is also made difficult by Shinto’s lack of a formal structure overseen by the clergy (priesthood) or by a spiritual leader.

Focus on life, not afterlife There are, however, some beliefs held by all branches of Shinto that can be considered common to the religion. One is that Shinto is not an otherworldly religion that emphasizes an afterlife. The goal of Shinto is to nurture contentment and success in this life. In fact, it is often said that Shinto and Buddhism divide up the universe

between them. While Buddhism emphasizes the afterlife and the cycle of death and rebirth leading to ultimate salvation, or deliverance from sin, Shinto emphasizes life in the world and a person's relationship with the spirits and his or her ancestors.

Role of the kami The second common aspect is the role of the kami, referred to collectively as *Yaoyorozu no Kami*. This phrase literally translates as “eight million kami,” a way of expressing the idea of a large number before the concept of infinity was understood. Kami are often thought of as gods or divinities, but this translation of the word does not capture their full meaning. The chief kami is the sun, personified as Amaterasu, the sun goddess. However, virtually anything can be an expression of a kami: a rock, the moon, a waterfall, a flower, a formal garden, and even abstract concepts such as an organization or growth.

The concept reflects the Shinto belief that the world is filled with spirits, or a life essence, so objects, places, activities, and even abstract ideas can be personified (brought to life) as kami. Kami are thought to guide people in their decisions and to help them achieve a life of contentment. Ancestral spirits are also considered to be kami. Shintoists believe that every person has a soul or a spirit, referred to as a *tama* or *reikon*. When a person dies, he or she is listed at the local shrine as *ujigami*, or a “named kami,” and is now regarded as a clan or local deity (god).

Further, kami are not spirits that exist above and beyond the human realm, as divinities in most other religions are. Instead, they exist in the world and are even capable of making mistakes. Not all kami are contented or even good. Some work mischief in the world (*ono*, or “demons”). The souls of people who die by violent means are referred to as *yurei*, or “tormented ghosts,” who seek revenge in the world. The kami of children who die young (*mizuko*) are thought of as angry, and they have to be calmed through rituals at local shrines.

Live a simple, harmonious life Shintoists do not follow any set of guidelines other than to live a simple and harmonious life. This is often expressed by the phrases *makoto no kokoro* or *magokoro*, usually translated as “sincerity,” “uprightness,” or “having a true heart.” Many do follow the “Four Affirmations,” which include:

1. Tradition and family: Shintoists regard the family and family life as the place in which Shinto traditions can best be preserved.



Shinto priests prepare for a ritual. Priests and priestesses can lead Shinto followers in worship, but their primary job is to care for the jinja, or shrines. © CHRIS LISLE/CORBIS.

2. Love of nature: Shintoists believe that the natural world is sacred. Any natural object can be regarded as divine and as an embodiment (representation) of a sacred spirit. Many religious scholars therefore regard Shinto as an animistic religion, meaning one that reveres objects in the natural world.
3. Cleanliness: Shintoists believe in personal cleanliness. They typically bathe, wash their hands, and even rinse their mouths frequently, particularly before entering a shrine. The emphasis on cleanliness reflects the Shinto attitude toward sin. Shintoists believe that certain evil deeds, called *kegare* (“dirtiness”), can create a kind of ritual impurity. (The opposite is *kiyome*, meaning “purity.”) Sin does not require “forgiveness” from the gods. Rather, sin is a state that causes discomfort for the person who commits it. A sinner can restore a sense of contentment by purifying him or herself of the “dirtiness” of the evil deed.

4. Worship of the kami: The fourth affirmation concerns *matsuri*, a word that refers collectively to the many Shinto festivals held each year to worship the kami. These festivals are local rather than national and are dedicated to one or more of the kami.

Purification An important aspect of Shinto life is the concept of purification. Historically purification rites were conducted to calm a disturbed kami when, for example, a shrine had to be moved. In modern life similar rituals are held for any number of purposes. During groundbreaking for a new building, Shinto priests purify the plot of ground (a process called *jichinsai*). Automobiles on the assembly line are often blessed, and new car owners often take their cars to shrines to have them blessed and purified. Similarly, new airplanes are blessed and purified during their first flight. A purification ritual was held during the Apollo 11 mission to the moon in 1969. Individuals also practice purification rituals by standing beneath a waterfall or bathing in the sea.

The concept of purification also dictates that people avoid certain activities. Even in modern life, purification is achieved by avoiding certain words or activities. Recently bereaved people (people whose loved ones have just died, for example) typically do not attend weddings, and the word *cut* is never used at a wedding because it is believed to bring bad fortune to the newly married couple.

Sacred writings

Just as it lacks a formal theology, Shinto does not have a sacred scripture. The Shinto text that comes closest to representing a sacred writing is the *Kojiki*, an eighth-century text and the earliest surviving document written by the Japanese. In some respects, it is difficult to categorize the *Kojiki*. It is part scripture (holy text), part history of early Japan, and part folktale and myth.

The *Kojiki*, which means “Record of Ancient Matters,” was in large part a political document. It originated in 673, after the emperor Tenmu seized the throne of Japan and ordered a history of Japan to be compiled. Tenmu believed that the records of many of his courtiers, imperial officials, and the chief families in the realm had been changed and corrupted. He wanted to see a more accurate history and, more importantly, one that would support his rule by showing that he descended from the gods. Accordingly, he commissioned a court reciter, Hieda no Are, to begin

memorizing a genealogy (family tree) and a collection of stories. Hieda no Are was ideal for the job. He had an excellent memory for any written text he looked at and could later recite it with complete accuracy.

After Tenmu's death in 686, the genealogies and stories Hieda no Are had compiled existed solely in his memory. Not until 712, during the reign of Empress Genmei, was the material Hieda no Are had memorized written down by O No Yasumaro. This work was called the *Kojiki*. This was just a year after the imperial capital of Japan had been moved to Nara under the Yamato court. (Yamato is the family name of a dynasty or succession of emperors and empresses.) The *Kojiki* further cemented the court's dominance over Japan.

The *Kojiki* contains 180 sections. The first third of the book is a mythic account of the creation of the world, the birth of the gods and goddesses, the creation of the Japanese islands, and the descent of the gods and goddesses to Japan. The remaining text is more historical and chronicles the line of succession of the Japanese emperors, linking those emperors with the gods and goddesses. It also records the taboos (actions forbidden by authorities in different religions), rituals, and ceremonies that were important to Shinto.

The Story of creation Of particular importance to Shinto, particularly to State Shinto, is the story of creation contained in the *Kojiki*. This story contributed to the myth of Japanese exceptionalism. This was the idea that Japan and the Japanese people were in some way unique and favored among the world's nations and peoples, an idea fostered during the decades leading to World War II. The creation story relays that, before anything else existed, chaos reigned as formless matter. The first celestial gods and goddesses sprang out of this chaos onto the Plain of High Heaven. These gods and goddesses were born as eight pairs of men and women, who were both mates and siblings. The eighth of these pairs, Izanagi and Izanami, would be the first to have children.

The pair stood on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, where they dipped a jeweled spear into the chaos. When they pulled the spear out, drops fell from it, forming the Japanese island of Onogoro. Izanagi and Izanami descended to Onogoro, where they built a palace and a ceremonial pillar. They also devised a wedding ritual around the pillar. When they completed the ritual, their "children" were the other islands

Shinto

The Myoto-Iwa, or Wedded Rocks, stand off the Japanese coast near Ise. The larger rock symbolizes Izanagi and has a tori gate on top, while the smaller rock represents Izanami. The rope tying the two together symbolizes their marriage as told in the Shinto story of creation. © RIC ERGENBRIGHT/CORBIS.



of Japan and the spirits that ruled them. In time these spirits came to be called kami.

Tenth-century records show that a number of shrines were built to Izanagi and Izanami in the Kinki area of Japan, an area that includes the cities of Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. Later the Taiga shrine was built for the worship of Izanagi in Omi, which is now the Shiga prefecture, or district. This shrine became the most popular place for worshipping the couple.

Nihonshoki In 720 a second text called the Nihonshoki, containing other stories Hieda no Are had committed to memory, was put into writing. The Nihonshoki can be considered the other major Shinto text from this era. Some of the material in the Nihonshoki overlaps that of the Kojiki, such as the creation story. In this version, though, some of the elements that reflect poorly on Izanami are not included.

Sacred symbols

The sun plays a prominent role in Shinto symbolism, reflecting the influence of Amaterasu, the sun goddess. While the nation is called Japan in the West, the Japanese name for the country is *Nippon* (or *Nihon*), which means “Land of the Rising Sun.” The Japanese flag, the *Hinomaru* (which means “sun circle”), consists of a white background with a red circle representing the sun.

When entering a Shinto shrine, the worshipper passes beneath the *tori* (or *torii*), a gateway that separates the finite (limited) world from the infinite (unlimited) world of the gods. Images of the tori are often thought of as the symbol of Shinto and can be found on bumper stickers, T-shirts, and other items.

In connection with Amaterasu are three sacred symbols that are found in Shinto shrines and that form the regalia, or ceremonial dress, of the emperor. One symbol includes a mirror (*kagami*), which is believed to reflect the light of Amaterasu. The second symbol is Amaterasu's jeweled necklace (*magatama*). The third is a ceremonial sword that represents the sword of Susano-o, Amaterasu's brother. According to Shinto mythology, Susano-o tricked the eight-headed, eight-tailed dragon of the Hino River into drinking *sake*, an alcoholic beverage made from rice. As the dragon lay drunk, Susano-o killed it, and inside one of its tails he found a sword.

Protective symbols Shintoists display many stone representations of the kami. Shrines are often guarded by the *koma-inu*, a pair of lion-dogs that are thought to ward off evil spirits, though some shrines use images of foxes instead. Similarly, the *dosojin* are stone markers, usually in human form, that are placed in a variety of locations: at the entrance to villages, on street corners and bridges, in mountain passes, and along country roads. These figures, too, are thought to ward off evil spirits and to offer protection to pedestrians, travelers, and pilgrims.

In January each year, "fire festivals" called Dosojin festivals are held. Shrine decorations and ornaments are burned in a fire fed with bamboo. According to traditional belief, the sound that the crackling fire makes provides clues about whether the upcoming year will be lucky or not. Children throw their calligraphy (artistic handwriting) into the fire, and ashes flying heavenward are a sign that the child will become a good calligrapher.

Purification symbols Other Shinto symbols have to do with purification rights. Elements that can be used to purify include water, sand, fire, sake, and salt. A person entering a shrine purifies him or herself by washing his or her hands in a bowl. Traditionally, people even rinsed their mouths (although this practice is no longer widely followed). In a shrine compound, a fire burns, and visitors often waft the smoke from the fire over their heads to burn away impurities and to gather the blessings of

Shinto



A floating torii gate stands in the water at a Shinto shrine. Shinto worshippers pass under a torii gate before entering a shrine. The gate is a popular symbol of the religion. © JON HICKS/CORBIS.

the gods. Many traditional Japanese still follow the practice of purifying the home by sprinkling water at the home's gate each morning and evening.

Others place small piles of salt (*mori shio*) at the home's entrance or around the four corners of the home's plot to purify it. Salt is sprinkled on land before ground is broken for a new building, and restaurants place small piles of salt at their entrances to purify the establishment and encourage people to enter. Some historians believe that this practice originated historically as a way to attract wealthy travelers, who were more likely to arrive on horseback, because the horse would stop to lick the salt.

Worship

Shinto worship is highly ritualized, meaning it has an established series of acts in a ceremony, and is designed to be pleasing to the senses. Shinto

shrines are constructed in a way that takes into account the beauties of the natural world. Attending a Shinto shrine is as much an artistic experience as it is a religious one. While Shinto rituals seem to be ancient, many in fact are relatively modern in their origins.

Much Shinto worship takes place in the home. Many homes contain shrines called *kami-dana*, or the “kami shelf,” where people place offerings of food or flowers and say prayers. The shelf also contains amulets, or ornamental charms, to ward off evil; a mirror, the symbol of the sun goddess, Amaterasu; a small replica of a shrine; and any objects that the family has purchased at a shrine. In this way, the family links its home to the shrine.

Public worship takes place at shrines (*jinja*). No particular day of the week is set aside for worship. People attend shrines for many reasons. A student, for example, might attend a shrine to ask the kami for success on an examination, or a suitor may wish for success in making a marriage proposal. In earlier centuries, wealthy people would donate a horse to a shrine when making a request of the shrine’s kami. In modern life, people often purchase *ema*, or small wooden tablets that contain a representation of a horse (or another animal, such as a snake). On the back of the ema they write a prayer or wish, then hang it in the shrine.

Worship in shrines is led by priests and priestesses, who recite prayers to the kami called *norito*. These prayers are highly formal and recited in poetic language, with emphasis on certain words that are thought to be auspicious, or to bring good fortune (and while avoiding inauspicious words that bring bad luck). Although Shinto priests and priestesses do lead prayers, their main function is to maintain the shrine.

Rituals A typical Shinto ritual, such as those held at festival times, consists of a number of parts and begins with passage under the torii into the world of the gods. After purifying themselves by ritually washing their hands, worshippers pass into the shrine’s sanctuary, where they bow before the altar. (An inner sanctuary can be entered only by priests and priestesses.) Food offerings are made, often consisting of rice cakes, based on the belief that each grain of rice is a symbol for a human soul. Then, the priest or priestess leads prayers on behalf of the worshippers. Many of these prayers date from as far back as the tenth century.

Music and dance are typically part of the ritual (as well as of Shinto festivals). Ritual dances called *kagura* are performed by trained dancers,

Spirits in Nature

Kami are the gods and spirits of the Shinto religion. They are spirits or energies that exist in and influence the world. They are present in the physical world in all things, particularly in nature. Kami are present in mountains, trees, and the wind. They exist side-by-side with humans. Kami can influence natural and human events and respond to prayers. They are not perfect, however, and may make mistakes or even behave badly.

Some kami have names, while others are simply referred to as kami. Amaterasu, the sun goddess, is one of the most well-known kami. The kami Izanami and Izanagi created the islands of Japan. Susano-o is the kami of the wind. He can both cause and protect against disasters. A *tanuki* is a mischievous kind of kami who often appears in Japanese folklore. One such story is “The Magic Kettle,” in which a Buddhist monk captures a raccoon-like tanuki that was dirtying his freshly cleaned kitchen.

Thousands of miles away from Shinto’s founding in Japan, the belief of spirits in the natural

world is shared by Native American religions. There are many different forms of Native American religion. These grew up within the different Native American tribes and often reflected the geography of where the tribes lived on the North American continent. Native American religions in general, however, are connected through their belief of a sacred or spiritual presence in nature. Special rituals, or ceremonies, developed around nature. These include ceremonies requesting rain or a good hunt. These ceremonies may be similar to a Shinto follower sending prayer to a kami.

Animals and plants used for food were seen as gifts from nature. Native Americans use them with great respect to the spirits of nature that gave them these gifts. The greatest spirit of Dakota (Sioux) religion is Wakan-Tanka, the source of all that is. *Wakan-Tanka* means “Great Mystery.” Among his creations are the sun, Earth, and sky. As with Shinto’s kami, Native American spirits can also behave badly. The Raven, Manabozho, and Coyote spirits are known for creating mischief and tricks.

accompanied by musical instruments. Symbolic offerings to the kami are made, consisting often of twigs from a sacred tree. After these offerings are removed, the sanctuary is closed, and the priest or priestess may deliver a sermon, though this is optional. The ritual is followed by a ceremonial meal, although in modern times the “meal” consists only of the ceremonial drinking of sake.

Observances and pilgrimages

One of the Four Affirmations of Shinto is to honor the kami. This is accomplished not only through prayer and rituals but also through festivals. The word *matsuri* is used to refer to any occasion when praise or thanks are offered to a god. The word means “to serve” or “to entertain,” but it

is also used to refer to Shinto festivals, which typically are related to the agricultural seasons. These festivals combine formal rituals with joyous celebration.

Festivals Each festival is held in honor of a different kami. An image of the kami is typically carried on a *mikoshi*, or palanquin. (A palanquin is an enclosed litter or box carried on the shoulders of men by means of poles.) The mikoshi is regarded as a portable shrine or altar, and the kami is regarded as a guest who is visiting the community and its permanent shrine to bring some sort of honor or blessing. In addition to processions, other festival events are likely to include *sumo* wrestling, feasting, and dramatic presentations. Shinto festivals tend to be loud and colorful, and food occupies a prominent place. They appeal to the senses in much the same way that shrine worship does.

The most important festival for Shinto is the celebration of the New Year (*Oshogatsu*) on January 1. Some of the most prominent shrines in Japan have more than one-half million visitors during the New Year festival, and one, the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, had three million visitors in 2003. The New Year is a time when people offer thanks to the kami and ask the kami to bless them with good fortune during the coming year. They also make resolutions for the new year to the kami. The Dosojin Festival or “Fire Festival” follows each year on January 15, when the ornaments and decorations used during the New Year festival are burned.

Two of the most important agricultural festivals are the Spring Festival (called *Haru Matsuri* or *Toshigoi-no-Matsuri*), held on February 17 to pray for a good harvest, and the Autumn Festival (*Aki Matsuri* or *Niname-sai*), held on August 15 to thank the kami for a good harvest. Finally, celebrations in honor of Amaterasu are held each year on July 17 and December 21 (the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year) to emphasize her role in giving light to the world.

Each year a community holds its annual festival, or *Rei-sai*. This festival is held in honor of the local kami, an image of which is carried in procession in a mikoshi. The festival includes music and dancing but also more solemn religious observances. Some of these festivals have become world famous. During the Tenjin Matsuri held in Osaka, the kami are launched downriver as fireworks are displayed. During the Danjuri Matsuri, also in Osaka, an expensive shrine is carried through the streets before large crowds of spectators.

Shinto Weddings

Until recently, the majority of weddings in Japan were conducted in Shinto shrines according to Shinto rituals. This practice, though, has been declining. It is estimated that only about 20 percent of weddings are Shinto. More and more couples are choosing to have Western, Christian-style wedding ceremonies with the bride wearing a Western-style dress.

Nonetheless, many couples do follow Shinto traditions. The ceremony itself is attended by only close relatives in the sanctuary of a shrine. Both the bride and the groom wear white *kimono*, or long robes with wide sleeves. The bride's hair is elaborately arranged. After a Shinto priest or priestess conducts the ceremony, the couple take part in a purification rite and the ceremonial drinking of sake in a ritual called *san-san-kudo*, or the "three times three" exchange of nuptial (wedding) cups. The couple then make ceremonial offerings to the kami. The ceremony is generally followed by a reception for friends and family. During the reception, the predominant color scheme is red and white, which are thought to bring good fortune. Typically, the bride changes into a second wedding dress for the reception.

Two important holy days are associated with people's ages. On one, called *Seijin shiki*, or Adults' Day (January 15), those who reached their twentieth birthday during the preceding year attend a shrine to give thanks. The other, called *Shichigosan*, is held on November 15. On this date, parents take their children ages three, five, and seven to the shrine to give thanks for a healthy life and to pray for good fortune in the future. The name of the holy day comes from the Japanese words for seven (*shichi*), five (*go*), and three (*san*).

Pilgrimages Shinto identifies no particular site as especially holy. All of nature and existence are considered sacred in Shinto. For centuries, however, the mountains of Japan have received special attention. Japan consists roughly of 80 percent mountainous and hilly terrain. Human activity, such as farming, has always taken place on the plains, so the mountains were historically thought to be mysterious and dangerous places that served as the home of many kami. Farmers believed that the mountains were the source of blessings, where clouds gathered to provide life-giving rains through the growing season. The kami were thought to with-

draw to the mountains when the growing season ended. They also saw the mountains as home of the dead. Archaeologists (scientists who study the physical remains of civilizations) have found examples of stone altars constructed at the foot of mountains, where, it is believed, early people offered prayers to the mountain kami.

For at least one thousand years, and probably longer, people have been making pilgrimages into Japan's mountains. At the top of many of Japan's hundreds of mountains are Shinto shrines, and many mountains have *tori*, or gates, at their bases. The most popular site for such a pilgrimage is Mount Fuji, Japan's tallest peak (12,388 feet, or 3,776 meters). It is mistakenly believed that Mount Fuji is Japan's "most sacred"

site, but Shintoists do not regard Mount Fuji as any more sacred than the islands' other mountains. It attracts many pilgrims and visitors, approximately 400,000 each year, not only because of its majesty but also because it is only about 60 miles (97 kilometers) from Tokyo, the capital city. Other mountains climbed by pilgrims include Mount Nantai San, overlooking Lake Chuzenji outside the ancient town of Nikko, and Mount Aso San, a name given to five peaks found at the center of the world's largest active volcanic region.

Everyday living

It is possible to make two contradicting statements about the influence of Shinto on everyday life in Japan. From one perspective, Shinto has little effect on everyday life. When compared to Islam, for example, whose followers take part in daily prayer rituals and whose religious beliefs influence almost every aspect of daily living, Shintoists lead what appear to be entirely secular (nonreligious) lives. No particular day or time is set aside for worship. People do not routinely read a sacred scripture or wear any particular dress. Men are not required to wear a beard or a turban, nor women a veil, and the religion has no specific rules, guidelines, or required rituals that people follow.

At the same time, it is possible to say that Shinto influences almost every aspect of Japanese life. However, it does so more as a cultural tradition and set of values than as a formalized religion. To be “Shinto” and to be “Japanese” are almost one and the same; Shinto has been referred to as the “religion of Japaneseness.” For example, Shinto, through the kami, emphasizes living a life in harmony with nature. This cultural value is carried out in architectural styles and in the design of Japanese homes, which are built to capture the beauty and harmony of the natural world. Japanese home building codes require the builder to include a garden and to position windows so that the occupants can look out on it. Formal gardens in Japan, in effect, become an expression of Shinto.

Similarly, Shinto urges its followers to lead simple and unadorned lives. This belief is reflected in the size of Japanese homes. The average home size in Japan (including apartments) is about 800 square feet (74 square meters). In the United States newly constructed homes in the early twenty-first century average about 2,200 square feet (204 square meters). Most apartments in the United States are likely to be at least twice the size of an average Japanese apartment. The Japanese tend to drive much smaller cars than Americans do as well. Useful items are

rarely disposed of in landfills. It is a common practice to place a used but serviceable item of furniture or other household objects out on the curb where they can be salvaged by others who can use them. These conditions and cultural norms reflect the crowded conditions of Japanese urban life, but the Japanese acceptance of this situation also reflects the fundamental goal of Shinto, leading a life of harmony and contentment.

Living in harmony with nature includes living in harmony with other people. On crowded Japanese subways, for example, workers are hired to jam people into the subway cars. During rush hour, subway riders around the larger cities routinely stand fully and tightly pressed up against the people who surround them. Japanese society is well known for its formality, a way of defining social relationships. The language is complex because different words that mean the same thing, even for such simple things as numbers, are used depending on the social status of the person one is addressing. Great emphasis is placed on harmony in such arenas as sports. Many competitions are allowed to end in a tie; violence among spectators is unheard of; taunting opponents would be considered dishonorable; and baseball players show their gratitude to a home run hitter by greeting him at home plate with teddy bears and flowers.

Harmony also reigns in the business world. Business decisions are usually reached by consensus. Agreement, at least on the surface, has to be reached before decisions are made. Japanese negotiators rarely say “no”; instead, they might say something like “This matter requires further consideration” as a way of allowing the other party to save face. A typical business contract in the United States might run to hundreds of pages. A similar contract in Japan might be only a page or two; the assumption is that all parties will adhere to the spirit of the agreement and do all they can to avoid conflict. Top Japanese corporate executives earn on average only about eight times what their lowest paid workers earn, as a way of promoting harmony among workers. The figure for the United States is variously estimated as three hundred to one thousand times more. Japanese workers often stand and sing a company song before the workday begins, another way of promoting harmony and unity. None of these characteristics of Japanese life are prescribed by Shinto, but Shinto provides the philosophical underpinning for them. They are peculiarly “Japanese,” and to be Japanese is to be Shinto in one’s daily life.



Shinto beliefs are visible in the Japanese sport of sumo both before and after a match. Sprinkling salt into the wrestling area, as shown here, is part of a Shinto practice of purification. © ROBERT ESSEL/CORBIS.

Shinto's influences

The greatest impact that Shinto had on world historical events was during the years before and during World War II. During these years Shinto was proclaimed the official state religion of Japan. It was used to foster an intense patriotism and worship of the emperor, who was regarded as a living god. The Japanese military used Shinto to promote a willingness to die for the emperor, making Japan a formidable fighter during the war.

In contemporary life, the impact of Shinto is much more peaceful. One expression of Shinto beliefs that people around the world are likely to know is sumo wrestling. These bouts feature huge men who practice Shinto rituals before and after the competitions, such as sprinkling salt in the wrestling arena to purify it. Sumo wrestling is probably at least fifteen hundred years old, although the earliest records date to about the eighth century. Historically, the purpose of sumo bouts at shrines was to ask the gods for a good harvest. Another cultural influence that has increased in

popularity is *anime* (often spelled animé to guide pronunciation as “an-ih-may”). Anime is a highly stylized form of animation used in films and comic books. Many examples of Japanese anime contain Shinto themes and images.

Other Japanese/Shinto practices that have spread worldwide include formal Japanese flower arranging (*ikebana*) and *origami*, an intricate form of artistic paper folding. Origami was likely brought to Japan from China after the Chinese invented paper-production processes. The Japanese began to practice the art form in about the fifteenth century. In the twentieth century, Japanese artist Akira Yoshizawa launched a worldwide revival of origami.

According to Japanese legend, a person who forms origami images of one thousand cranes (the bird) will obtain his or her heart’s desire. In the 1950s a young girl named Sadako Sasaki, a survivor of the atomic bomb blast over Hiroshima in 1945 who was dying of leukemia because of the bomb’s radiation, learned of the legend and tried to fold one thousand origami cranes before her death. She died before she could complete her task, but her schoolmates finished it for her, and she was buried with a wreath of one thousand origami cranes. A statue of Sadako Sasaki with an origami crane flying from her outstretched hand stands in the Hiroshima Peace Park.

The religion that was once used to encourage aggressive nationalism (loyalty and devotion to country) and military might has thus evolved in the modern world back to its roots as a religion of peace, cooperation, and harmony. While many observers state that Shinto is a declining religious tradition, it continues to impact Japanese society and culture in innumerable ways.

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Sikhism

The faith called Sikhism receives its name from a Sanskrit word that means “disciple” or “learner.” It originated in the fifteenth century in the Punjab region of what is now India and Pakistan. It is still principally an Indian religion. Its followers are called Sikhs, usually mispronounced in the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas) as “seek” but correctly pronounced “se-ikh,” with the “kh” pronounced gutturally, in the back of the throat. Sikhism’s origins have been the subject of considerable debate. Some historians argue that Sikhism was a combination of other Indian religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and local beliefs and practices. Others believe that Sikhism developed as a kind of purification or renewal of Hinduism. Many Sikhs, however, see their religion as unique and reject the view that it was derived from Hinduism or Islam.

Sikhism’s founder was Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539). (*Guru* means “teacher” or “leader.”) Guru Nanak preached that inner beliefs were more important than external forms of worship. Accordingly, he rejected many of the beliefs and practices of the Hindus who surrounded him, as well as what he saw as the intolerance of Indian Muslims. He opposed the caste system of Hindus, which ranked people by social class, and any form of idol worship, or the worship of objects as gods. He adopted the monotheism (belief in one supreme god) of Islam and emphasized the brotherhood of all humankind.

The fundamental beliefs of Sikhism are relatively simple. Sikhs believe that the purpose of religion is to create a close, loving relationship with God, particularly through prayer and meditation. Meditation is quiet reflection or focus on a single point. The God of the Sikhs is a single God who fills the universe. He has no form that can be represented in, for example, a painting or a sculpture. Sikhs believe in the Hindu concepts of *samsara*, or the endlessly repeated cycle of birth, life, and death; *karma*, or the concept that the sum of a person’s accumulated good and

WORDS TO KNOW

Akhand Paath: Any occasion, such as a marriage or a death, when the Granth Sahib is read in its entirety.

Anand Karaj: The Sikh wedding ceremony.

amrit: A solution of water and sugar, used in the ceremony when Sikhs are initiated into the faith.

Amrit Sanskar: The initiation ceremony for young Sikhs.

Ek Onkar: The “True God” of Sikhism.

five k’s: The five symbols of Sikhism that initiates wear: Kesh, Kungha, Kasha, Kara, and Kirpan.

Golden Temple: The chief Sikh temple, located in the city of Amritsar in India; more formally, the Sri Harmandir Sahib.

gurdwara: A Sikh temple or place of worship.

guru: A religious teacher.

kara: A steel bracelet, worn by Sikhs as a symbol of God.

kasha: The white shorts worn by Sikhs as a symbol of purity.

kesh: Uncut hair, a symbol of Sikhism.

Khalsa: The militant “brotherhood” of Sikhism, founded by Guru Gobind Singh.

Khanda: The emblem of Sikhism.

kirpan: A sword or dagger worn by Sikhs as a symbol of their willingness to fight to defend their faith.

kungha: The wooden comb used to groom hair, a symbol of Sikhism.

langar: A free community kitchen maintained by a gurdwara.

Naam Karam: The naming ceremony for children.

Rehit Maryada: The Sikh code of ethical conduct.

takhts: Seats of spiritual authority in Sikhism. The “Five Takhts” are gurdwaras located in India.

bad actions determines how he or she lives a future life; and reincarnation, or rebirth following death.

The homeland of the Sikhs is the Punjab state of northwest India. About nineteen million people, or 61 percent of the Punjabi population, are Sikhs. Outside India about 500,000 to 750,000 live in the United Kingdom, 225,000 in Canada, and 100,000 to 150,000 in the United States. Other small communities can be found in Malaysia and east Africa. Overall, it is estimated that the number of Sikhs worldwide is about twenty-three million, making it the ninth-largest religion in the world. Sikhism’s members have preserved their cultural identity wherever they have settled throughout the world.

History and development

The founder of Sikhism, Nanak Dev Ji, was born in the village of Talwandi (now Nankana Sahib), near Lahore in present-day Pakistan. His father was a civil servant, so he grew up in a middle-class family. From an early age, he was exposed to a variety of religious beliefs, including Hinduism and Islam, and he soon gained a reputation for questioning those beliefs. As a teenager, he worked as a herder, but he later moved to the city of Sultanpur, where he held an administrative job for the region's governor.

In 1499, according to Sikh belief, Nanak took a swim in a nearby river and did not resurface for three days. When he reappeared, he said that he had had a revelation. He famously proclaimed, "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim." He wanted to offer the people a new religion that combined the best elements of these and other faiths.

The Ten Gurus In the years that followed Nanak traveled widely, earning a reputation as a religious teacher, or *guru*. He remained tolerant of other religions, but he spoke out against idol worship, meaningless rituals, and discrimination against women. He also opposed the Hindu caste system, which divides people into social classes ranked from highest to lowest. At the top are Brahmins, or priests, followed by warriors and rulers, skilled workers and traders, and unskilled workers and laborers. Below all of these are the "untouchables," who perform menial tasks such as cleaning sewage and burying dead animals. Nanak preached that giving food to a poor person was a holier act than offering a sacrifice to God. At the same time, he believed firmly in one God, as do Muslims, and preached that the only way to know God is through prayer and meditation, since God fills the universe ("Endless are His Actions, endless are His Gifts," says a Sikh prayer).

Nanak, the first guru of the Sikh faith, died on September 7, 1539. He was followed by a succession of nine gurus:

Guru Angad (1504–1552), known primarily for developing Gurmukhi, a written form of the Punjabi language.

Guru Amar Das (1479–1574), who started the tradition of community kitchens called *langars* that still operate in Sikh temples.

Guru Ram Das (1534–1581), who created the spiritual center of Sikhism, the Indian city of Amritsar, with its famous Golden Temple.

About Sikhism

- **Belief.** Sikhism believes in a single God, in the authority of the ten living gurus, and in the truth of the Granth Sahib, the Sikh sacred scripture.
- **Followers.** Most of the world's twenty-three million Sikhs live in the Punjab region of India, though sizable communities live in England, Canada, and the United States. Sikhism is the ninth-largest religion in the world.
- **Name of God.** The God of the Sikhs is variously referred to as Waheguru ("The Wonderful Lord"), Ek Onkar ("True God"), Onkar, Satguru ("True Guru"), Satnaam ("True Name"), Akal-Purkh, Hari, Raam, and Pritam.
- **Symbols.** The chief symbols of Sikhism include the "five K's," the Sikh articles of faith: *kesh*, uncut hair; *kungha*, the wooden comb; *kasha*, white shorts; *kara*, the steel bracelet; and *kirpan*, the sword. Other symbols include an insignia called the *Khanda* and Ek Onkar, the first two words of the Granth Sahib.
- **Worship.** Worship is conducted both through private prayer and at temples called *gurdwaras*, where the focus of worship is readings from the Granth Sahib.
- **Dress.** Male Sikhs are generally recognizable by the long turbans carefully wrapped around their hair. Initiates also wear the *kasha*, or white shorts, which symbolize purity. In Western societies, Sikhs wear Western clothes, except for the turban. Women may choose to cover their hair.
- **Texts.** The chief scripture of Sikhism is the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, a collection of hymns and sacred writings first compiled by Guru Arjan Dev. The Granth Sahib fulfills the role of the eleventh and final guru of Sikhism.
- **Sites.** The most important sacred site for Sikhs is the city of Amritsar, founded in 1577 by Guru Ram Das. Amritsar is the site of the Golden Temple, the focus of Sikh authority and the spiritual center of Sikhism.
- **Observances.** Most of the observances of Sikhism focus either on key events in a Sikh's life (naming, initiation, marriage) or on key historical events, such as the birth of the first guru.
- **Phrases.** No particular phrases are associated with Sikhism, though words and phrases from the Granth Sahib are an important part of Sikh life. Included among these are Ek Onkar, or "True God," and *hukam*, meaning "divine will."

Guru Arjan Dev (1563–1606), who compiled the Sikh sacred scripture, the Granth Sahib, and died as a martyr to the faith when he was killed for refusing to convert to Islam.

Guru Hargobind (1595–1644), who took steps to increase the military readiness of Sikhs to defend themselves against threats to the religion.

Guru Har Rai (1630–1661), whose leadership was a time of peace for Sikhs.

Guru Harkrishan (1656–1664), who became a guru as a child and died at the age of eight.

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675), who, like Arjan Dev, refused to convert to Islam and died a martyr.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), who reformed Sikhism and declared that the Sikh holy book, the Granth Sahib, would serve in the role of guru after him.

Since 1708 the leadership of Sikhism has been invested in the Granth Sahib. People no longer served as gurus, but rather the Granth Sahib serves as the eleventh and final guru of Sikhism. It is considered to be the embodiment, or representation, of all the previous gurus.

Religion and politics The history of Sikhism is as much a political history as a religious one. From the mid-1400s the Punjab region had been under the control of Muslims, who had moved eastward into the region from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Until the early seventeenth century Muslim rulers were tolerant of Sikhism and other religious beliefs. That tolerance ended, however, in the early 1600s under the Muslim emperor Jahangir (1569–1627), who opposed Sikhism and was determined to convert its followers, including Guru Arjan Dev, to Islam. In the decades that followed, Sikhs armed themselves and took part in military training to defend their faith. Violent battles between Sikh and Muslim armies broke out. By the early eighteenth century, under the military leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur (1670–1716), the Sikhs had become an effective fighting force determined to defend the principle of religious tolerance, not just of Sikhs but of Hindus as well.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Sikhs found themselves in conflict with Great Britain. The British controlled southern India, but they competed with Sikhs for control of northern India. Leading the Sikhs in the early nineteenth century was Ranjit Singh (1780–1839). In 1799 he had captured the city of Lahore from Afghan Muslims and declared himself the ruler of a unified Sikh state. Under his leadership the number of Sikhs in northern India grew, and the region enjoyed relative peace. After his death in 1839, however, his empire collapsed. Tensions between Sikhs and the British led to two “Anglo-Sikh Wars,” one lasting from 1845 to 1846 and another from 1848 to 1849. British forces were too powerful for the Sikhs, and the Punjab region came firmly under the control of the British.

Sikhism



Most Sikhs, about nineteen million, live in the area of the religion's founding, the Punjab region of India. Other Sikh communities can be found in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THOMSON GALE.

In the twentieth century, however, tensions increased again. In the 1920s Indian nationalists, including many Sikhs, began to call for independence from British rule. (Nationalists promote the establishment of their own state.) Although as many as 100,000 Sikhs fought on the side of the British during World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan), Sikhs generally supported Indian independence. Agreements between Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus originally guaranteed that minorities in India would have their rights respected. At the end of the summer of 1946, however, the president of the Indian National Congress (the organization that led the Indian independence movement) rejected that agreement. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964)

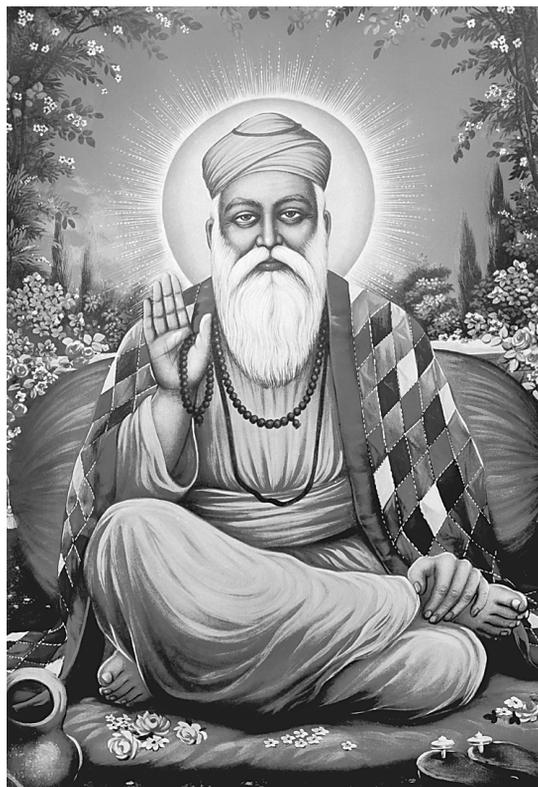
declared that the Congress would not be bound by agreements made while the British were in control of the country. Nehru's statement led directly to the division of British India into two separate states: modern India, which is mostly Hindu, and Pakistan, which is mostly Muslim. When Indian independence finally came in 1948, the Punjab was divided between the largely Hindu state of India and the largely Muslim state of Pakistan. Violence erupted between Sikhs and Muslims as Pakistani Sikhs fled to India and Indian Muslims fled to Pakistan.

In the decades following independence, tensions grew between Sikhs and the Indian government. Sikhs in India felt discriminated against by the majority Hindus. In the late 1940s, some Indian officials classified Sikhs as "a criminal tribe" and gave instructions that they should be shot if they did not obey Hindu officials. Sikh separatists (those who wanted a separate Sikh nation) grew angrier and caused more violence by desecrating Hindu temples. On June 5, 1984, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi (1917–1984) ordered Indian troops to attack Sikh extremists who had taken refuge in Amritsar. The resulting deaths and destruction deeply divided India and likely contributed to the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, by one of her bodyguards, who was a Sikh.

In the years that followed, the Indian government was able to control the Sikh separatists and prevent the outbreak of further violence. In 2004 Manmohan Singh (1932–) became the first Sikh prime minister in the history of India. The political unrest of the late twentieth century, though, has tarnished the reputation of Sikhism. In the eyes of some, Sikhism is representative of aggressive nationalism rather than tolerance. (Nationalism is loyalty and devotion to the interests, culture, social values, and religion of a particular group or nation.)

Sects and schisms

The majority of Sikhs practice orthodox, or traditional, Sikhism and follow the faith's basic beliefs and practices. However, a number of smaller sects, or groups, exist. These sects are not recognized by orthodox Sikhs.



Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, taught that all people are equal, regardless of their differences. He placed greater emphasis on inner beliefs than on external rituals of worship.

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One sect is the Udasis, founded by Nanak's son, Baba Sri Chand (1494–1629). This is a small group of holy men who are celibate (do not have sex) and live naked or wear a yellow robe. Like Hindu *sanyassins*, or holy men, they beg for alms (money) and food with a begging bowl, and they have been active as missionaries for the faith. Begging, though, is forbidden by orthodox Sikhism, which places emphasis on work and industry.

A second sect is the Sahajdharis, a name that means “slow adopters.” This group includes a number of smaller sects, whose members distinguish themselves from orthodox Sikhs by their shaved heads.

A final group is referred to as the Keshadharis, or “hair wearers.” This group, too, includes a number of smaller sects. The Nirmalas live in secluded monasteries, or buildings that house a community of monks, and lead lives of contemplation and prayer, a practice that most Sikhs reject. The Nihangs, in contrast, are the most militant, or confrontational, faction of Sikhism, and its members actually carry weapons in order to defend their faith, if necessary. They live a somewhat nomadic life, meaning that they do not settle in one place, and they see themselves as carrying on the tradition of the Khalsa army founded by Guru Gobind Singh. This group also conducts mock, or pretend, battles during the festival of Hola Mohalla held each year in March. Two other groups within the Keshadharis include the Nirankaris and the Namdari. The Nirankaris were founded by Baba Dayal in the early nineteenth century. This group follows living gurus rather than regarding the Granth Sahib as Sikhism's guru. Similarly, the Namdari, also known as the Kukas, accept a living guru who is a descendant of the original ten gurus.

Finally, although they are not sects, the traditional (keeping with past practices) and liberal (more accepting of change) wings of Sikhism are often in conflict with one another. Traditional Sikhs believe that to be a true Sikh, one has to follow all the traditions, such as not cutting the hair, wearing the turban (a piece of cloth that is wound tightly around the head to contain the hair), and avoiding alcohol. More liberal Sikhs, especially those who live outside India, believe that they can be Sikhs while accommodating themselves to the surrounding culture. In Canada, for example, a major conflict occurred over the use of furniture while eating. Traditional Sikhism requires meals to be eaten while sitting on the floor to emphasize that all people are equal in the eyes of God. In the mid-1990s, however, some Canadian gurdwaras (temples) began

The Khalsa

The Khalsa was formed in 1699. In 1675 Gobind Singh's father, Guru Tegh Bahadar, was executed by the Moghul emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707), the Muslim ruler of India. He refused to convert to Islam, even after he had witnessed the brutal execution of three of his closest followers. Gobind Singh was only nine years old at the time. After he became guru in early 1676, Gobind Singh decided to build up the military capabilities of the faith. Then in 1699, after years of conflict with Muslim authorities and their local supporters, he assembled the Sikhs and asked for a volunteer who would be willing to sacrifice his life for the faith. He took the first volunteer into a tent, then came out bearing a bloody sword. He then asked for a second volunteer, who again followed him into the tent. Eventually, five volunteers offered their lives.

The volunteers, however, did not die. Their lives were spared, and the blood on Gobind Singh's sword was that of a goat. They emerged from the tent, and Gobind Singh declared them the

“blessed ones,” or the Khalsa. They were blessed in a baptism-like ritual with *amrit*, a concentrated solution of sugar in water. The six, including Gobind Singh, were members of different castes, but they all drank from the same bowl during the ceremony, signifying the unity of all Sikhs regardless of their social status and background. (The caste system in India was a hereditary, or birth, system that determined things such as what jobs people could do and who they could marry. It greatly divided society, for there was little interaction between castes.) They all took the name Singh, meaning “lion,” and they became soldiers of the faith.

Within days of the first amrit ritual, fifty thousand Sikhs joined the Khalsa, and the Sikhs became a formidable fighting force. Guru Gobind Singh is therefore credited with giving a strong identity to the Sikh religion. In the twenty-first century, male Sikhs who undergo the amrit initiation still take the name Singh. When women are baptized as Sikhs, they take the name Kaur, meaning “princess.”

serving meals at tables with chairs, citing the colder temperatures of Canada, the discomfort of the elderly when they sat on floors, and the reluctance of young Sikhs to get married in gurdwaras when the meal is served on the floor. The conflict became so heated that it led to strikes, the excommunication (expulsion) of six Sikh leaders in Canada, and, it is suspected, even the assassination of one of the excommunicated leaders.

Basic beliefs

The principal belief of Sikhism is that there is only one God, and that this God is the same as the God of other religions. This belief is stated clearly in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh sacred scripture: “There is only one Supreme Lord; there is no other.” Names for God in Sikhism include Waheguru, or “The Wonderful Lord” in the Punjabi language, as well

as Ek (or Ik) Onkar (“True God”), Onkar, Satguru (“True Guru”), Satnaam (“True Name”), Akal-Purkh, Hari, Raam, and Pritam.

The God of the Sikhs is infinite, or endless, and can be described only through an infinite number of names and qualities. Everything in the universe is God’s creation; as the Granth Sahib explains: “He formed the planets, the solar system, and the nether regions, and brought what was hidden to manifestation [existence]. When He so willed, He created the world. Without any supporting power, He sustained the universe.” To know God, Sikhs are urged to remember Him always and to meditate or focus on His qualities: “Those contented souls who meditate on the Lord with single-minded love, meet the True Lord.”

A second primary belief of Sikhism is that every creature has a soul. This soul is eternal (neverending) and its goal is liberation from the body. Sikhs believe in the basic Hindu concepts of reincarnation, samsara, and karma. Reincarnation means that at death the soul passes to another living creature. Karma refers to the accumulated impact of a person’s actions on his or her future life: A person who builds up good karma will be reborn in a future life as a higher creature and eventually reach spiritual perfection and union with God. A person who accumulates bad karma by committing evil deeds is reborn as a lower creature, such as a plant or an insect. Samsara refers to the ongoing cycle of death and rebirth which Sikhs, as well as Hindus, Buddhists, and those from other religions, seek to escape. These basic beliefs are expressed in the Granth Sahib in this way: “Virtue and vice do not come by mere words; actions repeated, over and over again, are engraved [written] on the soul.”

Basic behaviors Guru Nanak preached the brotherhood of humanity, a doctrine that Sikhs in the twenty-first century try to uphold. Sikhs try to avoid any kind of racial, gender, or ethnic discrimination (unfair treatment). Consistent with this belief is the conviction that there are many paths to God, so Sikhs are famously tolerant of other religious beliefs. The Granth Sahib is likely the only major sacred scripture in the world that actually tries to teach members of other religions, including Christians and Muslims. It states, “Some read the Vedas, and some the Koran. Some wear blue robes, and some wear white. Some call themselves Muslim, and some call themselves Hindu. Some yearn for paradise, and others long for heaven. Says Nanak, one who knows . . . God’s will, knows the secrets of his Lord and Master.” Another passage states,

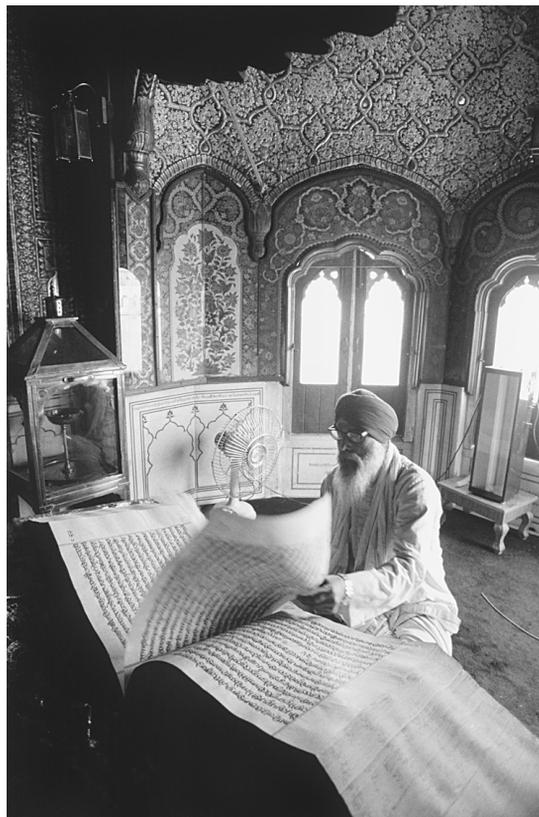
“By His power the Vedas and the Puraanas exist, and the Holy Scriptures of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions. By His power all deliberations exist.”

A final basic belief of Sikhism has to do with how a person lives his or her life. Sikhs are urged to maintain an upbeat, positive attitude, knowing that God is always present to help. They are urged to lead a life of discipline, through such practices as prayer and meditation, rising early and engaging in work, leading a simple life, and avoiding alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Sikhs, who tend to be well-educated and successful in business endeavors, devote much of their income to charity. Further, Sikhs are urged to avoid the “five thieves”: lust (*c’ham*), anger (*kr’odh*), greed (*lob’H*), attachment to material things (*mo’H*), and pride (*a’bankar*). The chief way to do so is to attack human weakness with the “five weapons”: contentment (*santokh*), charity (*dan*), kindness (*daya*), positive energy (*chardi kala*), and humility (*nimarta*).

Sacred writings

The fifth guru, Arjan Dev, compiled the Sikh holy text, the Granth Sahib (sometimes called the Adi Granth), in 1603. At the time the book consisted of the hymns and writings of Sikhism’s first five gurus, particularly those of Nanak, who composed them with the aid of his musician companion, Mardana. It also included the writings of various Hindu and Muslim saints. A saint is a deceased person honored for living a virtuous and holy life. In the years that followed, the Granth Sahib was updated to include the writings of later gurus. In all, it contains the work of six gurus: Nanak, Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, Arjan Dev, and Tegh Bahadur.

In the early eighteenth century the last of the living gurus, Gobind Singh, compiled all of these writings into an updated version of the Granth Sahib. He then proclaimed the text the eleventh and final guru of Sikhism. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib is still considered the final guru, and acts as the living embodiment, or personification, of the



A Sikh turns the pages of a large copy of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, a holy book. The book was written in a variety of languages and by a number of people, including the religion’s founder, Guru Nanak. © KAPOOR BALDEV/SYGMA/CORBIS.

previous gurus. (“Sri” is a term of respect that is sometimes used before the names of objects, books, and places, as well as before the names of people.) It remains the sacred scripture and spiritual guide of Sikhism. While it is not regarded as the direct word of God, it is considered to be divinely inspired.

The Granth Sahib consists of 5,894 hymns in some 15,000 stanzas. Most of the text is written in the dialect spoken in the Punjab region at the time, though some sections are written in Arabic, Hindi, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Marathi, Persian, and various local Indian dialects. They are written down in Gurmukhi, a Punjabi script that was developed and popularized by the second guru, Angad. The text is exactly 1,430 pages in length, and the material is arranged in a very precise manner. The first of its thirty-three sections is the *Jup*, an epic poem written by Nanak. Unlike the rest of the text, it is not meant to be sung. The next thirty-one sections are the *ragas*, which are songs or hymns based on traditional melodic patterns in Indian music. The ragas are organized according to the melody to which they are sung, then by the nature of the meter, or rhythm, of their lines, and finally by the musical key in which they are sung. The final section consists of assorted verses that were composed by musical groups.

The Granth Sahib is the focus of worship in a Sikh temple, called a gurdwara. Any place of worship that contains a copy of the Granth Sahib can be considered a gurdwara, a word that means “residence of (or “gateway to”) the Guru.” The Granth Sahib is stored in a room by itself during the night. When Sikhs assemble to worship, the Granth Sahib is carried out in ceremonial fashion and placed on a raised platform or throne, where it is covered by a rich cloth when it is not being read.

An ongoing issue in the Sikh faith is whether the Granth Sahib should be translated. Some traditional Sikhs believe that translating the book would diminish its holiness. Others, however, note that the original language of the Granth Sahib is difficult and one that is entirely unfamiliar to younger Sikhs living in the West. This group urges translation of the Granth Sahib so that younger Sikhs can carry on the faith’s traditions.

Other texts The other major text of Sikhism is the Dasam Granth. Most of this 1,400-page collection of verse was written by the tenth guru, Gobind Singh. It was compiled in 1734 by a Sikh scholar, Bhai Mani Singh. Parts of the Dasam Granth consist of Gobind Singh’s autobiography, describing his childhood and his conflicts with Muslim emperors.

A major portion consists of meditations on the nature of God. While the Dasam Granth is an important text, it is not considered sacred in the same way as the Granth Sahib.

In addition, two other texts are important to Sikhs. One is the *Janam Sakhis*, or “life stories,” about Nanak. The other is the *Rehit Maryada*, or the Sikh code of conduct, written in the twentieth century by a committee of Sikhs. The *Rehit Maryada* describes how a Sikh can lead an ethical, moral life in relation to God and to other people.

Sacred symbols

Strict Sikhs continue to display the five emblems, or symbols, of Sikhism, sometimes called the “five K’s” because each begins with the letter *K*, or *kakka* in Punjabi, the language of most Sikhs. These emblems were introduced by Guru Gobind Singh, and devout Sikhs incorporate them into their daily lives. By doing so, they readily identify themselves as Sikhs to the world at large. This identification not only creates a community spirit among Sikhs but also makes them responsible for their actions by revealing their religious identity to the world.

1. *Kesh*, uncut hair. Hair is seen as a gift from God, and growing hair is seen as a sign of God’s will. By keeping hair in its natural state, Sikhs bow to the will of God. The practice of allowing the hair to grow was started by Guru Nanak. Male Sikhs can typically be recognized by the turban that is wound tightly around the head to contain the hair.
2. *Kungha*, a wooden comb to keep the hair neat. Devout Sikhs groom their hair with the kungha twice each day. The kungha, in combination with the kesh and the turban, is symbolic of the group solidarity of Sikhs.
3. *Kasha* (or *kachh*), an undergarment, similar to shorts, that was worn by Sikh soldiers and suggests chastity and cleanliness. The kasha not only allowed freedom of movement for Sikh warriors but served as a constant reminder of the need to overcome earthly passions.



A man wears several Sikh symbols on his clothing, including the Kbanda, the crossed sword and circle, on his turban. The sword symbolizes that used by Guru Gobind Singh to stir the amrit in its first ritual, while the chakkar, the circle, represents the eternity of God. © CHRIS LISLE/CORBIS.

4. *Kara*, a steel bracelet that, because it is a perfect circle with no beginning or end, symbolizes a connection with God. It also serves as a reminder to avoid doing evil deeds, especially with the hands. The kara is always worn on the right wrist.
5. *Kirpan*, a sword carried in readiness to defend the weak or uphold the right. It symbolizes the dignity of Sikhs and their readiness to fight injustice. In the words of Guru Gobind Singh, “When the affairs are past other remedies, it is justifiable to unsheathe the sword.” The kirpan in modern life is not an actual weapon but a small symbolic reminder.

The Khanda The chief symbol of Sikhism is called the Khanda. The Khanda is made up of several symbols, but it takes its name from the central one, the Khanda itself. The Khanda is a double-edged sword, or dagger, with a triangular point at the top. The Khanda was used by Guru Gobind Singh to stir the *amrit* in the first amrit ritual used to create the Khalsa, the Sikhs’ seventeenth-century fighting force. While the Khanda was a dagger used in battle, it also has spiritual significance. The right edge symbolizes freedom; the left, divine justice. In the center of the Khanda is a circle called a *chakkar*. This is actually a circular iron weapon with a sharpened outer edge (popularized in the television series *Xena: Warrior Princess*). As with many circular religious symbols, it represents the eternity of God, who is without beginning and end. Finally, two crossed swords encircle the insignia. The left sword, called Piri, represents spiritual freedom; the right sword, called Miri, represents political freedom. Piri and Miri were the names Guru Hargobind, the sixth guru, gave to his personal weapons. Guru Hargobind also developed the Sikh flag, called Nishan Sahib, which depicts the Khanda on a triangular piece of saffron or ochre (yellow, yellowish-brown, or orange) colored material. This flag is flown outside of all Sikh temples.

A final symbol of Sikhism is the phrase *Ek Onkar*. These are the first words of the Granth Sahib and mean “There is only one God.” The words are a prominent symbol of Sikhism’s firm belief in a single God.

Worship

Sikh places of worship are called *gurdwaras*, usually translated as “residence of the guru” or “gateway to the guru.” The guru in this case refers to the Granth Sahib contained inside, which can also be called the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In theory any structure that contains a copy of

the Granth Sahib can be considered a gurdwara, including a home. In practice Sikhs worship at temples where the Granth Sahib can be kept secure. There are approximately two hundred gurdwaras in India and an equal number in the United States. Though some are open twenty-four hours a day, others open before dawn and remain open until late in the evening. Communal worship is generally held on Sundays. Sikhs are opposed to any form of idol worship, which is the worship of any physical object as if it were a god. To avoid even the possibility of idol worship, gurdwaras do not have paintings, photographs, statues, bells, or any similar items, though many gurdwaras are beautifully decorated.

Each gurdwara has four doors leading into it: the Door of Livelihood, the Door of Peace, the Door of Grace, and the Door of Learning. The four doors have symbolic meaning. They suggest that anyone is welcome from the four points of the compass. They also suggest that members of any of the four Indian castes are welcome. A light is always kept burning in the gurdwara to show that the teachings of the Granth Sahib are accessible to anyone at any time.

All gurdwaras carry out three major functions. The first is called *Kirtan*, which refers to the singing of hymns from the Granth Sahib. The second is *Katha*, referring to readings from the Granth Sahib, with discussion and explanation. The third is a community function, the *langar*, or free community kitchens. Volunteers in these kitchens cook and serve meals that can be eaten at any time during the day. Everyone sits on the floor, and the meal is vegetarian (without meat) so that people of all faiths can be accommodated. In addition to these functions, gurdwaras can serve as libraries and schools, and some provide overnight accommodations for travelers.

Head Coverings

One way in which Sikh men and women follow their religion is by covering their heads. Sikhs wear a turban to cover their heads. On women, the most common head covering is a round turban and a *chunni*, or veil. Some women wear only a turban or only a chunni. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh guru, officially established that Sikhs must cover their hair. This was, in part, to eliminate the use of turbans as a status symbol. People from higher classes used to wear turbans, while those from lower classes did not. Guru Gobind Singh used the turban to show that all Sikhs are equal. The turban is always worn when a Sikh is in public.

Other religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, also ask their followers to cover their heads. It is common for Muslim men to cover their heads with a cap or other covering while at prayer. Many Muslim women cover their hair with a head scarf, or *hijab*. Jewish men wear a *yarmulke*, or skullcap. Jewish women may cover their hair with a kerchief or wig. The early history of Christianity depicts its followers with covered heads as well. Women, such as Mary, the mother of the son of God, are shown veiled. Priests and other members of the Christian clergy, or priesthood, often don hats or other head coverings during a ceremony.

Not all followers of these faiths, however, may follow these practices. Nevertheless, in religion, head coverings can represent many things, including respect and devotion to God, and are a visible sign of the religion's teachings. They also symbolize membership in the community of one's faith.

Sikhism

A Sikh initiation ceremony, Amrit Sanskar, is held in a gurdwara. Holy water called amrit is mixed and stirred with a Khanda before being poured into the initiate's hands and sprinkled in his or her hair and eyes five times. © TIM

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Because the gurdwara houses the Granth Sahib, people who enter for *divann*, or communal worship, show great respect. The shoes are removed, and the head is covered. There is also a ritual washing of the hands, and, in some gurdwaras, of the feet as well. All worshippers sit on the floor, with the Granth Sahib at a higher level. The Granth Sahib, which is stored in a separate room, is carried out with great ceremony, placed on a table, and covered with a richly embroidered cloth when it is not being read. While a leader, called a Granthi, does read passages from the Granth Sahib for the congregation, this person is not a priest. Indeed, the concept of priests is foreign to Sikhs, who place great emphasis on the equality of all people, men and women. The Granthi, whether a man or a woman, is regarded simply as a reader and custodian of the Granth Sahib, although anyone who adopts this duty is expected to live a good and exemplary life.

Observances and pilgrimages

The Sikh calendar is based on the movements of both the sun and the moon. The year consists of twelve months of twenty-nine or thirty days. The beginning of each month coincides with the new moon.

A thirteenth month is added every three years to adjust the calendar to the movements of the sun. The full moon has significance for Sikhs because Guru Nanak was born during a full moon.

Ceremonies Sikhism is not known for having holy days or ceremonial occasions. Sikhs regard every day as holy. Nonetheless, a few days hold special significance because they mark important events in the life of a Sikh. One is called *Naam Karam*, or the naming of a child. As soon after the birth of a child as possible, the family gathers at the gurdwara, where hymns are sung and the parents prepare and distribute a sweet pudding called *karah prashad*. Then the Granthi opens the Granth Sahib at random and reads the hymn on that page. (The practice of opening the book at random is common in Sikhism, suggesting submission to the will of God.) The parents then choose a name for the child, whose name will contain the first letter of that in the randomly selected hymn.

Another ceremony that holds special significance is the Sikh initiation ritual, called *Amrit Sanskar*. During this ceremony, five Sikhs called *Panj Piaray*, or the “five elect,” initiate the young Sikh into the faith. They prepare holy water called amrit, which is made of water and sugar. They mix the solution with the Khanda, or double-edged sword, in a large iron bowl while reciting prayers. They then pour it into the hands of the initiate and sprinkle some of it into the hair and eyes five times. The initiate is now considered a member of the Khalsa brotherhood and is required to follow the Sikh code of conduct (Rehit Maryada) for life. Male initiates take the name Singh, meaning “lion,” and female initiates take the name Kaur, meaning “princess.”

A final ceremony is the *Akband Paath*, which is any occasion when the Granth Sahib is read in its entirety. This occurs on any number of special days, such as births, marriages, and deaths. The goal is to encourage Sikhs on these special occasions to reflect on the gurus’ teachings.

Festivals Sikhs celebrate a number of holidays and festivals, most of them commemorating important events in Sikh history. Some of these festivals include the following:

- Baisakhi: This holiday, celebrated in mid-April, marks the founding of the Khalsa brotherhood by Guru Gobind Singh. This anniversary is regarded as the founding of the Sikh nation, an event that gave identity and unity to the Sikh faith.

- **Bandi Chhor:** This holiday, which falls between the end of October and mid-November, marks the anniversary of Guru Hargobind's release from prison in 1617. He had been imprisoned by the Muslim emperor Jahangir because of his efforts to arm the Sikhs. Hargobind spent several months as a political prisoner before he was released. This holiday generally coincides with Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights.
- **Maghi:** Occurring on January 13, this holiday commemorates the martyrdom of forty Sikhs who were killed by a Muslim army as they fought for Guru Gobind Singh on December 29, 1705.
- **Hola Mohalla:** This holiday in mid-March is intended to help Sikhs maintain their fighting spirit. The holiday is marked by athletic events, martial arts exhibitions, and mock battles.
- **Gurupurabs (often spelled Gurupurbs):** These are anniversaries associated with the lives of the ten living gurus, so ten are celebrated each year. The most important is the birthday of Guru Nanak, called the Guru Nanak Jayanti, or Guru Nanak's birthday. The festival is also called Prakash Utsav, meaning "Festival of Light," because it is believed that Guru Nanak brought enlightenment to the world. The holiday begins three days before the actual birthday and is marked by a reading of the entire Granth Sahib. On the day itself, the Granth Sahib is carried in an elaborate procession through the streets. The holiday takes place in the Sikh month of Kartik, which corresponds to October–November. Also important are the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh and the days remembering the martyrdom of Gurus Arjan Dev and Tegh Bahadur. Martyrdom is suffering and death for one's cause.

The Golden Temple Like holidays, pilgrimages do not occupy an important place in Sikhism, for Sikhs regard every place on Earth as holy. Nonetheless, the spiritual center of Sikhism is the city of Amritsar in India. This city holds considerable historical interest for Sikhs worldwide. Originally Amritsar was the name of a lake, then the name of the Sikh temple complex, then the name of the entire site, including the surrounding city.

Amritsar was founded in 1577 by the fourth guru, Ram Das. The name comes from the words *amrit*, referring to the sacred water used in Sikh baptisms, and *sarowar*, meaning "lake." The lake had long been used as a retreat for wandering sages, or wise men, and others who

were drawn to its peacefulness, including Guru Nanak. Guru Ram Das had the lake enlarged and contained, and in time it became an appealing location for people looking for spiritual renewal, including not only mystics and spiritual leaders but also writers, musicians, scholars, and artists.

Ram Das's son, Arjan Dev, the fifth guru, then built a temple in the lake called Sri Harmandir Sahib. To finance the initial construction of the temple, Guru Arjan Dev decreed that each Sikh was to contribute one-tenth of his or her income. This requirement remains an important tenet for Sikhs, who generally contribute one-tenth of their incomes to charity. His successor, Guru Hargobind, built a smaller temple facing the Harmandir, where he administered the worldly affairs of Sikhism. From the early 1600s to the mid-1700s the site was repeatedly attacked by Muslim armies, and the temple was repeatedly destroyed. Each time it was rebuilt, and each new temple was more magnificent than the last. It took its present form under the leadership of Ranjit Singh, who imported marble and precious stones to ornament the temple. He also had it covered in gold-plated copper, so the temple came to be called the Golden Temple.

The Golden Temple is a mixture of Hindu and Muslim styles. While Muslims believe that a temple (mosque) should be entered from the west and Hindus believe a temple should be entered from the east, the Golden Temple has four doors so that one can enter from any direction, a practice carried out in Sikh gurdwaras. As Arjan Dev said, "My faith is for the people of all castes and all creeds from whichever direction they come and to whichever direction they bow."

The Five Takhts Sikhs also visit the "Five Takhts," which are regarded as seats of spiritual authority (the word *takht* means "seat" or "throne"). One is the Akal Takht, the smaller temple that Guru Hargobind built facing the Golden Temple. He believed that the earthly affairs of the Sikh faith should not be administered in the Golden Temple, so he built the smaller temple for this purpose. The Akal Takht remains the primary center of authority for Sikhs. The other four takhts are:

- Takht Damdama: At this site near the village of Talwandi Sabo, Guru Gobind Singh lived for a year as he compiled an edition of the Granth Sahib.
- Takht Keshgarh: At this site in the city of Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa.

- Takht Hazoor: This was the place where Guru Gobind Singh died and where his ashes are kept.
- Takht Patna: This is the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh.

Everyday living

The essence of Sikh life concerns personal behavior, not ritual. Sikhs generally do not value fasting (going without food) or withdrawal from life. Rather, they believe in the need to live within the world and to confront the problems that it presents. In their daily lives, devout Sikhs attempt to follow the commandments laid down by the ten gurus. These commandments can be grouped into a number of categories. The first category concerns the worship of God. Sikhs are required to worship one God, to make worship of God part of daily life (by recitation of prayers, for example), and to avoid any type of superstition, meaningless ritual, or idol worship. God is to be worshipped in an abstract form, not as a person or an image.

A second category has to do with leading an honest and industrious life. Sikhs are required to work hard, share their earnings with others through charitable contributions, help the needy, avoid harm to others, and maintain good relationships with their children and parents. Further, Sikhs believe that all people are the children of God and that all are equal. Sikhs try never to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, or caste. Sikhs tend to be strong believers in democratic institutions.

Finally, Sikhs are expected to live a sober life. All forms of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol are forbidden, as is gambling. While many Sikhs are vegetarian, those who are not eat meat prepared by Jewish kosher standards. (Kosher standards govern how animals are to be killed, which animal products may be eaten, and even how such products are consumed.)

Rites of passage Sikhs generally avoid ritual, though they do take part in naming and baptism rituals. A rite of passage for adolescent boys, though, is learning to tie the turban. The boy is taken to the gurdwara, and after the recitation of prayers, a Sikh elder ties the boy's turban, which is made of fine cotton or muslin cloth and can be up to 15 feet (4.5 meters) in length. The process is difficult, and it can take years for a young man to learn to tie his turban well. Elderly men tend to prefer white turbans, signifying wisdom. Middle-aged men tend to prefer saffron or deep blue, signifying a fighting spirit, while young men often prefer brighter, flashier colors.



A Sikh bride and groom are married during a ceremony at a gurdwara in London, England. Sikh weddings can be held in a gurdwara or in the home. © ARKRELIGION.COM/ALAMY.

Sikh weddings are frequently elaborate affairs, particularly in India. Weddings are often arranged by the couple's families, though the couple is required to consent to the marriage. Often, an engagement party called a *kurmaj* is held a week before the wedding. The wedding ceremony itself, called Anand Karaj, takes place either in a gurdwara or in the home of the bride or groom, anywhere a copy of the Granth Sahib is present. Brides are elaborately dressed, with a great deal of jewelry on their hands; grooms are typically covered with flowers. The ceremony consists of readings from the Granth Sahib and the binding of the couple with a saffron-colored scarf by the bride's father. The couple circles the Granth Sahib four times as the congregation (group of worshippers) sings hymns. The fourth time around, the congregation throws flower petals at the couple, and the service is complete.

Because Sikhs believe in reincarnation, funeral services tend not to be elaborate, nor are periods of mourning very lengthy. Funeral rites consist of two parts. The first is cremation of the body, often conducted by a close relative. The ashes are gathered and placed in any nearby river or the sea. Many Sikhs who live outside of India carry the ashes of loved ones to Punjab for disposal. No headstones or monuments, which are

associated with idol worship, are permitted. The second part of the funeral consists of a memorial service, held within ten days of the person's death. This service is marked by a reading of the Granth Sahib and a communal meal.

Sikhism's influences

Sikhism has had widespread influence both in India and throughout the world. While the religion is built on many traditional beliefs and practices, Sikhs believe that it is a religion suited to modern life, primarily because it does not preach blind acceptance of religious belief and because it avoids meaningless rituals. Sikhism places a great deal of emphasis on hard work and self-reliance. For this reason, Sikhs believe, the Punjab is the most agriculturally advanced region in all of India.

Sikhs place considerable emphasis on education. They regard theirs as an intellectual religion that stresses knowledge and thought. Driven by this value, Sikhs readily adopt new technologies and have become highly successful as business entrepreneurs.

While Sikhs tend to be wealthy, with many serving as doctors, engineers, college professors, or computer specialists, the faith has a strong tradition of community and charitable service. In Glasgow, Scotland, the Sikh Community Care Project and the Central Gurdwara Sigh Sabha won the 2003 Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. When the first gurdwara was established in the United States in Stockton, California, in 1915, members of the Sikh faith immediately turned their attention to serving the needs of the poor, offering meals to homeless men passing by on the local railroad line.

Sikhism is a religion that is holding steady. While the number of Sikhs worldwide has not increased in recent years, neither has it declined. The challenges faced by Sikhism in the modern world are many. Older Sikhs believe that younger Sikhs are in danger of losing their faith because of influences in the surrounding world. Many young Sikhs lack familiarity with the Punjabi language and reject such customs as the ban on alcohol or the cutting of their hair.

Sikhism's largest population center remains in the Punjab region of India, and tensions between Indians and Sikhs do still exist. Sikh nationalism remains a problem, with demands for a separate Sikh nation always simmering under the surface in Indian politics. In the West, people sometimes confuse Sikhs with Muslims. Following the September 11, 2001,

attacks by Islamic terrorists on the United States, this confusion has caused problems for some Sikhs, particularly men who wear the turban. (Terrorists are extremists who try to instill fear and create political, cultural, or other change through violence. Religious extremists tend to believe that they can only bring about their vision for their religion through violent means.) In some countries efforts have been made to ban Sikh articles of faith in schools, including the kirpan in Canada and the turban in France. Many Sikhs believe that Sikhism needs to improve its communication with those outside the faith. They feel that some of these issues will diminish in importance as more people become familiar with the faith.

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Zoroastrianism

Historians remain uncertain about when Zoroastrianism first developed, but many believe that it is older than Judaism. If that belief is correct, then Zoroastrianism is the world's first major monotheistic religion (a religion that worships one god). Zoroastrianism was founded by the prophet, Zarathushtra (also spelled Zarathustra), often referred to by the ancient Greek version of his name, Zoroaster. The core of Zoroastrian belief is that God, Ahura Mazda, is the supreme creator and the source of all truth. Zoroastrians see life as a battleground between the forces of good and evil. The good is represented by an aspect, or side, of Ahura Mazda called Spenta Mainyu, who exists in ongoing conflict with his evil opponent, another aspect of Ahura Mazda called Angra Mainyu. Within this ongoing battle between good and evil, humans have free moral choice. The goal of human existence is to create a social order that is morally perfect.

An alternative name for the religion is Mazdayasna, meaning "Worship of Wisdom." In modern Persian the religion is often called Behdin, which means "Good Religion" or "Good Law." Zoroastrians often call themselves Zartoshti, which simply means "Zoroastrian," Behdini ("Followers of the Good Religion"), or Mazdayasni ("Worshippers of Wisdom").

Zoroastrianism's historical roots are in ancient Persia (modern-day Iran). Over time the religion spread throughout the Middle East and eastward into India. In the twenty-first century a distinction is made between Indian Zoroastrians, called Parsis (or Parsees), and Iranian Zoroastrians, who maintain communities in such cities as Tehran, Yazd, and Kerman. In other countries in the region, such as Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, many people have shown interest in rediscovering their Zoroastrian heritage. The religion is also practiced in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The number of Zoroastrians in the world is relatively small, though how small is difficult to calculate. Until about 2002 most sources gave estimates of the number of Zoroastrians that were as low as 100,000

WORDS TO KNOW

adur aduran: The “fire of fires” that burns in Zoroastrian temples.

Ahura Mazda: The supreme God of Zoroastrianism.

Amesha Spentas: The “Bounteous Immortals,” aspects, or sides, of Ahura Mazda.

asha: Righteousness that derives from natural law.

Avesta: The chief sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism.

daevas: Ancient Persian deities.

Faravahar: A figure of a bird with its wings spread that is a chief symbol of Zoroastrianism.

Gahambars: Seasonal festivals.

Gathas: A portion of the Avesta that contains holy songs; believed to be the words of Zarathushtra himself.

kushti: The sacred cord, or belt, that Zoroastrians wear.

kusti: The “holy path” one has to follow to be a Zoroastrian.

Parsis (Parsees): Zoroastrians who live in India.

Sedreh-pushi: The Zoroastrian initiation rite.

urvan: The soul.

yazata: Guardian angel.

to 140,000. Some sources declared the religion to be on the verge of extinction. After 2002, though, many sources began to report much higher numbers, as many as 2 million to 3.5 million worldwide, with estimates of the number in North America ranging from 18,000 to 25,000. Many sources, however, continue to report the earlier figures rather than the more recent estimates.

These more recent, higher numbers are not the result of a sudden explosion in the number of Zoroastrians. Historically, Zoroastrians have been persecuted (harassed or even injured), especially in Iran, but in the early years of the twenty-first century more people became willing to openly acknowledge their belief in this ancient faith. The Indian government has supported Zoroastrianism, encouraging its followers to identify it as their religious affiliation. Thus, the number of Zoroastrians may not have actually increased. Rather, the number of people who acknowledge the faith has increased. Using an estimate of 2.6 million, one source ranks Zoroastrianism as the seventeenth-largest religion in the world. Still, it is generally believed that the number of Zoroastrians is shrinking, largely because many traditional Zoroastrians believe that one cannot convert to the religion but rather has to be born into it.

History and development

Little is known about the life of Zarathushtra, the founder of Zoroastrianism. His name is composed of two words in the Avestan language of ancient Persia (a language related to Sanskrit). The name means something like “Keeper of Old Camels,” though different translations have been suggested. The modern Persian version of his name is Zartosht. Although he was an actual historical figure, historians cannot agree on when he lived. Some of the earliest dates put his life as far back as 10,000 BCE, but Persian tradition and the writings of many ancient Greek and Roman historians put the date later, at around 7,000 BCE. (This is the date that most Parsis accept.) Some archeological evidence suggests a date of about 2,000 BCE.

Most modern historians, however, have argued for later dates, somewhere roughly between 1500 and 1000 BCE (although a very few put the dates even later, around the middle of the first millennium BCE). These historians base their estimate on the language of the Gathas, a Zoroastrian sacred text believed to record the actual words of Zarathushtra. By comparing the Gathas to other Sanskrit writings of the same period, especially the Rig Veda of Hinduism, they find similarities in the language that suggest a date around 1200 BCE. In addition, the Gathas contain references to social customs that were followed roughly around this same time.

These dates are uncertain because many of the religion’s texts were destroyed. They either no longer exist or exist only in fragments. Some were destroyed by the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) in 330 BCE; others, by Arab and Mongol invaders beginning in 650 CE. With the destruction of these texts, the religion was left with few written records.

The life of Zarathushtra Most of what is known about Zarathushtra’s life is found in Zoroastrian scripture, histories written by ancient Greeks, and oral tradition. He was probably born and lived in northwestern Persia. Throughout his childhood he was unnaturally wise. By age fifteen he had decided to devote himself to religion. Traditional accounts say that when Zarathushtra was just seven years old, he was the target of an assassination plot at the hands of Iranians who recognized that he was the prophet of a new religion that would threaten their established way of life. At age twenty he left his parents’ house and lived for seven years in a cave, where he meditated. When he returned, Zarathushtra was prepared

About Zoroastrianism

- **Belief.** Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion that worships a Supreme God and sees the world as engaged in an ongoing struggle between good and evil. A key belief is that people have free will and can choose good over evil.
- **Followers.** The number of Zoroastrians, who live primarily in Iran and India, is difficult to calculate. Many sources give numbers in the low hundreds of thousands, while other sources estimate that Zoroastrianism has as many as 3.5 million followers.
- **Name of God.** The name of the Supreme God of Zoroastrianism is Ahura Mazda, a name that means "Wise Lord."
- **Symbols.** Zoroastrians have three primary symbols. Fire represents the wisdom and creative energy of Ahura Mazda. White is a symbol of purity. The *Faravahar* is a bird with its wings spread that symbolizes the human connection with Ahura Mazda.
- **Worship.** Much Zoroastrian worship takes place individually and consists of prayers. Zoroastrians worship in temples, often called fire temples because a sacred flame is maintained inside.
- **Dress.** Zoroastrians do wear two items of symbolic clothing. One is the *kushti*, a woolen cord, or belt, that symbolically binds them to their religion and their community. The other is a *kudreh*, a white muslin vest or undershirt that has a small pocket in front that serves as a reminder to "fill" it each day with good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.
- **Texts.** The sacred text of Zoroastrianism is the Avesta, which contains the Gathas. The Gathas are believed to be the actual words of the religion's prophet, Zarathushtra.
- **Sites.** A holy site for Zoroastrians is a group of six shrines near Yazd, Iran. Chief among them is the Pir-e-Sabz shrine, which many Zoroastrians visit on pilgrimage.
- **Observances.** Zoroastrians celebrate six seasonal festivals called *Gahambars*. Additionally, they celebrate a number of other holy days, including the presumed dates of Zarathushtra's birth and death.
- **Phrases.** The motto of Zoroastrianism is *Pendar-e Nik, Gofar-e Nik, and Kerdar-e Nik*, which means "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds."

to preach a new religion, one that placed less emphasis on ritual and more on thought and intellect.

At first Zarathushtra met with little success. His first and only convert, other than members of his immediate family, was a cousin (some sources say a nephew). Many people in his community thought that he was insane and distanced themselves from him. The people rejected his beliefs because he reduced the *daevas*, or evil spirits of Iranian religion,

from gods to mere workers on behalf of Angra Mainyu, the aspect, or side, of god that represents evil. At one point Zarathushtra was imprisoned, but he escaped.

After twelve years of trying to find acceptance for his beliefs, Zarathushtra left his community and found refuge in Bactria, an ancient kingdom in modern-day Afghanistan and Tajikistan. There King Vishtaspa and his queen, Hutosa, heard Zarathushtra debate local religious leaders and decided to adopt his ideas. The king and queen made Zoroastrianism the official religion of the kingdom and gave their daughter's hand to Zarathushtra in marriage. At first Zoroastrianism had a military, or aggressive, quality as its members fought persecution and fended off attacks. During a battle with a group called the Turanians, Zarathushtra was killed as he tended the sacred fire in a temple. In time, however, the religion spread rapidly, and this militant defiance against the established religious order was no longer necessary.

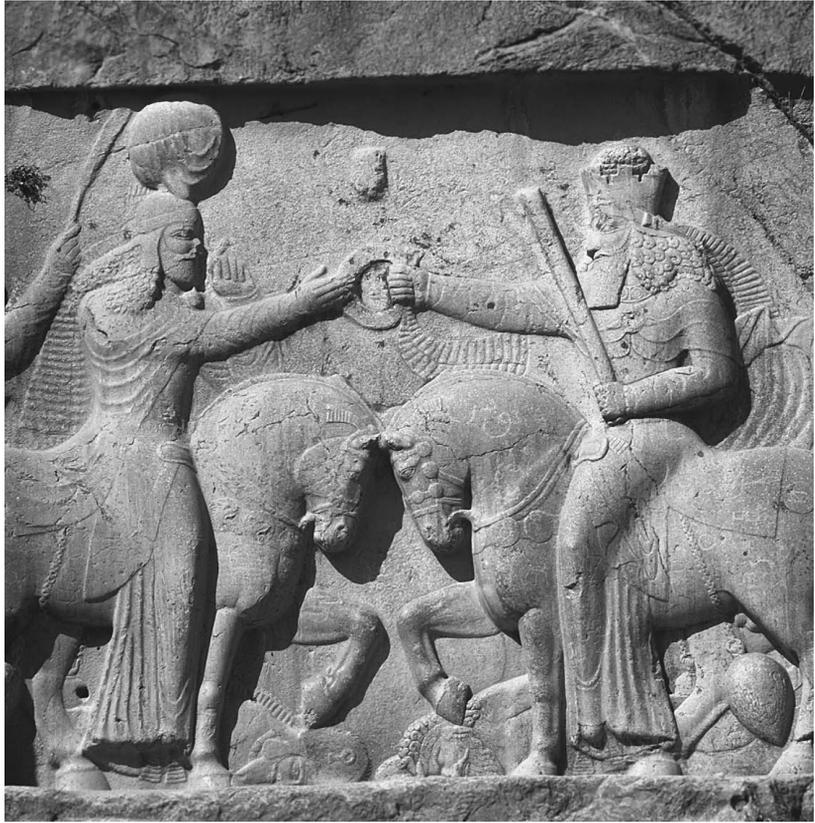
Zoroastrianism in the Persian Empire Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion of the Persian Empire. It was the favored religion in the empire during the Achaemenid Dynasty (529–323 BCE). A dynasty is the period of reign by a particular ruling family. The Achaemenid Dynasty reached the peak of its power in about 500 BCE and ruled over the entire region, from eastern Europe through the Middle East and into central Asia and south-southwest into North Africa. After Alexander the Great overthrew the Achaemenids in the 330s BCE, the empire was ruled by the Seleucid and Parthian dynasties, but few records remain from this time. It is believed, however, that the Three Wise Men, or Magi, who in Christian tradition brought gifts to the infant Jesus, were Zoroastrians from Parthia. Also during this period a sect, or group, derived from Zoroastrianism, called Mithraism, began to worship Mitra, a sun-god. Mithraism gained some popularity in the Roman Empire (c. 31 BCE–476 CE), particularly among members of the Roman army.



Zarathushtra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, holds the sacred fire and the law of reform in his hands. Each were brought to him by Abura Mazda. Zarathushtra gained a small following for the religion, but its size grew greater after his death. THE ART ARCHIVE.

Zoroastrianism

Sassanid king Ardechir I receives his crown from the Zoroastrian God, Abura Mazda, in the third century CE. Zoroastrianism spread throughout the Persian empire during the Sassanid Dynasty of this time period, even reaching into parts of China. © PAUL ALMASY/CORBIS.



During the Sassanid Dynasty (224–651 CE) Zoroastrianism spread aggressively throughout the Persian Empire. By the sixth century CE it had moved into northern China, though it died out there by the thirteenth century. In the seventh century the Persian Sassanid Dynasty was overthrown by Arab Muslims. Because of persecution, particularly in Iran, Zoroastrianism began to lose influence. During the eighth and ninth centuries large numbers of Zoroastrians fled Iran for India, where they were given refuge and protection under two conditions: that they not proselytize, or try to win converts, and that they marry only other Zoroastrians. Some twenty-first century Parsis continue to follow these restrictions, though many do not. In Iran, where Zoroastrianism continues to be persecuted and its members are called Gabars, or infidels (unbelievers), the government strongly encourages Zoroastrians to marry within their faith as a way of keeping membership in the religion from growing. Even in Iran, however,

Zoroastrianism is idealized as representative of the nation's cultural and historical roots.

Sects and schisms

Seven different sects, or groups, have been identified in the history of Zoroastrianism. Some of these sects continue to exist, while others no longer have any followers. In addition to Orthodox Zoroastrianism, which emphasizes the traditional doctrines, or principles, of the religion. The seven sects include the following:

1. **Zurvanism:** Zurvanism emerged late in the Achaemenid period (700–331 BCE). It was based on the belief that because Ahura Mazda did not create the evil Angra Mainyu (called Ahriman by Zurvans), the two must have been the sons of a third figure, Zurvan, whose name means “time.” Zurvanism was a pessimistic cult because it believed that Zurvan had given Ahriman dominion over the world, so the world was inherently evil. Zurvanism died out by the seventh century.
2. **Kshnoon:** This movement was begun in India in the early twentieth century by Behramshah Shroff (1857–1927), and it retains a few members, mostly in Mumbai (previously called Bombay), India. Kshnoon believes in reincarnation, meaning that when a person dies, the soul inhabits another body. Through the cycle of death and rebirth, a soul can achieve spiritual purity. Members also believe that Shroff was able to extract hidden, secret knowledge from Zoroastrian scripture.
3. **Parsi Reform Movement:** The Parsi Reform Movement began in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its adherents believe that Zoroastrian beliefs have to be updated to remain relevant in the modern world. Members of this movement believe that one way to do so is to absorb Western knowledge through education. The Parsi Reform Movement also calls for less emphasis on rituals. Its teachings are at odds with traditional Zoroastrianism in several ways. The followers of this movement believe that death is a release from bondage and that the world is not essentially good.
4. **Parsi Theosophy:** Theosophy is a philosophical approach to religion based on spiritual insight. As a worldwide movement theosophy began in the nineteenth century in New York with the foundation of the Theosophical Society. Parsi theosophists believe that the Zoroastrian scriptures, particularly in the original language, are a

Darius the Great

One of the most famous Zoroastrians in history was Darius I, also called Darius the Great (d. 486 BCE), who ruled the Persian Empire for more than thirty years. Darius was a member of a high-ranking Persian family. After Darius's predecessor, Cambyses II (ruled 529–522 BCE), committed suicide, the Persian throne was seized by a man named Gaumata, who ruled under the name Smerdis (sixth century). Darius, however, believed that Smerdis had seized the throne illegally because he was not a member of the royal family (though later historians believe that he was). Darius gathered about him a number of Persian nobles, marched against the king, and put him to death.

Darius was a strong believer in Zoroastrianism. He said that he was able to take his legitimate place as the hereditary ruler of Persia “with the help of Ahura Mazda.” He was also a strong king and an effective administrator. When the leaders of a number of outlying kingdoms in the empire rebelled, thinking that they, too, had legitimate claims to the throne, Darius quickly put the rebellions down and secured the empire. He launched a number of building projects, introduced a monetary (money) system based on gold and silver, developed a system of law, standardized weights and measures, appointed administrators to the empire's various provinces, and encouraged trade with other nations. His only real setback occurred near the end of his reign, when his forces were defeated by the Greeks at the famous Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE.

source of this mystical, or spiritual, insight. Further, this sect believes that Zoroastrian scripture must be interpreted metaphorically (that is, symbolically) rather than literally and that Zoroastrian doctrines have to be reinterpreted in light of modern science.

5. “Typical” Parsi Zoroastrianism: This movement avoids theological (religious) debates and attempts to emphasize the ethical side of the religion as a way of making it more relevant for younger people.
6. Mazdaznan Movement: The Mazdaznan movement, founded in the early twentieth century by Rev. Dr. Otoman Zar-Adhushst Hanish (d. 1936), included the first Zoroastrians in the United States. This movement incorporates elements of Christianity and Hinduism. It continues to believe in a monotheistic God, but it also believes in a Father (the male creative principle), a Mother (the female creative principle), and the Child (representing salvation, or deliverance from sin, and faith in the future). Members of this movement practice rhythmic praying and chanting, follow a strict vegetarian diet, and are urged to lead a simple life. The movement eventually spread to Mexico and to several countries in Europe.
7. The Lovers of Meher Baba: This movement has only very loose links with Zoroastrianism. It was founded by Meher Baba (1894–1969), who declared himself the last *avatar* in the current cycle of time.

(An avatar is an incarnation of a god and is usually associated with the god Vishnu of Hinduism.) Baba, whose name means “Compassionate Father,” preached that the goal of life was to become one with God through love. It is believed that this sect has hundreds of thousands of believers.

Basic beliefs

The supreme God of Zoroastrianism is Ahura Mazda (often written in English as one word, Ahuramazda). This name comes from the words *abura*, meaning “divinity” or “lord,” and *mazda*, meaning “wisdom,” so *Ahura Mazda* is usually translated as “Wise Lord” or “Lord of Wisdom.” In addition to Ahura Mazda are a number of *Amesha Spentas*, or Bounteous Immortals (sometimes called Holy Immortals). These figures, which were developed from ancient Persian deities called *daevas*, are thought of as various aspects, or sides, of Ahura Mazda. Chief among them is Spenta Mainyu, similar to the Christian “Holy Spirit.” Zoroastrianism recognizes six more the Amesha Spentas:

1. Vohu Manah, who represents good mind and purpose;
2. Asha Vahishta, or truth and righteousness;
3. Spenta Ameraiti, or devotion, serenity, and kindness;
4. Khashathra Vairya, or power and just rule;
5. Hauravatat, or wholeness and health; and
6. Ameretat, or long life and immortality.

It is believed that Vohu Manah appeared to Zarathushtra when he was in seclusion in the cave and revealed to him that Ahura Mazda was the one true God.

Good and evil Some Zoroastrians also believe that Angra Mainyu is not an aspect, or side, of Ahura Mazda, but a separate spirit involved in an ongoing battle between good and evil. They believe that in time Ahura Mazda will prevail and that the principle of goodness will reign supreme. Other Zoroastrians believe that the battle between good and evil exists only in the human mind. Either way, it is through the existence of Angra Mainyu, whether as a being or as a concept, that Zoroastrians account for the existence of evil in the world. This “problem of evil” is a problem with which monotheistic religions have long dealt. The puzzle is this: If God is all powerful and all good, why does evil exist in the world?

In Zoroastrianism this puzzle remains unresolved. Historically, Zoroastrian theologians, or religious scholars, have argued that Ahura Mazda, as a kind God, could not have created Angra Mainyu. If such is the case, however, then the religion cannot be said to be monotheistic, for Angra Mainyu would have an existence independent from Ahura

Mazda. On the other hand, Ahura Mazda created people who are capable of doing evil, so this leaves open the possibility that he also created Angra Mainyu. Ultimately Zoroastrianism does not offer a clear answer to this problem. What is clear is that a core belief of Zoroastrianism is free will: that people can choose good over evil, or evil over good.

Zoroastrianism had a great deal of influence on Judaism and Christianity, giving rise to such concepts as the soul, heaven and hell, the savior, resurrection, final judgment, guardian angels (called *yazatas* by Zoroastrians), and others. Zoroastrians believe that the soul, or *urvan*, is given three days to meditate after death as it passes along the Path to Judgment, called *Chinvat Peretum*. If good thoughts outweigh the bad, the soul is admitted to heaven. If the bad outweighs the good, the soul is sent to hell.

Zoroastrians also believe that the world passes through three phases. The first phase is creation. The second phase is the present world. During this phase good and evil are mixed, but people's good actions and thoughts are helping to lead the world to a heavenly ideal. In the final stage, good and evil will be separated, all will be pure and good, and even the souls that were sent to hell will be freed. Another strong similarity between Zoroastrianism and Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is that a savior, a descendant of Zarathushtra called Saoshyant, will be born of a virgin. He will raise the dead and pass judgment on everyone in the final judgment.

Ordinary members of the faith do not dwell on these theological concepts. Rather, they concern themselves with their everyday conduct as part of the ongoing battle between good and evil. They dedicate themselves to a "threefold path," which is stated simply in the Zoroastrian motto: "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds" (in modern-day Persian, *Pendar-e Nik*, *Goftar-e Nik*, and *Kerdar-e Nik*). This goal is expressed by the term *asha*, a form of righteousness that comes from natural law (law derived from the way the universe operates rather than from human sources) and includes truth, order, discipline, and progress.

Choice Zoroastrianism is a religion that is remarkably free of dogma, or principles regarded by the religion as true and authoritative, and commandments, or laws. It instead emphasizes an ethical life. Zarathushtra, who believed in the power of human reason, taught that each person was capable of knowing the difference between good and evil and following the good. A person endowed with *Vobu Manab*, or "good mind," will

follow the path of righteousness in conformity with the law of *asha*. Such a person follows the *Kusti*, or “Holy Path,” to become a Behdini, or “Follower of the Good Religion.” It should be noted that the Persian word that is often translated as “religion” can also be translated as “law.” The Zoroastrian concept of law is that of a divine order, a rightness to things, that people naturally follow.

Sacred writings

The main scripture of Zoroastrianism is called the Avesta. Originally a twenty-one-volume work, many of the volumes are now lost. The term *avesta* is thought to come from an Iranian word that means “shelter” or “support.” Sometimes the title Zend (or Zand) Avesta is used to refer to the Zoroastrian scripture, but this title refers more specifically to a compilation of Zoroastrian writings made in the ninth century. The Avesta was compiled over a long period of time, ranging from 1700 BCE to 400 CE. Like many scriptures, or holy texts, it was originally transmitted orally.

Within the Avesta is a seventy-two-chapter ritual text called the Yasna, which means “reverence” or “veneration.” In turn, within the Yasna are the Gathas, a collection of divine songs totaling about 6,000 words and 241 verses arranged in 17 chapters. The Gathas are the core of the Avesta, for they are believed to have been composed by Zarathushtra himself more than three thousand years ago. They record the sermons he gave at the court of King Vishtaspa.

Scholarship (research) shows that the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism are, in fact, very old. Much of the Avesta is written in a language called Avestan, sometimes referred to as Gathic Avestan. This is one of the oldest surviving Indo-European languages (a class of languages related to English, Latin, ancient Greek, Persian, and Sanskrit, among others). Some Zoroastrian writings are preserved in Pahlavi, a Middle Persian language used between 300 BCE and 950 CE. The Avesta had to be reconstructed from scattered texts, some of them in Greek translations. One effort to do so was made by Vologeses I (died c. 80 CE), the king of Parthia, a kingdom in the northeast of modern-day Iran, from 51 to 77 CE. The effort was not completed, however, until the reign of the Sassanian king Shapur I (240–271). In the twenty-first century many Zoroastrians continue to recite the Avesta in the Avestan language, although most people do not understand the words. Often the original Avestan is recited, and then the text is repeated in the local language.



The faravahar is a sacred symbol of Zoroastrianism. It is a winged bird with the body of a man at its center. It represents the soul of the individual, which can progress to the goal of reaching Ahura Mazda.

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In addition to the Gathas are a number of other texts that are part of the Avesta. The Vendidad contains laws about becoming and remaining pure and also includes myths, or stories, and religious observances. The Khorda Avesta, which contains a number of ritual prayers, includes the Yashts, which are individual hymns to Ahura Mazda and to the guardian angels. The Visperad contains a service dedicated to Ahura Mazda.

Sacred symbols

The most common symbol of Zoroastrianism is fire. For this reason, Zoroastrians have sometimes been mistakenly characterized as “fire worshippers,” but this is incorrect. Rather, they see fire as a symbol of the creative power of Ahura Mazda. It is also a symbol of truth and righteousness, an element that purifies and provides light and that cannot be corrupted. Zoroastrian places of worship are called fire temples. Here, a fire called *Adur Aduran* (“fire of fires”) is

kept constantly burning to represent the light of God. The fire is the focal point of worship services. At only ten Zoroastrian temples, two in Iran and eight in India that represent the religion’s most sacred places, a more sacred fire called the *Atash Babram* (“fire of victory”) burns. Fires also burn in homes and temporary places of worship.

The color white, representing purity, bears special significance for Zoroastrians. Zoroastrians wear a white cord, or belt, called a *kushti* (or *koshti*). It is made of seventy-two strands of lamb’s wool, and symbolically binds worshippers to their religion and their community. Further, most Zoroastrians wear a white undershirt or vest called a *kudreh*, which also serves as a reminder of the need for purity in their lives. The kudreh has a small symbolic pocket in front as a reminder to the wearer to fill it each day with “good thoughts, good words, good deeds.”

The Faravahar The most prominent symbol of Zoroastrianism is the *Faravahar*, sometimes spelled *Farobar*. The name comes from an Avestan word, *fravarane*, meaning “I choose,” suggesting the idea that a person

chooses to follow the religion. The Faravahar depicts a bird with its wings spread and a human figure sitting atop it. The symbolism of the Faravahar is interpreted in many ways, but generally the meaning is as follows:

The human figure represents the Zoroastrian's connection with humankind. Some efforts have been made to show that the figure represents either Ahura Mazda or Zarathushtra. Zoroastrians, however, generally do not give Ahura Mazda any kind of human shape or form, and evidence that it represents Zarathushtra is not clear. Many religious historians believe that it likely represents the Persian king.

Each of the two wings has three major feathers, which represent the three mainstays of the Zoroastrian ethical code: good thoughts, good words, good deeds.

The three lower parts of the figure represent the opposite: bad thoughts, bad words, bad deeds, which cause misfortune and unhappiness.

The two loops at the sides of the Faravahar represent the two opposing forces in the universe, Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu, the forces of good and evil. The human face is turned in the direction of the good.

The circle in the middle of the figure represents eternity, a suggestion that the human spirit is immortal.

One of the human figure's hands points upward, suggesting the need to struggle upward to achieve salvation, or freedom from sin. The other hand holds a ring. Similar to a wedding ring, this band represents a covenant, or promise, between Ahura Mazda and humanity.

Worship

Zoroastrians often worship privately in the home. For example, the names of some of the more important *yazatas* (guardian angels) are given to the days of the week and the months of the year. On a day or month that bears the name of a yazata, individuals may choose to recite one of the Yashts in honor of that yazata. When Zoroastrians pray, they generally face either the sun or another source of light, which is symbolic of the energy and goodness of Ahura Mazda. To face the sun, many will pray at a window in the home.

Khorshed Niyaesh

Each day devout Zoroastrians are required to recite standard prayers. One of these prayers is called the Khorshed Niyaesh, a prayer in praise of Ahura Mazda. Devout Zoroastrians recite this prayer during each of the three daytime prayer times, when the sun is in the sky. A portion of the prayer is as follows:

• • •

May there be the rejoicing of Ahura Mazda. I commence this recital in the name of the Creator. I praise and invoke Ahura Mazda, who is the keeper of treasures, Glorious, Omniscient [All-Knowing], the Perfector of all deeds, the Lord of Lords, King over all Kings, the Protector, the Creator, of all things created, the Giver of the daily bread, the Natural, and the Powerful, without beginning or end, the Bestower [Giver] of good things, the Forgiver of sins, the Loving, Omnipotent [All-Powerful], Wise, and the Nourisher of all creation.

In addition, many individual acts of worship consist of prayers from the Avesta that are recited at five different times during the day. These prayer times are called Hawan (between sunrise to noon), Rapithwin (between noon and 3:00 PM), Uzerin (between 3:00 PM and sunset), Aiwisruthrem (between sunset and midnight), and Ushahin (between midnight and sunrise). Zoroastrians are known for being hard workers and early risers, so the Ushahin prayers are generally recited early in the morning, before sunrise. One prayer is a confirmation of faith. Before and during this prayer, the worshipper unties and reties the knots of the kushti, or sacred cord worn a symbol of the Zoroastrian's commitment to the faith. Individual worship also takes place when the faithful visit a temple. Another common individual ritual is lighting a fire in an urn, then feeding the fire with sandalwood, incense, and myrrh.

Communal worship In addition to individual worship, Zoroastrians take part in communal worship. Communal worship takes place around a fire urn, which a priest called a Raspi tends throughout the ritual. The fire ritual typically

consists of recited prayers, often followed by a communal meal. Zoroastrians take part in a large number of communal rituals, many of them connected with specific feast days. One of the most common rituals is called the Afrinagan, a ceremony of blessing that honors both living participants and ancestors who have died.

The Afrinagan can take many forms, which vary depending on the time of the year, but typically the ritual follows a set format. It is led by a chief priest, called a Zoti, and it incorporates elements of creation, including plants (which, during the ceremony, are represented by flowers), animals (represented by milk), fire, water, the earth, and the sky. The ritual consists of a number of preliminary prayers, including a prayer for the tying of the sacred cord, a prayer to obedience, a fire ritual, and a prayer in praise of Ahura Mazda. These prayers are followed by an

introduction to the service itself. This introduction consists of a number of prayers and makes use of *ayat*, or ritual implements, including the fire urn; a tray with sandalwood, incense, and myrrh; a tray containing milk, fruit, wine, water, and other items; and, especially, a tray holding flowers, usually five but sometimes three or eight. The flowers all have to be of the same length and, traditionally, have come from either a jujuba tree or a myrtle tree. The five flowers, which are arranged in a specified manner on the tray, symbolize the five prayer times of the day. The ritual ends with additional prayers.

Observances and pilgrimages

The Zoroastrian religious calendar is complicated because three different calendars are used. The first and oldest of these, called the Fasli calendar, is tied to the seasons of the year. The Shahanshahi calendar, used primarily by Parsis in India, is also tied to the seasons, but it requires the addition of a month every 120 years. Over a period of some hundreds of years, this extra month was not added, so the calendar remains off by many months. Finally, the Qadimi calendar was adopted in Iran and is one month ahead of the Shahanshahi calendar. Efforts have been made to reform and unify the Zoroastrian calendar, but the different calendars cause confusion about the dates on which religious festivals and observances are held. For example, in Iran the new year is celebrated in March-April, but in India it is celebrated in August-September. In all the calendars, however, each month and each day are presided over by a Zoroastrian spirit and are marked by prayers to that spirit.

Festivals Zoroastrian religious festivals are of two major types: Gahambars (*Gahambar* means “in time”) are seasonal festivals, and Jashans are other festivals that are not associated with the seasons. The six Gahambars reflect the roots of Zoroastrianism in an agricultural society. Because the calendars have not been corrected in centuries, the seasons each Gahambar represents often do not match the common calendar. Each Gahambar corresponds to one of the six days of creation. The six Gahambars are:

1. Maidyozarem: the midspring festival, held in early October and commemorating the creation of heaven.
2. Maidyoshahem: the midsummer festival, held in early December and commemorating the creation of water.



Zoroastrian priests gather around the sacred flame to celebrate Pateti, the new year. The fire temple is visited on this day and Zoroastrians renew their promise to live with good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. © TIM PAGE/CORBIS.

3. Paitishahem: the harvest festival, held in mid-February and commemorating the creation of Earth.
4. Ayathrem: a festival celebrating the bringing in of herds, held in mid-March and commemorating the creation of plants.
5. Maidyarem: the midwinter festival, held in early June and commemorating the creation of animals.
6. Hamaspathmaidyem, or Muktd: the Festival of All Souls, commemorating the creation of humankind.

In addition to the seasonal festivals are a number of other important festivals (Jashans) and holidays:

Pateti: New Year's, celebrated in August-September by the Parsis and in spring by Iranians.

Jamshed-e Navroz: New Year's Day (Norouz), celebrated in August-September by Parsis and in spring by Iranians.

Jashan-e Sadeh: the Festival of Fire, celebrated on the one-hundredth day before Navroz (New Year's).

Jashan-e Mehragan: Festival of Mihr, a day of thanksgiving dedicated to the highest angel, Mithra.

Jashan-e Tirigan: Festival of Tir, a day dedicated to Tishtrya, the angel of the star Sirius and of rain.

Farvardigan: Festival of the Guardian Angels.

Khordad Sal: The birthday of Zarathushtra.

Zartosht No-Diso: The traditional anniversary of the death of Zarathushtra.

Pilgrimages Zoroastrianism originated in ancient Persia, a country roughly corresponding to modern-day Iran, so most of the religion's holy sites and places of pilgrimage are located in Iran. Early Zoroastrians built many fire temples in the caves, mountains, rocks, and deserts of the region. Many of these temples were abandoned in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, when Islam became the dominant religion, but many survive. In the modern era, Zoroastrians, both from Iran and from India, travel back to these ancient sites as a way of discovering their religious roots.

One of the major places of pilgrimage is a group of six shrines in the Yazd region of Iran. While many pilgrims visit these shrines individually, more often they visit as part of communal celebrations, with feasting, dancing, and music. The most important of the six shrines is the Pir-e-Sabz shrine, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) from Yazd. (The word *pir*, meaning "saint," is used to refer to these shrines.) Surrounding the shrine is a legend that the daughter of a Sassanian ruler was being pursued by a Muslim army. She stopped at the site of the shrine, where she prayed to Ahura Mazda for help. Miraculously, the rocks of the mountain opened and provided her with protection. Near the shrine are a holy spring and a huge tree traditionally thought to have taken root from the Sassanian daughter's cane. Thousands of pilgrims flock to the site each year on June 14 through 18. Throughout June, July, and August, pilgrims also visit the other nearby shrines, including Seti Pir, Pir-e Narestuneh, Pir-e Banu-Pars, Pir-e Naraki, and Pir-e Herisht.

Everyday living

Much of Zoroastrian life is rooted in the religion's motto: "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds." Devout Zoroastrians begin their

day with a prayer to Asha Vahishta, or righteousness, as a reminder to practice the principles of Zoroastrianism throughout the day. A devout Zoroastrian also begins the day by lighting a fire, the sacred symbol of Ahura Mazda.

Zoroastrians are known primarily for two beliefs that influence their daily lives: respect for the environment and an emphasis on industry and hard work. Zoroastrianism has been called “the world’s first ecological (or environmental) religion.” Based on the idea that Ahura Mazda represents all that is good and pure, Zoroastrians believe that the natural environment is sacred. Thus, devout Zoroastrians try to avoid any activity that pollutes the air, water, or soil, including burial of the dead. Related to this is the belief that all creatures are sacred. Thus, Zoroastrians avoid any type of violence, discrimination (mistreatment), and persecution, and they show great respect for people of other religious traditions. Many are vegetarians, meaning they avoid eating meat and foods that come from animals. Zoroastrians also promote equality of men and women.

Zoroastrians place considerable emphasis on hard work and industry. Any kind of laziness is frowned on by members of the community. For this reason, especially in India, Zoroastrians tend to be successful in business and are regarded as honest in all their business dealings. Many of the nation’s business leaders are Zoroastrians. Zoroastrians often share the fruits of their industry with those who are less fortunate. In general, they contribute a great deal of their income to charity.

Rites of passage An important ritual for Zoroastrians is the Sedreh-pushhi Ceremony, when a Zoroastrian child is initiated into the faith. The ceremony is also called the Navjote. At this time the child is given a *sedreh* (vest) and *koshti* (sacred cord). By wearing the *koshti*, the child signifies that he or she is bound to the teachings of Zarathushtra. During the ceremony the child, usually between the ages of seven and twelve, recites prayers and takes part in a ritual washing.

Marriage, another important ritual, is preceded by the signing of a marriage contract. The wedding ceremony itself is a time of great celebration and is typically accompanied by feasting that lasts from three to seven days. Traditionally, both the bride and the groom are dressed in white, and during the wedding service, married female relatives of the bride and groom hold a white scarf over the couple’s heads. Sugar cones are rubbed together to symbolize sweetness in the couple’s married life. Then the ends of the scarf are sewn together to symbolize the unity of the couple.



The Sedreh-pushli ceremony, or Navjote, initiates Zoroastrian children into their religion. A koshti, or sacred cord, is given to the child, symbolizing his or her connection to Zarathushtra's teachings. © LINDSAY HEBBERD/CORBIS.

Funeral services for Zoroastrians might be regarded as unusual in the West, and indeed Zoroastrians have had to adapt their beliefs to modern life. Traditionally Zoroastrians allowed the dead to remain exposed until vultures and other scavenger birds consumed the flesh and the bones were bleached. They believed that burying a body would pollute Ahura Mazda's Earth. In India, so-called Towers of Silence were constructed as places where bodies could be exposed to the birds. Unfortunately, the vulture population has declined significantly, making the practice impractical in modern life, so Zoroastrians are rethinking the practice. In other parts of the world, Zoroastrians do bury or cremate the dead.

Modern issues One of the issues facing modern Zoroastrianism is the possibility that the religion could die out. The religion does not seek converts, and traditional Zoroastrians believe that one has to be born into

the faith and cannot adopt it in later life. This limits the number of followers. Further, traditional Zoroastrians believe that one is obliged to marry only another Zoroastrian. A woman (and her children) who marries a non-Zoroastrian is no longer a member of the religion, though a Zoroastrian man who marries a non-Zoroastrian woman does remain a member.

These views are not universally accepted, particularly by Zoroastrian clergy, or priesthood, because they contradict Zoroastrians' professed belief in the equality of the sexes. Yet these beliefs continue to influence people's behavior. The issue becomes a particular problem with Zoroastrians who live outside of India or Iran, where Zoroastrians are few and suitable spouses may not be readily available.

Zoroastrianism's influences

One of the fascinations of historical religious studies is the religious activity that took place in Asia and the Middle East in the centuries before and after the start of the Common Era. During these centuries the countries of the Middle East and surrounding areas successively fell under the rule of various empires, including the Persians and the Romans. As a result, religions tended to intermix. The official religion of empires frequently changed, and one religion could exercise a marked influence on the thought and development of another. Such is the case with Zoroastrianism.

Scholars continue to debate the influences that Zoroastrianism had. One factor that sustains the debate is the uncertainty about dates. Conventionally, Zoroastrianism is regarded as the first monotheistic religion, but that holds true only if it predated Judaism. Scholars are by no means unanimous in their belief that it did. Many historians believe that because the ancient region of Babylon was part of the Persian Empire, some of the beliefs of Zoroastrianism were transferred to Judaism during the time of the Jews' Babylonian captivity. Additionally, because Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, it indirectly influenced Christianity, which developed out of Judaism. Some of these beliefs include belief in angels and devils, a life after death, a system of punishments and rewards for immoral and moral behavior, the immortality of the soul, and the Last Judgment. Other scholars, however, argue just the opposite: that Judaism predated Zoroastrianism and therefore Zoroastrians absorbed these beliefs from Judaism. Still others believe that the two religions developed entirely independently. Either way, Zoroastrianism and the Judeo-Christian tradition have striking similarities.

In the modern world, Zoroastrians have had an impact on industry, government (in both India and England), and the arts. It is a small religion, but one that has had great historical impact and one whose roots are among the most ancient of the religions practiced in the modern world. Its members are highly regarded in India, where they are leaders in society. The challenge for modern-day Zoroastrians is sustaining the religion and finding ways to adapt their beliefs to the changes of modern life.

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World Religions

Biographies

World Religions

Biographies VOLUME 1

Michael J. O'Neal and J. Sydney Jones
Neil Schlager and Jayne Weisblatt, Editors

U•X•L

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Reader's Guide

Religion influences the views and actions of many people in the world today in both political and personal ways. In some instances religious fervor compels people to perform selfless acts of compassion, while in others it spurs them to bitter warfare. Religion opens some people to all humanity but restricts others to remain loyal to small groups.

In general, religion can be described as a unified system of thought, feeling, and action that is shared by a group and that gives its members an object of devotion—someone or something sacred to believe in, such as a god or a spiritual concept. Religion also involves a code of behavior or personal moral conduct by which individuals may judge the personal and social consequences of their actions and the actions of others. Most of the time, religion also deals with what might be called the supernatural or the spiritual, about forces and a power beyond the control of humans. In this function, religion attempts to answer questions that science does not touch, such as the meaning of life and what happens after death.

Perhaps one of the most amazing things about religion is that there is no commonly held way of looking at it. Yet most of the

world's population participates in it in one way or another. Though hard to define, religion seems to be a universal experience and need. Of the nearly 6.5 billion people on Earth, only about 16 percent (about 1.1 billion) say they do not believe in a god or do not believe in a specific religion. The rest of the world's population belongs to one of more than twenty different major religions.

Features and Format

World Religions: Biographies presents the biographies of fifty men and women who have played a critical role in the world's religions throughout history. Among those profiled are Abraham, whose influence is seen in three of the modern world's most dominant religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Muhammad, considered the final and most important prophet by Muslims; and Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha. More modern figures are also included, from the Hindu teacher Swami Vivekananda to Bahá'ú'lláh, who founded the Bahá'í faith. Women who made significant impacts on religion are also featured, including Mother Teresa, the Buddhist nun Dipa Ma, and the ancient Mesopotamian priestess Enheduanna.

Nearly one hundred black-and-white photos and maps illustrate the text, while sidebars highlight interesting concepts and fascinating facts connected to the individuals being profiled. The set also includes a glossary, a timeline, sources for further reading, and a subject index.

World Religions Reference Library

World Religions: Biographies is only one component of the three-part World Religions Reference Library. The set also includes two almanac volumes and one volume of primary source documents:

- *World Religions: Almanac* (two volumes) covers the history, traditions, and world-views of dominant and less prominent religions and their sects and offshoots. This title examines the development of religions throughout history and into modern times: their philosophies and practices, sacred texts and teachings, effects on everyday life, influences on society and culture, and more. The set features eighteen chapters on today's prominent world religions and also explores ancient beliefs, such as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia; smaller movements like that of neo-paganism and Bahá'í; and philosophies, including those of ancient Greece and Rome, agnosticism, and atheism. In addition, an introductory chapter explores the concept of religion in more depth.
- *World Religions: Primary Sources* (one volume) offers eighteen excerpted writings, speeches, and sacred texts from across the religious spectrum. These include selections from the Bible, including both the Old and New Testament (Judaism and Christianity); the Qur'an (Islam);

and the Dhammapada (Buddhism). Among the other selections are the Daoist text *Dao De Jing*; the Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism; the Sikh sacred scripture, *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*; and Thomas Henry Huxley's essay "Agnosticism and Christianity."

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Comments and Suggestions

We welcome your comments on *World Religions: Biographies* and suggestions for other topics in history to consider. Please write to Editors, *World Religions: Biographies*, U•X•L, 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48331-3535; call toll-free 800-877-4253; send faxes to 248-699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.gale.com>.

Timeline of Events

- c. 2300–c. 2260 BCE Life span of **Enheduanna**. The daughter of the Sumerian ruler Sargon of Akkad, Enheduanna is made High Priestess to the Sumerian Moon God, Nanna, beginning a tradition that will last for the next five hundred years among the princesses of the kings of the Middle Eastern region of Mesopotamia. Enheduanna also establishes the religious cult of Inanna, the daughter of the Moon God.
- c. 2050–c. 1950 BCE Life span of **Abraham**, a central figure in three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- 1353 BCE **Akhenaten**, also known as Amenhotep IV, becomes pharaoh of Egypt.
- c. thirteenth century BCE According to Judeo-Christian belief, **Moses** leads the Israelites, the Jewish people, out of slavery from Egypt.
- c. 1200 BCE Date perhaps marking the life of **Zarathushtra**, the founder of Zoroastrianism.
- c. 604 BCE **Laozi**, considered the founder of Daoism, is born in China.
- c. 569 BCE Vardhamana, who later takes the name **Mahavira** and is considered the founder of Jainism, gives up all of his worldly possessions to live a life of piety.
- c. 551–479 BCE Life span of the scholar Kong zi, who is known in the West by his Latinized name, **Confucius**.
- 528 According to Buddhist belief, Siddhartha Gautama achieves enlightenment after a night of meditation, thus becoming **the Buddha**.

- c. 483 BCE Death of the Buddha.
- c. 476 BCE Greek philosopher **Anaxagoras** produces his major work *On Nature*.
- c. 390 BCE The Greek philosopher **Plato** writes his most influential work, *The Republic*.
- 384–322 BCE Life span of the Greek philosopher **Aristotle**. Believing that achieving happiness is humanity’s chief goal, he organizes all human behavior into a pyramid of actions that all lead to one supreme activity or goal for the individual.
- c. 6 BCE **Jesus Christ**, also known as Jesus of Nazareth, is born.
- c. 30 CE Jesus Christ is put to death by crucifixion by Roman authorities in Jerusalem.
- c. 35 Saul of Tarsus, later known as **Saint Paul**, converts to Christianity.
- 610 According to Islamic belief, **Muhammad** begins receiving revelations and prophecies from the archangel Jabra’il (Gabriel).
- 661 ‘**Alī ibn Abī Tālib**, the fourth caliph, or leader, of Islam, is murdered. His followers, part of the Shi’a sect, believe that ‘Alī is the first imam, or leader with divinely inspired powers.
- c. 717–c. 801 Life span of **Rābi’ah al-Adawiyah**, a poet and a founding member of the mystical branch of Islam called Sufism. Her verses and prayers will become part of the literature and oral tradition of Islam.
- 1017–1137 Life span of **Ramanuja**, one of the great Hindu teachers of medieval India.
- c. 1105 The Islamic philosopher **Abu Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī** publishes his greatest work, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. The book explains the doctrines or rules and practices of Islam, especially Sufi Islam.
- 1177 **Moses Maimonides**, a Jewish scholar best known for his “thirteen principles of faith,” is officially appointed head of Cairo’s Jewish community.
- c. 1199–c. 1287 Life span of **Madhva**, the founder of a sect of Hinduism called Madhivism.

- 1253** Japanese Buddhist monk **Nichiren** claims that the only true Buddhist religion is Nichiren Buddhism.
- c. 1270** The Sufi Muslim poet **Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī** finishes his most important work, the *Masnawi*. After his death in 1273, his name becomes associated with the Muslim sect known as the Whirling Dervishes, who are noted for their ecstatic body movements or dances as they chant the many names of Allah.
- 1377** The Muslim historian **Ibn Khaldūn** publishes his *Muqaddima*, in which he presents his theory for the rise and fall of civilizations.
- 1517** The German Augustinian monk **Martin Luther** launches the Protestant Reformation, which divides Christianity into two denominations, or branches: Catholicism and Protestantism.
- 1534** The Spanish nobleman **Ignatius of Loyola** establishes the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuit order, in 1534.
- 1536** **John Calvin** publishes the first edition of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In it, he argues that the authority of the pope should be rejected, that all humans are sinful and without any free will, and that eternal life is predetermined by God.
- 1698–1760** Life span of **Israel ben Eliezer**, the founder of Hasidism, a Jewish mystical movement that emphasizes a direct connection to God through prayer and through joyous experiences such as music and dance.
- 1699** The Sikh leader **Gobind Singh** founds the Khalsa, a militant brotherhood that gives identity to Sikhism and empowers Sikhs to resist persecution.
- 1783** Publication of *Jerusalem; or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, by the German Jewish scholar **Moses Mendelssohn**. In the book, Mendelssohn calls for freedom of conscience and argues that the state should play no role in determining the religious beliefs of its citizens.
- 1804** The Islamic leader **Usman dan Fodio** leads a successful *jihad* (holy war) to become the ruler of the Fulani Empire in West Africa.

- 1844** The Communist philosopher **Karl Marx** publishes *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Public Law*. In it, he explains his atheist views, writing that “Man makes religion, religion does not make man.”
- 1866** **Bahá’u’lláh**, founder of the Bahá’í faith, publicly declares himself the Messenger of God.
- 1873** Jewish rabbi **Isaac Mayer Wise** forms the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; two years later he forms Hebrew Union College. In so doing, Wise becomes a key figure in the development of Reform Judaism in the United States.
- 1875** **Dayananda Sarasvati** founds the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement. This organization will play a major part in the growth of Indian nationalism.
- 1893** The paper “What Is Hinduism?” by **Swami Vivekananda**, presented at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, exposes many Westerners to Hinduism for the first time. Also in Chicago at this conference, **Anagarika Dharmapala** speaks movingly of his religion, Theravada Buddhism. He gains converts in the United States and opens a U.S. chapter of the Maha Bodhi Society.
- 1911–1989** Life span of **Dipa Ma**, who becomes a beloved Buddhist teacher.
- 1932** **Black Elk** works with poet John G. Neihardt to write the work *Black Elk Speaks*. This book brought the traditional religious practices of the Lakota Sioux tribe to a wider audience.
- 1942** Israeli scholar **Nechama Leibowitz** begins providing weekly lessons about the Torah to students via the mail. She will continue the lessons for fifty years.
- 1945** **Mother Maria Skobtsova**, a nun in the Eastern Orthodox Church, dies in the concentration camp at Ravensbrück in Germany.
- 1947** India gains its independence from Britain, due in large part to the nonviolent protest movement led by **Mahatma Gandhi**, a devout Hindu.
- 1950** In Calcutta, India, **Mother Teresa** founds a new order of Catholic nuns, eventually called the Missionaries of Charity. Mother

Teresa and the order establish hospices, orphanages, and schools throughout India and eventually throughout the world.

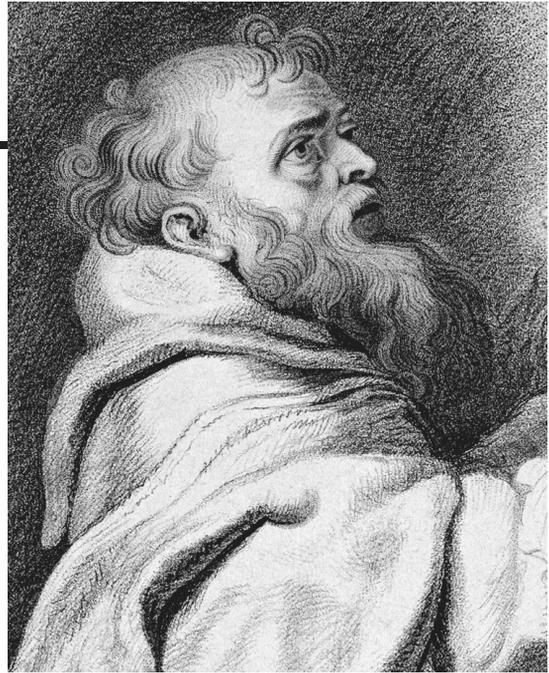
- 1954** **Gerald Brousseau Gardner** publishes *Witchcraft Today*, which places witchcraft as the surviving piece of pagan or pre-Christian religion in the modern world. With the book's popularity, Gardner is dubbed by the English media as "Britain's Chief Witch."
- 1966** The Buddhist teacher **Thich Nhat Hanh** is exiled from Vietnam.
- 1986** The Anglican priest **Desmond Mpilo Tutu** becomes the Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa. He continues his efforts to gain civil rights for South Africa's black population.
- 1989** The **Dalai Lama** wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on behalf of his homeland, Tibet, which has been under Chinese control since 1950.
- 1994** **Malidoma Patrice Somé** publishes his autobiography, *Of Water and the Spirit*. In it, he describes his youth as a member of the Dagara tribe in West Africa.

Abraham

BORN: c. 2050 BCE • Ur, Mesopotamia

DIED: c. 1950 BCE • Hebron, Canaan

religious leader



“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; . . . and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

— God to Abraham, Genesis 12:2–3

Abraham is considered by many scholars to be one of the most important figures in religious history. His belief in one supreme being had a significant effect on the development of Western religion, and his life is often seen as a symbol of the power of faith and loyalty.

Abraham plays a central role in the major religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Christians believe that Abraham had much in common with **Jesus Christ** (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry), since both received promises from God to bless humanity. In the Islamic faith he is regarded as the first prophet, or messenger of God, as well as the ancestor (through his first son, Ishmael) of the Arab people. Both Christianity and Islam, as well as Judaism, look to Abraham as a founding father of their faith. In a 2002 *Time* magazine article, David Van Biema noted: “In fact, excluding God, Abraham is the only biblical

Abraham.

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figure who enjoys the unanimous acclaim of all three faiths, the only one . . . referred to by all three as Father.”

The only records of Abraham’s life come from oral tradition and passages in the Bible and the Islamic holy book, the Qur’an. This has made it difficult for historians to write a completely factual biography of him. The life of Abraham is thus a mixture of historical reconstruction, religious legend, and guesswork.

A child of Mesopotamia

Abraham was born in Ur, the major city of Mesopotamia, near modern-day Baghdad. According to the Bible, he was originally given the name of Abram or Avram, which means “exalted father” in Hebrew. It was much later in his life that God supposedly gave him the name Abraham, which means “father of many nations.”

Abram’s father, Terah, was well over seventy when Abram and his brothers, Haran and Nahor, were born. Abram was raised in a wealthy family. Terah owned property and livestock and also is said to have made idols (images worshipped as gods) of various gods of ancient Babylonia. Polytheism, or belief in many gods, was common among Mesopotamians and Babylonians during this period. Ur was the center of a cult, or group of religious followers, that worshipped Nanna, the moon god. Around the time of Abram’s birth, the Babylonians began to recognize one god, Marduk, as having power over all the other gods. Some historians consider this an early move in the direction of monotheism, or the belief in one supreme being.

Many stories grew around the fact that Terah produced idols and his son Abram did not believe in worshipping them. People would pray to the idols, which represented various gods. One legend had young Abram breaking all the idols in a shop except for one, which was said to be an early hint that his later beliefs would turn to monotheism. Other tales have him criticizing older customers for buying idols. Several later stories relate how Abram burned his father’s idols. The Qur’an recounts that because of his disapproval of idols, Abram was condemned to burn in the furnace of the king of Babylon, but God protected him. Abram’s brother, Haran, also did not believe in idols, but he was not saved by God. He is said to have died in the furnace because his faith in God was not strong enough.

Promise of a new land

Terah decided to leave Ur around the time Abram married his half sister, Sarai. Terah took his family, including Abram, Sarai, and Haran's son, Lot, with him. They settled in the city of Haran (later part of Turkey). After Terah died, Abram received his first message from God, telling him to leave his homeland behind and to go to the land that God would show him.

Abram was seventy-five at the time, and, according to the account in Genesis from the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, he had not demonstrated any specific religious beliefs or devotion. The tales of his destruction of the idols were a much later addition to the Abraham legend. According to the passages in Genesis numbered chapter 12, verse 2 (12:2) and 12:3, God told Abram: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." This passage from the Old Testament became an important part of a later Christian argument from the Apostle **Paul** (c. 3 BCE–c. 67 CE; see entry). An apostle was one of a group of people in the New Testament of the Bible who were sent out to preach the words of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that these words showed that Abraham passed on God's blessing to all humankind, not just to Jews, paving the way for the rise of Christianity.

Into Canaan

Abram listened to the word of God and set out from Haran with his wife, his nephew, Lot, and the community that had gathered around them. The group traveled west to the Euphrates River, crossing it and perhaps stopping temporarily at ancient Damascus, now a part of Syria. From there they traveled south and east, crossing the Jordan River and reaching the plain of Schechem. God again appeared to Abram and promised him and his offspring the surrounding land of Canaan (modern-day Israel), even though it was already populated by Canaanites, the descendants of Noah and his son, Ham. Abram built an altar to God at Schechem and then moved on to Bethel, north of Jerusalem, where he built another altar.

According to Genesis, Abram and his followers remained in Canaan until a famine drove them farther south into Egypt. There, fearful that the sight of his beautiful wife, Sarai, might cause the Egyptians to murder

Abraham

The first page from the Book of Abraham, written in Hebrew.

Details of Abraham's life are relayed in the Old Testament, a holy text of the Jewish and Christian faiths, and in the Islamic holy book, the Qur'an.

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him in order to win his bride, Abram told Sarai that they would travel as brother and sister. When the Egyptian pharaoh saw her, he took Sarai into his harem, not knowing that she was Abram's wife. Abram became wealthy as a result of this, acquiring sheep, cattle, and servants from the pharaoh. Such payments were compensation from the pharaoh for taking Sarai into the harem. When God learned of this, however, it displeased Him and He punished the pharaoh with a plague. As a result, the

pharaoh became angry with Abram, returned Sarai, and ordered Abram and his people to leave Egypt with their carts of wealth.

They returned to Canaan. There, Lot and Abram decided to part company because of arguments between the men who tended their livestock. Lot and his followers set off for the lands east of the Jordan River and southwest of the Dead Sea, where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were located. Again God appeared to Abram and told him that the lands to the north were his, so Abram and his group traveled to Hebron, where they settled and built another altar to God. Abram then heard that Lot and his group had been caught up in a war between the king of Sodom and three other kings and had been taken prisoner. Abram gathered 318 fighters and rescued his nephew. God then gave Abram a prophesy, or a foretelling of the future. He told Abram that the land between the Nile River and the Euphrates would belong to his descendants, but that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four centuries before such things came to pass. God also promised Abram that he would have as many heirs (children) as there were stars in the sky.

Fulfilling God's promise

In Egypt Sarai had acquired a maid named Hagar. Sarai was unable to bear children, so she gave Abram this maid to provide him with heirs. When Abram was eighty-six, Hagar gave birth to his son, Ishmael. Sarai soon grew jealous of her maid and drove her away, but God sent Hagar back. When Abram was ninety-nine, God again appeared to him and told him that he would be the father of many nations. God also declared that he was no longer to be known as Abram, but as Abraham.

Abraham's wife's name was changed to Sarah, and God said that she would bear a male child who would carry on Abraham's line and the covenant, or agreement, with God that promised that Abraham and his heirs would be blessed. The child would be called Isaac, meaning "he laughs," because Abraham laughed at the idea of having a son at the age of one hundred. Ishmael, the first-born son, would be blessed as the father of twelve rulers, which both Jews and Arabs believe to be the twelve Arab tribes.

Bargaining with God

A short time later, God appeared again, disguised as a visitor with two companions, and Abraham proved himself a generous host to these

The Birth of the Jews

God's blessing of Abraham was passed on to Abraham's son, Isaac. Isaac had two children, Esau and Jacob. Esau, as the oldest, was chosen to receive the blessing after his father. Jacob, however, tricked his brother out of his birthright by offering the hungry Esau a bowl of soup in exchange for his inheritance. Jacob, who later became known as Israel, had a dozen sons, and these sons formed the twelve tribes of Israel. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun settled in the north of Canaan, while Ruben, Simeon, and Gad settled in the south. Benjamin made his home in the west, as did Ephraim and Menassah, the children of Joseph, Jacob's favorite son. Dan, Asher, and Naphtali moved to districts in the east. The tribe of Jacob's third son, Levi, was set apart to serve the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The Bible refers to Abraham and his descendants as Hebrews, and later, after Jacob's change of name to Israel, as Israelites. The term *Jew* is a shortened version of Judahites, which is what the inhabitants of Judah's northern tribe were called.

strangers. God let Abraham know that he was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. Abraham bargained with God in order to save Lot, who still lived in Sodom. God agreed that if He could find ten righteous people in Sodom, He would spare the city. Although He failed to find ten good people, God did warn Lot and his family to leave the city before He destroyed it. Lot's wife, however, was turned into a column of salt because, although she was told not to, she glanced back to look at the city as they ran away.

After the destruction of Sodom, Abraham and his household moved to Gerar, located in the western Negev desert, about nine miles southeast of Gaza and fifteen miles northwest of Beersheba. Again fearing for his life because of his beautiful wife, Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister. The local king, Abimelech, was attracted to her and took her into his house, but once again God intervened. The king returned Abraham's wife untouched and gave Abraham sheep, cattle, slaves, and money as a form of apology.

Accepting God's will

As promised, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah while they were living in Gerar. Sarah still wished to get rid of Hagar and Hagar's son, Ishmael, and Abraham allowed her to send them away. God saved them, however, and, according to the Qur'an, mother and son traveled to Mecca, where Abraham often went to visit them.

God had one more test for Abraham. He wanted him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. (In Islamic tradition, it was believed that Ishmael was to have been the sacrifice.) Abraham obeyed this command and took his son, who was then probably an adult, to the appointed place, tied him down, and was about to kill him when God called out for Abraham to stop. As recounted in Genesis 22:12, God said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. . . . Do not do anything to him. Now I

know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Then God renewed his promise to Abraham, saying, “I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all the nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Genesis 22:17–18).

Abraham’s wife Sarah reportedly lived to be 127 years old. When she died, Abraham buried her in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron and eventually took another wife, Keturah, who bore him many children. Abraham left all his possessions to his son Isaac, who married Rebekah. They became the parents of Jacob and Esau. Jacob, in turn, had a dozen sons who later formed the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham is said to have lived to the age of 175, although this has never been confirmed. He was buried next to Sarah.

The importance of Abraham

The life of Abraham has had a profound influence on Hebrew (Jewish) culture right up to the modern day. It was Abraham who refused to follow polytheism and pursued the belief in one god, and it was to Abraham that God promised the lands between the Nile and the Euphrates rivers. Such a promise is important even in the modern-day state of Israel, as many Israelis believe it gives authority to their claim to the lands in this region. Jews trace their ancestry back to Abraham, his son Isaac, and grandson Jacob. Many Jews also see Abraham as a role model of faith, obedience, and success.

Abraham and the Old Testament story of Abraham’s blessing also figures prominently in Christianity. Christians claim that God blessed all nations on Earth through Abraham, therefore showing that Judaism is not the one and true religion. In the orthodox, or conservative, Christian view, this interpretation is taken even further. Conservative Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of God’s blessing and that Christianity is the true religion of God. In Islam, Abraham is considered to be a prophet. The Qur’an states that he was in fact the first Muslim. Christians also point out that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac was similar to God’s later sacrifice of his only son, Jesus. As a test of his faith, Abraham was required to show his love for God by sacrificing his son, Isaac, as a burnt

offering. Just as Isaac carried wood for his own sacrifice up the mountain and did not fight being sacrificed, so did Jesus carry his own cross and allowed himself to be crucified.

Similarly, Muslims also look to Abraham, whom they call Ibrahim, as one of the fathers of their faith. The Prophet **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry) claimed Abraham was the first messenger or prophet of God, while he, Muhammad, was the final prophet. Arabs also see Abraham's first-born, Ishmael, or Ismail, as the ancestor of the Arab people. According to Muslim tradition, Ibrahim and Ismail built the Ka'aba inside the Great Mosque in Mecca, the holiest site in Islam. The Ka'aba is thought to be the shrine that Ibrahim built to God when he was traveling in the desert. The five repetitions of daily Muslim prayer also begin and end with a reference to Abraham.

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Akhenaten

BORN: c. 1371 BCE • Egypt

DIED: c. 1334 BCE • Egypt

Egyptian pharaoh



“How numerous are your works, though hidden from sight. / Unique god, there is none beside him. / You mould the earth to your wish, you and you alone. . . .”

Akhenaten, which means “One useful to Aten,” was the name taken by the pharaoh Amenhotep IV. He ruled Egypt from about 1350 to 1334 BCE. In the fourth year of his rule, he elevated a minor deity or god, Aten, to the position of state god of Egypt, and moved his capital from Thebes to Akhetaten, a deserted spot midway between Thebes and Memphis. He is often cited in history as one of the first leaders to direct religion toward monotheism, or belief in one god. Egypt had been a polytheistic society, or one that believes in many gods, before Akhenaten’s reign. His switch to monotheism made him hated by many people in Egypt who did not like the change. A few years after his death the pharaoh Tutankhamen (reigned 1361–52 BCE) moved the capital back to Thebes and reestablished the power of the earlier gods. Attempts were later made to erase Akhenaten’s name from historical records. This effort was successful until modern archaeology, which is the

Akhenaten.

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scientific study of past human culture and behavior, established the identity of this mysterious ruler.

From Amenhotep IV to Akhenaten

Historical dating in ancient Egypt is a difficult matter because not all records survived or were accurately recorded. As a result, the exact date of the birth of Amenhotep IV is unclear, but most sources put his birth at 1371 BCE. He was the second son of Amenhotep III, a pharaoh, or king, during the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1540–c. 1307 BCE). He grew up in his father's court at Memphis, near modern-day Cairo, and then later at the court in Thebes, modern-day Luxor. After the early death of his older brother, Thutmose, Amenhotep IV became next in line to become pharaoh. It is believed that he served as coregent (copharaoh) with his father for a time, and when Amenhotep III died in about 1353 BCE, Amenhotep IV took the throne.

Amenhotep IV inherited a rich empire that stretched from North Africa to the Middle East. As pharaoh he was considered by his subjects to be both a ruler and a godlike person. Egypt had long been a theocracy, a government ruled by religious authority. Even though he was viewed as a god himself, the pharaoh still had to ask the most powerful gods for divine assistance. He prayed to the gods through the priests. During the time of Amenhotep IV, the primary god was Amen (also Amun or Amon), king of the gods. Next in importance was Ra (or Re), the sun god. These two were jointly worshipped by the powerful cult of Amen-Ra.

At the beginning of his reign Amenhotep IV appears to have followed the practices of previous Egyptian rulers. He worshipped the old gods, such as Amon and Re, and built temples in their honor at Thebes. There were some early hints, however, that he was not destined to be a completely traditional pharaoh. Like his father before him, Amenhotep IV married a commoner. This was noteworthy because Egyptian rulers were expected to marry only within the royal bloodline. Amenhotep IV took Nefertiti as his wife before he assumed the throne. Noted for her beauty, Nefertiti later shared divine status with her husband. She was the daughter of a military advisor, Ay, who may have been a brother of Amenhotep IV's mother, Queen Tiy. Amenhotep IV and Nefertiti had six daughters.

In the first year of his rule Amenhotep IV worshipped a minor god, Aten (also spelled Aton), a local variation of the sun god. Aten was the Egyptian word for the sun as seen in the sky, and Aten was portrayed as a disk with rays shining from it. The rays sometimes had human hands at the ends, holding out the *ankh*, or symbol of life, to the king and queen. It is unknown what drew Amenhotep IV to this minor deity. It may have been the idea of the sun as the source of all life. Some also believe that Amenhotep IV was sickly and the warmth of the sun eased his discomfort. Other historians say that there was a more practical reason for the pharaoh's attraction to this god. There was no powerful priest class built around Aten as there was around Amen-Ra. No great rituals were performed, and no temples had been erected. Therefore, by making Aten his god, Amenhotep IV may have been attempting to win more power for himself. He may have wanted to weaken the power of the priest class and centralize it in the office of pharaoh.

In his third year of power Amenhotep IV decided to celebrate what was known as a Sed-festival. The festival was a royal celebration usually held only in the thirtieth year of a pharaoh's rule. This made it apparent to many that Amenhotep IV was trying to increase his power. Around 1347 BCE he established Aten as the state god of Egypt. The following year he officially changed his name to Akhenaten. His wife changed hers to Neferneferuaten ("Exquisite Beauty of the Aten"). That same year Akhenaten decided to move the capital of Egypt from Thebes to a new location two hundred miles distant, on the east side of the Nile. This place is now called Tel el-Amarna or Amarna, and Amarna is the name given to the brief period of Akhenaten's rule from that capital.

Amarna Art

During the Amarna period, as Akhenaten's rule is known, the art of Egypt went through a revolution. Egyptian art traditionally portrayed people in a lifeless, dignified, and stiff manner. In profile, their faces appeared calm and almost expressionless. Emphasis was on angular lines. Realism became more common during Akhenaten's rule. In the visual arts there was more use of curved lines and roundness. Portraits showed motion and close relations between people. Vegetation and nature were added. Akhenaten and his wife, Neferneferuaten, were shown in formal poses making offerings to the sun god, Aten, but they were also seen in happy domestic scenes, playing with three of their daughters. This emphasis on realism and human qualities even translated to writing. The vernacular, or common spoken language, was introduced into the written language for the first time.

Realism was encouraged in paintings of Akhenaten. He was shown with a thin, drawn-out face, a pointed chin and thick lips, an elongated neck, and almost feminine breasts. He had a round belly with wide hips, fat thighs, thin legs, and long, spidery fingers. These portrayals have inspired many art and medical historians to consider the Akhenaten's physical condition. Many historians have speculated whether these depictions of him reflect a disease that affected his appearance, such as Marfan's syndrome, a disorder affecting the elastic tissue, skeleton, cardiovascular system, and eyes. There are many theories about Akhenaten and why he appears as he does in the artwork from the Amarna period. Until his mummy is found, however, no verification is available. Regardless of whether Akhenaten had such a disease, the art from his rule endures as a unique and curious period in Egyptian history.

The Amarna period

On this desert site Akhenaten created a new capital, called Akhetaten (“Horizon of Aten”). It stretched for five miles on a narrow band of desert between high cliffs and the Nile River. To the north and south were the homes of merchants and government officials. In the center of the city lay the royal palace, the granaries (grain storage buildings), and the Great Temple of Aten. Akhenaten’s worship of the sun influenced a new style of architecture. His temples to Aten were not the usual massive, closed structures, but a series of open courts facing east, the direction in which the sun rises. Even the doorways in these temples had openings in the tops of their frames to allow the light of the sun to reach every corner. The city appears to have been created as a huge stage for Akhenaten. His daily journey from his palace through the city and back again was said to symbolize the passage of the sun from sunrise to sunset.

Just as Akhenaten and Neferneferuaten worshipped Aten, so did the Egyptian people in turn worship Akhenaten and his wife. They believed Aten gave life through the pharaoh, who they saw as his direct representative and son. In the ninth year of his rule Akhenaten announced that Aten was not just the supreme god of Egypt, but the only god. Therefore the power of Akhenaten, who was Aten’s representative, was multiplied along with the god’s increase in status. The word “gods” on public monuments was erased. The priest class the pharaoh established competed with the older priests who served Amen and Ra and had assembled enormous power for themselves. Temples to Amen and Ra were closed or destroyed. Akhenaten even declared that Aten would take over the work of Osiris, god of the underworld and the dead, and look after the souls of the departed. No longer would there be an underworld where such spirits dwelled. Instead the spirits, or *ba*, remained on Earth. At sunset, spirits that were found loyal to Akhenaten traveled to the temple of Aten at Akhetaten, where they received offerings.

These later stages of Atenism were a form of monotheism. Since the people actually worshipped Akhenaten and his wife rather than Aten directly, however, it was different from the strict monotheism practiced in religions developed later such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Atenism had no apparent ethical system or code of conduct. Instead, it appears to have been more a form of nature worship. Hymns that were written to Aten praised nature and the power of the sun. Some historians have speculated that Akhenaten and his religion influenced the contemporary Hebrew lawgiver and religious leader **Moses** (c. 1392–c. 1272 BCE; see entry).



Akhenaten makes offerings to the god Aten, represented as a sun disk. The style of art during Akhenaten's reign was quite different from the traditional style and is often referred to as Amarna Art.

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For example, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the father of modern psychiatry (the study of the mind and its ills), wrote in his *Moses and Monotheism* that Moses was a priest of Aten forced to flee Egypt after the death of Akhenaten. The lack of moral guidelines in Atenism, however, is in striking contrast to the many laws of Judaism.

Another interesting aspect of Akhenaten's reign and of Atenism is the stronger role women played during this period. Akhenaten's mother, Tiy, continued to play an important role in the government. Some historians even say that she may have been a coregent until her death. Nefertiti is believed by many archaeologists and historians to have had a strong influential role over her husband. Akhenaten also had other royal wives, including Kiya. She was probably the mother of Tutankhamen,

the child-pharaoh, whose tomb in Egypt's Valley of the Kings was discovered by Howard Carter in 1922. In addition, there was Meritaten, the primary royal wife later in Akhenaten's rule, and Ankhesenpaaten. These last two may also have been Akhenaten's own daughters.

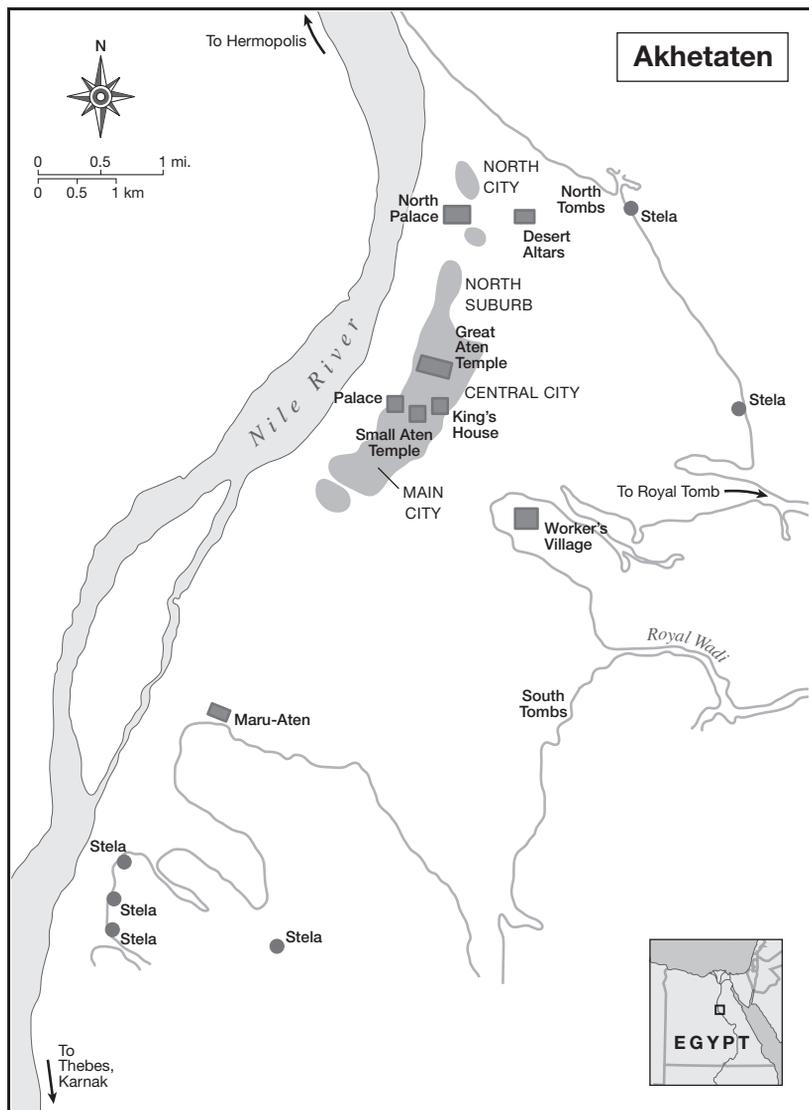
Decline and fall

Akhenaten's focus on religion led to a decline in the economic power of Egypt. Great sums were spent on the building of Akhetaten and the construction of temples to Aten throughout the country. The property and wealth of other temples were transferred to those honoring Aten. This ultimately led to misuse of funds and corruption. Additionally, Akhenaten's focus on religion had harmful results on the politics of Egypt, both within the empire and internationally. Akhenaten made many political enemies when he destroyed the religious traditions of centuries in a few short years. He also neglected the army, and without a strong army, order could not be kept.

Akhenaten ignored the outposts of his empire in Syria and Palestine, as documented in the writings later called the Amarna Letters. These 380 clay tablets present letters between Akhenaten and the kings or princes of colonies all over the Middle East. They include requests for aid from the local princes, who were being invaded by other tribes. It appears Akhenaten did nothing to help these princes. The vast Egyptian empire he had inherited eventually began to fall apart. Foreign trade was lost, and new enemies threatened Egypt. There was also an outbreak of influenza (flu) or the plague during the later Amarna period. The sickness spread into the Middle East. The Egyptian people began to wonder if the old gods had turned against Akhenaten.

Toward the end of his seventeen-year reign, Akhenaten appears to have tried to strengthen his failing rule. His successor, Smenkhare, may have acted as coregent for a time. Historical documents do not note what happened to Neferneferuaten at the end of her husband's reign. Archaeologists suspect that she either took a stronger role in the government or died and was replaced by other wives. Akhenaten died peacefully at about thirty-five years of age. He was succeeded by Smenkhare, probably one of his sons by Kiya. When Smenkhare died suddenly, Tutankhaten took over the leadership. He soon changed his name to Tutankhamen, embracing the old god Amen and moving the capital back to Thebes.

Akhenaten



Akhenaten founded the city of Akhetaten, modern-day Tell el-Amarna, and moved Egypt's capital there. The city was dedicated to the worship of Akhenaten's one god, Aten.
THOMSON GALE.

The Amen-Ra priesthood once again came to power. After the death of the next pharaoh, Ay, and the takeover by the military leader Horemheb, all four pharaohs that were associated with the Amarna period were erased from the historical record of Egypt. The ruins of Akhenaten's once-glorious city eventually crumbled back into the desert. His experiment in monotheism was a forgotten part of history for three thousand years. It was not until the late nineteenth century that archaeologists uncovered the riches of this era in Egyptian history.

The site of Akhetaten was initially investigated by archaeologist John Gardner Wilkinson in 1824. Its story was then gradually revealed to the public.

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ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib

BORN: c. 600 • Mecca, Saudi Arabia

DIED: January, 661 • Kufa, Iraq

Arabian religious leader

“Whoever is eager for Paradise will ignore temptations; whoever fears the fire of Hell will abstain from sins; whoever practices piety will easily bear the difficulties of life; and whoever anticipates death will hasten towards good deeds.”

ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib is considered the second most well-known Muslim after **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry), the founder of the Islamic faith. ʿAli was one of the first converts (a person who changes his or her religion) to Islam, and he was a loyal follower of Muhammad, who was both his cousin and his father-in-law. A respected soldier and administrator, ʿAli became the fourth caliph, or leader, of the people of Islam in 656. Yet not all Muslims, or the faithful of Islam, accepted him. In fact, it was the disagreement over the legitimate succession to the position of caliph that caused the basic split in Islam that still exists in the early twenty-first century.

The followers of ʿAli were known as *Shiʿat ʿAli*, which became commonly shortened to Shiʿa. These people believe that the Muslim leader should come from the direct descendants of Muhammad. The opposite and larger branch of Islam is known as the Sunni. The Sunni do not want to accept the authority of the direct descendants of Muhammad and choose instead to follow the *sunna*, or practices of Muhammad himself.

The murder of ʿAli in 661 is one of the major events in Islamic history. Known as the Lion of God and Commander of the Faithful to both branches of Islam, ʿAli is honored by pilgrimages to his shrine



The Hand of Fatima, an Islamic symbol of good luck, is often used as a symbol to ward off evil spirits. Fatima was ‘Ali’s wife and the daughter of the prophet Muhammad. © JOHN AND LISA MERRILL/CORBIS.

in Najaf, Iraq. Muslims view ‘Ali as a great man of learning. His speeches, letters, and sayings are gathered in his *Nahjul Belagha* (“Peak of Eloquence”).

A youth in Muhammad’s household

Ali was born in Mecca, part of modern-day Saudi Arabia, in about 600 CE. The Shi’a Muslims say that his name comes from one of the ninety-nine names of God, Al-Ali, meaning the “exalted.” He was the son of Abu Tālib, a member of the Banu Hashim clan. This was one of the twelve major clans of the Quraysh tribe, which was the most influential in Mecca. The Quraysh owned one of the most powerful trading businesses in central Arabia and also held custody of the Ka’aba, the central shrine for pre-Islamic Arabs, since the fifth century. Many sacred idols, or statues to which people prayed, were housed in the Ka’aba. The shrine was a

major site of pilgrimage, or holy journey, for Arabs and thus was a great source of money for the Quraysh. Some Muslims say that ‘Ali was actually born inside the Ka’aba.

Abu Tālib was also uncle to a young businessman named Muhammad, who later became the founder of Islam. Abu Tālib had raised Muhammad after the death of the young man’s parents. Now Muhammad repaid the favor, taking his cousin, ‘Ali, into his household when the boy was about eight. When Muhammad later reported that he had a divine or spiritual revelation (message) from God, others doubted him, but ‘Ali believed in him immediately. Some sources say that ‘Ali was, in fact, the first male convert to Islam. Others give this title to Muhammad’s friend, associate, and later father-in-law, Abu Bakr (573–634), who became ‘Ali’s primary rival for the leadership of Islam after the death of Muhammad.

‘Ali was a loyal helper to Muhammad during the years in Mecca when people first mocked and then tried to suppress the new religion of Islam. Despite the fact that Muhammad was a member of their

tribe, the Quraysh were particularly hostile to Islam. Their largest objection to the new faith was that it taught that there was only one God. The Quraysh made a lot of money from pilgrims who came to worship the many deities (gods and goddesses) of Arabia, so they were not pleased with Muhammad claiming these deities were false. In 622 Muhammad learned of a plot to kill him and decided to leave Mecca and settle in Yathrib (modern-day Medina). Muhammad had to slip away in the night and ‘Ali risked his own life for his cousin, sleeping in Muhammad’s bed to make others think Muhammad was still there. Although ‘Ali narrowly escaped the killers, he remained in Mecca until he had returned the money and property various people had left in safe-keeping with Muhammad. ‘Ali then made his way to Yathrib to rejoin Muhammad and his small group of followers.

Building a religion

‘Ali and the others who had followed Muhammad to Yathrib had little money, and at first they lived on the charity of new converts to Islam. They eventually began working as laborers and raiding the trade caravans sent from Mecca. This angered the Quraysh, who raised an army to fight ‘Ali and his forces. The Battle of Badr was fought in 624, and it was the first time ‘Ali was identified as a warrior. Leading a smaller force with less equipment, ‘Ali managed to defeat the army from Mecca. This victory became known throughout the region and helped to spread the word and fame of Islam. Muhammad publicly praised his younger cousin, and ‘Ali was also honored with a marriage to Muhammad’s daughter, Fatima. ‘Ali and Fatima had many children, but only four survived to adulthood. Their two sons were Hasan and Husayn (also spelled Husein), and their daughters were called Zaynab and Umm Kulthum. ‘Ali grew even closer to Muhammad with the birth of these children.

Until Muhammad’s death in 632, ‘Ali was his constant advisor, aide, and faithful lieutenant. He served in the many military campaigns that spread the power of Islam. He also became an important official in the theocracy, or government ruled by religious authority, that Muhammad established in Yathrib. By 630 Mecca had fallen to the forces of Muhammad and ‘Ali, and all of Arabia was brought under the control of the Islamic state. According to legend, it was ‘Ali who smashed the idols of the pre-Islamic deities at the Ka’aba.

Fatima

Little actual information is known about Fatima bint Muhammad (or Fatima Zahra). She was the daughter of Muhammad and his first wife, Khadija (c. 555–619). Born in about 605, Fatima married Ali when she was seventeen and had four children with him. Her one son, Husayn (c. 626–680) had a strong impact on Islam.

Fatima, however, was more than the daughter, wife, and mother of famous Muslim men. She is viewed as a holy woman in Islam, and is sometimes referred to as the patron saint of fertility. Fatima is called *al-Azhar* (the Brilliant or Shining One) and is regarded as the female ideal in Islam. Muslims often appeal to Fatima as a mediator between themselves and God. As a source of blessing, her hand is often used as a symbol for protection.

During her life Fatima was very close to her father Muhammad. Although the exact day of her death is not known, historians agree that she died in 633, about six months after Muhammad’s death. The later Fatimid Dynasty (909–1171) of North Africa and the Middle East claimed to be descended from Fatima.

When Muhammad died many Muslims assumed that ‘Ali would take over leadership of the community and the religion. Some even said that Muhammad named ‘Ali his successor just before he died. While ‘Ali and Muhammad’s family were busy preparing the body for burial, however, ‘Ali learned that Abu Bakr had been chosen by the inner circle of the community to be the next leader. ‘Ali had not even been told that this meeting was taking place. Abu Bakr took the title *khalīfatū r-rasul*, or “deputy of the messenger.” The “messenger” in this case was Muhammad, the prophet or messenger of God. In English this title has become “caliph.”

‘Ali was disappointed, and not only because of the loss of the leadership position. There was also the matter of an inheritance from Muhammad. By the time of his death, Muhammad owned a great deal of property. Abu Bakr now said that this property belonged to the full community of Islam. Some money was given to the wives of Muhammad, including A’isha, who was Abu Bakr’s daughter, but ‘Ali and Fatima were denied any inheritance. Still ‘Ali did not fight the election of Abu Bakr. He wanted there to be harmony within Islam and knew that a battle for succession would be bad for the religion.

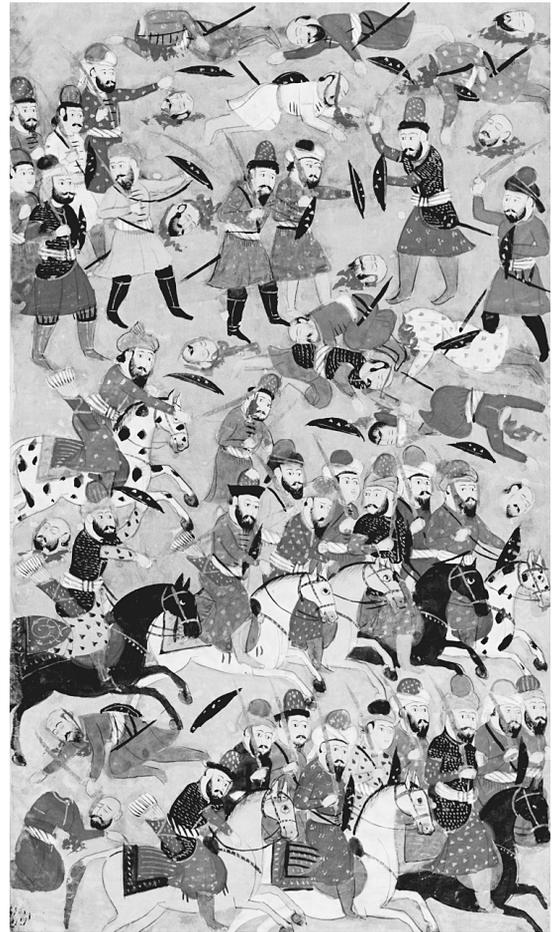
The supporters of ‘Ali, who formed a large part of the community in Yathrib, did not accept Abu Bakr at first. They were called *Rafidis*, or “refusers.” This disagreement over the succession would later lead to the major division in Islam between the Shi’a, followers of ‘Ali, and the Sunni. Meanwhile, ‘Ali spent the next several years doing religious work. He arranged the words of Muhammad chronologically, or in order of oldest to most recent, which became the content of the Muslim holy book, the Qur’an. ‘Ali was a scholar not only of the Qur’an, but also of the Hadith, which contained the sayings and deeds of Muhammad. Because of this, he became a consultant to the caliphs in religious and legal matters.

The fourth caliph

‘Ali was passed over twice more for the leadership of Islam. After the death of Abu Bakr in 634, Umar (581–684), a former advisor to Muhammad, was chosen as the second caliph. Under Umar, Islam became an imperial power, and military conquests extended the empire out of Arabia and into Syria, Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), and Egypt. ‘Ali again did not object to this choice, and even gave his daughter Umm Kulthum to Umar in marriage. Umar ruled for ten years before he was murdered in 644 by a slave. Umar was succeeded by Uthman (574–656), a member of the powerful Umayyad clan, one of the dominant families of the Quraysh tribe.

During his twelve years in power, Uthman replaced many of the generals and governors appointed by the earlier caliphs. He appointed members of the Umayyad clan to these positions. This earned the new caliph many enemies. It appeared to some critics that he was re-establishing the power of the nobles, the high-ranking families that Muhammad had originally fought against. Uthman was killed by Muslim troops in 656.

After Uthman’s death the Muslims of Yathrib chose ‘Ali to become the fourth caliph. He was at first reluctant to take the position, knowing that he would inherit the problems created by the three earlier caliphs. He also did not wish to be seen as profiting from the death of Uthman. Finally he accepted the leadership. ‘Ali immediately angered the Quraysh nobility with his attempts to bring Islam back to the traditions created by Muhammad. He sought to base his rule on the Islamic ideals of equality and social justice. As a first step, he replaced many of those Uthman put in office with his own advisors. These were people from all levels of Arab and Muslim society, not just the higher classes, which displeased the Quraysh. Additionally, the murder of Uthman had caused great anger and a desire for revenge in the Muslim world. Uthman, like ‘Ali, had been a son-in-law of Muhammad and an early



‘Ali served in many battles in the effort to spread Islam. By 630 CE ‘Ali and the Prophet Muhammad had brought all of the Arabian peninsula under the control of an Islamic state.

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convert to Islam. All these issues helped spark a five-year civil war among Muslims, called the First Civil War (656–661), or *fitnah*, which means “trial” in Arabic.

‘Ali had to battle various Muslim groups during his entire rule. The first of these was an army led by a group of Quraysh nobles, one of whom was Muhammad’s widow, A’isha. ‘Ali’s troops defeated these warriors at the Battle of the Camel at Basra, Iraq (so named because A’isha rode a camel into battle). The male leaders were killed, and A’isha was escorted back to Yathrib. After the battle ‘Ali moved his capital from Yathrib south to Kufa, in modern-day Iraq.

A new threat to ‘Ali arose in Syria, which was ruled by Muawiya (c. 602–680), a relative of Uthman. Uthman’s murder gave Muawiya the opportunity to challenge the rule of ‘Ali. The two forces clashed at the Battle of Siffin in Syria in 657. ‘Ali’s forces were winning when the Syrian troops placed copies of the Qur’an on the points of their spears and asked for arbitration (an agreement to be reached by a neutral party). ‘Ali accepted this arbitration. In doing so he angered some of his followers, who became known as the Kharijites, an Arabic word meaning “those who split apart.” These purists did not want any compromise with Muawiya.

While negotiations were underway, both ‘Ali and Muawiya removed their troops to their own lands. In 658 ‘Ali had to fight his former supporters, the Kharijites, and he killed most of them. Nothing was decided by all this bloodshed, and Muawiya continued to claim he was the rightful caliph. By 660 ‘Ali had lost control of Egypt and of the northwestern region of Arabia known as the Hejaz, where both Mecca and Yathrib were located.

‘Ali’s rule ended violently. While performing morning prayers at a mosque (Muslim house of worship) in Kufa, he was stabbed by a poisoned sword and died two days later. His killer was a Kharijite. The supporters of ‘Ali in Kufa said that ‘Ali’s son Hasan should become the next caliph, but Muawiya also wanted the position. In the end, Hasan made an agreement with Muawiya and retired to Yathrib. Muawiya became the fifth caliph, moving the capital to Damascus and establishing the first dynasty, or rule by one family, in Islam. The Umayyads ruled from 661 to 750 and reinstated the power of the old pre-Islamic nobles.

With ‘Ali’s death, the first phase of the history of the Muslim people came to a close. The first four caliphs are called the *Rasbidun*, or “rightly guided,” by Muslims because they were true to the principles of their religion in the way they governed. Afterwards, the rule of the Islamic community became similar to a hereditary monarchy, or a kingdom in which rule is passed from father to son.

‘Ali’s short reign did not accomplish the re-unification of Islam that he wanted. In fact, his greatest legacy was the split in Islam between the Shi‘a and the Sunnis. Although it began as a political disagreement over the succession of caliphs, this split later became religious when the Shi‘ites claimed ‘Ali was the first imam, or leader with divinely inspired powers. In the end, however, ‘Ali is remembered by both Shi‘ite and Sunni Muslims as a fair religious leader, a warrior, and a writer. The Mashad ‘Ali mosque was built in ‘Ali’s honor at nearby Najaf, on the spot where he is supposedly buried.

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Anaxagoras

BORN: c. 500 BCE • Clazomenae, Greece

DIED: c. 428 BCE • Lampsacus, Greece

Greek philosopher



“Other things include a portion of everything, but mind is infinite and self-powerful and mixed with nothing . . . over all that has life, both greater and less, mind rules.”

Anaxagoras was one of the most famous of early Greek philosophers. He is credited with turning Athens into a center of ancient study and intellectual activity. Anaxagoras expanded on the work of earlier philosophers, especially those from the Milesian or Ionian School. These thinkers proposed that substances such as air, fire, water, or earth made up the universe. Anaxagoras, in contrast, proposed that the universe was made up of a substance that could be divided infinitely, or forever.

Anaxagoras, like many other philosophers of his time, sought to find an explanation for the source of motion by searching for an organizing principle. Anaxagoras believed this principle was what he called *nous* or “mind.” His theory was that *nous* set unarranged matter in the universe into motion and created order from it. Because of his focus on this principle, Anaxagoras has been credited both with an advance towards

Anaxagoras.
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theism, the concept of a personal creator-god involved in human affairs, and with the first steps toward atheism, or the total disbelief in god or gods. In placing nous as the beginning of creation, Anaxagoras paved the way for believing in a single creative force, God. Ironically, his philosophical concept of nous also helped lead to a rejection of all gods, for the beginning of the world and creation could now be explained in scientific terms rather than religious ones.

Early years

Anaxagoras was born in about 500 BCE, into a wealthy and noble family in the town of Clazomenae in Ionia in Asia Minor. This strip of land along the coast of what is modern-day western Turkey was part of Greece during Anaxagoras's lifetime. About fifty years before Anaxagoras's birth, Ionia had been conquered by the Persians under Cyrus the Great. The Persians were harsh rulers, and in 498 BCE the Greeks of Ionia rebelled against the current Persian ruler, Darius. The revolt was defeated in 492 BCE, but led to the later Persian Wars. In these wars, Persia attempted to punish Athens for having helped the Ionian citizens in their rebellion. Roughly fifty years of periodic warfare followed.

Anaxagoras was born into complex times. His focus, however, was on the mind rather than military and political affairs. Although little is known of these early years of Anaxagoras's life, it is believed that as a young man he gave up his noble position and wealth in order to concentrate on science. Most likely he was aware of the intellectual activity that was occurring in the nearby seaport of Miletus, which had no priesthood or king that ruled as God's representative on Earth. There early philosophers sought to describe the nature of the universe using reason and logic. They formed the Ionian or Milesian School of writers and thinkers, which was the birthplace of Greek philosophy.

Thinkers such as Thales (c. 636–c. 546 BCE), Anaximander (c. 611–c. 547 BCE), and Anaximenes (sixth century BCE) focused their attention on the study of nature. They were searching for an elemental building block of matter or for one primary substance or originating principle, the *arché*. The one primary substance or originating principle refers to the one substance that existed at the beginning of time. Anaximander defined the primary source of everything as *apeiron*, or the unlimited and infinite (forever). Anaximenes believed that everything was originally composed of air or vapor, the thinning and thickening of which gave substance to

life. Heraclitus (c. 535–c. 475 BCE), from Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor, credited fire as the original substance that formed everything and declared change was the only constant in the universe. Such change, according to Heraclitus, was guided by *logos*, or reason. Heraclitus, though not Ionian, advanced this search for the primary building blocks of the universe by saying that there were four unchanging elements: earth, water, fire, and air. These elements were combined and separated by Love and Strife, his organizing principles.

Anaxagoras was aware of the work of these Ionian philosophers. Even before the age of twenty, when he departed for Athens, he saw that their arguments failed to explain movement and change. He was determined to create a theory that accounted for all aspects of the universe. In Athens, Anaxagoras became friends with the young statesman Pericles (c. 495–429 BCE). Pericles rose to prominence in about 460 BCE, becoming a popular political and military leader of the city. Anaxagoras was also said to be friends with other important Athenians, and some say he was even a teacher of the famous philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE), though this is unlikely.

Time in Athens

Anaxagoras's years in Athens were productive ones. By about 467 BCE he produced his major work of writing, *On Nature*, only fragments of which exist today. Many quotations from Anaxagoras come from the works of later philosophers. In *On Nature*, Anaxagoras attempted to further the work of the earlier Ionian School thinkers. Instead of air, fire, water, and earth as the four elements of creation, Anaxagoras said that there were an infinite number of particles or “seeds” (*spermata*) that combined to create everything in the universe. These seeds, or building blocks, could be divided into smaller parts, or combined to form larger items. Anaxagoras claimed that this ability of matter to be divided or combined together accounted for the vast variety of forms in the universe.

Anaxagoras's creation of the cosmos Anaxagoras held that these seeds were eternal and have always been in existence. For Anaxagoras, there was no such thing as a void or empty space. At the beginning of the cosmos (universe), such seeds were initially in one huge mass without shape or form. Through nous, or organizing principle, this mass was set in rotary motion. This motion caused the mass to separate out into smaller elements.

Anaxagoras believed the creation of the world was due to this separating of the seeds and by the effect of the spinning motion on these seeds. The formation of the universe or cosmos took place in two stages. First was the revolving process, which separated and then remixed the particles. In this stage, all the dark particles came together to form night, and the fluid seeds joined to make the oceans. The friction in this rotary motion in turn caused heat, which set the stars and sun on fire.

The development of all living things came in the second stage, when the same types of seeds or particles attracted others like them. The separation of the seeds by the rotary motion was imperfect, as Anaxagoras noted, and therefore, according to his theory, there are a few seeds of everything in everything else. What makes something what we believe it to be is that it has a majority of seeds of one type. For example, white is white because it has a majority of white seeds, but it also contains black seeds. Hair is hair, because most of its seeds are of the hair type, but it also has parts of everything else in creation in it.

Ordering the universe and studying it An important factor of Anaxagoras's theory is the action he claimed *nous* had upon the organization of the universe. This approach was popular with later philosophers such as Socrates (469–399 BCE), Plato (428–348 BCE), and Aristotle (384–322 BCE), all of whom were highly concerned with ethical problems and how to live a good life. For them, the concept of an ordering principle to the universe, such as *nous*, was appealing. They criticized Anaxagoras, however, for not taking his theory further and explaining the purpose of such an ordering principle. Anaxagoras simply explained his theory of matter and motion but did not ask why it happened as it did.

Anaxagoras was also known for his work in astronomy (the study of the sun, moon, planets, stars, and objects found in space), which may have been inspired by the fall of a large meteorite, or mass of matter that falls to Earth from space, near Aegyptomi in 467 BCE. He believed that the sun was a blazing ball of metal about the size of the Peloponessus, the major island of southern Greece. Anaxagoras went further, however, and said that the moon was made of similar matter as Earth and shone because it reflected light from the sun. From this, he went on to describe how Earth moves between the sun and moon, blocking the light and causing lunar eclipses. He also explained how the moon sometimes moves between Earth and sun, causing a solar eclipse.

Anaxagoras accused

Anaxagoras's theories of the universe angered some citizens of Athens because they challenged the accepted beliefs of the time. His friendship with Pericles may also have caused Anaxagoras trouble. Pericles had enemies, and these enemies ultimately targeted his friends. Some time around 450 BCE Anaxagoras was imprisoned and charged with impiety, or disbelief in the gods. The reason for his imprisonment was his claim that the sun was only a huge mass of hot metal and not a god, as was commonly believed at the time. He was also accused of maintaining secret communications with the Persians, the enemy of Athens, and was sentenced to death. Pericles used his influence and had the death sentence changed to one of exile, which meant Anaxagoras's life was spared, but he was forced to live outside of Athens.

Exile in Lampsacus Anaxagoras left Athens for Lampsacus, an ancient Greek city in northwestern Asia Minor. Many young Greeks came to study with him until his death in 429 BCE. Few specifics are known of Anaxagoras's work in exile. However, a much later Roman author and architect mentioned that Anaxagoras created theater designs that allowed viewers to better see objects in the front and back of the stage. This suggests that Anaxagoras also may have done some philosophical work on perspective, perhaps the earliest of its kind. Perspective is the appearance to the eye of objects in respect to their relative distance and position.

Anaxagoras was not the last of the great philosophers of ancient Greece to be accused of not believing in the gods. Socrates was also tried for this offense and put to death. Aristotle was accused of the same crime, but fled from Athens, saying he refused to allow the Athenians to sin against philosophy a third time.

Pericles

Pericles, a well-known speaker and patron of learning and the arts, was born around 493 BCE in Athens. Although for much of his early life he was concerned with the theatre, in 461 BCE he became involved in politics. He helped organize a vote in the popular assembly that took power away from the Areopagus, the ancient aristocratic council that ruled Athens. The vote left the Areopagus basically a legal court rather than a ruling council.

Pericles then initiated a number of democratic reforms in Athens, including the payment of salaries to state officials and the opening of such offices to commoners. He introduced laws that limited the power of the Athenian aristocrats, although this won him many enemies. He also established a truce with Athens's long-time rival, Sparta, which created a golden age of peace in the city.

During his involvement in politics, Pericles continued to support the arts. Around 447 BCE he also began to show a strong interest in building and architecture. He oversaw the construction of the Parthenon, which he envisioned as a monument to the power of Athens. The Parthenon was built on the central fortified hill of the city, the Acropolis.

Pericles was eventually driven from office by political enemies, but was reelected the city's military commander in 428 BCE. He died shortly thereafter.

Effects on thought

Anaxagoras's work had a significant effect on philosophy and thought. His theory of nous proved an inspiration for Socrates, though the latter was sorry Anaxagoras had not taken his argument further. For Socrates, nous seemed to be simply a mechanical means of organizing the universe, a force without morality or goal. Socrates believed there was more than this to the universe. Nevertheless, Anaxagoras's theory of creation is historically important because some of its aspects were adopted by later scientists. These include his theory of the rotating cosmic mass at the beginning of time and his idea that the basic building blocks of life could be divided.

More importantly, by attempting to explain the process of creation without relying on gods as the driving factor, Anaxagoras helped to pave the way for criticism of religious ideas about the origin of the universe. His explanation of the formation of heavenly bodies such as the sun, stars, and the moon ultimately led to doubts in God's existence (agnosticism) or possibly even a complete lack of belief in God or gods (atheism). Some historians, however, call Anaxagoras the father of theism, the belief in a personal god that created the universe, or even of monotheism, the belief in one supreme being. Although it was never referred to as a god, the nous Anaxagoras believed in was the thing that set the early cosmos in motion and organized life. This was taken by some to mean that Anaxagoras's theory focused on one power or force in the universe, rather than a pantheon, or group, of gods as the Greeks had believed. Therefore, the father of agnosticism or atheism is sometimes also called the father of monotheism.

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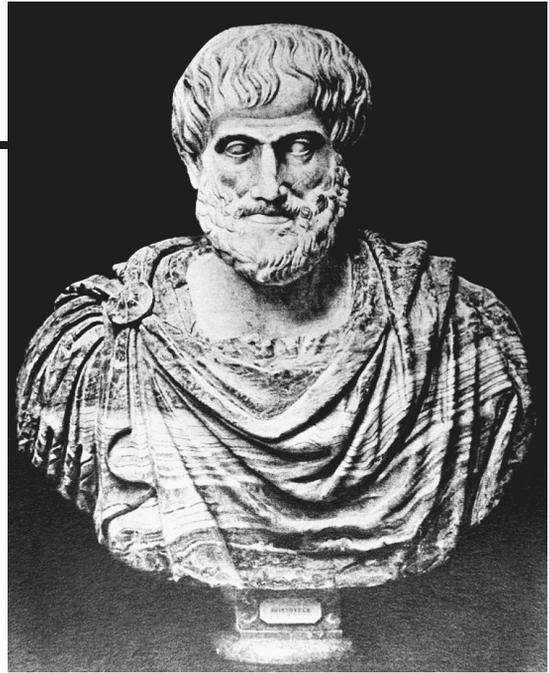
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Aristotle

BORN: 384 BCE • Stagira, Chalcidice, Greece

DIED: March 7, 322 BCE • Chalcis, Euboea, Greece

Greek philosopher; biologist; scientist; educator; writer



“The whole is more than the sum of its parts.”

Aristotle, and his teacher **Plato** (c. 427–347 BCE; see entry) were the most famous of the classic Greek philosophers. The word *philosophia* means “love of wisdom,” a concept embraced with great energy by men such as these. Aristotle wrote not only on philosophical and logical matters, but also on biology, the natural sciences, ethics, politics, poetry, drama, economics, meteorology (the study of weather), astronomy (the study of the planets and stars), theology (the study of religion), and psychology (the study of the mind). Most significantly, he was the first to treat many of these areas of knowledge as subjects worthy of individual study. His existing writings fill more than two thousand pages, and that is thought to be only a small portion of his total work.

Plato searched for the ultimate reality behind existence. Aristotle found such a reality in existence itself and set out with excitement to organize and categorize it all. His classification system for animals was the model used for almost two thousand years. The same desire for order influenced Aristotle’s approach to human conduct. He felt that achieving happiness was humanity’s chief goal, and he organized all human

Aristotle.

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behavior into a pyramid detailing the actions that led to this supreme goal for the individual.

Aristotle, perhaps more than any other great thinker, paved the way for the development of Western intellectual study. Though many of his conclusions on natural sciences—for example, the sun revolves around the earth—have been proved false, his ideas and methods are still used by modern-day thinkers. His greatest accomplishments were the formation of a system for studying formal logic and the establishment of the study of zoology, the branch of biology dealing with animals. His work in ethics, or proper behavior, was also significant. Many of his ideas were later adapted by the Arab philosopher Averroës (1126–1198); the Jewish scholar **Maimonides** (1135–1204; see entry); the Scholastics, or medieval church scholars, such as Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274); and by rationalist thinkers (those who believe in reason over experience) such as Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), who drafted the United States Constitution and served as the country's third president.

The doctor's son

Aristotle was born in the small town of Stagira, in the northern Greek province of Chalcidice, in 384 BCE. His mother's name was Phaestis, and she came from Chalcis in the province of Euboea. His father, Nicomachus, was a doctor. Nicomachus probably intended to hand down his medical skills to his son, as was the tradition of the time, so as a young boy Aristotle most likely studied biology and anatomy. The family later moved to the neighboring province of Macedonia, a powerful district in Greece, and Nicomachus soon won an appointment as court physician to the king, Amyntas III. It is not known if Aristotle accompanied his father to Pella, the capital city of Macedonia, but it is clear from historical records that he became friends as a youth with the king's son, Philip (382–336 BCE), who later became King Philip II of Macedon.

Aristotle's life changed greatly when he was ten. His father died, and his mother passed away not long after. He was put into the care of his uncle, Proxenus, who saw to the youngster's further education in the humanities. Aristotle studied Greek, rhetoric (the study of the use of language), and poetry. He had already been taught the sciences by his father. At about the age of seventeen, in 367 BCE, Aristotle was sent to Athens, where he became a student in the Academy, the educational institution established by Plato about two decades earlier. Aristotle remained at

the Academy for twenty years, as both student and teacher, lecturing and writing on rhetoric.

With the death of Plato in 347 BCE, Aristotle finally left the Academy. There are several explanations for this move. Some say it is because he was passed over for head of the Academy in favor of Plato's nephew, with whom Aristotle had philosophical differences. Aristotle's connections to the Macedonian court may also have been a factor in his decision to leave. Phillip II came to the throne in 359 BCE, and his kingdom was a challenge to the power of Athens. Anti-Macedonia sentiment was strong in Athens as a result, and some thought that Aristotle left the city because of it.

The wandering scholar

Aristotle found a more welcoming environment on the coast of Asia Minor at Assus, where the ruler, Hermias of Atarneus, a former soldier, wanted to establish the system of Greek learning. Hermias not only offered Aristotle a school to head, but also provided a bride for him. Aristotle married Hermias's niece and adopted daughter, Pythias. The couple was married for ten years and had a daughter.

Aristotle worked on part of his book, *Politics*, in Assus, sketching out his ideas about the purpose of the city-state, which he believed was to provide an atmosphere where philosophy could thrive. Aristotle was in favor of rule by an enlightened oligarchy, or a small and dominant class of well-educated rulers, who had the best interests of the people at heart. He said the kings of such an oligarchy should, however, be willing to take the advice of wise philosophers.

Aristotle and his followers also began to collect observations on the physical structures of animals that helped lay the foundations of biological sciences. Aristotle continued these studies when he left Assus for the neighboring island of Lesbos (modern-day Mytilene). His move was the result of political events; an uprising had led to the execution of Assus's ruler and Aristotle's protector, Hermias. Aristotle stayed on Lesbos for a year, gathering a group of scholars around him. He continued his studies in animal life, developing his theory that all plants and animals have goals or natural ends. To Aristotle, such ends must be understood in order to comprehend the animal's physical structures fully. Such belief is called teleology, and it assumes there is some sort of organizing principle at work in the cosmos. It was during this time that Aristotle also formed

Aristotle assembled a group of followers in Pella and took them with him when he left the capital for his hometown, Stagira, in 340 BCE. After the death of his wife, Aristotle formed a lifelong relationship with a woman named Herpyllis, and they had a son together, Nicomachus, named after Aristotle's father. He remained in Stagira until 335 BCE, when he returned to Athens. He was nearly fifty, which was considered quite old as the life expectancy of most Greeks at the time was around twenty.

Founds the Lyceum

In Aristotle's absence from Athens, the leadership of the Academy had passed to an old friend, Xenocrates of Chalcedony. Aristotle began teaching at a location near the temple of Apollo Lyceus, just outside Athens in a grove of olive trees. The school was called the Lyceum, after its temple location. A shaded walkway, the *peripatos*, was a favored place of instruction for Aristotle, who liked to walk as he lectured. Because of this, the school also became known as the Peripatetic School, as *peripatoi* means "to walk." Aristotle believed that a person could not really claim to know a subject until he could teach it to another. For the next twelve years, he lectured at the school while he continued his research.

The wide variety of subject matter offered for study made Aristotle's Lyceum different from the Academy founded by Plato. Indeed, because of the many subjects Aristotle taught, and also because of his emphasis on observation and research, many consider the Lyceum to be the first true university in history. Aristotle also founded a library and museum at the Lyceum, further enhancing its reputation.

It was during his years at the Lyceum that Aristotle composed most of his writings. Many of these works are in the form of dialogues, a model Plato had originated, in which theories and ideas are presented and explained in popular language in the form of a conversation between two people. He also wrote many treatises, or systematic explanations of a subject, in more formal and technical language.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, anti-Macedonian sentiment again became high in Athens. The people of Athens blamed Macedonians like Alexander and his father for taking away their power as a city-state. Aristotle again became the focus for some of this negative sentiment. Like another well-known philosopher before him, Socrates (470–399 BCE), Aristotle was charged with impiety, or disbelief in the

Aristotle the Man

It is difficult to get an accurate picture of Aristotle as a normal human being, rather than as a giant of thought. The busts and engravings that still exist show a rather handsome and elegant individual. Some writings, however, describe Aristotle in less flattering terms.

According to these descriptions, he had very thin legs, small eyes, suffered from poor digestion, and spoke with a lisp. These reports also say he wore fashionable clothing to compensate for his physical defects. His cloak and sandals were always of the finest materials. He wore finger rings and kept his hair cut short. Whether or not he lisped, he was known as a fine public speaker, and was clear, witty, and persuasive in his lectures and in conversation. It is believed that he was comfortable financially, and his family's holdings in Stagira allowed him to indulge his passion for collecting books. Aristotle appears to have been devoted to his family, and he made continual references to them in his will.

gods. Instead of facing his accusers, Aristotle left Athens, saying that he would not give the Athenians a chance to sin against philosophy again, for Socrates had been put to death as a result of his trial. Aristotle went to his mother's estate in Chalcis on the island of Euboea. The next year, 322 BCE, Aristotle developed stomach problems and died.

The works

Historians think it likely that Aristotle authored more than 170 books. Of these, only about thirty are still in existence. These works cover Aristotle's wide range of interests, but it is uncertain if they were ever meant to be published, as they resemble working papers and lecture notes rather than perfected pieces. The polished works meant for publication have largely been lost. No real chronology or timeline can be established for Aristotle's works, so they are usually organized by subject or discipline. Although Aristotle wrote about many different theories, a central theme in his work is his belief that reality

and the fundamentals of existence can only be understood by careful observation and categorization.

Aristotle was essentially an empiricist, or someone who believes knowledge should be gained through experience and experimentation. He not only used observation to learn about an object or being, but also studied what others had said about it. He was an advocate of two different types of reasoning. In deductive reasoning, he would take a general idea, such as "all birds can fly" and conclude that, based on this, if he saw a bird, it could fly. In inductive reasoning, he approached the argument in reverse order, going from a specific statement to a general idea. "This particular bird can fly," Aristotle might have said, "therefore all birds can fly."

Logic and the sciences Aristotle published six discussions on logic collected in the *Organon* ("a tool or instrument of thought"). He intended this work to provide his readers with a universal method of reasoning

whose use would make it possible to learn everything there was to know about reality. Aristotle's primary work in philosophy is the *Metaphysics*. In the twelve books of *Metaphysics* Aristotle rejects Plato's idea of abstract and universal forms. He lays out his reasoning for the eternal existence of substance.

In *Physics*, Aristotle details one of his most important ideas, the Four Causes, which forms the core of modern Western scientific thought. Aristotle said that in order to understand an object, a person must be able to answer four questions about it. The first cause, or descriptive trait, is the material out of which the thing is made. Next is the formal cause, or the pattern, structure, or model of the thing. The efficient cause is how the thing came into being, or was created. The final cause is the goal, function, or purpose of the object. Aristotle also addressed social issues and politics in *Politics*, literary art in *Poetics*, and the use of persuasive language in *Rhetoric*.

Ethics Two of Aristotle's works, *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, deal with moral behavior. In these works, Aristotle discussed how moral responsibility is assumed by individuals, the ways such moral responsibility was evaluated, the nature of friendship, and how to achieve happiness in human life. The major question Aristotle sought to answer was what was necessary for an individual to be a good person. Aristotle concluded that ethics are man-made rather than passed down by a supernatural being or god. He also felt that whether an action was right or wrong varied according to the situation, which was a new concept at the time. This belief made him suspicious of strict and unchanging principles. (An example of a strict, unchanging principle is the Christian commandment "Thou shall not kill.")

Aristotle called his belief that all actions needed to be judged according to the situation "equity." This has become a guiding principle in the modern-day legal system and is also integral to parts of Christianity. In the modern legal system and in Christianity, the condition of guilt or of committing a sin depends in part on a person's intent. For example, in law, murdering someone with intent and not in self defense is called homicide and is punished more severely than causing a death accidentally, which is called manslaughter. Aristotle believed that happiness was the primary goal of mankind. He claimed that such happiness could be found in doing good deeds, because virtuous activity, rather than a focus on mindless amusement, led to a life of real value. For Aristotle,

intellectual thought was the highest form of moral activity because it was what human beings were best suited for. He believed it was the ultimate cause or reason for being. This system of thought has formed the core of Western intellectual study for more than two thousand years.

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Bahá'u'lláh

BORN: November 12, 1817 • Tehran, Persia

DIED: May 29, 1892 • Acre, Palestine, Persia

Persian religious leader; writer

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. . . . The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”

Bahá'u'lláh, a Persian noble by birth, was the founder of the Bahá'í faith. Bahá'u'lláh was a writer as well as a religious leader, and he produced hundreds of books, speeches, and essays during his lifetime. The most important of these works is the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, or “Book of Laws,” which is the primary sacred text for Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh called himself the Messenger of God, claiming he was a prophet like the **Buddha** (563–483 BCE; see entry), **Jesus Christ** (c. 4 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry), and **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry).

A privileged childhood

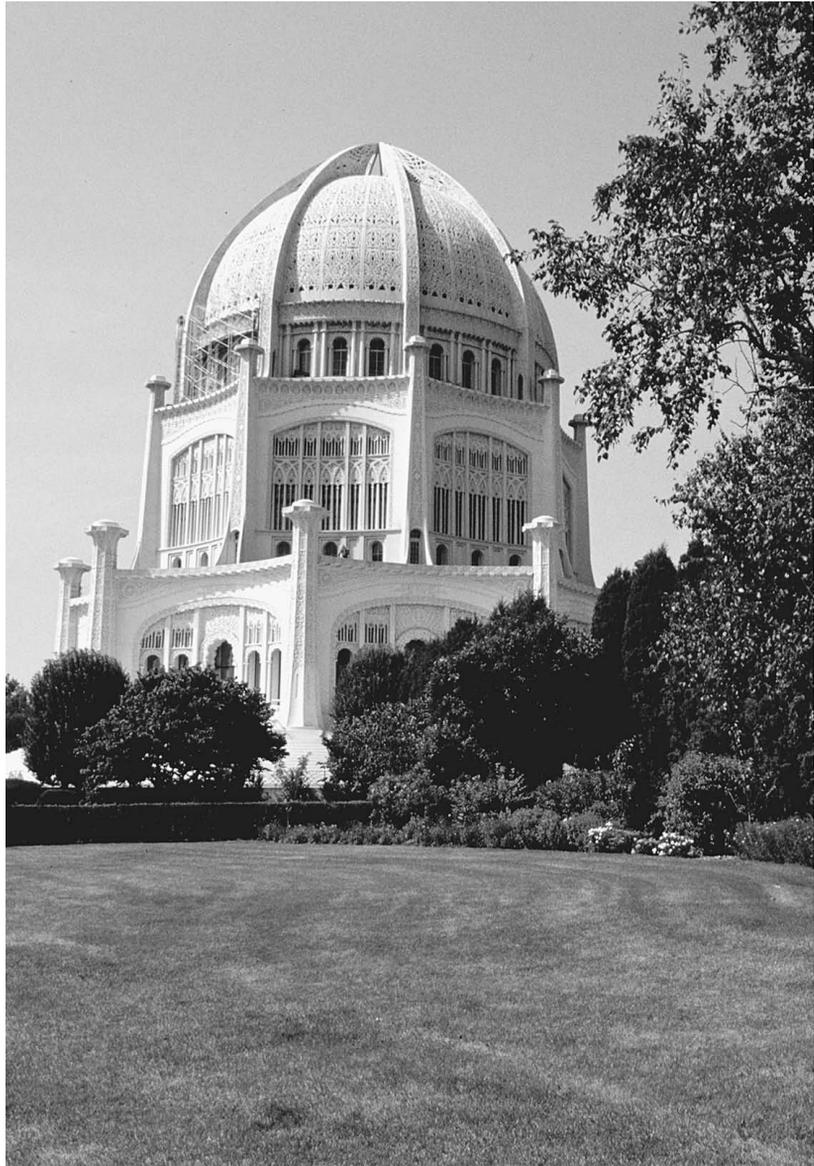
Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, later known as Bahá'u'lláh, was born on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, Persia (modern-day Iran). He was the son of a well-respected nobleman who held a position at the court of the shah (ruler) of Persia, Fath-'Ali Shah (1762–1834). His father was Mirza Abbas Nuri, better known as Mirza Buzurg, and his mother's name was Khadijih Khanum. The Nuri family traced its heritage back to a ruling family of Persia in the seventh century.

Nuri grew up in a wealthy household and was a sensitive and well-educated youth. According to his biographers, he began demonstrating an interest in spiritual matters at an early age. One story relates that while viewing a puppet show he was struck by how temporary and

Bahá'u'lláh

The Bahá'í temple in Wilmette, Illinois, was the first Bahá'í temple constructed in the West. Its foundation was laid under the oversight of Bahá'u'lláh's son and successor, Abdu'l-Baha.

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short life is, because when the show came to an end, all the puppets were quickly packed into a trunk and taken away. Like other young men of the Persian upper class, Nuri was trained in horsemanship, swordsmanship, calligraphy (fine writing), and classic poetry. He was brought up in the Muslim faith and belonged to the Shi'ite branch of that religion, one of the two main sects of Islam. Some sources report that by the age

of thirteen, Nuri was already having complex discussions with Muslim religious officials regarding spiritual issues and details in the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book.

Nuri's father was a favorite at court and was appointed governor of two provinces in the late 1820s. When the old *shah*, or leader, died in 1834, however, one of his sons took over and wanted to show his independence from his father and all his old advisors. Mirza Buzurg was no longer a royal favorite and lost his positions and salary. He did manage to keep his family's lands near the village of Takur in the district of Nur, which was located in the province of Mazandaran.

Joins the Babis

Nuri married his first wife, Asiyih Navvab, in 1835. She was the daughter of another noble family, and together they had three children. Muslim law permitted polygamy, or having more than one spouse, so Nuri also wed two other women. He was the father of fourteen children in total, only seven of whom survived to adulthood. Despite the fact that his father was not liked by the new shah, Nuri was offered a post in the government. He turned it down and instead chose to work for the good of humanity by organizing various charities with his first wife. By the early 1840s his kind deeds had earned him the name "Father of the Poor," and he became highly respected in Tehran.

During this time Nuri was also becoming involved in the more mystical teachings of the Shi'ite Muslim religion. Shi'ites believe that there are divine successors to the Prophet Muhammad. Such a person is called an *imam*. Shi'ites are waiting for the return of the twelfth and final imam, who they believe went into hiding in the ninth century to avoid being killed by rivals. His return, according to the Shi'ites, will usher in a new golden age for the world, a belief similar to that held by Christians regarding the second coming of God's son, Jesus Christ. Indeed, during the first half of the nineteenth century, there were several movements throughout the world that claimed a new spiritual age was close to arrival. In the United States and Europe, many groups declared that Christ was about to return, while in the Muslim world some predicted a new messiah, or savior, would soon come to save the world. Some called this savior the Twelfth Imam while others referred to him as the *mahdi*, which translates as "he who is divinely guided."

The Twelve Principles of Bahá'í

The Bahá'í faith is guided by twelve main principles or laws:

1. The oneness of the entire human race.
2. The independent investigation and search for truth.
3. The harmony between religion and science.
4. The idea that religion is unfolding, always growing, and that the gods of all religions are representatives of the one true God.
5. All religions have the same divine foundation and are thus part of each other and not separate from or better than others.
6. The equality of men and women.
7. The removal of all prejudice regarding race, religion, and class.
8. The creation of universal peace through a world government.
9. The creation of universal compulsory (required) education.
10. The need for a universal language shared by all humankind.
11. The solution of economic problems through spirituality.
12. The creation of a Universal House of Justice with a divinely inspired president.

By following these guiding principles laid out by Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís believe they will create the kingdom of heaven on Earth.

In 1844 a holy man from Shiraz, Persia, announced that he was the *Bab*, or “gateway” to the Twelfth Imam. This man, named Siyyid ‘Ali Muhammad (1819–1850), claimed to be the spokesperson for the purer spiritual age to come and criticized what he saw as the intellectual dishonesty of the Muslim religious leaders. He also promised that within twenty years a Messenger of God would appear and teach humanity the principles for this new spiritual age. The Bab won followers throughout Persia, one of whom was Nuri, who converted to Babism, as the religion became known, in 1844. Nuri’s half-brother, Mirza Yahya (1830–1912), also converted to the new faith. Due to his impressive speaking ability and the high standing of his family, Nuri quickly became one of the movement’s most successful speakers in spreading the word of the new faith.

The Babi movement was greatly distrusted by the Muslim religious leaders, or *mullahs*, who felt threatened by the Bab. The mullahs encouraged the government to attempt to stop the movement, and the Bab was imprisoned. In 1848 the Babi leadership, including Nuri and Mirza Yahya, met to discuss how they might get the Bab out of prison. The Bab decided to make a final break with the laws and principles of Islam. At this point Nuri took the name Bahá'u'lláh, which means “Glory of God.” His half-brother assumed the title Subh-i Azal, or “Morning of Eternity.” Bahá'u'lláh, as one of the leaders of the Babis, was closely watched by the mullahs and the government. When the Bab was put to death in

1850, Bahá'u'lláh, who still had friends in powerful positions, was advised to leave Tehran.

When Bahá'u'lláh returned to Tehran in 1852, he discovered that a plot had been formed by several Babis to kill the shah in revenge for

the execution of the Bab. Although Bahá'u'lláh rejected this plan, it was carried out, unsuccessfully, in August 1852. Bahá'u'lláh was one of many Babis arrested after the incident. Thousands were executed, and Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in a huge jail in Tehran known as the *Siyab-Chal*, or the “black pit.” There he received what he called a visitation from a “Maiden from God” who told him that he was the Messenger of God of whom the Bab had spoken. When Bahá'u'lláh was found innocent of the attempted crime and released several months later, he did not tell anyone of the visitation. He and his family, along with many other Babis, were banished from Persia by the authorities and decided to settle in Baghdad, in present-day Iraq. The city at that time was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, a dynastic (ruled by the same family or line) state that was based mostly in modern-day Turkey.

Into exile

Though Bahá'u'lláh felt that he was the messenger the Bab said would come, the leadership of the Babi religion passed to his half-brother, Subh-i Azal. Some historians believe that Subh-i Azal was actually a false leader set up to protect the real authority of the Babis from government harassment. Subh-i Azal took his position seriously, however, and tensions grew between the two men. Many new followers to the religion and those visiting Baghdad saw Bahá'u'lláh as the spiritual leader and not Subh-i Azal. In order to avoid conflict and to take some time to consider the mission that he had been given by the Maiden of God, Bahá'u'lláh went alone into the mountains of Kurdistan, far to the north of Baghdad. He stayed there for two years, during which he wrote one of his first books, *Four Valleys*.

In 1856 Subh-i Azal discovered the whereabouts of Bahá'u'lláh and wrote his half-brother, asking him to come back to Baghdad. When Bahá'u'lláh returned to the city, he discovered that twenty-five people had already claimed to be the Messenger of God that the Bab spoke of. He also learned that Subh-i Azal had had several of his opponents killed.

Bahá'u'lláh's became even more well-known in Baghdad during the next seven years, and he continued writing texts of his teachings and spiritual discoveries. A couple of the most important of these were the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, or the *Book of Certitude*, and the *Hidden Words*. In 1862 Bahá'u'lláh completed the Bab's *Bayan*, a book of laws for the Babis, which had been

left unfinished with only eleven of its proposed nineteen chapters written. Bahá'u'lláh used his authorship of these works to argue that he should be the leader of the Babis, but he still did not reveal that he was the Messenger of God. Subh-i Azal also claimed to have completed the Bab's work with his Motammem Al-Bayan, and relations between the two half-brothers grew worse.

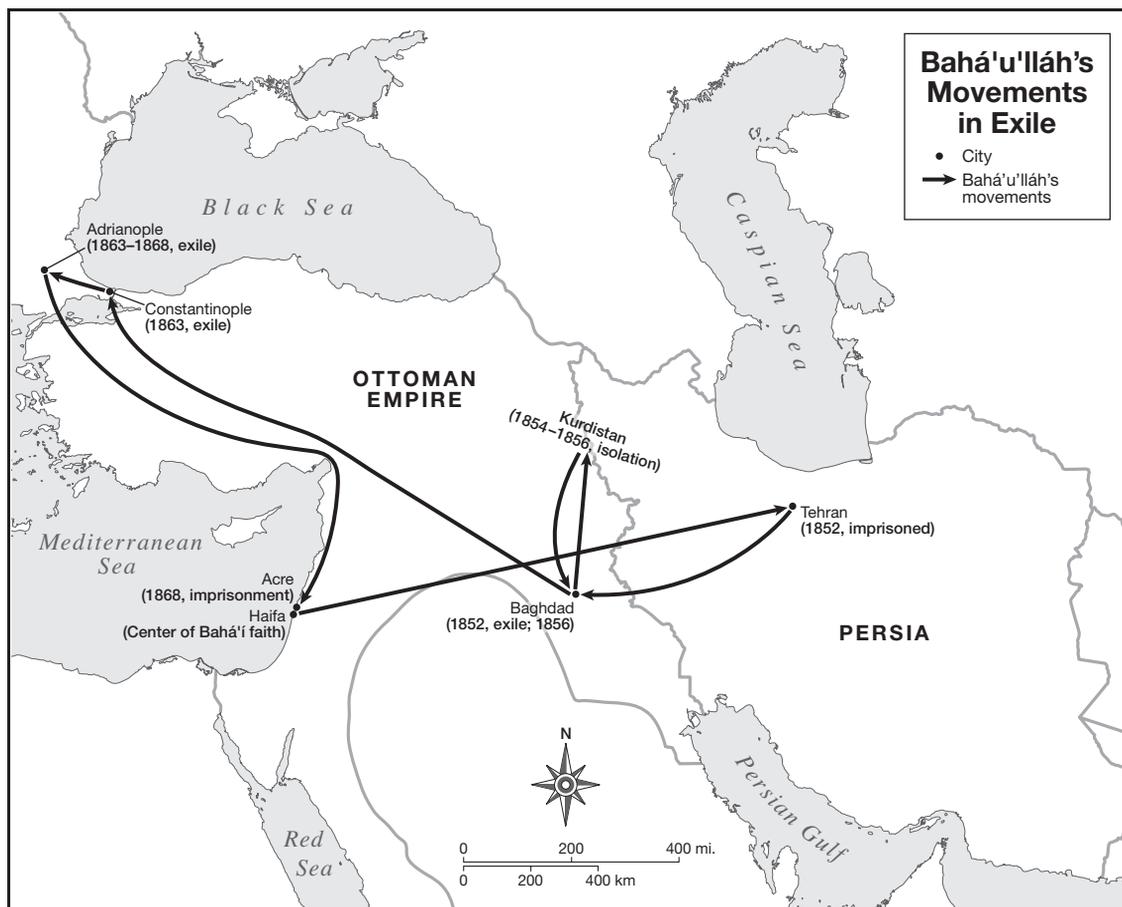
Bahá'u'lláh's influence began to reach beyond Baghdad to his native Persia. This rebirth of the popularity of the Babi movement again upset the mullahs and the Persian government. They convinced the Ottoman government, which controlled Baghdad, to banish Bahá'u'lláh from the city. In 1863, just before he was exiled to the city of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey), Bahá'u'lláh finally told a small group of followers about his visitation in prison eleven years earlier, announcing for the first time that he was the Messenger of God. This took place in the Garden of Ridvan near Baghdad, between April 21 and May 2. These dates later became an important Bahá'í holy celebration, the twelve-day Festival of Ridvan.

Splits from Babis to form the Bahá'í faith

Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and a small group of followers moved from Baghdad to Constantinople and then on to Adrianople (modern-day Edirne, Turkey). In 1866 Bahá'u'lláh publicly declared that he was the Messenger of God and a prophet, as Muhammad and Christ had been before him. He wrote official letters to political and religious leaders of the world, such as Pope Pius IX and Queen Victoria of England, announcing his presence and mission. Bahá'u'lláh declared in these letters that he was the promised one of whom all religions spoke, the Messenger of God. He also spoke out against war and the purchasing of weapons, telling these leaders that their budgets would be better spent taking care of the poor and establishing a world government that could provide security for all citizens.

These actions led to a complete break with the Babis who still followed Subh-i Azal. Those who sided with Bahá'u'lláh called themselves Bahá'ís, while followers of Subh-i Azal called themselves Azalis for a time and then Bayanis. The Bayan religion still existed as of the early twenty-first century, though with only a few thousand believers located mainly in Iran. The Bahá'ís, in contrast, went on to create one of the major world religions.

Shortly after the break, Bahá'u'lláh was poisoned, possibly on the orders of Subh-i Azal. Though he survived, the poison left a permanent



Bahá'u'lláh was forced into exile or imprisonment several times in his life as he sought to spread the word of God as it was revealed to him. He spent the last years of his life in Palestine, modern-day Israel. THOMSON GALE.

tremor, or shaking motion, in his hand. In 1868 Bahá'u'lláh and his followers were transported to the prison city of Acre in Palestine (modern-day Akko, Israel). This walled city was the final destination for some of the worst criminals and for political and religious trouble-makers. According to legend, the air was so bad in Acre that birds flying over would die. Bahá'u'lláh and his family were held for nine years, at first in the general prison population, and then in a small house inside the city walls. It was here that Bahá'u'lláh wrote the book that is central to the Bahá'í religion, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or the *Book of Laws*, also known as the *Most Holy Book of Bahá'ís*. In this work he laid out the main beliefs and principles of the Bahá'í faith.

The central belief of the Bahá'í faith is the concept of oneness. Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God and that all religions are built on the messages of that God. Similarly, Bahá'ís believe in the unity of humankind and that all humans should be treated equally. Bahá'u'lláh wrote that it is the duty of a spiritual person to try to understand God, and that the more one is able to do this, the closer one will be to the idea of heaven. He also laid out daily laws for the faithful. Members must pray at least once a day; avoid alcohol and drugs; fast (go without food and water) for nineteen days before the Bahá'í New Year, which falls on the first day of spring; do good works; and reject prejudice. There is no priesthood in the Bahá'í faith. Any member can read from the sacred texts during the monthly meetings. Bahá'u'lláh also made a covenant, or solemn agreement, with his followers. He said that if they put their faith in Bahá'í, he would lead them to a new age and guarantee the continuity of their religion by creating a line of succession, or a line of people who would lead the religion after his death. Followers of Bahá'í believe that although Bahá'u'lláh was not the last of God's messengers, he is the one who created the spiritual foundation from which global peace and unification will one day arise.

Bahá'u'lláh was finally permitted to depart Acre in 1877 to live in the nearby town of Bahji. He found an abandoned mansion and lived out the rest of his life there, continuing to write and teach. He died of a fever on May 29, 1892, after naming his oldest son, Abdu'l-Baha ("Servant of Baha" in Arabic; 1844–1921), his successor. A shrine built to Bahá'u'lláh in Bahji is the main pilgrimage site of the Bahá'í religion.

Since the death of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í faith has spread around the globe to 247 countries and has more than seven million members. Although it is one of the world's youngest religions, it had already grown to be the thirteenth largest by the early twenty-first century. The center of the Bahá'í faith is in Haifa, Israel, where the Universal House of Justice, the main administration of the Bahá'í faith, is located. The Bab and Abdu'l-Baha are also buried in this city.

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Black Elk

BORN: December, 1863 • Little Powder River,
Wyoming

DIED: August 19, 1950 • Manderson,
South Dakota

Native American shaman; writer

“The first peace . . . is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka (the Great Spirit), and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us.”

Black Elk, a medicine man and spiritual leader of the Lakota, one of the three branches of the Sioux nation, was among the most influential Native Americans of his generation. During his lifetime, the lands of his people in the modern-day U.S. states of South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming were opened to white settlement. The Indians who lived in these areas were moved to reservations or limited territories. Other Native Americans during the late nineteenth century, such as Sitting Bull (1831–1890) and Crazy Horse (1849–1877), battled against the settlers and gold miners and were killed by soldiers. Black Elk also fought as a young man and was present at two of the most important battles in the closing chapter of Indian independence: the defeat of George

Armstrong Custer (1839–1879) at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana, and the 1890 massacre of Indians at Wounded Knee in South Dakota.

Ultimately, however, Black Elk turned to the spiritual world to help his people recover from the loss of their lands. Said to experience powerful visions as a boy, he became a *wicasa wakan*, or holy man. He was also a strong supporter of the preservation, or saving, of traditional Indian religious practices. When his healing and spiritual work were limited by the whites, who the Native Americans referred to as *Wasichu*, Black Elk became a Catholic and spread his beliefs through that religion. These beliefs were documented in two important works, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux as Told to John G. Neibardt (Flaming Rainbow)* and *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Both whites and Native Americans have used these books to understand Indian traditions and spirituality.

Born to medicine men

Black Elk was born in December 1863, on the Little Powder River in what is modern-day Wyoming in the United States. He was the son of Sees the White Crow and of Black Elk, who was a medicine man for the Big Road band of Oglalas (one of the seven tribes of the Lakotas). At the time of Black Elk's birth, the United States government was beginning to take over large parts of what were traditionally Native American lands and encouraging white settlers to move to these lands. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota added to the crush of new settlers, and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad also displaced many Native Americans. (The Transcontinental Railroad was the first railroad to span the entire continent, from the east coast to the west coast. It was completed in 1869.) Several treaties (agreements) promising land rights were made with the Indians, but they were often broken by the U.S. government. The Native Americans began to lose their traditional way of life, which involved following the herds of buffalo on the Great Plains and moving from camp to camp across hundreds of miles of open land.

Black Elk began having visions as a very young boy, with one of the most important occurring when he was nine years old. In this vision a voice came to him, saying that the Grandfathers were waiting for him. Suddenly, Black Elk fell ill and went into a coma for many days. During this time, he experienced visions of being taken to a cloud world where

he met six Grandfathers. These men represented the central spirit or mystery of Lakota belief. Each Grandfather gave him some special gift, such as a wooden cup of water that represented the life force, a sacred pipe to cure sick people, or a red stick which sprouted blooming branches and represented rebirth.

The Grandfathers told Black Elk that he had the spirit of an eagle and would make his nation live once again. Black Elk also experienced tests of strength and endurance in the vision. Horses ran at him from the four directions of the compass. He saw a village of tepees arranged in a circle, but the village seemed to be dying until he rode through it and planted the red stick. The stick quickly grew into a tree at the center of the village, giving fresh life to the Native American people. More tests followed. He saw the rise and fall of his people, and he saw the sacred hoop (representing the harmony and oneness of being) broken and finally repaired again. When Black Elk woke, his parents told him that he had been sick for many days. Black Elk did not tell them of his great vision, but he knew that somehow he must work to help his people.

The shrinking world of the Lakota

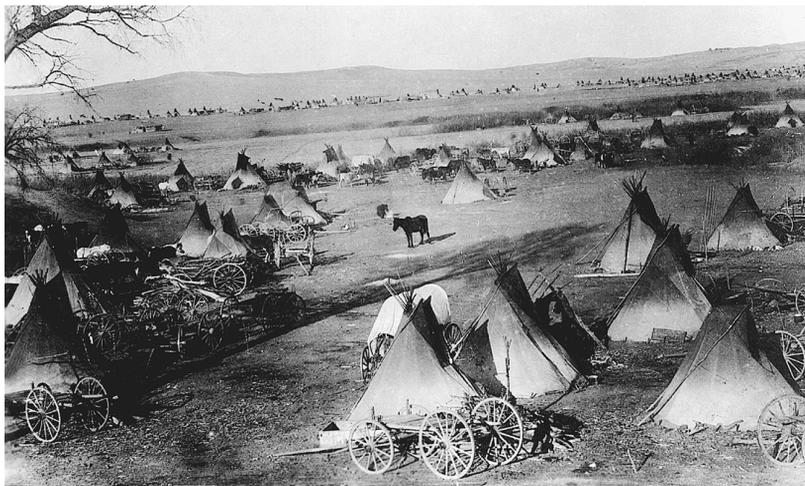
In 1866 the Lakota chief Red Cloud (1822–1909) fought and defeated the soldiers of Lieutenant Colonel William Fetterman at Fort Phil Kearny in Wyoming. Almost one hundred U.S. soldiers were killed, and Black Elk's father was injured in the battle. Red Cloud later signed the Treaty of 1868, which was supposed to save the Lakota territory from white settlement. By the terms of the treaty, the Lakota were promised the western part of modern-day South Dakota. This area included the sacred Black Hills, where Lakota tradition says man first emerged from underground to live in the world.

Despite this treaty the whites continued to push into the western lands. Custer led an patrol in 1874 and 1875 that discovered gold in the Black Hills, and the area was taken from the Lakota. By late spring of 1876, Black Elk's father had lost faith in his chief, Red Cloud, for accepting this white injustice. He took his family to join with the band led by Crazy Horse, his cousin and a chief who was still eager to fight the whites. Many other tribes gathered that summer at Greasy Grass, the Indian name for the Little Big Horn in Montana. They held a ritual Sun Dance, with the chief Sitting Bull as the leader. The next day the bands were attacked by soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry, led by Custer.

Black Elk

The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Black Elk was forced to move to the reservation in 1880. It was there that he experienced his visions for his people.

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The cavalry, however, was hugely outnumbered by the four thousand warriors it faced, and the Native Americans defeated the U.S. soldiers, killing Custer in the process. Black Elk, only twelve at the time, killed a soldier and took his first scalp at this battle.

This defeat of Custer's forces, however, did nothing to strengthen the Native Americans' claims to their land. In fact, the U.S. defeat brought more soldiers into their territory. When Crazy Horse was killed by soldiers in 1877, Black Elk's clan headed north to Canada, where they joined Sitting Bull outside the reach of the U.S. Army. In Canada, Black Elk continued to have visions, and he began to feel he should go back to his people and use the power his visions told him he had.

Black Elk returned to the United States in 1879, where he found most of the Native Americans gone and the buffalo herds destroyed by the whites. At age seventeen, Black Elk finally told an old medicine man, Black Road, about his visions, and this man became his teacher. Black Road trained Black Elk, telling him how he could use his visions and powers to create a ritual dance to educate his people. The next year Black Elk was forced to move to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. On the reservation he began to practice as a healer, or medicine man.

From Europe to the Ghost Dance

In 1886 Black Elk joined many other Native Americans, including Sitting Bull, in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Buffalo Bill (1846–1917) was a

scout and promoter who gathered a cast of hundreds and toured throughout the East Coast and Europe. Black Elk traveled with the show in an effort to learn the secrets of the Wasichu. He was disappointed, however, to learn that the whites did not have any special knowledge or powers, and that in fact they were less civilized in many ways than the Native Americans. Black Elk left Buffalo Bill after the show toured England. He joined another western show and traveled through Italy, Germany, and France. He stayed for two years in Paris, settling down with a French woman.

Black Elk had more visions while in Paris, and in 1889 he returned to Pine Ridge, where he found his family and his band suffering. The soldiers had taken their rifles and horses from them, and they were dying from diseases passed to them from the whites. Black Elk began working as a healer once again. He soon heard of a Paiute Indian named Wovoka who claimed to have had a vision for the renewal of the Native American way of life. Wovoka was leading the people in a movement called the Ghost Dance. This movement became a rallying cry for Indians across the Great Plains who thought that by dancing they could bring the buffalo back and get rid of the white settlers. Black Elk saw similarities in the vision of Wovoka and his own, and joined the Ghost Dancers. He developed colorful Ghost Shirts, which were thought to be able to protect the wearers even from bullets.

The Ghost Dance movement soon earned the suspicion of the soldiers and administrators running the reservations. They were afraid of renewed Indian wars and decided to put a stop to the practice. On December 29, 1890, soldiers rode into an Indian camp at Wounded Knee, not far from the Pine Ridge Reservation where Black Elk was living. They killed 153 men, women, and children in an effort to take their weapons away, and another 150 were missing after the attack. Black Elk rode to Pine Ridge and managed to save a baby from the massacre, but was too late to stop the rest of the slaughter. For him, this was the end of the dream of Indian independence.

Converts to Catholicism

Black Elk continued to work as a healer and holy man for the Indians on the reservation. He was married in 1892 to Katie War Bonnet. After she died in 1903 he converted to the Roman Catholic faith, taking Nicholas as his Christian name. This conversion was partly a practical measure, as the traditional Lakota spiritual practices and societies

Lakota Religion

For the Lakota people and most other Native Americans, religious practice provided a basic way of observing the world and interacting with it. The Lakota rhythm of life was determined by the movement of the sun and moon. They believed the universe was a whole, and saw the circle, or hoop, as the symbol for that unity. Another Lakota symbol of unity was the buffalo skull. The buffalo was a sacred animal to the Lakota because it provided food and skins to make clothing. At the very center of this unity was the supreme god of the Sioux religion, *Wakan Tanka*, who was called the Grandfather or the Great Mystery. According to Lakota tradition, their lives passed through four stages: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. At death, a person's spirit went to meet an old woman who would determine if the person was ready to pass on to the spirit world or would be reborn on earth to learn to live peacefully and in harmony. Values such as a sense of community, bravery, wisdom, and generosity were highly valued.

Holy men, or *wicasa wakan*, were responsible for conducting seven sacred rites or rituals

given to the Lakota by the legendary White Buffalo Calf Woman. Along with instructions for these holy rituals, she also gave the Lakota *Cannupa Wakan*, or the sacred pipe. By smoking it during ceremonies, the Lakota could send their prayers upward in the smoke to *Wakan Tanka*. The first of the seven rites was *Inikagapi*, or life renewal. During this the Lakota cleansed their bodies in a sweat lodge, a dome-shaped sauna. The second was a vision quest in which young men would be isolated on a hill for days without food or water until they experienced a vision. A third rite involved grieving for a year for dead relatives. The fourth rite, the Sun Dance, was one of the most important of all. It was a yearly gathering of tribes and bands during the summer in which participants sacrificed bits of their skin and tied them to a sacred tree at the center of the dance. Other rites included a young person taking an adopted family, prayers for a young girl just entering maturity, and a game in which a girl threw a ball up and many young men attempted to catch it. The winner was thought to be more fortunate than other participants.

were not allowed on the reservation. Although his eyesight was beginning to fail, Black Elk committed himself to his new religion with great energy and made a thorough study of the Bible, the sacred book of Christianity. He became a catechist, or assistant to the priests. Sometimes, if no priest were available, he would even perform the church services. In 1905 Black Elk took a second wife, Anne Brings White, and they were together until her death in 1941. He had four sons and a daughter from his two marriages. Black Elk became an important elder in the Oglala Lakota band. He kept their traditional practices alive by organizing dances for tourists visiting the Black Hills.

In the early 1930s, poet John G. Neihardt (1881–1973) interviewed Black Elk to get information on the Ghost Dance for a cycle of poems he was writing. Black Elk did not speak English, so he told his stories to his son Benjamin, who then translated them for Neihardt. The Lakota holy man was impressed by Neihardt's interest in Native American affairs. He decided to entrust him with his life's story and the lessons he had learned and wished to pass on to others before he died. Working together, the two men created *Black Elk Speaks*, which follows the story of Black Elk's life up to the massacre at Wounded Knee. When the book was published in 1932, it was a critical success. The book's descriptions of visions and traditional Lakota values, however, were disliked by the Jesuit priests Black Elk worked with.

Black Elk Speaks has become a classic and a favorite on school reading lists. Since its publication scholars have disagreed about how much of the work is Black Elk's and how much is Neihardt's. Regardless, as the Native American author N. Scott Momaday (1934–) noted in *A Sender of Words: Essays in Memory of John G. Neihardt*, the Black Elk–Neihardt team “is one of the truly fortunate collaborations in our American heritage, bridging times, places, and cultures.” Momaday also calls the work “an extraordinary human document.”

Other authors came to talk with Black Elk after *Black Elk Speaks* was published. One of these was Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), who interviewed Black Elk during the winter of 1947–48. Brown focused on recording the rituals of the Lakota Sioux. His book, *The Sacred Pipe*, was published in 1953, three years after Black Elk's death at eighty-six.

Black Elk is an important figure in both his own culture and the culture of whites. He contributed to the renewal of his people through his role as a holy man. He was able to blend the cultures of Native American and white by serving in both traditional Lakota spirituality and the Catholic Church. His sayings have become part of a revival in native wisdom and faith. For non-Native Americans, his words have helped inspire interest in traditional and alternative religions. Though at the end of *Black Elk Speaks* the medicine man appears saddened that he was unable to save his people, others believe that Black Elk accomplished his mission. Gretchen M. Battaile, an American critic and educator, for example, noted in an essay for *A Sender of Words*, “By keeping their traditions alive, the [Lakota] people continue to live. Through the telling of his story, Black Elk fulfilled his vision.”

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The Buddha

BORN: April 8, 563 BCE • Lumbini, Nepal

DIED: February 25, 483 BCE • Kushinagar, India

Indian philosopher; spiritual teacher



“Hold fast to the dharma as your lamp, hold fast to the dharma as your refuge, and you shall surely reach nirvana.”

Siddhartha Gautama was a prince who sought to eliminate the sufferings of life. He abandoned the luxuries of the palace for the difficulties of life as a poor ascetic, or one who shuns worldly pleasures in pursuit of spiritual truth. After years of seeking, Siddhartha became enlightened and took the name of the Buddha, or the “Awakened One.” To become enlightened means one has come to understand the realities of the world and how to end its suffering. The Buddha shared his wisdom with others throughout the rest of his life. His teachings evolved into the religion of Buddhism, the fourth largest religion in the world in the twenty-first century.

Early life

The Buddha was born Siddhartha Gautama on April 8, 563 BCE, in Lumbini in modern-day Nepal. His father, Suddhodana, was the king of a local tribe called the Shakyas. For this reason one of the Buddha’s

The Buddha.

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traditional names is Shakyamuni, meaning “wise man of the Shakyas.” His mother was Queen Maha Maya. At the time of his birth, a holy man predicted that Siddhartha would grow to become a great ruler or a great spiritual man. In fact, *Siddhartha* means “He whose purpose in life has already been attained.”

Siddhartha’s mother died shortly after his birth. Siddhartha’s father did not want his son to fulfill a spiritual destiny. He wanted Siddhartha to succeed him as king. Suddhodana did all in his power to protect Siddhartha from the tragedies of life and made sure that Siddhartha’s every desire was met. Siddhartha grew up in the palace, where he received the best education and became very skilled at archery. He was so protected that he knew nothing of life’s suffering.

By the time he was twenty-nine years old, Siddhartha was married to Yasodhara and had a son, Rahula. He had everything he wanted, and yet the young prince was not satisfied. He began to question whether there was no greater purpose to life. At the time of Siddhartha’s life, many people were asking the same type of questions. The religion of Hinduism was established but still developing in the region, and disagreements existed over religious beliefs and practices and the best way to achieve a better existence.

Siddhartha received his father’s permission to travel beyond the palace gates. His father tried to make sure that Siddhartha would not be exposed to any suffering or tragedy in town. Nevertheless, Siddhartha saw four things he had never seen before: a man with disease, a person bent and slow with age, a dead body, and an ascetic. At each sight, he asked his servant, Channa, to explain what he was seeing. Siddhartha came to realize that people grew old, suffered, and died. He also came to understand that there were people, such as the ascetic, who looked for ways to escape from this suffering.

He returned to the palace, his thoughts troubled by what he had learned. Siddhartha felt compelled to find the answers to this suffering. That evening Siddhartha left his wife and son in the palace and renounced the only life he had known. Outside the palace gates, he changed into a simple robe, cut off his hair, and took a bowl for the food he would beg. Siddhartha then walked off into the forest to become an ascetic.

Enlightenment

Siddhartha devoted himself to attaining spiritual understanding. He learned yoga and meditation. Yoga is an intense physical and spiritual

discipline meant to focus and train the mind to receive spiritual truths. Meditation is the practice of tuning out distractions in the world to focus inward and achieve spiritual knowledge. Siddhartha even subjected his body to great deprivation, such as going without food, in an effort to deny the material world and focus solely on the spiritual. His intense dedication impressed other ascetics and he gained followers. Siddhartha eventually realized, however, that neglecting his body weakened his mind and made it difficult for him to focus on his spiritual pursuits.

With this realization, Siddhartha began to eat regular meals again. His followers were upset, believing he had abandoned his search for enlightenment. They left him. His body satisfied, Siddhartha sat under a *bodhi*, or fig, tree near the city of Gaya, India, and fell into a deep meditation. He became completely unaware of the outside world as his senses focused increasingly inward. Mara, the tempter, soon appeared to Siddhartha and tried to distract him from his goal. He did not want anyone to know how to end suffering. Mara sent his beautiful daughters to Siddhartha, and tried to encourage passion, desire, and doubt. For weeks as he meditated, Siddhartha faced these temptations. Eventually, Mara himself appeared before Siddhartha, but Siddhartha would not be deterred.

When he awoke from his meditation, he was the Buddha, the “Awakened One.” The word *buddha* comes from the Sanskrit word *budh*, meaning “to wake up.” During his long meditation under the bodhi tree, the Buddha found escape from life’s suffering and death. This escape is called *nirvana*. The knowledge that life’s suffering could be ended, and how to end it, is called enlightenment. The Buddha was enlightened, and he sought to share his knowledge with others. His former followers realized that the Buddha had gained new insight. They returned to learn from him the *dharma*, or the path to enlightenment and nirvana.



The Buddha is tempted by the devil Mara while meditating. It was after resisting all of Mara's temptations that the Buddha achieved enlightenment. © BETTMANN/CORBIS.

Teaches the dharma

The Buddha gave his first sermon on the dharma at Deer Park, near Benares, India. In this sermon the Buddha revealed the central teachings of what would become the religion of Buddhism. The first teaching is the Four Noble Truths. These are that life contains suffering, that desire causes suffering, that nirvana is the end of suffering, and that one can attain nirvana by following the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path is the second teaching revealed by the Buddha at Deer Park. It contains the following steps:

1. Right understanding, being aware of the world the way it really is;
2. Right purpose, vowing to live life aware of its true nature rather than being deceived by illusion and desire;
3. Right speech, such as not lying or hurting others through one's words;
4. Right conduct, including not killing or harming other living beings;
5. Right occupation, including avoiding work that brings harm to others, such as hunting animals or selling weapons;
6. Right effort, trying to think, act, and speak in accordance with right understanding;
7. Right attention, keeping the mind in the present and always aware of the dharma; and
8. Right meditation, training the mind so that it can overcome its desires.

By following these eight steps, a person could attain enlightenment and achieve nirvana. The Buddha taught the Middle Way, meaning a path that avoided extreme indulgence and extreme denial. For instance, a Buddhist may abstain from alcohol by choice, but the Middle Way would allow for the drinking of alcohol so long as one did not become intoxicated. These teachings could be followed by anyone and did not rely on an authority structure, such as priests, or on ritual methods of worship. From Deer Park, the Buddha set forth to travel throughout northern India, teaching others about the dharma.

A religion for all

Indian society in the sixth century BCE was heavily divided by the caste system, a hereditary social structure that determined people's education, their jobs, who they could marry, and many other aspects of their lives.

The castes did not interact with one another beyond what may have been needed to carry out work. They did not even worship at the same temples. The Buddha, born a prince, was from the highest of the four castes. He did not, however, distinguish between castes as he spread his teachings and considered all people to be equally able to understand the dharma and achieve nirvana. This was very appealing to people, and the Buddha gained an increasing number of followers everywhere he went.

One day, five or seven years after he had left, the Buddha returned to the palace of his youth. He made converts of his family. His aunt, Maha-Pajapati Gautama, wanted to join him on his travels. The Buddha, however, would not let women join him. He told her that women could follow the dharma just as easily from home. He believed that it would be too difficult for men and women to focus on their spiritual pursuits if they had to also handle the challenges of living side-by-side. His aunt persisted, however, and became the first nun of the new religion.

In 483 BCE, after more than forty years of spreading the dharma, the Buddha's health began to fail. He had established no written teachings and no hierarchy of authority. He did not believe that these things were necessary. Shortly before his death, one of the Buddha's followers, Ananda, asked the Buddha about his successor. According to Eknath Easwaran in *The Dhammapada*, the Buddha replied, "Be a refuge unto yourselves, Ananda. Be a lamp unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves and on nothing else. Hold fast to the dharma as your lamp, hold fast to the dharma as your refuge, and you shall surely reach nirvana." A few days later, outside the town of Kusinara in modern-day Nepal, and before all of those who had followed him for so many years, the Buddha died.

Formalizing a religion

Although the Buddha himself did not believe his teachings needed to be recorded, his followers worried that without a written record, his words could be changed or reinterpreted. They did not want to lose the original meaning of the Buddha's teachings. A council of elders met a few weeks after the Buddha's death to discuss how to continue to spread the dharma to others. They agreed to write down some of the Buddha's words. This became the Dhammapada, a part of a larger collection of Buddhist sacred texts called the Tipitaka.

Buddhist Nuns

The first Buddhist nun was Siddhartha's aunt, Maha-Pajapati Gautama. When the Buddha returned to his hometown five years after gaining enlightenment, his aunt converted to his teachings. She approached him about joining his order of monks, wishing to devote her life to this spiritual path, but he refused her. Just as the Buddha would not be tempted by Mara, however, Maha-Pajapati would not be deterred. She gathered a large group of women and walked 150 miles (241 kilometers) to join the Buddha at his camp in Vesali, India.

It was not until the Buddha's follower, Ananda, asked the Buddha whether women could not attain *nirvana*, or the end of suffering, just as men could, that the Buddha relented. The *sangha*, or community, of nuns is called *bhikkhuni*, while the *sangha* of monks is called *bhikkhu*.

The women who would be nuns had to agree to eight conditions.

1. They must give deference, or high regard and respect, to monks.
2. They must spend their yearly retreat in a separate location from monks.
3. They must consult with monks on teaching the dharma.
4. Nuns must confess any wrongdoing before a community of both monks and nuns.
5. Any nun breaking a rule that governs monks and nuns will receive punishment before them.
6. Nuns must be ordained, or accepted into the *bhikkhuni*, before a gathering of both monks and nuns.

7. Nuns may not treat any monk badly or abuse him.

8. Buddhist nuns cannot teach monks.

The Buddha was among the first of religious leaders to grant women such a high status. In early years, he ordained monks and nuns himself. The potential monk or nun had to recite the Three Refuges: "I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha." As the *sangha* grew, however, the Buddha allowed trusted followers to carry out the ordinations. He also added more rules that a person needed to meet in order to be a monk or nun. These were primarily rules of conduct. They gradually increased from ten to more than two hundred.

Buddhist nuns live in monasteries. These are refuges away from worldly distractions where one can focus on following the dharma and attaining enlightenment. They have very few personal possessions, oftentimes just a robe or two and a bowl for food. Meals may be taken only once a day, when laypeople, or Buddhists within the community who have not taken vows to join the *bhikkhuni*, give alms to the nuns. Additionally, nuns shave their heads as a symbol of their giving up their former lives and of their membership in the *sangha*. Nuns take the spiritual knowledge they have learned at the monastery and share it with laypeople. A layperson may consult a nun for guidance on handling a difficult family matter or to hear teachings on the dharma. This is also true of monks.

The word *dhamma* is an alternate spelling of *dharma* and means “the path.” The word *Dhammapada* is often translated as “Words of the Doctrine.” It consists of hundreds of aphorisms, or short, concise statements that contain a truth, principle, or sentiment, usually in memorable language. The verses are divided into sections that follow a particular theme, such as “The Mind” or “The Wise.” The Dhammapada has been translated into numerous languages and is consulted daily by many Buddhists.

Examples of the Buddha’s sayings from the Dhammapada, as relayed in the translation by Eknath Easwaran, include:

“Do not give your attention to what others do or fail to do; give it to what you do or fail to do.”

“Hasten to do good; refrain from evil. If you neglect the good, evil can enter your mind.”

“Better than ruling this world, better than attaining the realm of the gods, better than being lord of all the worlds, is one step taken on the path to nirvana.”

While the Buddha taught that anyone could follow the dharma and that one did not need to rely on a priest or any other authority figure, as well as on any formal instructional setting, such a system did not easily lend itself to the continued growth of his teachings. His followers created an organized structure for the religion in the years following his death. Monasteries arose as places to house Buddhist monks and nuns, and where laypeople, or Buddhists who were not monks and nuns, could seek refuge. Buddhist temples also developed, where people could gather to meditate and hear the Buddha’s teachings together in a community, or *sangha*.

About a century after the Buddha’s death, another council was held to formalize Buddhist doctrine, or the principles of the religion. During this council a major split emerged in the faith and two main schools of Buddhism emerged: Theravada and Mahayana. The Theravada school is the most traditional. It follows the Buddha’s early teachings as recorded in what is called the Pali Canon, which it believes to be the most accurate documentation. Theravada also gives great attention to the final step on the Eightfold Path, right meditation. The Mahayana branch accepts later writings as part of the Buddha’s teachings, particularly those representing the later part of his life. Mahayana also contains numerous *bodhisattvas*, or enlightened individuals who exist on another level. They have turned back from nirvana so that they may help others attain enlightenment.

Mahayana Buddhists may direct their worship to these bodhisattvas, which are similar to gods. Theravada Buddhists, however, recognize no gods.

The nirvana described by the Buddha can be compared to the heaven detailed in religions such as Judaism and Christianity, a place where there is no suffering, a reward for a good life lived with kindness and compassion. While heaven is a reward from God in these other faiths, however, the Buddha did not discuss the existence of a god, nor did he claim to be one. He believed that everything in existence had an opposite, such as happy and sad and fear and hope, and he believed that suffering must also have non-suffering. He discovered that in order to attain non-suffering, one must train the mind to see through illusion and desire so that one can recognize and live within the unity and harmony of all things in creation. The Buddha believed that the divine truth of existence is everywhere and is available to everyone.

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Caitanya Mahaprabhu

BORN: February 4, 1485 • Navadvipa, West Bengal, India

DIED: June 14, 1533 • Puri, Orissa, India

Indian religious leader

“One should chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street; one should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige and should be ready to offer all respect to others.”

Caitanya (also spelled Chaitanya) Mahaprabhu was an Indian Hindu ascetic and mystic who lived during the sixteenth century. An ascetic is someone who gives up the pleasure and comforts of the world to lead a life of self-denial and religious devotion. A mystic is a person who claims to have direct knowledge of God and of spiritual truth. Caitanya was the founder of a sect, or division, of Hinduism called Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Vaishnavas, or those who practice Vaishnavism, regard Krishna as the supreme, original God. In this respect they differ from members of other schools of Hinduism who see Krishna as an *avatar* of Vishnu. Vishnu is one of the major Hindu gods and is regarded as the preserver of the universe. An avatar is an incarnation, or birth in human form, of a Hindu god. All Hindu gods are considered to be representations of the one God, Brahma.

The movement Caitanya founded declined after his death, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it experienced a rebirth.



Caitanya, a Hindu holy man, founded a new branch of Hinduism called Gaudiya Vaishnavism, and worshipped Krishna as the supreme God.

He is shown here with a follower, Nityananda. © THE

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In the twenty-first century, the teachings of Caitanya are followed by many Hindu communities throughout the world. His most readily recognized followers are members of the Hare Krishna movement.

Birth and early life

Caitanya was born on February 4, 1485. His father, Jagannath Mishra (or Misra), was a Brahmin, meaning he belonged to the highest caste, or social class, in India. His mother was Sachi Devi. The couple had had eight daughters, all of whom died soon after they were born. The couple's ninth child, a son named Viswarup, survived. Caitanya was their tenth child.

Caitanya was born in the town of Navadvipa in West Bengal, India. Caitanya's name at birth was Visvambhar (also spelled Viswambar) Mishra, but in his youth he acquired two nicknames. One was Nimai, taken from the name of the Neem tree under which he was supposed to

have been born. The other was Gaura, meaning "the fair," or "the golden one," referring to his fair skin.

Many of the details recorded by biographers about Visvambhar's early life may or may not be true. He became such a mythical figure among his followers that some of what was later written about him may have been exaggerated. According to his early biographers, the young Visvambhar was an extremely intelligent student. At a school founded by a famous guru, or teacher, named Vasudev Sarvabhauma, he studied logic, grammar, literature, rhetoric (language), philosophy, and theology (religion). He was a student of Nyaya, a school of logic dating back to the second century. According to legend, one of the teachers at Visvambhar's school had written a book on Nyaya and sought to become the world's leading authority on the subject. While still in his teens Visvambhar also wrote a book on Nyaya. When Visvambhar shared what he had written with the teacher, the teacher wept because he recognized that Visvambhar's book was the better of the two. As an act of humility and kindness, Visvambhar dismissed his own book as nothing but dry philosophy and threw it into the river.

At the age of sixteen Visvambhar started his own school. He married Lakshmi, the daughter of a highly respected teacher named Vallabha. While Visvambhar was traveling, his wife was bitten by a snake and died. He later remarried, to a woman named Vishnupriya. He continued to accept students and gained a reputation as an accomplished teacher. Up until this time he had not shown any particular interest in religious concepts, although he was a devout Hindu. That changed, however, after the death of his father. In 1509 Visvambhar went on a pilgrimage to the northeastern Indian city of Gaya in honor of his father. In Gaya he met another famed guru, Ishvar Puri. Under the guru's instruction Visvambhar became a follower of the god Krishna. He then returned to West Bengal, where the local Vaishnavas saw that a major change had come over him. They recognized him as the leader of their sect.

The life of a sannyasi

Visvambhar spent the rest of his relatively short life as a *sannyasi*. A sannyasi is an ascetic, a person who has given up worldly pleasures in favor of a life of religious devotion. It was at this point in his life that Visvambhar took the name Caitanya Mahaprabhu. During his final years he traveled throughout India, preaching to people and attracting followers to his sect. He finally settled in the town of Puri. He often forgot to eat or drink and he slept naked on the ground. He constantly chanted the name of Krishna.

During this period Caitanya attracted the attention of Maharaja Prataparudra, the king of Orissa, a region of India. (India was a collection of separate kingdoms in the sixteenth century. Orissa is now a modern-day Indian state.) The king saw Caitanya as an incarnation of Krishna and gave him considerable support, allowing the sect to grow in numbers and influence. At one point Caitanya and a well-known scholar named Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya held a debate about the meaning of a verse from Hindu scripture. According to legend, Sarvabhauma was able to explain nine different meanings of the verse. Caitanya was able to explain sixty-one meanings. The scholar was overcome with humility, knowing that Caitanya had bested him. Sarvabhauma realized that he had lost his devotion to God. Under Caitanya's influence, he converted to the Gaudiya Vaishnavism sect and became a more devoted follower of Krishna.

Caitanya spent much of his time in deep meditation, or focused thought with the goal of attaining greater spiritual understanding.

Caitanya's Writings

Caitanya left behind little in the way of written materials. In fact only eight of his verses have survived. These verses, called Sikshashtaka, are regarded as prayers by his followers. Below are some excerpts from these verse-prayers, as found on the *Divine Life Society* Web site.:

• • •

Glory to the Shri Krishna Sankirtana [chanting of God's names by worshippers], which cleanses the heart of all the dust accumulated for years and extinguishes the fire of conditional life, of repeated birth and death. This Sankirtana movement is the prime benediction [blessing] for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon. . . . It increases the ocean of transcendental [beyond the universe or material existence] bliss, and it enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are always anxious.

O my Lord, Your holy name alone can render all benediction to living beings, and thus You have hundreds and millions of names. . . .

There are not even hard and fast rules for chanting these names. O my Lord, out of kindness You enable us to easily approach You by Your holy names, but I am so unfortunate that I have no attraction for them.

One should chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street; one should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige and should be ready to offer all respect to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly.

O Almighty Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. I only want Your causeless devotional service birth after birth.

He was also given to outbursts of ecstasy, or periods of uncontrolled emotion, and often fell into a trance. Modern-day scholars believe that Caitanya may have suffered from epilepsy, a disorder of the nervous system, and that his trances were actually seizures. Believers, however, insist that his periods of ecstatic chanting and dancing, as well as his trances, resulted from his deep religious faith.

Accomplishes miracles

A number of miracles have been attributed to Caitanya. One concerned two brothers, Jagai and Madhai, who were well-known drunkards, robbers, and murderers. Caitanya took upon himself the task of converting them into members of his sect. He and a group of his followers went to the brothers' camp, chanting the name of Krishna. Madhai assaulted one of Caitanya's followers, wounding him severely, and was about to kill the

man when Jagai stopped him. Caitanya pushed to the front of the group, tended to his follower's injuries, and embraced Jagai for his act of kindness. According to legend Jagai then fell to the ground in a trance. When he awoke, he confessed that he was a sinner and asked Krishna for forgiveness. Madhai, too, fell into a trance and was converted. The two brothers went on to become saints.

Caitanya made converts of many people in much the same way. One story tells how Caitanya encountered a man washing clothes in a river. Caitanya approached the man, who believed that Caitanya was simply a beggar. Caitanya first persuaded the man to repeat the name of Krishna, then he embraced him, and the man immediately began dancing and chanting in a state of ecstasy. The man's wife called the villagers to help her husband, thinking he had gone mad. As the villagers approached the man, he embraced each one. At that point they too began to dance and chant. In this way, the entire village was converted. Another legend claims that Caitanya healed and converted a leper by embracing him. Leprosy is a disease that causes deformities and rotting of the flesh. Lepers were outcasts, and at that time one would never touch a leper for fear of getting the disease.

In another story Caitanya leapt into the sea in a fit of devotional ecstasy. He was very thin and frail because of his constant fasting (not eating), so he was soon lost in the waters. His followers searched frantically up and down the seacoast but were unable to find him. Meanwhile, a fisherman had cast his net into the sea and pulled up what appeared to be a human body. He was frightened because the body was making noises. He left his boat and walked along the shore, not knowing what to do. He encountered a pair of Caitanya's followers and told them the story. They rushed to the fisherman's boat, freed Caitanya from the net, and brought him back to consciousness.

Regardless of whether any of these legends are true, they show how highly Caitanya's followers respected him. Indeed, followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism believe that Caitanya was the latest avatar of Krishna. As he neared his death, Caitanya selected six of these followers to spread his principles of devotion. These six formalized the teachings of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and spread them throughout eastern India, primarily in Bengal and Orissa. In fact some historians of religion believe that Hinduism in Bengal might not have survived if not for Caitanya's influence. To keep Gaudiya Vaishnavism alive, Caitanya's followers established lineages, or family lines, that passed the traditions of the

Caitanya Mahaprabhu

Krishna is pictured with the goddess Radha. Some of the miracles attributed to Caitanya occurred after Krishna's name was repeated several times.

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sect down from generation to generation. These lineages still exist in the early twenty-first century, and many of the members have become noted Hindu scholars and teachers.

The tradition of Gaudiya Vaishnavism spread farther in the twentieth century due to the teachings of Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), who established temples in the West (the countries in Europe and the Americas). Swami Prabhupada is also generally regarded as the founder of the Hare Krishna movement. Members of this group can often be seen in public places chanting “Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.” *Hare* means something like “the devotional energy of God,” although it is often translated simply as

“O,” as in “O Lord.” *Rama* means loosely “the supreme personality of God,” so it is another name for Krishna. Followers of the Hare Krishna movement believe that people have to awaken their “Krishna consciousness,” or love for God, by repeating this mantra, called the “maha-mantra,” or “great chant,” repeatedly.

Caitanya died on June 14, 1533. Although no firm evidence supports the theory, he may have been murdered by priests of the temple of Jagannath in Puri. The priests disagreed with Caitanya regarding whether Muslims and “Untouchables” could be accepted at the temple as disciples of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Caitanya once commented on the caste system, according to Srila Vrindavan das Thakur, saying: “Only the most wretched sinner will discriminate a Vaisnava’s caste, race or nationality, and for doing so he suffers the pangs of repeated birth in the lower species of life.” As noted in “Lord Gauranga (Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu),” he spoke the following words before dying: “Oh Lord, I ask not for wealth or followers, or for poetic genius. May my motiveless devotion to Thee continue in me whenever I take birth.” This was a reference to the Hindu belief in reincarnation, or being born into a new life.

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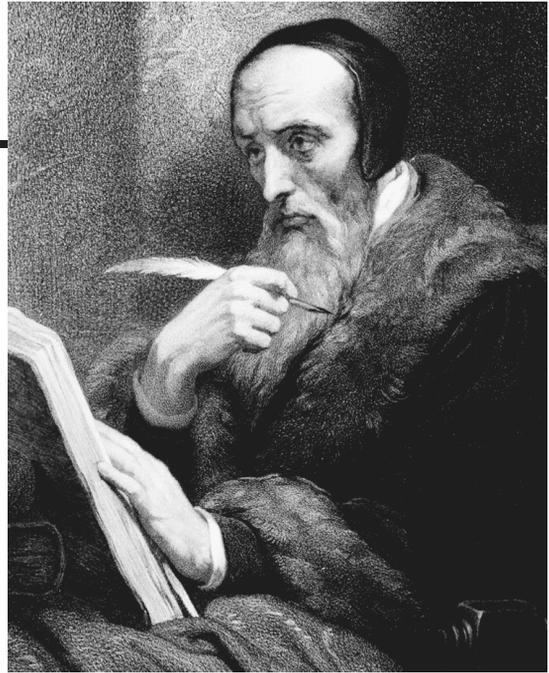
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John Calvin

BORN: July 10, 1509 • Noyon, Picardy, France

DIED: May 27, 1564 • Geneva, Switzerland

French religious leader



“Our minds ought to come to a halt at the point where we learn in Scripture to know Jesus Christ and him alone, so that we may be directly led by him to the Father who contains in himself all perfection.”

John Calvin had a powerful influence on Western religion and thought. Calvin was a French theologian, or religious scholar, who developed a system of belief called Calvinism. Calvin taught that the Bible, the sacred text of Christianity, was the ultimate word on all religious matters, including the organization of the church itself. He also developed the idea of predestination. Predestination teaches that God chooses certain people for spiritual salvation, and this choice does not change regardless of a person’s actions. These chosen people, called the “elect,” form the core of the Calvinist Church.

The Calvinist belief in a strict interpretation of the Bible led to a strong and rigid moral position on matters of faith. These principles eventually had a direct influence on the Puritans, those Protestants

John Calvin.

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who fled England and helped settle North America. Consequently, Calvinism had a significant influence on early culture and thought in the United States.

French origins

John Calvin, originally named Jean Cauvin, was born to Gérard Cauvin and Jeanne Lefranc in Noyon, Picardy, France, in 1509. Gérard was a lawyer and the secretary to the bishop of Noyon, and he used his influence to ensure his son would have a suitable professional career. Gérard decided that his son should work in the church, and at age twelve Jean secured the minor position of chaplain in the Cathedral of Noyon. Two years later he was sent to Paris for schooling. While in college he changed his name to its Latin version, John Calvin.

Calvin first studied Latin at the Collège de la Marche, at the University of Paris. He then took classes in scholastic debate at the Collège de Montaigu, where the famous scholar and theologian Erasmus (1466–1536) had studied. In 1528 Calvin earned his Master of Arts degree. Around this time Calvin's father had a disagreement with the bishop of Noyon, leading to his excommunication, or exclusion from the church community. Because of this, Gérard Cauvin suggested his son change his studies from theology to law. Calvin obeyed and moved to Orléans to study law, despite the fact that he had already developed a passion for theology and the study of the Bible. He then transferred to Bourges in 1529 and earned his law degree in 1531, which was also the year of his father's death. Historians believe that the difficulties Calvin had in securing a Christian burial for his excommunicated father may have partly turned him against the Catholic faith.

Following his father's death, Calvin returned to Paris to study humanism and classical literature. He published his first book in 1532, a commentary on the work of the Roman philosopher Seneca. Around this time Calvin became interested in the ideas of German theologian **Martin Luther** (1483–1546; see entry). Luther was gaining popularity in France by calling for church reform and promoting faith as a means to salvation. Calvin was attracted to these Protestant teachings, which led him to become a friend of Nicholas Cop, the rector of the University of Paris. In 1533 Calvin converted from Catholicism to Protestantism and pursued religious studies with renewed passion.

Later that year Calvin's friend, Cop, gave an address at the university that called for a return to a simpler, more biblical Christianity, rather than one focused on the showy ceremonies of the Catholic Church. The king of France, Frances I (1494–1547; ruled 1515–47), did not approve of such Protestant ideas, so he arrested many of those involved in the speech. Cop himself escaped to Switzerland. As some believed that Calvin had actually written the speech, he also left Paris for a time, settling first at the court of the king's Protestant sister, Marguerite of Navarre. After briefly returning to Paris in 1534, he decided to leave France permanently to escape the king's anger. He moved to Switzerland, where about half the population was Protestant.

A life in exile

Traveling under the false name Martianus Lucianus, Calvin first took refuge in Basel, Switzerland, where Protestants from other European countries had settled to avoid harassment. In 1536 he published the first edition of what would become a lifelong work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a manual on Christian theology. Later editions appeared in 1541, 1559, and 1560. In this book Calvin explained his main religious ideas, such as his belief that God was glorious and magnificent far beyond humanity's ability to understand. Calvin said that all humans were sinful and had no free will, a belief similar to Luther's. He also said humans could not seek their own salvation, because only the grace of God determined who was saved and who was damned. So while strong faith and good works are important to Calvinists, they do not automatically lead to salvation. Calvin also stated that the authority of the pope should be rejected.

Calvin organized his basic thoughts into the Five Points of Calvinism, which were later developed further by his followers. These are often referred to by the acronym TULIP:

- “Total depravity” refers to the sin into which humans are born.
- “Unconditional election” refers to selection by God for salvation.
- “Limited atonement” is the concept that God's son Jesus Christ was crucified (nailed to a cross until dead) to erase the sins not of all people but of the elect.
- “Irresistible grace” is the principle that God's mercy and grace apply to those He elects for salvation.
- “Perseverance of the saints” holds that those who have been elected cannot later be condemned.

In creating his new religious system, Calvin based all his principles on a literal reading of the Bible. He called for a simple church ceremony, with the sermon (discussion of the Bible readings) being the central part. There are only two sacraments, or holy rituals, in the Calvinist Church. One is baptism, a symbolic use of water resulting in admission to the Christian community. The second is the Lord's Supper, or the reenactment of the Last Supper, which took place between Christ and his closest followers before Christ was crucified. In many congregations, the faithful stand during the entire service. In Calvinism the "visible church" includes all those who worship Christ, and the "invisible church" includes those chosen by God for salvation. Belonging to the visible church and having faith are requirements for being saved, but do not themselves guarantee salvation. Also, in Calvinism church and state are not considered separate but are both God's creations. The church teaches morality and faith, while the state preserves order and carries out the laws of the church.

In 1536 Calvin traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, where he met the Protestant reformer Guillaume Farel (1489–1565), who persuaded him to make the city his home. Farel, who was also a Frenchman in exile, had led Protestant reform in Geneva for several years. At Farel's insistence, Calvin took a position as a minister and began playing a major role in the establishment of a set of principles for Geneva's faithful.

Calvin was largely responsible for the passage of a set of laws that greatly reduced Catholic influence in Geneva. These laws prohibited numerous activities Calvin believed were immoral, including adultery (sexual intercourse with someone other than a person's spouse), gambling, and even the wearing of expensive clothing. A new city council with leanings toward Catholicism came to power, however, and both Calvin and Farel were forced to leave Geneva. Calvin then went to Strasbourg, France, where he became the minister for a small congregation of Protestants. In France he married Idelette de Bure, and the couple had one child who died in infancy.

Return to Geneva

Calvin's stay in Strasbourg did not last long. In 1541 he was summoned back to Geneva, where he was promised the freedom to set up a reform church according to the principles outlined in his *Institutes*. This

Ulrich Zwingli

The Protestant religion was introduced to Switzerland by Swiss native Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531). Zwingli was born to a prominent family in Wildhaus. His father was the chief magistrate (a civil officer with the power to administer and enforce law) and his uncle was a church leader. Zwingli studied religion in various cities—including Vienna, Austria, and Basel—and earned his degree in 1506. After his graduation he served as a pastor in Glarus for ten years, at times accompanying Swiss mercenaries, or hired soldiers, into battle as their chaplain. In 1518 he became the priest at Zurich's Great Minster church.

Until his appointment in Zurich, Zwingli had been a strong believer in Catholicism and the pope. During his time at Great Minster, however, he began to question the Catholic Church, especially its ceremonies and excesses. He soon began preaching against practices such as enforced celibacy (not having sexual intercourse) for priests and the selling of indulgences, which are special favors from God. Martin Luther had recently opposed the same practices in Germany, although the two had no contact with each other. Zwingli himself married and had four children, thereby taking a personal stand against Catholic priesthood celibacy.

Zwingli was popular in Zurich, having done much for the population during an epidemic of the plague, a deadly disease caused by bacteria, and his new practices were welcomed by most of the faithful. Zwingli looked for inspiration and information in the Bible. In 1523 Zwingli introduced his sixty-seven articles calling for reform of the church. The city fathers of Zurich decided that these principles should apply throughout the entire canton, or province, effectively creating a state church. His denomination was called Reformed, and it was very similar to the Lutheranism that was developing in Germany.

The reform movement swept through Switzerland, and Zwingli became the virtual ruler of Zurich. His Reformed Church was not without its critics and opponents, however, and Catholic territories began banding together against Zurich and Zwingli's increasing power there. In 1531 a civil war broke out between Protestants and Catholics, and Zwingli was killed in battle. His death ended the period of theocracy in Zurich, as his successor became a religious leader only, rather than a ruler of both church and state. The leadership of Swiss Protestantism then passed to a French immigrant named John Calvin.

opportunity gave him the chance to put his theories into action and create a society where church and state worked together. Calvinists believe the correct structure of any Christian state is laid out in the Bible: the clergy, or the body of people authorized to perform religious service, must teach and interpret the laws, and the state must enforce them. Such an arrangement is referred to as a theocracy, and Calvin helped form such a government in Geneva. He wrote the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* in 1542, and these rules were accepted by the city council. They gave the clergy a great deal of control in terms of disciplinary powers, including that of excommunication.

Calvin's laws set up four levels of the ministry: pastors, deacons, teachers, and lay elders. The pastors had authority over all religious matters, such as deciding whether or not a person could preach in the city. The deacons cared for the sick and elderly. The individual behavior of all citizens was reviewed regularly by a group of lay elders and pastors known as the Consistory. These people had the power to make unscheduled visits and search people's homes. Attendance at weekly services was required. Drunkenness and gambling were not allowed. Even clothing color, hairstyles, and amounts of food eaten were closely regulated. There was no freedom of the press, and criticism of Calvin or of the clergy was forbidden. Typical punishments for offenses included fines, religion classes, whippings, torture, and exile (being forced to leave a place). Death sentences were given to people who committed adultery and blasphemers, or those who took the name of God in vain. In 1553 Calvin was personally responsible for the burning of a Spanish physician who denied the concept of the Trinity, which is the union of the Father (God), Son (Christ), and Holy Spirit. Education was controlled by the church, as were social services such as charities. Begging was not allowed. In short, Geneva was ruled by very strict and rigid laws. Calvin remained the head of, and force behind, this theocracy from 1541 until his death in 1564.

Calvin's intention was to turn Geneva into a model Christian city. All who visited were impressed by the order and cleanliness of the city, but the costs were high. During Calvin's years of control, fifty-eight people were put to death and seventy-six banished for failing to obey moral laws and church discipline. Calvin used his Consistory to help strengthen his power. When he was criticized for ordaining, or making pastors of, French immigrants before Swiss natives, he had his critics first humiliated and then murdered. He had the city council, which he controlled, find such people guilty of offenses from treason (crimes against the state) to heresy (crimes against the faith). These people were tortured and sometimes killed by the Consistory as punishment. Meanwhile, in addition to attending to his administrative tasks, Calvin continued to revise and expand his *Institutes* and wrote many lengthy commentaries on the Bible.

Calvin became famous throughout Europe, and translations and new editions of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* were printed. Calvinism became the dominant form of Protestantism throughout Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and Scotland. Calvin also wrote letters to powerful



John Calvin speaks of reform at the Council of Geneva in 1542. Calvin's reforms stemmed from guidelines that he believed were laid out in the Bible. The city of Geneva accepted his proposals. HULTON/ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES.

Protestants throughout Europe and the British Isles and strongly affected the development of Protestantism in Germany and Scandinavia. In addition, Calvin claimed that the Church of England had been weakened by political struggles and was not focusing enough on spiritual matters. His writings on this subject inspired a group in England called the Puritans who were also discontented with the Church. These Puritans eventually left England to colonize North America.

Calvin's health began to fail late in his life, and he eventually needed to be carried to the pulpit at times. He suffered from kidney stones, lung problems, swollen joints, and severe headaches. He died on May 27, 1564, and was buried, as requested, under a simple tombstone bearing only the initials "J. C." His followers continued to spread Calvinism

throughout the Christian world, and his writings helped make him one of the most influential Protestant theologians. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has had a deep and lasting effect on the development of Protestantism.

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Confucius

BORN: September 28, c. 551 BCE • Qufu, Lu, China

DIED: c. 479 BCE • Qufu, Lu, China

Chinese philosopher; teacher; writer



“Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you.”

Confucius was ancient China’s most famous philosopher and is believed by many to be one of the most influential in history. His system of thought and behavior has been followed by more people for a longer period of time than any other set of ethical principles. Confucian ideas spread throughout Chinese and east Asian society so thoroughly that in the early twenty-first century, most Chinese still lived by some of his principles. Chief among these are a focus on family and respect for ancestors, elders, and paternal (fatherly) authority. Confucius founded what is known as *Ru Jia* (*Ju Chia*), or the School of the Scholars, which in the West is referred to as Confucianism. Although Confucianism is termed a religion in Western tradition, in China it is simply seen as a way of confronting the world and living appropriately.

The main principle of Confucian philosophy holds that a natural social order revolves around five basic family and social relationships. The strongest of these is filial devotion, or the love and respect shown

Confucius.

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by a child for a parent. Also central to Confucian thought is the importance of *ren* (*jen*), a focus on social virtue and empathy, or understanding another person's feelings and situation. Confucians believe that if certain manners or society rituals, called *li*, are observed, then these relationships will remain in order, and society as a whole will also remain in order.

Early life

The philosophical work of Confucius can only be properly understood by studying the time period in which he lived. He was born Kong Qui around 551 BCE, in the small town of Qufu (Ch'u-fu) in the state of Lu, or the modern-day Chinese province of Shandong (Shan-tung). He is most often referred to in Chinese as Kongzi (K'ung-tzu), which means "Master Kong," and also sometimes as Kong Fuzi (K'ung Fu-tzu). China already had a long history of intellectual and cultural advances by the time of Confucius's birth. During the Shang Dynasty (c. 1766–c. 1112 BCE), the Chinese had established an administrative system, a complex agricultural system, and defined social classes. A method of writing and the first Chinese calendar had also been developed. This era was followed by the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty (c. 1025–256 BCE), China's classical age. This period featured written laws, a monetary economy, tools made from iron, and ox-drawn plows.

During the Zhou Dynasty, the kings began gradually losing their hold on the people, and large areas of China fell under the control of local princes. By 800 BCE these princes began fighting not only the Zhou leaders but also each other for control of the lands. The next several hundred years were ones of great chaos and disorder. In Lu, the state where Confucius lived, the three leading families fought bitterly for powerful positions. Assassinations (political killings) and dishonesty within the government were common, and the people lived under the constant threat of invasion by neighboring states. An almost continual state of war existed, maintained by roving bands of mercenaries (soldiers who fought for money) hired by the various princes. Additionally, the aristocracy, or ruling class, expanded until not enough government positions remained to accommodate everyone. Due to this, the class of *shi* (*shih*), the lower aristocracy trained for public service into which Confucius was born, began to experience the same poor living conditions as the peasants. Perhaps because of the effects these conflicts had on people's lives, the period gave rise to some of the greatest thinkers in Chinese history, Confucius among them, and is called the Hundred Schools of Thought period.

Confucius was the son of Shuliang He (Shu-liang Ho) and Yan Zhen-sai (Yen Chen-sai). Historians disagree on his family's status. Many hold that his father was a soldier and a government official, perhaps even governor of the town of Zou (Tsou). Others believe Confucius was a direct descendant of the royal house of the Shang dynasty. According to these accounts, about three to five generations before Confucius's birth, his ancestors moved from the state of Song (Sung) to Lu. Confucius himself later wrote in his *Analects* (Lun Yu) that he was "without rank and in humble circumstances" at the time of his birth. Later legends speak of strange occurrences at Confucius's birth, such as dragons and a unicorn appearing.

Shuliang He died when Confucius was three years old. Confucius was then educated by his mother and also perhaps at a school for nobles. He learned the basics of the Six Arts, also known as the Six Disciplines: ritual, music, archery, chariot riding, calligraphy (fine handwriting), and computation (mathematics). For Confucius, the arts of music, dance, painting, and poetry, which he classified as *wen*, were the highest forms of culture. He would later emphasize these in his teachings. He was skilled, as were most nobles of the day, in fishing and hunting, though he reportedly did not fish with a net and never shot a bird at rest. As a young child, his favorite pastime was arranging the various objects used in traditional sacrifices and offerings and then playacting through the entire rituals. Confucius determined by age fifteen that he would be a scholar, and as a young man he held various minor offices in the state of Lu, such as keeping accounts of sheep and cattle. At the age of nineteen he married Qiguan Shi (Ch'i-kuan Shih), and they had, by some accounts, both a son and a daughter. In 528 BCE Confucius's mother died, and he left his government post to perform the traditional three years of mourning.

The Confucian ethical system

Confucius remained busy during his years of mourning. He concentrated on the study of li, classical music, and poetry. He focused on the ancient Shang Dynasty and its well-defined social classes, court and family etiquette (manners) and rituals, and orderly bureaucracy. He also studied the early Zhou dynasty, in particular one of its founders, the Duke of Zhou, who became for Confucius the model of the virtuous (good and fair) ruler. According to tradition, such rulers were given their power through a *Tianming* (*t'ien-ming*), or "mandate of Heaven," a concept that Confucius accepted. Confucius held that rulers should still behave well,



Temples such as this one in Nanjing, China, were built in honor of Confucius and his teachings. © LIU LIQUN/CORBIS.

however. He believed their strength lay in *de* (*tè*), or virtue, rather than in force. Like other thinkers of his age, Confucius sought a way through which society could be renewed, and he saw the traditions of the past as an answer. He also believed that a new individualism had taken over Chinese society as a result of the lack of strong central power. This led Confucius to assemble a set of principles based on traditional Chinese culture and its heavy reliance on the family as the basis of all society.

Confucius's goal was the development of a *junzi* (*chun-tzu*), a superior person or gentleman, both as leader and as citizen. Such a gentleman would have a strong sense of humanity and empathy, or *ren*, which would in turn be developed through *li*. Confucius specified three different types of *li*: making sacrifices to gods and ancestors, following the rituals of social and political institutions, and obeying the rules of society in daily behavior. Before Confucius, the rules surrounding *li* were assumed to come from Heaven, *Tian*. Though he claimed to be a transmitter of

knowledge rather than a creator, Confucius in fact redefined li as a law of humankind rather than of Heaven.

Confucius held that propriety, or following the rituals of society, should become part of one's every action. Self-interest was always to be balanced by the needs of family and society. Confucius applied his concept of li to the basic five relationships, which he defined as those between father and son, elder brother and junior brother, husband and wife, elder friend and junior friend, and ruler and subject. For example, a father should act lovingly towards his child, and a son should be deeply respectful to his father. Similar conditions were put on friendships and sibling relationships, with age being the deciding factor in terms of who received the most respect. Confucius said that between husband and wife, the wife is to be respectful and supportive. When a ruler is benevolent, or kindly, the subject should be loyal. The two aspects of these relationships that most deeply and continually affected the Chinese were filial piety, or the devotion and honor children give to their parents, and respect for those who are older.

Teacher and politician

Following his period of mourning, Confucius hoped to put his new theories about the family and leadership into practice, first by teaching and then by achieving high government office. He felt that by teaching young men the correct way to live, he could improve society as a whole. He is known as the first such teacher in China who attempted to make education available to all men. Prior to his efforts, education was generally obtained in the home through a hired tutor or not at all. Confucius was a key figure in the establishment of teaching as a profession. His supposed birthday, September 28, is still celebrated as Teachers' Day in Taiwan.

Confucius taught by example and by telling stories from his life and the lives of others. He also taught through conversation, asking questions that challenged the beliefs of his pupils. In addition to Confucian philosophy, his students also learned to master the Six Arts, just as Confucius had. He took groups of twenty to twenty-five pupils at a time and was said never to have turned away a hopeful student because the student could not pay. He attempted to inspire a sense of empathy in these young men and also to prepare them for government service. Chinese civil service examinations were later based on Confucian philosophy.

Naming Confucius

In the late 1500s, the Jesuits, a Roman Catholic religious order, chose to perform missionary work in China. One of the first Jesuits in China was Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who came from Italy in 1578. He had to keep his missionary work secret, for the Chinese government was highly suspicious of foreign influence. In order to understand and communicate with the Chinese people, Ricci immersed himself in the nation's history and customs and learned its language and traditions. He worked in China for more than thirty years. In order to share his work with Jesuits in Europe, he transformed Chinese words and names into Latin, the language of the Catholic Church at the time. Kong Fuzi thus became Confucius, the name by which the West has known the Chinese philosopher ever since.

Confucius was the first to make merit more important than family connections in the awarding of government positions.

Many of Confucius's teachings were later gathered by his followers and compiled in a work called the *Analects*. This book is considered the most reliable source of information about the life and teachings of Confucius. *Analects* is also the most important volume of what are known as the Four Books, four collections of Confucius's wisdom. The others are *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Mencius*.

Confucius left Lu for the neighboring state of Qi (Ch'i), hoping to advise the Duke of Qi in how to establish a more fair and reasonable government. He remained there for one year, but the duke did not listen to Confucius, so he returned to Lu and continued teaching there.

When he was about fifty years old, Confucius became a minister of public works and then minister of crime, or chief magistrate, under Duke Ling. For a number of years, he attempted to reduce the influence of the three most powerful families in Lu and restore more power to the duke. However, his efforts were not successful, and the duke continued to lose power to these powerful families, who in turn became enemies of Confucius. Finally, around age fifty-five, he was forced into exile (made to leave his home city).

Years of exile, years of contemplation

Confucius traveled throughout China for thirteen years with a small group of followers, teaching his principles of proper etiquette and ritual. He sought administrative positions from various rulers, but few listened to him. At times his life was in danger. He was once mistaken for an infamous bandit and thrown in a dungeon. He escaped assassins and near-starvation and, in time, began to miss his home in Lu. A chance to return came with the death of Duke Ling and his replacement by Duke Ai. When Ai's primary minister died, he appointed one of Confucius's students to the position. After a number of years this student was able to arrange for Confucius's safe return to Lu.

Confucius then moved away from politics and focused on teaching and writing. He took a minor government position, edited and wrote comments on classical Chinese texts, and continued to teach his followers, who came from all social and economic classes. He wrote a history of Lu's rulers, *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which he felt would be his greatest contribution to learning. In his final years, Confucius saw the deaths of his son, Bo Ye (Po Yeh), and his most beloved pupil, Yan Hui (Yen Hui). Confucius died in 479 BCE, never having achieved his ambition to become a great political leader but having gained a reputation as a hugely successful teacher and philosopher.

In the *Analects*, Confucius summed up his life this way: "At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line." Confucius's life was an example of a virtuous existence, and he became the *junzi*, or superior man, that he had encouraged others to be for the good of society. Although he was a simple man who never claimed divine status, Confucius was the creator of an ethical system that would regulate the daily lives of people in China and east Asia for thousands of years to come.

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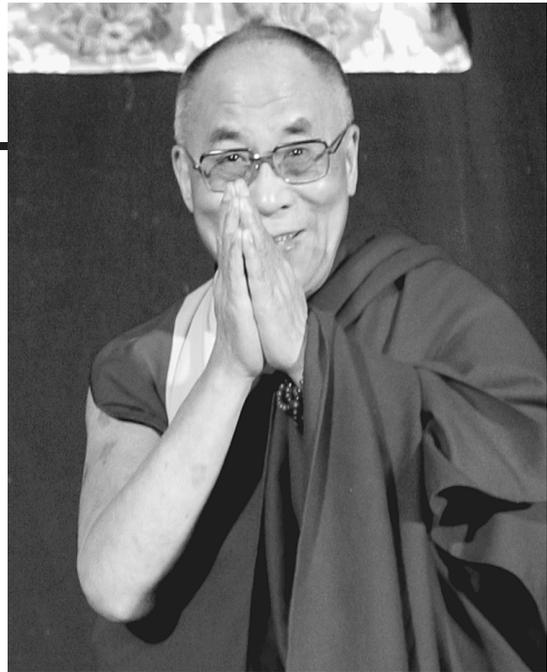
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Dalai Lama

BORN: July 6, 1935 • Taktser, Amdo, Tibet

Tibetan religious leader; writer



“I am just a simple Buddhist monk—no more, nor less.”

Tenzin Gyatso is the name that was given to the fourteenth *dalai lama*, or spiritual and temporal (civil) leader of Tibet. Part of a lineage that stretches back to the fourteenth century, the dalai lama has been referred to as “the Buddhist pope.” Unlike the Catholic pope, however, the dalai lama does not speak for all Buddhists. Rather, he is the representative of one distinct branch of Tibetan Buddhism, known as Geluk (also Gelug). Since the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 and his subsequent exile, the Dalai Lama has become an important spokesperson for an independent Tibet. His tireless efforts on behalf of his homeland and his search for a nonviolent end to Tibet’s struggle for independence won him the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize and made him a well-known figure in the international community.

Dalai means “ocean,” or “all-embracing,” while *lama* means “teacher,” or “wisdom.” The title is therefore loosely translated as “ocean of wisdom.” In his role as religious leader, the Dalai Lama travels worldwide and speaks extensively on his belief in religious tolerance and the need for dialogue between religions. He has also written nearly eighty books.

Dalai Lama.

JUNKO KIMURA/
GETTY IMAGES.

These include works of autobiography, such as *My Land and My People* and *Freedom in Exile*, as well as numerous texts explaining Buddhist principles.

Humble origins

Tenzin Gyatso was born on July 6, 1935, in the village of Taktser in northeastern Tibet. He was the fifth of nine children born to the relatively well-off peasants Sonam Isomo and his wife, Diki Tsering. The future dalai lama was given the birth name of Lhamo Dhondup, which translates as “wish-fulfilling goddess.” According to his mother, his birth was preceded by strange happenings, including the death of the family’s small herd of horses, years of drought and famine, and the mysterious illness of his father. When Lhamo Dhondup was born, his father was suddenly cured of his sickness and rains once again returned. Lhamo Dhondup’s mother knew that he was different from her other children while he was still young. She often found him packing his clothes and his belongings. When she asked where he was going, he would reply that he was going to Lhasa.

Lhasa was the capital of Tibet and home to the religious and political head of the country, the dalai lama. Two years before Lhamo Dhondup’s birth, the thirteenth dalai lama had died. Since that time monks had been searching for the child they believed to be his reincarnation, or the body into which his soul had been reborn. Each of Tibet’s dalai lamas is believed to be the reincarnation of the previous dalai lama, a line that stretches back to Gedun Drub (1391–1474). The dalai lamas are also believed to be representations of Avalokitesvara, also known as Chenrezig, Bodhisattva of Compassion, a near-divine *bodhisattva*, or enlightened one, who is considered by many in Tibet to be the patron god of the country. It would seem by his actions that, from a very early age, the child Lhamo Dhondup thought of himself as the next reincarnated dalai lama.

The family of Sonam Isomo already had one important member. The oldest son, Thupten Jigme Norbu, had been designated a *tulku*, or reincarnation of a famous lama, or Tibetan monk and teacher. With one tulku in the house, the appearance of another was thought highly unlikely. Nonetheless, when Lhamo Dhondup was barely three years old, an official search party reached the area near his home. Several signs had led them to this location. First, the head of the deceased thirteenth dalai lama

had turned to the northeast. Additionally, the lama who was then temporarily acting as ruler of the faith had experienced a vision. While looking into the waters of the sacred lake of Lhamoi Lhatso, he noticed the Tibetan letters “ah,” “ka,” and “ma” float into view. These in turn were followed by the visions first of a monastery with three floors and a turquoise and gold roof, then of a small house with very distinctive gutters. The regent became convinced that the letter “ah” referred to Amdo, the northeastern province of Tibet, the direction toward which the previous dalai lama’s head had turned. A search party was sent to the monastery there, Kumbum, which began with the letter “ka” and had three floors and the properly colored roof. All that remained for the search party to find was the small dwelling with the distinctive gutters, which led them to the home of Lhamo Dhondup. When they arrived, the lamas did not reveal the reason for their visit, instead merely asking for lodging for the night in hopes of observing the child. Lhamo Dhondup, however, recognized the leader of the party and called out the name of his monastery. The lamas were impressed and returned the next day with further tests, bringing some of the previous dalai lama’s possessions, which the boy was asked to pick out from among an assortment of objects. Lhamo Dhondup passed all the tests, and the lamas were convinced that he was the new dalai lama.

The training of the Dalai Lama

The boy was taken to the nearby Kumbum monastery, where he began his religious training. In 1939, in the company of his parents, his brother, Lobsang Samten, and the original search party, he set off for Lhasa, a journey that took three months. On February 2, 1940, he was officially installed as the spiritual leader of Tibet and given the name Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso (“holy lord, gentle glory, compassionate, defender of the faith, ocean of wisdom”) and the title of fourteenth dalai lama. At this point Gyatso was only confirmed as the spiritual leader of Tibet; political power remained in the hands of elder monks until he reached the proper age. He lived in the Potala and Norbulinka palaces in Lhasa and had as his chief tutors two important high spiritual leaders who were themselves tulku lamas. In addition to his Buddhist studies, Gyatso was given some training in history and literature. He also studied English, and from an early age he demonstrated a love of machines of all sorts. During World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated

The Tradition of The Dalai Lama

Tibetan Buddhism contains a mixture of many Buddhist traditions and teachings. It developed from one of the two main branches of Buddhism, Mahayana, and combines some of the sorcery of the native religion of Tibet, Bön, and the mystical beliefs of Tantrism, a system of meditation and chanting used in both Hinduism and Buddhism to bring rapid enlightenment. Tibetan Buddhism, also sometimes referred to as Vajrayana, or “vehicle of the thunderbolt,” was introduced into Tibet in the seventh century CE. By about 750 the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery had been built near Lhasa.

Four major sects (religious divisions) of Tibetan Buddhism ultimately formed: *Nyingmapa*, or “ancient ones”; *Kagyupa*, or “oral lineage”; *Sakyapa*, or “grey earth”; and *Gelukpa*, or “way of virtue.” The Dalai Lama is a member of this last sect. The Gelukpa originated in a fourteenth-century reform movement that sought to restore discipline in monastic life. The leader of the Gelukpa is not the dalai lama but the Ganden Tripa, or “holder of the throne of Ganden.” The tradition of the dalai lama began in 1391, with the first to hold the office, Gedun Drub (1391–1474). The second, Gendun Gyatso (1475–1541), established a

permanent seat for the lineage at the monastery of Drepung, near Lhasa. Each dalai lama is believed to be the reincarnation of the previous one, so upon the death of the dalai lama, monks set out on a search for signs of the new leader. Sometimes, as with Tenzin Gyatso, the search takes several years, leaving gaps in the dalai lama lineage.

By the seventeenth century, Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682), the fifth dalai lama, was able (with the help of a Mongol ruler) to use force to extend his power over most of Tibet and unify the country. It was this dalai lama who built the huge winter palace, Potala, in Lhasa. Also supposedly during the time of Lobsang Gyatso, new texts were discovered showing that the dalai lama was not merely the reincarnation of the previous holder of the office but also the incarnation of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokitesvara. This discovery helped to give the holder of the title real authority. The dalai lamas maintained rule in Tibet until 1951, when the country came under the direct control of the People’s Republic of China. Though still the primary spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, the dalai lama does not speak for all Tibetan sects, merely for the dominant Geluk school.

Germany, Italy, and Japan) the Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Harrer, who later wrote the book *Seven Years in Tibet*, escaped a British prison camp and became friends with the young Dalai Lama, introducing him to events in the rest of the world.

Such events quickly began affecting Tibet. Although it had long been considered a protectorate (a region under the protection and partial control of another) of China, Tibet was invaded by the newly established Chinese communists in 1950. On November 17 of this year, after the invasion began, Gyatso finally assumed political control of Tibet. The communists quickly overran the country, reaching Lhasa in late 1951.

The Dalai Lama then played a dangerous diplomatic game with the Chinese for nearly ten years in an attempt to preserve Tibetan traditions. The Chinese demanded that the country be modernized, specifically through the termination of its age-old feudal society. In fact, even into the twentieth century Tibet closely resembled a medieval European land, with a few nobles and the clergy controlling the wealth while the peasants worked the land. Such a system was not always fair to the lower classes. The Chinese advance, however, accompanied as it was by violence and threats of violence against peasants and Buddhist monks and nuns alike, did not present an agreeable alternative. In an effort to work with the Chinese, the Dalai Lama visited Beijing in 1954 to speak personally with Chinese leaders. His efforts failed, and the Chinese continued to employ force in governing Tibet and even tried to enlist the second spiritual leader of the country, the Panchen Lama, to act as an opponent of the Dalai Lama and to reduce his influence with the people. This move by the Chinese was not successful, and war broke out by the late 1950s.

Throughout these difficult years the Dalai Lama continued his studies, and by the age of twenty-five he was ready to take his exams at the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, where he earned a Lharampa degree, the highest level degree in Buddhist studies. There was little time for rejoicing, however. In March 1959 the Dalai Lama was invited to a Chinese theatrical performance, a deception that had been used previously to kidnap Tibetan leaders. Accordingly, he stayed in his palace, surrounded by thousands of his followers, while the Chinese sent in troops. On March 17, disguised as a simple soldier, the Dalai Lama escaped from the palace, accompanied by his mother, sister, and a small group of followers, and headed over the Himalaya Mountains on horseback toward India. After two weeks the group reached the mountain village of Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama set up a government in exile.

Life outside of Tibet

Ultimately, more than one hundred thousand Tibetan refugees joined the Dalai Lama in exile, and Dharamsala came to be known as “Little Lhasa.” From Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama has continued to put pressure on China, through the international community, to provide Tibet with some form of autonomy, or self-rule. He has also attempted to create a piece of Tibet in a foreign land, thereby preserving his nation’s cultural traditions. The Dalai Lama has helped refugees settle on agricultural land in northern India and established an educational system to teach his

Dalai Lama



Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, in China, was home to the Dalai Lama before he was exiled. © KEREN SU/CORBIS.

fellow countrymen Tibetan language, history, and culture. Two institutions have helped further these goals: the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts and the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, an Indian university for Tibetan refugees. Also, in order to preserve religious traditions, the Dalai Lama has overseen the construction of about two hundred Tibetan monasteries in India.

The Indian government, fearful of angering their powerful neighbor, China, at first refused to allow the Dalai Lama to travel outside of the country. Nevertheless, he was able to inspire United Nations resolutions in 1959, 1961, and 1965 that called on China to respect human rights in Tibet and to allow for free choice by the people. In response to criticism of Tibet's impractical political system, the Dalai Lama helped draw up a democratic Tibetan constitution in 1963 which provided for a parliament elected directly by the people. He has also declared that if Tibet regains its independence, he will forgo holding public office and act solely as a spiritual leader.

In 1967 the Indian government finally permitted the Dalai Lama to travel, and since then he has visited almost fifty countries, including the United States. On his journeys he speaks of conditions in his homeland under the continued rule of the Chinese and addresses spiritual questions. He discusses the bridges that can be built between different faiths and the emphasis in Tibetan Buddhism on compassion and nonviolence, ideas he feels could be of use to people in Western religions.

As the first dalai lama to travel to the West, Gyatso has become the symbol of Buddhism for many. He has met with numerous world leaders, from U.S. presidents to popes, and has called for a “zone of peace” in his native Tibet. For his efforts, he won the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award in 1987 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. As noted on the *Nobelprize.org* Web site, the Nobel committee wanted to recognize the fact that the Dalai Lama opposed the use of violence in efforts to liberate Tibet: “He has instead advocated peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect in order to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of his people.” For his part, Gyatso, as reported on the Web site *His Holiness the Dalai Lama*, is said to have often observed, “I am just a simple Buddhist monk—no more, nor less.”

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the Dalai Lama continued to press for an independent Tibet, free of Chinese control. In 1995, partly due to his influence, the European parliament issued a statement noting Tibet’s unique religious and cultural heritage and reaffirming the illegality of the Chinese occupation. In 2001, after a meeting between the Dalai Lama and President George W. Bush (1946–), the White House announced its support of the preservation of Tibetan culture, language, and religion. Eventually, the Dalai Lama began to lessen his demands for a totally independent Tibet, noting that the state could remain part of China if the Chinese showed due respect for the people’s culture and religion.

In addition to addressing the needs of his people, the Dalai Lama has spoken out on a wide range of other issues, including the importance of creating world peace and ending world hunger, and has promoted these goals through the Dalai Lama Foundation. He has also continued to advocate discussions between different faiths. His many books deal with that subject as well as with Buddhist concepts, and many are based on his talks around the world. Particularly notable are such works as *Buddha Heart*, *Buddha Mind: Living the Four Noble Truths* and *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*. The Dalai Lama has also written on

the intersection of faith and science in *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*.

Because of his high profile and the fact that he leads his life by the principles of compassion, the Dalai Lama is partly responsible for the spreading popularity of Tibetan Buddhism. Westerners from movie stars to politicians have been embracing Buddhist principles and meditation (deep and concentrated thinking) practices. Speaking with Robert Thurman of *Mother Jones*, the Dalai Lama explained why he thought his faith was becoming so popular in Western countries, including the United States:

I feel that Americans are interested because they are open-minded. They have an education system that teaches them to find out for themselves why things are the way they are. . . . Also, your education tends to develop the brain while it neglects the heart, so you have a longing for teachings that develop and strengthen the good heart.

In 2005 the Dalai Lama celebrated his seventieth birthday. More than ten thousand Tibetan refugees, monks, and followers from around the world gathered outside his home in Dharamsala. There, he has continued to live the simple life of a Buddhist monk, rising at four o'clock every morning to say prayers.

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Dayananda Sarasvati

BORN: 1824 • Tankara, India

DIED: October 30, 1883 • Ajmir, India

Indian religious reformer



“Every living being has a soul which deserves affection; in every human being there is a soul worthy of respect. Any one who does not know this basic principle cannot understand the true meaning of the Vedic religion.”

Dayananda Sarasvati (often spelled Saraswati) was a leading Hindu ascetic, or person who gives up worldly comforts to live in poverty, in nineteenth-century India. He is best known as an aggressive reformer who urged Hindus to return to the traditions and principles in the Vedas, the Hindu sacred scripture. He was also the founder of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement. This organization played a major role in the growth of Indian nationalism. At the time of Dayananda Sarasvati’s birth, India was a British colony, but his Arya Samaj and other organizations encouraged the desire among Indians to achieve independence from Great Britain.

Dayananda Sarasvati.
K. L. KAMAT/KAMAT’S
POTPOURRI.

Birth and early life

Sarasvati was born as Mula Sankara in 1824, in Tankara, a city in the modern-day Indian state of Gujarat. He came from a wealthy *Brahmin*

family. Brahmins are the highest Indian caste, or social hereditary class, which consists of religious leaders, teachers, and intellectuals. Sankara received an education both in orthodox (traditional) Hinduism and in the Sanskrit language, the historical literary language of the religion.

Hindu religious practice often involves presenting a statue or other image, representing a Hindu god or goddess, with offerings such as fruit and water. (While Hinduism has many gods, all are considered to be manifestations, or forms, of the one God, Brahma.) According to one story, when Sankara was fourteen he made a visit with his father to a Hindu temple. During the night he saw mice running over the image of the Hindu god Shiva because they were attracted by the offerings of food placed before it. Sankara was disturbed by this and turned away from worship that involved images. Even as a youngster, then, he began to question Hindu practices that he later came to believe they were not part of true, historical Hinduism.

Sankara had many doubts about his religion. When a beloved uncle died five years after the incident at the temple, he began to search for a path that humans could follow to overcome their mortality (death). Hindus believe in reincarnation, an ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that in effect traps the human soul in the material world. In an attempt to escape that trap, Sankara began to practice yoga, an intensely focused mental, spiritual, and physical discipline that some believe can lead to enlightenment and spiritual salvation, or release from the cycle of death and rebirth, called *samsara*. In 1843 Sankara fled his home, fearing that his family would arrange a marriage for him. He became a member of the wandering order of monks called the Sarasvatis, taking the name of the order as his own.

The wandering ascetic and crusader

Dayananda Sarasvati spent nearly twenty-five years, from 1845 to 1869, as a wandering ascetic, searching for religious truth. An ascetic is someone who gives up material goods and lives a life of self-denial, devoted to spiritual matters. He lived in jungles, in retreats in the Himalayan Mountains, and at a number of pilgrimage sites in northern India. During these years Dayananda Sarasvati practiced various forms of yoga. He became a disciple, or follower, of a well-known religious teacher, Swami Birajananda (sometimes spelled Virajananda). Birajananda believed that Hinduism had

strayed from its historical roots and that many of its practices had become impure. Dayananda Sarasvati promised Birajananda that he would devote his life to restoring the rightful place of the Vedas in the Hindu faith.

He kept his vow to Birajananda and became a religious crusader. Leaving behind the quiet, private existence he had led up to this time, Dayananda Sarasvati entered public life and began to develop his views about reforming Hinduism. His goal was to urge Hindus to turn away from worship involving images and to place their entire faith in the truth of the Vedas. He began to gain some recognition after he took part in a public debate with traditional Hindu scholars in the city of Benares. The subject of the debate was the authority of the Vedas. This debate was conducted by the *maharaja*, or ruler, of Benares, who came to share Dayananda Sarasvati's views. Through the support of the influential maharaja, Dayananda Sarasvati and his views became more widely known throughout the region.

The early 1870s were an important period in Dayananda Sarasvati's life. By this time he had abandoned the life of a wandering ascetic. He lived among and had close contact with many of the Hindu Brahmins in the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata). Prior to his arrival in the city, he had worn only a loincloth (a cloth covering just the middle portion of his body) and had preached in the Sanskrit language. His supporters in Calcutta urged him to go about fully clothed. They also recommended he preach and lecture in Hindi rather than Sanskrit, since Hindi was the language of the majority of the population, while Sanskrit was spoken only by the educated few. Dayananda Sarasvati followed their advice and was able to reach a much wider audience. In the years that followed, he continued to lecture and hold public debates not only with Hindus but with Christians and Muslims as well.

The Light of Truth

Two important events in Dayananda Sarasvati's life occurred in 1875. The first of these was the publication of his book *Sathyartha Prakasha* (Light of Truth). This was Dayananda Sarasvati's most important published work. In the book, he outlined his beliefs in a very brief and direct way. For example, he wrote, "I hold that the four Vedas . . . are the Word of God. . . . They are absolutely free from error, and are an authority unto themselves."

Dayananda Sarasvati argued that the commentaries on and additions to the Vedas over the centuries were not true Hindu teachings. To find the truth of Hinduism, he claimed, one had only to read the original Vedas.

The Vedas

The Vedas, Hinduism's sacred scripture, consist principally of a large number of hymns or songs. These hymns were composed by early Hindu wise men who, according to traditional belief, heard them in ecstatic (highly emotional and trancelike) visions. Most scholars date the Vedas at about 1500 to 1200 BCE, although some claim they are even older and were written around 5000 or 7000 BCE. One of the Vedas, called the Rig Veda, may date from as far back as 12,000 BCE.

The Vedas were transmitted orally from teachers to students. They are often referred to as *sruti*, a word that means "that which is heard." Many of these teachers and students were able to memorize thousands of lines of text. The Vedas encompass all spiritual knowledge and detail rituals, philosophies, and other practices. Devout Hindus see the Vedas as timeless and authorless. According to this belief, they did not come from the hand of humans. They represent an eternal wisdom that appears anew with each new cycle of history.

He also restated his belief in such principles as the eternal nature of God, rebirth, and *moksha*, the liberation of the soul from the cycle of reincarnation.

Arya Samaj

In 1875 Sarasvati also formed the Arya Samaj, which can be translated into English as "Society of Aryans." The Aryans were speakers of an original, unrecorded Indo-European language from which many of the languages spoken in Europe and Central Asia are descended. Thousands of years ago the Aryans moved eastward into the Indian subcontinent. The Arya Samaj is a sect of Hinduism that preaches Dayananda Sarasvati's view that the Vedas are the only real source of God's truth and that all other developments in the faith since the time the Vedas were revealed are false.

The Arya Samaj opposes ancestor worship, the sacrifice of animals, religious beliefs and practices that do not originate in the Vedas, and the caste, or social class, system. It also rejects the notion of "untouchability," which refers to the lowest caste of Indian society, the Untouchables, who perform such tasks as dis-

posing of waste and dead animals. The sect is also against child marriage, offerings made to the gods in temples, pilgrimages, and the belief that priests hold some sort of secret wisdom. The Arya Samaj upholds belief in karma (the idea that a person's actions affect his or her destiny), reincarnation, and the important role of *samskaras*, or individual sacraments (rites or rituals). There are sixteen such sacraments marking important stages in a person's life, ending with the final funeral rites.

The group was, and continues to be, a force for social change in Indian society. The Arya Samaj has supported many programs of reform. It opposes discrimination against women and supports education for both men and women. To that end, it has built a network of schools and institutions of higher learning. It also defends marriages between members of different castes, a practice discouraged by traditional Indians.

In addition, the Arya Samaj has built missions, orphanages, and homes for widows, and has carried out medical work and famine relief (help for those suffering from a severe food shortage).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Arya Samaj also supported Indian independence from Great Britain. During the remainder of his life Dayananda Sarasvati challenged Indians to be more aggressive against British rule. He called for armed revolution against the British, as well as against Christian missionaries in India. At the same time he expressed admiration for European civilization. He believed that the nations of Europe were advanced because they had representative governments, a system of education, and networks of trade. Dayananda Sarasvati's goal for India was realized when the country became independent from Great Britain in 1947.



An image of the Hindu god Shiva. Dayananda Sarasvati was disturbed when mice ran over an image of the god in a temple. This experience helped form his beliefs about how Hinduism should be practiced.

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Death

Dayananda Sarasvati continued to preach his views for the remainder of his life. He engaged Christians and Muslims in debate and gained a reputation for being an opponent of those religions. He also offended orthodox, or traditional, Hindus because he challenged their views. Several attempts were made on his life.

In 1883 Dayananda Sarasvati was a guest of the maharaja of Jodhpur. The maharaja led a life of worldly pleasure, and Dayananda Sarasvati advised him to change his ways and seek purity and discipline in his life. Some of the members of the maharaja's court were offended by Dayananda Sarasvati's boldness. It is believed that they poisoned him on the night of October 30, 1883. The accusation, however, was never proven, and the cause of Dayananda Sarasvati's death remains a mystery.

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Anagarika Dharmapala

BORN: September 9, 1864 • Colombo, Ceylon

DIED: April 29, 1933 • Sarnath, India

Ceylonese religious leader; writer

“The tendency of enlightened thought of the day all over the world is not toward theology, but philosophy and psychology. Indeed, the [ship] of theology drifts into danger.”

Anagarika Dharmapala was a religious leader who is credited with introducing Buddhism to the United States and Europe. He also helped to restore Buddhism in his native Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) after centuries of foreign invaders had forced their religions on its citizens. He gave new energy to the religion through a reform movement that emphasized its moral and ethical aspects. Anagarika Dharmapala preached his ideas in many countries and was the Buddhist representative to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois, in 1893. He made several other trips to the United States and Europe and wrote widely on Buddhist topics before dying in India in 1933.

The making of a Buddhist

Anagarika Dharmapala was born David Hewavitarne in Colombo, Ceylon, on September 17, 1864. His father, H. Don Carolis, was the wealthy founder of a furniture manufacturing business. His mother was Mallika Hewavitarne, whose surname comes from a famous queen in Buddhist literature. The family was of Sinhalese origin. The Sinhalese people arrived in Ceylon from northern India around the fifth century BCE. They conquered the native forest-dwelling Veddas and quickly formed the majority of the nation's population. Buddhism was adopted as the

national religion in the third century BCE, and the island became one of its leading world centers.

Several centuries of foreign intervention began when the Tamil people of south India invaded Ceylon in the late third century. Then the Portuguese conquered much of the island by the late sixteenth century and introduced Roman Catholicism to the inhabitants. Slightly more than a century later, the Dutch overthrew the Portuguese and occupied Ceylon. They were in turn defeated by the British, who made most of Ceylon a crown colony in 1798 and installed the Anglican religion. In 1815 the entire country was brought under British rule, and the ancient line of Sinhalese kings ended. The British established rubber, tea, and coffee plantations and created an educational system in the form of missionary schools and a university. The native population attempted to regain its independence several times, but the British remained in power until 1948.

When Hewavitarne was born in 1864, the country had been under British control for many years. Christianity had replaced Buddhism as the religion of much of the population, and the Sinhalese culture was largely lost as a result of the three hundred years of foreign occupation. Most of the middle and upper-middle class population, especially in the coastal areas, had taken Christian names, including Hewavitarne's family. Young David was sent to missionary schools for primary and secondary education, as was the practice at the time. At Saint Benedict's Anglican School and then later at Saint Thomas's Collegiate School, Christian values were emphasized, and church attendance and Christian religious instruction were required.

Throughout his education, however, Hewavitarne did not lose his belief in Buddhism, his ancestors' faith. He became influenced by two of the most well-known Buddhist leaders of the period, Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thera and Migettuwatte Sri Gunananda Thera. Hewavitarne found he much preferred the two Buddhists' simple lifestyles over those of the missionary teachers for whom he had little respect. After witnessing a riot that broke out after Christians attacked a peaceful Buddhist procession, Hewavitarne became disgusted with the hypocrisy (the claiming of beliefs one does not actually hold or follow) of the British and their religion. He dropped out of school to study on his own.

Around this time Ceylon received a pair of interesting guests. One of these, Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), was a founder of the Theosophical



Buddhists light lamps in a temple during the Wesak Festival, which celebrates the Buddha's birthday and enlightenment. Dharmapala was able to celebrate the first Wesak Festival in the United States in 1896. © ANURUDDHA LOKUHAPUARACHICHI/REUTERS/CORBIS.

Society, a mystical religious and philosophical movement that combines Buddhist and Hindu beliefs. The society is aimed at helping a Western audience investigate the universe and humanity's place in it by becoming closer to the divine. Blavatsky was accompanied by the society's cofounder, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). The two had come to Ceylon to learn more about Buddhist principles. Soon after their arrival they began studies with a *bhikkhu*, an ordained Buddhist monk, and declared themselves Buddhists. After he dropped out of school, Hewavitarne met Blavatsky and Olcott and joined the Theosophical Society. He acted as a translator to aid Olcott in his efforts to open Buddhist schools throughout the country and revitalize Buddhism. Hewavitarne also became a good friend of Blavatsky, who encouraged him to learn Pali, an early Indian language in which much of the Buddhist

canon, or body of literature, is written. Blavatsky also inspired him to work for his people and religion.

Hewavitarne gave up his family wealth and changed his name to Dharmapala, which means “guardian of the dharma.” The dharma are the teachings of the Buddha, an Indian philosopher and the founder of Buddhism who revealed the path to enlightenment and nirvana. For a first name he took Anagarika, which means “one who has no home.” This choice reflected his pledge to dedicate himself to a life following the rules of Buddhism, including celibacy, or refraining from sexual intercourse. He wore a yellow robe similar to those of Buddhist monks, although he was not one himself. He also counseled others to exchange their Western names for traditional native names. Dharmapala assisted Olcott in opening more than three hundred schools in Ceylon. This helped revive Buddhism’s traditional branch of Theravada, which means “the way of the elders.”

When he was twenty years old, Dharmapala began writing for a weekly paper, the *Saraasavi-Sandaresa*. This was the first of many writing jobs he held throughout his lifetime. He eventually took over the paper’s entire operation, writing, printing, and distributing it twice a week. He argued for a revival of native Sinhalese traditions and a return to the country’s Buddhist roots. Together with Olcott he toured Ceylon’s villages to see the religious conditions across the country for himself. In 1888 he founded an English-language newspaper, the *Buddhist*, and used it to communicate his thoughts about the Buddhist revival and Sinhalese nationalism to the English-speaking community.

Missions abroad

In 1888 Dharmapala traveled with Olcott to Japan to visit Buddhist sites and to attempt to encourage good relations among the different branches of Buddhism. Three years later Dharmapala and Blavatsky toured India, the country of Buddhism’s origins. The religion had nearly died out there, however. Dharmapala was distressed to find Buddhist shrines, such as the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, in poor condition. When he returned to Ceylon, Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society in order to restore the temple, which honors the site of Buddha’s enlightenment. The aims of the society soon broadened to include teaching and promoting Buddhism in Ceylon

Buddhism in Sri Lanka

In the early twenty-first century, Sri Lanka was the home of the world's oldest ongoing Buddhist civilization. Though the religion began in India, it nearly ceased to exist there after it spread to other countries. The Indian emperor Ashoka Maurya, also called Asoka, who ruled from c. 273 to c. 232 BCE, converted to Buddhism after a bloody struggle to gain power and was determined to devote himself to peace. He attempted to achieve this by sending missionaries outside of India to spread the faith. One of these, his son, Mahinda, is credited with bringing Buddhism to Ceylon in the third century BCE.

The Sinhalese king accepted Buddhism, linking the religion with the line of Ceylon rulers. The civilization's magnificent central city of Anuradhapura became the center for Theravada Buddhism. The city covered a relatively large amount of land, measuring about 30 square miles, and featured houses of two and three stories tall and temples up to nine stories tall. By the fifth

century CE, eight thousand Buddhist monks lived there. A cutting from the *bodhi* tree, the sacred fig tree under which the Indian philosopher Buddha (563–483) was said to have been sitting when he gained enlightenment, was planted in the city. When the Tamil invaded in the eighth century, the Sinhalese moved farther south and the city was abandoned.

Despite occupations by three different foreign powers and the invasion of Christianity, Buddhism retained a hold on the people of Ceylon. The Sinhalese kings remained Buddhists until the British overthrew the last of their line in 1815. The efforts of Anagarika Dharmapala and other reformers helped to revive the religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, restoring a belief system with roots more than two thousand years old. Due to their efforts, Sri Lanka eventually became the primary center of Theravada Buddhism in the world.

and India. In 1892 he founded the *Maha Bodhi Journal* to aid in this process.

Dharmapala became known outside Asia when he traveled to Chicago in 1893 as the Theravada Buddhist representative to the World Parliament of Religions. Though he was a young man of only twenty-nine among gray-haired elders, Dharmapala spoke emotionally and intelligently of his religion. He gained followers in the United States and opened a U.S. chapter of the Maha Bodhi Society.

A life of Buddhist service

Dharmapala continued to work for the revival of Buddhism in his native Ceylon and in India. He also spoke out for an independent Ceylon, free of British rule. When Blavatsky died Dharmapala stopped working with the Theosophical Society. A wealthy American patron, Mary E. Foster, helped finance further tours abroad for him. During an 1896 tour,

Dharmapala was able to celebrate the first Wesak Festival in the United States. The Wesak Festival is held in honor of the Buddha's birthday and enlightenment. In 1906 he founded a weekly publication, the *Sinhala Baudbhaya*, with financial support from Foster. In this paper he discussed his twin passions of Buddhism and Sinhalese nationalism and criticized the British administration in Ceylon. He also continued to travel around the world. He opened new branches of the Maha Bodhi Society in cities such as London, England; New Delhi, India; and New York in the United States. On a trip to England in 1926, he founded a publication called the *British Buddhist*, and the following year he led that nation's first Wesak Festival.

His efforts to promote Sinhalese nationalism and an independent Ceylon gained him many enemies. Because of this, towards the end of his life he decided to leave Ceylon and settle in India. On January 13, 1933, he was ordained (authorized to have priestly authority) a bhikkhu, or Buddhist monk, by Sinhalese monks. He died three months later.

Dharmapala is credited with establishing a code of ethics directed at the Buddhist worshippers rather than at the monks and nuns. This code is in many respects similar to Protestant Christianity with its emphasis on worldly, ethical actions. For example, Dharmapala emphasized integrating basic Buddhist beliefs such as the Eightfold Path in one's daily life, similar to the way the Ten Commandments provide rules for everyday living for Christians. Some have described the result as a "Protestant Buddhism," which focuses on spiritual teachings in one's everyday life.

He is best known for three lasting achievements. First, he revitalized Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the home of the religion's oldest school, and in India, the religion's birthplace. Second, he introduced Buddhist teachings throughout Asia, North America, and Europe. Third, he awakened a Sinhalese nationalism which had been inactive due to so many centuries of foreign rule. Dharmapala left behind a large body of published work, including *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays, and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, and many writings on Buddhism.

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Dipa Ma

BORN: March 25, 1911 • East Bengal, India

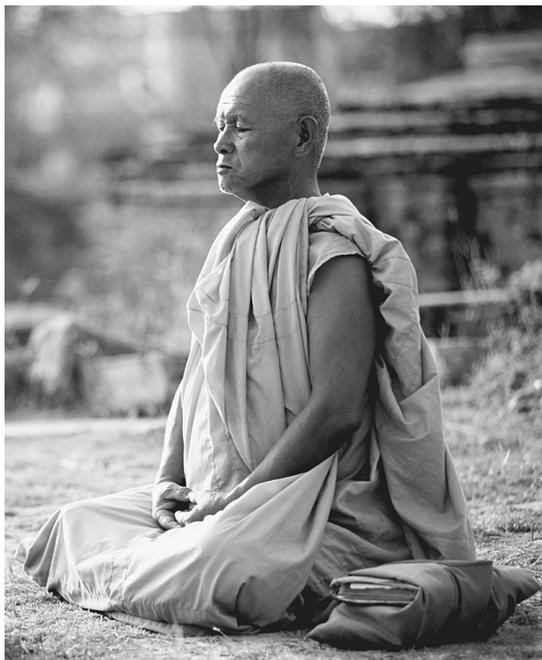
DIED: September, 1989 • Calcutta, West Bengal, India

Indian religious leader

“The whole path of mindfulness is this: ‘Whatever you are doing, be aware of it.’”

During a lifetime that spanned most of the twentieth century, Dipa Ma overcame tragedy by meditating (engaging in continuous and profound thinking) and living quietly, surrounded by her family, friends, and students. She became an important figure in the history of modern Buddhism as a teacher and role model for ordinary people trying to achieve enlightenment while carrying out family responsibilities. Her life was a source of great inspiration to her students, many of whom went on to spread her version of the Buddhist message of *dharmā* to others.

Dharma is a concept rooted in Hindu philosophy. Although the word means “protection,” it can be used to refer to the basic principles of existence, which might be called divine law. Buddhists and others who follow dharma protect themselves from unhappiness and discontent by living in accord with these principles of existence. Buddhists, in particular, do so by following the teachings of the **Buddha**, Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE; see entry), the founder of Buddhism. Some of these teachings address the importance of compassion, cherishing others, and transforming oneself in the face of difficulties. Followers of dharma believe that through meditation they can achieve happiness and enlightenment, even if they are suffering from poverty, tragedy, or simply the daily concerns of life. Dipa Ma made her life’s work the teaching of dharma to those who sought her out.



Dipa Ma used meditation, like the Buddhist monk pictured here, to overcome the tragedy she faced during her life.

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Birth and early life

Dipa Ma was born Nani Bala Barua on March 25, 1911. Her birthplace was a small village in the Indian province of East Bengal (modern-day Bangladesh), near the border with Burma (later called Myanmar). She was born to a clan that could trace its lineage back to the time of the Buddha. The people in her community practiced Buddhist rituals and customs, but they did not practice meditation, which was primarily left to monks and nuns.

From an early age Nani showed great interest in Buddhist rituals and practices. She helped monks at local temples and made statues of the Buddha. Instead of playing with other children, she read and studied, often discussing matters of Buddhist faith and practice with her father. Because she was a girl, she had little opportunity

to obtain formal schooling in her village. Girls were expected to marry early. These marriages were typically arranged by the parents of the couple. When Nani was twelve years old, she was taken from her village and married to a twenty-five-year-old engineer named Rajani Ranjan Barua. She had been with her husband for just a week when he left to take a job in Rangoon (renamed Yangon in 1989), which was then the capital city of Burma. For two years she lived with her husband's parents until she was finally put on a boat to join him in Rangoon.

Soon after arriving in Rangoon, the teenage Nani, expressed interest in meditating. For a Buddhist, meditating is not simply a matter of sitting in a chair and thinking. The discipline of meditation has to be studied and practiced, often with the help of a Buddhist master. Without guidance and focus, Buddhists believe, meditation can turn into pointless daydreaming. Nani asked her husband for permission to study meditation. Her husband was not opposed to the idea, but he and his wife were “householders,” the term used by Buddhists to refer to people who are not monks or nuns. Traditionally, householders did not engage in intense religious practice until after they had fulfilled their responsibilities as householders, especially the raising of children. Due to this Rajani told Nani to delay studying meditation until she was older.

Parenthood

Nani encountered great difficulty when she tried to have children. Because a woman in her circumstances was expected to be a mother, this was a source of shame to her. In time, she did become pregnant, but the child died in infancy. A second child also died while still very young. Finally, after she had been married for twenty-seven years, Nani gave birth to a daughter who survived. The daughter's name was Dipa, so Nani took the name Dipa Ma, which means "mother of Dipa." *Dipa* means "light" in the Bengali language, so Dipa Ma can also be translated as "mother of light." Dipa Ma and her husband also adopted Dipa Ma's younger brother Bijoy.

Soon after her daughter's birth, Dipa Ma's health began to decline. She suffered from severe hypertension, or high blood pressure, and for several years was unable to leave her bed. Her husband nursed her, but one day in 1957 he came home from work complaining that he was also feeling ill. He died a few hours later from a heart attack. Dipa Ma, overcome with grief and sickness, almost died herself. She concluded that the only way to survive would be through meditation. She said that during this period of sadness and confusion, she had a dream in which the Buddha chanted these verses from the Dhammapada, a sacred Buddhist text:

Clinging to what is dear brings sorrow.
Clinging to what is dear brings fear.
To one who is entirely free from endearment
There is no sorrow or fear.

Dipa Ma turned both her property and her daughter over to a neighbor and enrolled at the Kamayut Meditation Center in Rangoon. Her intention was to spend the remainder of her life there, but events took an unexpected turn. On her first day, she fell into a deep meditative state. She found that she was unable to move her leg, although she felt no pain. Finally, she realized that a dog had seized her leg and would not let go. Monks pried the dog off, and Dipa Ma was sent first to a hospital for treatment, then home to recover. Her daughter, glad to have her mother back, insisted that she not return to the center. Dipa Ma then decided that she would practice meditation at home.

Transformation

For several years Dipa Ma meditated at home. A friend then encouraged her to attend the Thathana Yeiktha meditation center in Burma, to study under the well-known teacher Mahasi Sayadaw. By this time Dipa Ma was



Buddhist nuns gather in a large room to pray. Dipa Ma challenged the notion that only men could become enlightened. Meditation is an important element on the path to enlightenment. © MICHAEL FREEMAN/CORBIS.

fifty-three years old and so frail that she could barely climb the stairs to the center. After a short period of study, Dipa Ma was able to enter stages of deep concentration and meditation that transformed her life. The condition of her heart improved. Her blood pressure went down. The weakness in her legs disappeared. Instead of feeling ill and grief stricken, Dipa Ma found herself a healthy, vigorous, happy woman.

Dipa Ma's friends and family were inspired by her changes. Several of them, including her daughter and Dipa Ma's sister, Hema, joined her at the center. For nearly a year, they followed the center's code of discipline, which involved maintaining silence, avoiding eye contact with others, sleeping for just four hours each night, and eating no food after noon. In 1967, however, the Burmese government ordered all foreigners to leave the country. The monks at the center believed that Dipa Ma could have stayed if she wanted to, but she decided to move to Calcutta (now Kolkata), India. She believed that in Calcutta her daughter

would have more educational opportunities. She and Dipa moved and took up residence in a small room above a machine shop. The room had no running water, and the two had to share a toilet with another family. They cooked on a small charcoal grill on the floor. Dipa Ma slept on a thin straw pallet on the floor.

Teacher

Word quickly spread throughout the city that a gifted teacher of meditation had arrived from Burma. Soon people were appearing at Dipa Ma's door looking for instruction. Traditionally, teachers of meditation had been monks or spiritual masters, and were always men. In fact, traditional Buddhism taught that only men could become enlightened like the Buddha. A woman had to be reborn as a man in a future life in order to become enlightened. Dipa Ma, however, taught meditation to ordinary householders, many of them women, who were trying to balance domestic chores with a desire for spiritual enlightenment. Some of her followers referred to her as the "patron saint of householders."

The key lesson that Dipa Ma shared with the students who came to her was "mindfulness." This word refers to focusing intently on a task, whatever that task might be. For example, she would teach mothers of infants to become "mindful" as their infants were nursing. By becoming mindful, they would focus on their bodily sensations as the child nursed. Similarly, she taught busy shop owners to become mindful of their business or family, even if only for a few minutes each day. Her goal was to help people not go through their lives being unhappy because they had too much to do. Mindfulness made her students fully and deeply aware of their activities and made those activities important and a source of contentment.

Dipa Ma's students said that they learned not by what she did, but by who she was. They claimed her presence alone was enough to promote a

Vipassana

The type of meditation Dipa Ma taught is called *vipassana*, or "insight" meditation. This type of meditation was practiced by the Buddha. The purpose of vipassana is to focus awareness on the body and on the experiences of the senses. Some practitioners focus separately on the various parts of their bodies, doing what is sometimes called a "body sweep," concentrating in turn on their toes, their feet, their legs, and so forth. Others focus on their breathing. By intently concentrating on the rhythms of breathing, a person is said to be able to "breathe out" negative states of mind and "breathe in" such qualities as tolerance and patience. A person may also visualize his or her breath as a light that radiates from the body, spreading peace and happiness.

As a practitioner of vipassana becomes more relaxed and aware, unhappiness, confusion, and even tragedy can be overcome. Teachers of insight meditation stress that what a person concentrates on is not important. One can even concentrate on a pain or discomfort in the body. What is most important is the process of the concentrating. And as with any process, people improve their ability to concentrate over time. Through practice and discipline, they become more mindful both of the surrounding world and of their inner feelings.

sense of peace and mindfulness in them. She was a demanding teacher, insisting that her students not be lazy as they practiced meditation, but she was kind and loving as well. She would greet her students by blessing them and stroking their hair, and she shared her blessings with people, animals, and even inanimate objects on the street.

In the 1980s Dipa Ma traveled to the United States to teach her techniques at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts. The society was created by three Westerners, Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzberg. These three had traveled to Calcutta frequently to meet with and learn from Dipa Ma. As quoted by Amy Schmidt in *Dipa Ma: The Life and Legacy of a Buddhist Master*, Goldstein said, “There may be a few times in our lives when we meet a person who is so unusual that she or he transforms the way we live just by being who they are. Dipa Ma was such a person. . . . ‘Her’ stillness and love were different from anything I had encountered before.”

Dipa Ma died in September 1989. According to a neighbor who was at her side at the time of her death, in her last moments she folded her hands in prayer and bowed to a statue of the Buddha. She then stopped breathing, dying as calmly as she had lived during the last decades of her life. Her teachings have survived through the efforts of her students, many of whom went on to teach others.

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Enheduanna

BORN: c. 2300 BCE • Mesopotamia

DIED: c. 2260 BCE • Mesopotamia

Mesopotamian princess; priestess; poet

“The day was favorable for her, she was clothed sumptuously / she was garbed in womanly beauty. / Like the light of the rising moon, / how she was sumptuously attired.”

Enheduanna is often referred to by historians as the first female poet and is even considered by some to be the first known author in all of literature. The daughter of the Sumerian king Sargon I of Akkad (ruled c. 2334–c. 2279 BCE), Enheduanna was a high priestess to the Sumerian moon god, Nanna. As a priestess, Enheduanna was regarded as having near-divine power herself. She chose Nanna’s daughter, Inanna, a fertility goddess and the goddess of war, to be her personal goddess and protector. Enheduanna established the religious cult of Inanna and helped to spread belief in the goddess throughout the region. Enheduanna also composed several hymns to Inanna, including *The Exaltation of Inanna*, the oldest poem credited to a specific author.

Historical background

By the time of Enheduanna’s birth in the twenty-fourth century BCE, the region of Mesopotamia, which consisted of parts of modern-day Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, had been settled for thousands of years. The local tribes were nomadic (had no permanent home) until the middle of the fourth millennium BCE. The first center of civilization formed in the south of modern-day Iraq, in what was called Sumer. Farming villages in this region grew into a series of a dozen powerful city-states

Enheduanna

Enheduanna is depicted making offerings to Inanna.

UNIVERSITY OF
PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM
(IMAGE 166665).



which were sometimes at war with one another and sometimes fought together against common enemies. The earliest written records also date from about this time, in the form of clay tablets. These tablets detailed the operations of the large temple complexes in each city.

The stepped temple complexes, called ziggurats, averaged about 150 feet (46 meters) in height. Each ziggurat was built in honor of one of the many gods in the Mesopotamian pantheon, or collection of gods and goddesses. The most important of these were the sky god, An; the storm god and Earth god, Enlil; and the water god, Ea, who was sometimes also called the god of wisdom. These were followed in importance by a second threesome composed of the moon god, Nanna; the sun god, Utu; and the goddess of fertility and war, Inanna. The temple complex in the city of Ur honored Nanna. Uruk, one of the leading cultural centers of the early Sumerian period, had temples to Inanna and An. Priests managed the running of the temples. Ordinary citizens did not take part in the worship of the statues built to represent the various deities (gods and goddesses).

Sumer was conquered around 2330 BCE by the Akkadians, a Semitic group who had occupied the lands north of the city. Sumer and Akkad were combined under the rule Sargon I, the father of Enheduanna and the leader of the Akkadians. Sargon became the first Semitic king of Mesopotamia and the first ruler ever to conquer and hold an empire. His realm stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. The empire lasted some 160 years, and Sargon himself ruled for fifty-five of those years.

Little is known of Sargon's early life. According to one Sumerian legend, he was born near the banks of the Euphrates River to a high priestess who found it necessary to hide her baby. She set him afloat in a reed basket that was later found by a gardener named Akki, who raised the baby as his own. The goddess Inanna took a liking to the boy and protected him. Before long he became a cupbearer to the king of Kish, a city in the north of Sumer, and then later king himself. He founded the city of Akkad, which archaeologists (people who study the remains of past human life) believe was located near the modern-day city of Baghdad, Iraq. Sargon fought many battles during his reign. Some accounts total his victories at thirty-four, including the victory over the Sumerian king that united Akkad and Sumer.

The Akkadians introduced many new gods when they conquered Sumer, but they did not forbid the Sumerians from continuing to worship their former gods. Sargon did take power away from the priest class by combining the offices of the *ensi*, the chief civil and religious leader, and the *lugal*, the temporary leader taken on in time of war. The new position was known as *ensi*. By incorporating these functions, Sargon fused the temporary civil leader with the permanent religious leader, and thereby reduced the political strength of the priests. In general, the Akkadians combined elements of Sumerian religion with their own rather than rejecting it.

Sargon appointed his firstborn daughter as the *en*, or priestess, to the Sumerian god Nanna in the city of Ur. This may have been done to encourage the Sumerian people to think of Sargon less as a foreign invader and more as a rightful ruler chosen by the gods. Nanna, the moon god, was the firstborn of Enlil and Ninlil, the goddess of Earth, heaven, and air. Sargon's daughter, whose birth name is unknown, took Enheduanna as her *en* name. Enheduanna means "chief priestess of the ornament of heaven." For the next five hundred years, royal princesses were traditionally installed as high priestesses at Ur, one of Mesopotamia's most

Inanna

Most gods and goddesses in the Mesopotamian pantheon represented some element of nature. Inanna, or Ishtar in Akkadian, was one of the pantheon's most complex deities. She was the goddess of such unlike forces as love, fertility, and war. A pantheon is a group of gods and goddesses. Inanna was described as cruel, vengeful, warlike, and destructive, but also as peaceful, tender, comforting, and mystical. She was seen as the protector of both Sargon and his daughter, Enheduanna. It was partly due to Enheduanna's focus on the goddess that Inanna became the most important deity in Mesopotamia for more than five hundred years.

Inanna was the daughter of Nanna, the moon god, and the twin sister of Utu, the sun god. She was represented in the heavens by the planet Venus. In fact, astronomers (scientists who study the planets and the stars) named a continent on that planet after her. In Sumerian the name Inanna means "Great Lady of An," with An being the god of heaven. When she first

began to be worshipped by the Sumerians, Inanna symbolized the life force and was the goddess of both sexuality and fertility. When displeased, she could destroy crops and make women unable to bear children. Among the Assyrians and Akkadians to the north, she was worshipped as the goddess of war and the hunt and was often pictured in battle dress with bow and arrow.

Inanna is at the center of several powerful myths, including one that tells of her descent into the underworld to claim control of it. Her sister, Ereshkigal, who already ruled the underworld, was upset by this and sentenced Inanna to death. When Inanna died, however, the world dried up and crops would no longer grow. The water god, Ea, arranged to save Inanna, with the agreement that someone else would have to take her place in the underworld. Inanna chose her lover, Dumuzi. Dumuzi then ruled from the underworld for half of each year and rejoined Inanna for the other half.

important centers. This linked the royal daughters with Nanna, which in turn linked the kingship with the pantheon.

Princess, priestess, and poet

During digs conducted at Ur by English archaeologist Sir Leonard Wooley in 1925 and 1927, a thin, see-through limestone disk was found. The disk bears a likeness of Enheduanna on one side and an inscription identifying her as the "wife" of Nanna and the daughter of King Sargon on the other. Most likely a religious artifact from the temple, the disk shows the priestess performing a ritual.

The disk also serves as an introduction to the duties of a priestess, such as making daily offerings to the god or goddess honored by the temple. These offerings consisted of foods such as grain, honey, and dates that were carried in a basket called a *gimasab*, which is represented

on the disk. Other duties included conducting a ceremony to purify water and caring for the *giparu*, the building attached to the temple that contained the priestess's private residence. Enheduanna's position took her to the other major cities of Mesopotamia, where she promoted not only her deity, Nanna, but also the goddess Inanna, whom Enheduanna took as her personal deity and protector.

Priestesses were also responsible for composing hymns, songs, and poetry honoring the deities. Some of the historical knowledge of Enheduanna comes through the hymns she composed to Inanna. These hymns were later transcribed in cuneiform, wedge-shaped writing carved with a pointed stick on clay tablets. More than one hundred such tablets are believed to be the work of Enheduanna because they were written in Sumerian. Her father, Sargon, typically wrote in Akkadian. At least six different compositions have been attributed to Enheduanna from the tablets, the most well-known and completely translated of which is *The Exaltation of Inanna*. Historians and archaeologists have given these hymns Sumerian titles taken from their first lines. Therefore *The Exaltation of Inanna* is also sometimes called *Nin-me-sar-ra* (Queen of Countless Divine Powers).

The Exaltation of Inanna is 153 lines long and begins with a description of Inanna's characteristics. The second part details Inanna's powers as a goddess of battle. The third section tells of the trouble endured by Enheduanna when a local lugal (third-highest ranking military officer) rebelled against her father and she was banished from the temples in Ur and Uruk. She also mentions in the hymn the difficulty she has finding inspiration to write.

The *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* relays the *Exaltation* in translation for modern readers. This excerpt is from the section in which Enheduanna praises Inanna's powers in battle:

At your battle-cry, my lady, the foreign lands bow low. When humanity comes before you in awed silence at the terrifying radiance and tempest [storm or upheaval], you grasp the most terrible of all the divine powers. Because of you, the threshold



The goddess Inanna, or Ishtar, was worshipped by the priestess Enheduanna. Inanna was the Mesopotamian goddess of love, fertility, and war. HEAD OF A STATUE OF ISHTAR, WEARING A HEADRESS FROM THE TEMPLE OF USHTAR AT MARI, SYRIAN, 2800–2300 BC (ALABASTER)/ASSYRIAN SCHOOL/NATIONAL MUSEUM, DAMASCUS, SYRIA, GIRAUDON/THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY INTERNATIONAL.

[door] of tears is opened, and people walk along the path of the house of great lamentations [cries of grief]. In the van of battle, all is struck down before you. With your strength, my lady, teeth can crush flint. You charge forward like a charging storm. You roar with the roaring storm, you continually thunder with Ickur [god of storms]. You spread exhaustion with the stormwinds, while your own feet remain tireless. With the lamenting *balaj* drum a lament is struck up.

Another verse written by Enheduanna is *In-nin sa-gur-ra* (Stouthearted Lady), the longest of her surviving works at 274 lines. This hymn's main theme is the power that Inanna has over all aspects of human life. Another group of hymns that has been translated into English is *E-u-nir* (Temple Hymns). This is a collection of forty-two verses written or gathered by Enheduanna. Each verse is addressed to a different temple in Sumer or Akkad. More hymns to Inanna are included in *In-nin me-bus-a* (Inanna and Ebih). Fragments of verses and hymns are also found in two smaller collections, *E-u-gim e-a* (Hymn of Praise to Ekishnugal and Nanna on Assumption of En-ship) and *Hymn of Praise to Enheduanna*. In all of these collections, Enheduanna identifies herself somewhere in the text as the priestess of Nanna and the creator of the verses. Thus, it was possible that the copyists simply attributed these verses to the same person incorrectly. Later study of the texts, however, showed enough similarities to prove that they were all by the same person, Enheduanna.

In her dual roles as princess and priestess, Enheduanna helped merge the royal line with the line of Sumerian deities. She also raised Inanna to the position of one of the most worshipped goddesses in the Mesopotamian pantheon. As Inanna was also her father's patron deity, this worship was also extended to him, strengthening his kingship. Due to the skill displayed in her verses and the fact they have survived for thousands of years, some scholars refer to Enheduanna as the "Shakespeare of Sumerian literature."

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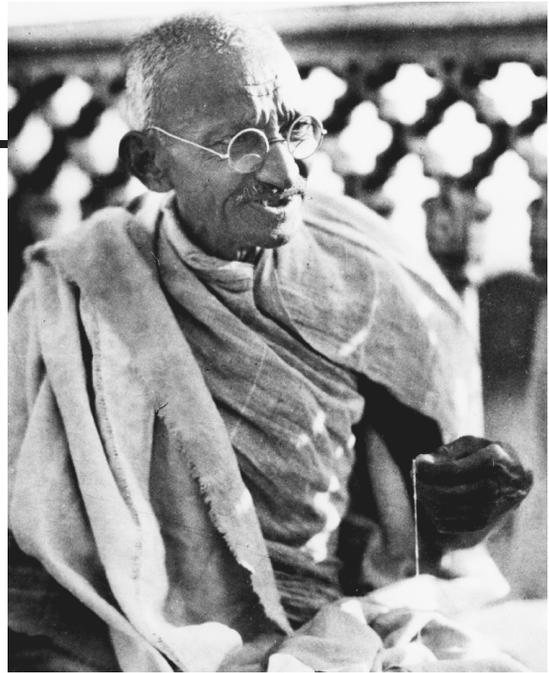
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Mahatma Gandhi

BORN: October 2, 1869 • Porbandar, India

DIED: January 30, 1948 • Delhi, India

Indian religious leader; reformer; lawyer



“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

Mahatma Gandhi was an Indian religious leader who led his country to independence from England in 1948 without striking a single blow. His policy of *satyagraha*, or nonviolent struggle, won his people their freedom and has influenced peaceful resistance movements around the world. This fragile-looking man, wearing only sandals, a loincloth (a piece of cloth worn around the hips), and round glasses, has become an international symbol of love and brotherhood. Gandhi was a devout Hindu, or follower of India’s primary religion, Hinduism. He used the principles of his faith in his own life and in his work to seek peace and justice in India.

Out of India

Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, an Indian town on the coast near Bombay. He came from a wealthy family that was part of the merchant and business caste (a social division in Indian society) called Vaisya. His father had been a prime minister for several small

Mahatma Gandhi.

AP IMAGES.

states in India. His mother was a very religious woman who went to Hindu services every day. From her Gandhi learned some of the principles of her branch of Hinduism, such as not doing harm to any living thing, vegetarianism (not eating meat), fasting (going without food to purify the mind and body), and a respect for other branches of Hinduism and other beliefs. Gandhi was a quiet boy and an average student who did not take part in sports. He was shy but occasionally showed a violent temper.

As was the Indian tradition at the time, Gandhi's parents arranged a marriage for him when he was thirteen to a girl of the same age. Her name was Kasturbai Makharji. At first Gandhi treated her as his inferior, but later their relationship improved. Together they had four children, the first born in 1888 when Gandhi was nineteen. As a young man, Gandhi wanted to become a doctor, but such a profession was considered beneath his caste. Instead, after graduating from high school in India and spending a short time at college, he traveled to London, England, where he trained as a lawyer.

Before leaving for England, Gandhi promised his mother that he would continue to be true to his religion and not eat meat or drink alcohol. While in London, he paid close attention to his legal studies and also began to develop his own sense of spirituality and moral behavior. Because he was Indian, many of his fellow students treated him unfairly. He had occasionally experienced racism before in India from the British upper classes and military, but in London it was a daily experience. He became involved with a vegetarian society, and some of its members were part of a group called the Theosophical Society, a spiritual movement that follows a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs.

The founder of the movement, Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), persuaded Gandhi to begin reading the Bhagavad Gita, one of the holy books of Hinduism. While in London, Gandhi not only became more interested in his own religion, but also in Christianity and Buddhism. Some of the other vegetarians he became friends with were Christians who were inspired by the religious principles of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy preached nonviolence and living a simple life with few possessions.

Gandhi also became familiar with the writings of the American social critic and nature writer, Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience" taught the value of nonviolent resistance to government policies with which one does not agree. Gandhi was also

influenced by the works of the English social and art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900). In his book *Unto This Last*, Ruskin complained about the harmful changes in society that came about with industrialization. He called for a return to the simpler life of farming and producing handmade goods that he claimed would heal society.

Gandhi returned to India in 1891 after receiving his law degree. His shyness was a major difficulty for him in his career, however. He became frightened and nervous when appearing in court and would stutter and forget what he was going to say. After two unsuccessful years of practicing law, he accepted a contract as an office clerk with an Indian business in South Africa.

Years in South Africa

When he arrived in South Africa in 1893, Gandhi was still a young man driven by personal ambition but with no great awareness of or concern for the welfare of others. His personal experiences in South Africa changed that. Gandhi visited the province of Natal where Indians (mostly Muslims, or followers of Islam) outnumbered the white residents. This had caused the ruling whites to pass laws stopping further immigration from India and encouraging Indians to leave South Africa. Gandhi experienced the prejudice that the other Indians in the country were facing immediately upon arriving in the country, when a white man demanded that he give up his first class train seat and sleeping berth because he was Indian. The man demanded that Gandhi go to the third-class coach where other Indians and black South Africans were supposed to sit. Gandhi refused and was forced off the train. He spent the night in a train station thinking about prejudice and how it could be cured. As he noted in his *Autobiography*, this incident convinced him never to give in to force but also never to use force to win a cause: “I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary, the evil it does is permanent.”

Other incidents of this nature occurred to Gandhi during his time in South Africa. A judge once demanded that he take off his turban (head-dress) in court, but Gandhi refused and left. Another time he was beaten by the driver of a stagecoach for refusing to ride on the outside to make room for a white passenger. His race barred him from hotels and restaurants. Experiences like these led to a major turning point in Gandhi's life. He began to see and understand the hardships of the people in South Africa under white rule. Finally he decided to do something about it,

Mahatma Gandhi



Indian children dressed as Mahatma Gandhi travel on a rickshaw to take part in Gandhi's birthday anniversary celebrations in the northern city of Lucknow, India. Gandhi's influences on peaceful movements are honored around the world. © PAWAN KUMAR/ RUETERS/CORBIS.

applying his idea of nonviolence, or *ahimsa* in the Hindi language, to the problem. He began a campaign to improve the legal status of Indians in South Africa, writing newspaper articles and founding the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 to educate the people. Gandhi had planned to stay in South Africa for only a year, but these and other political activities kept him in South Africa for more than twenty years.

In 1896 he returned briefly to India to bring his family to South Africa. When he arrived back in South Africa, a white mob tried to hang him. During the Boer War (1899–1902), in which the Dutch-descended population (called Boers) of southern Africa fought Great Britain for independence, Gandhi supported the British by organizing a volunteer ambulance corps. He was given a medal by the victorious

British government after the war. In spite of the help Great Britain had received from Indians during the fighting, however, they did not win the right of citizenship afterwards. In fact, the situation for South Africans of other than European origin slowly became worse.

In 1906 a law was passed requiring that Indians be fingerprinted and registered with the government. Gandhi called a mass meeting in protest and put into practice his new theory of nonviolent protest, or *satyagraha* (“devotion to truth,” or the use of ahimsa for political protest), for the first time. He was arrested and imprisoned for two months, but the Indian population continued his protest. For the next seven years they ceased to work, refused to register, and burned their registration cards. Thousands were jailed, beaten, and even killed. Public and international reaction to such harsh treatment finally forced the government to compromise with Gandhi.

Prior to the protest, Gandhi had been working to create a new life for himself and his family. He had bought a farm in Natal and lived a simple life, abandoning his Western dress for the simple cotton loincloth and shawl of Indian peasants or poor farmers. By 1906 Gandhi had become celibate, which means that he did not have sexual intercourse, and lived in voluntary poverty. In 1910, as his nonviolent protests spread throughout Indian South Africa, he decided to build another colony near Johannesburg, South Africa. Known as Tolstoy Farm, it became a gathering place for those who resisted the government’s policies.

Gandhi’s nonviolent struggle in South Africa accomplished several things. In addition to achieving an eventual compromise over Indian registration, Gandhi also managed to make Hindu marriages legal and valid. Previously, only Christian marriages were recognized by the government. He was also successful in ending the practice of indentured labor. In this system, Indians would be brought to South Africa and forced to work for a specific period of time before they earned their freedom.

The fight for Indian independence

After more than twenty years in South Africa, Gandhi decided to return to his native India, where he spent the rest of his life. By this time, he had already been given the honorary title “Mahatma” (“Great Soul”) by the poet Indian Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). For the first three years after his return, he did not draw attention to himself or get involved in politics. He supported the British during World War I (1914–18; a war

in which Great Britain, France, the United States and their allies defeated Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their allies) by organizing an Indian ambulance training corps. He was forced out of the service, however, for protesting the racism of his English commanding officer.

In 1919 Gandhi was spurred into action by the passage of the Rowlatt Acts, which allowed the British-run government of India to put people accused of political crimes on trial without a jury. Gandhi organized a general strike and workers throughout the country refused to go to their jobs. He called this off when four hundred peaceful Indian protestors were killed by British-led soldiers. He was not ready to give up the fight for independence, however, and soon Indians throughout the country were expressing support for his movement. Gandhi became the leader of the Indian National Congress political party, and in 1920 he began a campaign to boycott (not buy) British goods. Instead, he advised the Indians to spin their own cotton and make their own clothes as he did. Gandhi hoped to create economic independence for each Indian village in this manner. This campaign led to Gandhi being imprisoned for two years. He was released in 1924 for medical reasons.

Gandhi developed several nonviolent methods of protest, including mass marches and fasting. In an attempt to try to bring Indian Muslims and Hindus together, he fasted for twenty-one days. When the British placed a salt tax on Indians in 1930, he organized a 24-day, 200-mile march to the sea with thousands of protestors. Once they reached the sea, they boiled seawater to make their own salt. In 1932 Gandhi also fasted to draw attention to the lives of the lowest caste in Indian society, the untouchables, whom Gandhi called the *harijans*, or “children of god.”

Throughout the 1930s Gandhi concentrated on building a sense of national pride in Indians, promoting Hindi as the national language, and trying to establish basic education for the poor. He also continued to encourage fabric making as a way to self-sufficiency. Though he retired as the head of the National Congress, he remained its actual leader, working closely with others such as Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964). Nehru would later become the first prime minister of the independent republic of India.

The birth of India

Gandhi became convinced that there would be no real freedom for India as long as it remained part of the British Empire. When World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and

their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan) began, Gandhi demanded that India be given its independence as “payment” for helping the British. England, however, managed to bring India into the war without making any such promises. The seventy-three-year-old Gandhi was sent to jail from 1942 until 1944, along with other Congress Party members such as Nehru. This set off violent protests throughout India.

In prison Gandhi fasted for three weeks. He became ill with malaria, a potentially deadly disease spread by mosquitoes. He also learned that his wife of sixty years, Kasturbai, had died. Finally Gandhi and the others were released. As the war reached its end, the British began to give clear indications that they were ready to transfer power to the Indians and leave the country. Gandhi’s movement against British rule was largely responsible for this. Additionally, the costs of World War II had been high, and Britain could no longer afford the military price of maintaining its empire.

However, independence was not as simple as the Indian people had hoped. Islam and Hinduism continued to divide the country. The leader of the Muslims, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), called for the creation of a separate Muslim state, to be called Pakistan. In August 1946 he declared a “Direct Action Day” that set Muslims against Hindus. The day turned violent and thousands were killed. Gandhi, now seventy-seven, fasted in protest of this violence, but the rioting continued in various parts of the country. By the time the British withdrew from India in 1948, the Congress Party had agreed to the division of the country the Muslims sought. Gandhi began his final fast on January 13, 1948, praying for unity in India. While attending prayers on January 30, he was shot and killed by a radical Hindu who did not approve of Gandhi’s attempts to bring peace between the two religions.

Since his death Gandhi has come to represent peaceful protest and the power of nonviolence. Not only was he largely responsible for liberating his country from British rule, he also presented a model for other freedom activists. His satyagraha influenced protest movements and leaders around the world, including Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) and his efforts to gain

Gandhi’s Ashes

After he was killed, the body of Gandhi was cremated, or burned. About twenty urns (vases) were filled with his ashes. All but one of these urns were sent around the country so that the ashes could be spread in the rivers of India, as Gandhi had wished. The final urn was sent to Cuttack, the capital of the Indian state of Orissa. There it was placed in a bank vault for safekeeping until a proper ceremony could be arranged. After India gained its independence, the capital of Orissa moved from Cuttack to a new location in Bhubaneswar. Somehow the urn containing Gandhi’s ashes was forgotten in the confusion.

In 1997, almost fifty years after Gandhi’s death, the urn was rediscovered by a bank employee. Later that year Gandhi’s final set of ashes was spread in India’s Ganges River by his great-grandson, and Gandhi was finally put to rest in his native land.

equality for African Americans in the United States; and Nelson Mandela (1918–), who spent twenty-five years in prison before becoming the first president of an independent South Africa.

Despite his many achievements, Gandhi remained humble. He was fond of saying, “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills.” Known as the “Father of the Nation” by the people of India, his birthday, October 2, is celebrated as a national holiday. In 2000 *Time* magazine placed Gandhi second on its “Person of the Century” list.

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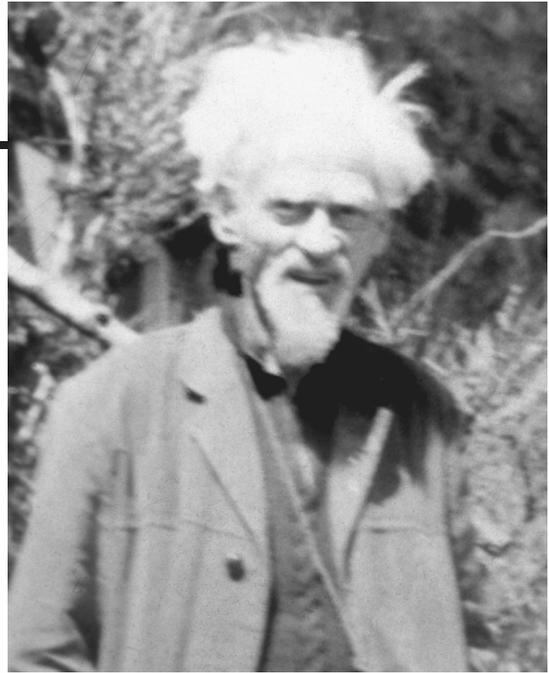
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Gerald Brousseau Gardner

BORN: June 13, 1884 • Blundellsands, England

DIED: February 12, 1964

British religious leader; witch; writer



“I think we must say good-bye to the witch. The cult is doomed, I am afraid, partly because of modern conditions, housing shortage, the smallness of families, and chiefly by education. The modern child is not interested. He knows witches are all bunk.”

Gerald B. Gardner, the pioneer of the modern witchcraft revival movement, was a writer and occultist. An occultist is someone interested in supernatural powers and mystical knowledge. Gardner called himself a witch and founded the contemporary religion of witchcraft in England during the 1950s. This later led to the establishment of Wicca. Wicca is a form of white (benevolent and kind) witchcraft that comes from pre-Christian religious traditions that involve magic and a focus on the rhythms of nature. Gardner gathered beliefs and celebrations from a wide variety of sources to create what became known as the Gardnerian Tradition in witchcraft. He also initiated many people on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean into his coven, or assembly of witches.

Gerald Gardner.

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A very British beginning

Gardner was born Gerald Brousseau Gardner on June 13, 1884, in the small northern English town of Blundellsands near Liverpool. He came from a moderately wealthy family, with a father who was an important local merchant and justice of the peace. Gardner later claimed that his grandfather had married a witch and that other members of the family had supernatural or psychic powers. There are also claims of a family connection to a woman named Grissell Gairdner, who was burned as a witch in 1610.

Gardner had asthma as a child and did not play with his two brothers. Instead he was cared for by a full-time Irish nursemaid who took him on trips across Europe and largely let the youth engage his curiosity as he pleased. Gardner formed early passions for both history and archaeology, which is the study of past human life and culture. When his nursemaid married and went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to live with her husband, Gardner followed. The tropical climate was better for his asthma. Just sixteen, he took a job on a tea plantation. He worked on the plantation for nineteen years before moving to Borneo, a large island in the Malay Archipelago islands, where he became a rubber tree planter. In 1923 he moved to Malaysia, where he was employed for the next thirteen years as a rubber tree plantation inspector, a customs official, and an inspector of opium (an addictive drug made from opium poppies) establishments.

A student of local culture and magic

During his years in the East, Gardner turned his attention to local customs, religions, and supernatural and magical beliefs. He studied ritual weapons and the Malay *kris*, a type of dagger with a wave-shaped blade. His first published work, *Kris and Other Malay Weapons*, resulted from this interest. He conducted original research into the early civilizations of Malaya (now Malaysia), writing for the *Royal Asiatic Society* journal and becoming an expert on the native people of Malaya. He mounted archaeological expeditions in search of lost cities of the East. Gardner was able to finance his work with the income he made from the rubber trade.

Gardner retired at age fifty-two and returned to England with his wife, whom he had married in 1927. They settled in the south of England, in the area known as New Forest. He spent most of his time leading archaeological expeditions throughout Europe and Asia Minor. While on a visit to the island of Cyprus, he discovered what he described as places that he had dreamed about earlier. He became convinced that he had lived on Cyprus

in another lifetime. He used this as the background and setting for his second book, the 1939 novel *A Goddess Arrives*. The book centered around the worship of the goddess Aphrodite 2,500 years earlier.

Gardner became fascinated with the idea of a goddess religion that supposedly ruled the peoples of Europe during the Stone Age, the earliest known period of human culture. According to this religion, the Mother Goddess was the creator and the center of religious power. This feminine-based religion, many say, was the primary form of religious belief for many centuries until it was finally replaced several thousand years ago by what is called the Sky God, or male-dominated religious systems that are known now. The existence of this religion was deemed uncertain by the early twenty-first century, but during the 1930s many people in England and the United States believed in it. According to legend, pre-Christian Europe was matriarchal, or controlled by women, and the supreme spiritual being was a mother goddess.

As a student of local folklore, Gardner soon became interested in the history of the region where he had settled, and he discovered that it had deep roots in witchcraft. He became involved with an occult group, the Fellowship of Crotona, which was led by the daughter of an early member of the Theosophical Society. The Theosophical Society is a mystical religious and philosophical movement founded in New York City in 1875. The society combines Buddhist and Hindu beliefs and seeks to investigate the universe and humanity's place in it. The Fellowship of Crotona practiced both Theosophy and Rosicrucian rituals. The Rosicrucians are an organization devoted to the study of ancient mystical, philosophical, and religious principles. The Crotona group claimed to be a line of hereditary witches, with secret knowledge passed down to them for hundreds of years. (Modern-day research indicates the group was only two decades old at the time of Gardner's involvement with them.) They had built a theater, and Gardner assisted them in the production of plays with occult themes. One member of the fellowship claimed to have known Gardner in his previous life on Cyprus.

Gardner claimed he was initiated into a coven, or group of witches, in 1939, by its leader, a woman he referred to as "Old Dorothy." Historians believe he was referring to a very prim and seemingly conservative lady named Dorothy Clutterbuck (1880–1951), who ran a small coven. (Gardner later claimed that he learned his witchcraft tradition from a coven that had a deep historical tradition, and that his writings were thus handed down from generation to generation. Clutterbuck's small coven, however, was one with



A woman reads from the Wiccan Book of Shadows during a séance. Gerald Gardner led a revival of Wicca in modern times. © THE COVER STORY/CORBIS.

recent roots only.) Once he was a member of the coven, Gardner began to study witchcraft ritual with the intent to publish a book. England still possessed laws against witchcraft at the time, however, so he wrote the 1949 novel *High Magic's Aid* using the false name of Scire. Though fiction, this book revealed much about witchcraft. Some of the material came from Gardner's association with Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), one of the more famous practitioners of the occult in England at the time.

When Gardner met Crowley, shortly before Crowley's death, Gardner persuaded him to write down the practices of a coven to which he had once belonged. Crowley also initiated Gardner into the Ordo Templi Orientis, a group that

practiced the East Asian form of magic called Tantrism. Tantrism is a spiritual movement which involves mantras (verbal formulas), symbolic body postures and hand motions, and sexual rituals. Crowley's version of Tantrism was a corrupted form of tantra yoga, a Hindu discipline intended to awaken the energy in the body by using rituals to address relationships and sexuality. Gardner soon opened his own lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis at his new home on the grounds of a nudist club to which he belonged. His lodge was made up mostly of men. In fact, the female membership of the group was often so low that he had to hire prostitutes from London to carry out the Great Rite, a ritual during which a high priestess was required to have sexual intercourse with male members.

England's chief witch

By 1951 the laws against witchcraft in England had been eliminated, and Gardner could speak publicly about the practice. He was also free to establish his own coven. Gardner moved to the Isle of Man where an acquaintance had opened the Museum of Magic and Witchcraft. Gardner soon bought the museum and operated it himself. In 1953 he met Doreen Valiente (1922–1999), whom he initiated into his coven of witches. Together they edited and expanded what Gardner called his Book of Shadows, a book of rules and rituals for the operation of a coven. Historians believe Valiente

may have toned down some of Crowley's information regarding sexual practices and also helped to insert an emphasis on goddess worship.

In 1954 Gardner published *Witchcraft Today*, perhaps his most influential work. In it he acknowledged and drew from the theories of Egyptologist Margaret Murray (1863–1963) and her 1921 *Witchcraft: The Witch Cult in Western Europe*. Murray's book posed the theory that witchcraft was the remaining aspects of pagan religions that had survived the arrival of Christianity and the centuries of witch hunts that followed. Murray held that the practice of witchcraft went back to ancient times and was widespread throughout Europe. These ideas gained some popularity, although many of her professional colleagues mocked them. Gardner was intrigued by her theories and asked Murray to write the forward to his book.

In *Witchcraft Today* Gardner complained that witchcraft was in danger of dying out. He wrote: "I think we must say good-bye to the witch. The cult is doomed, I am afraid, partly because of modern conditions, housing shortage, the smallness of families, and chiefly by education. The modern child is not interested. He knows witches are all bunk." The book's publication, however, brought about a resurgence of interest in England and led to the formation of many new covens. Gardner was dubbed by the English media as "Britain's Chief Witch." He angered some witches in the country who felt that he was sharing too many secrets of the practice with outsiders. Others disapproved because Gardner incorporated his beliefs on naturism (nudism) with witchcraft.

By all accounts, Gardner was a difficult man with whom to work. Some considered him controlling and arrogant. Many of his followers, including Valiente, who had become the high priestess of his coven, split with him over personality clashes. The increasing media coverage of Gardner also did not please some of the other witches. Gardner continued to work, publishing *The Meaning of Witchcraft* in 1959. The following year he was invited to Buckingham Palace, not, however, because of his work in witchcraft, but for his government service in the Far East. Gardner's wife died that same year.

After a brief trip to Lebanon for health reasons, Gardner was returning by ship to England when he died of a heart attack on February 12, 1964. The captain of the ship was the only mourner at his funeral, and he was buried in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, in Africa. Gardner had left his museum to the current high priestess of his coven, who, with

her husband, continued to run it for a time. Soon, however, they sold the contents of the museum to the Ripley's Believe It or Not company, and the collected artifacts were distributed around the world to the Ripley's museums.

After Gardner's death his papers were made public, and it quickly became apparent that his claims to being initiated into a witchcraft tradition with a long and established ritual were untrue. The papers revealed that Gardner had created much of the ritual himself, blending elements he learned from Crowley with medieval texts, writings of other mystical orders, and bits of Asian ritual and folklore practices. The ritual knife he used, the *athame*, was developed from the Malaysian kris, which Gardner was very familiar with. He took eight different ancient pagan festivals and holy days and adapted them to become the witchcraft holy days, or Sabbats. He also instituted meetings, called Esbats, every other week.

Gardner has been credited with bringing the concept of witchcraft or Wicca to the United States, though he personally never traveled there. In 1963 he initiated a visiting Englishman named Raymond Buckley into the practice. Buckley then went back to the United States, where he was living. He began to spread Gardner's teachings in America, and they ultimately developed into the Wicca movement, which had more than fifty thousand practitioners by the early twenty-first century.

The Gardnerian Tradition

Gardner wrote about the sources he used for his witchcraft ritual in his *Book of Shadows*. Although it is a central sacred text to the religion of Wicca, this book was never published or made available to the general public. Instead, each coven possesses its own hand-written copy, and some of these are in code. They all supposedly contain the basic principles of Gardner's teachings and rituals, but differ somewhat from coven to coven, based on local preferences.

The Gardnerian Tradition contains mysteries and secrets that are supposedly passed on through three different levels, or degrees. When a person reaches the Third Degree, he has complete knowledge of the tradition and may break away, or hive, to form his own coven. The ideal number for a coven is considered to be thirteen. Wicca is a religion of initiation. That is, membership is not purely voluntary, but involves an initiation rite. A coven must find students serious about learning the rites in order for them to be accepted. Some witches, however, prefer to practice Wicca

on their own and are called solitaries. Not all Wiccans practice witchcraft. Some merely believe in the nature elements of the religion.

Wiccans worship the Goddess and may also worship the God, according to Gardner's teachings, and celebrate Sabbats and Esbats. These Sabbats include the solstices (the two longest days of the year), the equinoxes (the two times a year when day and night are equal in length), Litha in the summer, Yule in the winter, Ostara in the spring, and Mabon in the autumn. Other Sabbats include Imbolic on February 1, Beltane on May 1, Lughnasadh on August 1, and Samhain on November 1. This celebration calendar, also called the Wheel of the Year, is used by most Neo-Pagan groups in the early twenty-first century.

Gardner developed rituals to accompany each of these holy days and for each degree of initiation into Wicca. One major ritual of the Gardnerian Tradition is called "Drawing Down the Moon." The high priestess of the coven enters a trance and becomes the Goddess, who is symbolized by the moon. The high priest of the coven calls on, or draws down, the Goddess into the high priestess. Wiccans generally celebrate inside a magic circle, holding hands and saying prayers to the Goddess and God. In the Gardnerian Tradition, such ceremonies are conducted in the nude.

A pentagram, or five-pointed star, is the general symbol of Wicca, and there are several interpretations of what these five points mean. Followers of the Gardnerian Tradition, however, deny that they have any meaning at all. A primary tenet, or principle, of the religion states "If no harm is done, do what you will." Gardner also applied the concept of karma to this tenet. Karma is a Hindu and Buddhist belief that one's actions will return to affect one positively or negatively in three ways: physically, mentally, and spiritually.

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Abu Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī

BORN: 1058 • Tus, Persia

DIED: 1111 • Tus, Persia

Persian religious scholar; writer

“What remained for me was not to be attained by oral instruction and study, but only by immediate experience and by walking in the mystic way.”

Although Abu Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī was a legal scholar and teacher, he is best known for his writings on religion and philosophy. In the middle of his life, al-Ghazālī gave up his academic career and spent years of deep thought on religion. He joined the Sufi sect of Islam, the mystical branch that emphasizes a direct connection with God through prayer and self-denial. Al-Ghazālī wrote more than four hundred works, including *Ihyaʾ ʿUlum ad-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), which brought the mysticism of Sufism into the mainstream of Islam. Known as Algazel in the West, al-Ghazālī and his writings have influenced not only Islamic thinkers but Christian ones as well.

Period of learning

Al-Ghazālī was born in 1058 CE in the small village of Tus, near the town of Masshad in Persia (modern-day Iran). He may have been named after his father’s business, as *ghazzālī* means “wool merchant.” His father was a

Abu Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī

The Assassins share in some drugged wine before going to carry out their work of murder. The Assassins were responsible for the death of al-Ghazālī's sponsor, Nizam al-Mulk. MS FR 2810 F.17

HASSAN I SABBAH LEADING THE INITIATIONS AT ALAMUT GIVING HIS FOLLOWERS DRUGGED WINE (VELLUM), BOUCICAUT MASTER, (FL. 1390-1430) (AND WORKSHOP)/ BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE, PARIS, FRANCE,/THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY INTERNATIONAL.



Sufi. He had several sisters and a brother, Ahmad, who became a Sufi poet. Al-Ghazālī's father died when he was very young, and he and his brother were left in the care of a Sufi friend, Ahmad al-Radkhani, who had promised to educate the boys. Economic conditions were not good, but by the age of fifteen, arrangements had been made for al-Ghazālī to continue his studies with a leading scholar, Abu Nasr al-Isma'ili, in the region of Jurgan, on the Caspian Sea.

Al-Ghazālī would later note in his autobiography, *al-Munkidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error), that he was more ambitious than religious as a young man. He pursued a scholarly religious path at first because that was what was available to a young man with little money or family standing. So, while studying with various teachers, he took notes, but did not bother to consider or memorize the lessons. One story tells how he was returning to his native Tus from Jurgan when his group was attacked by bandits. When al-Ghazālī begged that they not steal his school notebooks, the leader of the robbers laughed at him. The robber said that obviously al-Ghazālī was not much of a scholar if all his learning was kept in notebooks and not in his mind. From this point on, al-Ghazālī memorized his lessons instead of simply copying them down.

When al-Ghazālī was nineteen he earned a place at a religious college, or *madrasa*, in Nishapur, about 50 miles west of Tus. In Nishapur he studied with one of the major religious scholars of the generation,

Abu al-Malik al-Juwayni (died 1085), also known as Imam al-Haramayn. Al-Juwayni was the imam, or religious leader, of the two most sacred cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina. Al-Ghazālī studied both Islamic law and religion and was introduced to the work of two earlier Islamic thinkers, Abu al-Nasr al-Farabi (870–950) and Ibn Sina (980–1037). These men attempted to combine the use of reason and rational thought developed by ancient Greek philosophers with the Islamic belief in one supreme being, Allah.

Al-Ghazālī was a bright student and became a favorite of al-Juwayni. After finishing his studies, he remained for a time at the school and helped with teaching. The young Muslim scholar soon came to the attention of the powerful *vizier* (state official), Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092). The minister had built the college in Nishapur, as well as several others in Persia and what is modern-day Iraq. After the death of al-Juwayni, Nizam al-Mulk invited al-Ghazālī to come to Baghdad, in modern-day Iraq, the administrative center of the Islamic empire.

A brilliant career

In Baghdad al-Ghazālī served Nizam al-Mulk as a legal advisor, taught, wrote, and enjoyed the company of other scholars. In 1091, at only thirty-three years old, he was named the chief professor at Baghdad's Nizamiyya college. This was one of the most prominent positions in the Muslim world. He lectured to large crowds of students on law and logic. He was noted for giving clear and easily understood presentations on complicated religious matters. He also wrote one of his best known works, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, in which he attempted to reveal the mistakes in the theories of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. He believed these earlier thinkers had relied too much on rational thought, which he felt was not adequate for understanding concepts such as Allah and infinity, or something without boundaries.

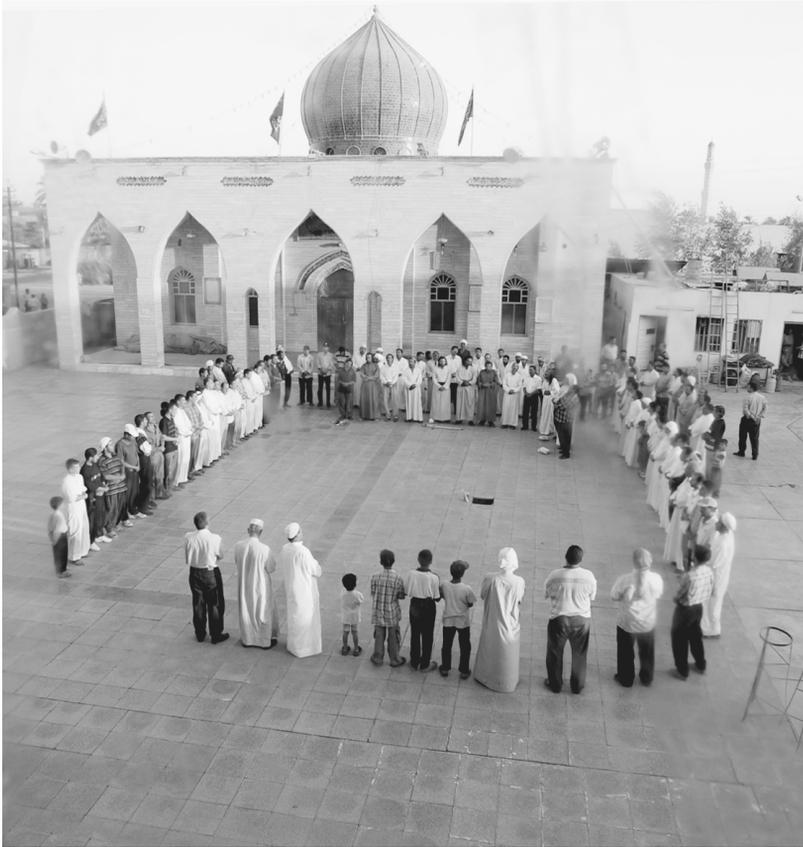
Al-Ghazālī's philosophy was adopted by a group known as the Kalam thinkers, who attempted to prove that the universe had a beginning and therefore was created by Allah. The basic Kalam argument takes the following form: The universe had a beginning. Everything that has a beginning has a cause. Therefore, the universe has a cause, which is Allah. In their rejection of **Aristotle's** (384–322 BCE; see entry) theory that the world of matter and motion is eternal, the Kalam thinkers and al-Ghazālī had much in common.

During his time in Baghdad, Al-Ghazālī also wrote *Fadaʿih al-Batinīyya* (The Obscenities of the Esoterics), a critical account of, among other things, the Assassins, a radical sect of Muslims organized in the late eleventh century. The Assassins often killed their enemies by using knives or poison. The name came from their practice of preparing themselves for their work by using *hashishin*, or the drug hashish. The word “assassination” later became used to describe a planned murder. The Assassins killed a number of prominent Muslims during al-Ghazālī’s years in Baghdad, including his sponsor, Nizam al-Mulk.

Al-Ghazālī’s rise in popularity came to a sudden halt. He suffered a crisis of belief, and maybe even a nervous collapse. In 1095 he developed a stutter that prevented him from lecturing and that ultimately made him mute, or unable to talk. Though he later recovered his voice and lost the stutter, al-Ghazālī gave up his teaching position and left Baghdad. It is possible he left the city in part because he feared being killed, due to his published criticism of the Assassins. In his autobiography, al-Ghazālī claims he could no longer stand the dishonesty he found in many of his fellow scholars. He believed they were more interested in money and fame than in real learning. He also decided that true religion could only come through a direct experience with Allah, not through scholarship. As he wrote in his autobiography: “I apprehended clearly that the mystics are men who had real experiences, not men of words, and that I had already progressed as far as possible by way of intellectual apprehension. What remained for me was not to be attained by oral instruction and study, but only by immediate experience and by walking in the mystic way.”

Retires from the world

Al-Ghazālī moved his family back to Tus. He gave up his wealth and began to live the severe ascetic life of a Sufi. Such a life is marked by contemplation, prayer, self-denial, and poverty. The ultimate goal is to understand and become one with Allah. For Sufis, learning and education are the least important ways a person can experience Allah. More important is the physical experience of the divine, such as enjoying beautiful art or poetry, dancing, fasting (not eating), and even self-mortification, or beating and whipping oneself. For the next decade, al-Ghazālī traveled throughout the Middle East. He lived for a time in Damascus (in modern-day Syria), made a pilgrimage to Mecca (in modern-day Saudi Arabia), and visited Egypt. In 1099 he returned to



Sufis pray during an evening ceremony outside a mosque in Baghdad, Iraq. Later in life, Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī turned towards the severe life of a Sufi, spending much time in prayer and contemplation. © BENJAMIN LOWY/CORBIS.

Tus, where he established a Sufi retreat and school. He lived a quiet life of prayer and writing, and became known as a mystic, one who seeks enlightenment or understanding through religious mysteries.

In 1106 Nizam al-Mulk's son persuaded al-Ghazālī to return to teaching. After much debate al-Ghazālī finally decided to teach at the Nizamiyya in Nishapur, where he had once studied. It was during these years that he completed his greatest work, *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*. In this book al-Ghazālī explains the rules and practices of Islam. It is basically an encyclopedia of the religion. Al-Ghazālī also attempts to show how devotion and practice of Islamic traditions ultimately lead to a higher mystical level of life for the believer. This principle brought Sufism into the orthodox, or traditional, practice of Islam. In another work, *Bidayat al-Hidayah* (The Beginning of Guidance), al-Ghazālī presents a simplified version of this same subject. A third major piece, *Michkat al-Anwar*

(Corner for Lights), compares the mystical experience to other ways of thinking and understanding.

After teaching in Nishapur for four years, al-Ghazālī returned to Tus in poor health. He died in 1111, but his influence has survived for centuries. He is known as a “Defender of the Faith,” for his teachings and writings on Islamic practice. His arguments about the weakness of reason in understanding spiritual issues were later adopted by Christian scholars such as St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) to establish the power of Catholic Christianity in Europe. Indeed, al-Ghazālī was so successful in his arguments in favor of religion that some scholars have accused him of damaging the growth of philosophy.

About a century after al-Ghazālī’s death, the great Spanish Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) attempted to disprove *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* with his own book, *Tabafut al-Tabafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence). Despite the fine reasoning in that work, al-Ghazālī’s comments about the weakness of philosophy still influence Islam. Al-Ghazālī’s own experiences provided examples of how a rich inner life and a mystical pursuit of Allah could be combined with the full observance of the rules of Islam. His work ended the suspicions of Islamic religious scholars regarding Sufism and made them look more favorably on the practice. This in turn ultimately made it easier for ordinary Muslims to participate in Sufi practices.

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Gobind Singh

BORN: December 22, 1666 • Patna, Bihar, India

DIED: October 7, 1708 • Nanded, Maharashtra, India

Indian religious leader

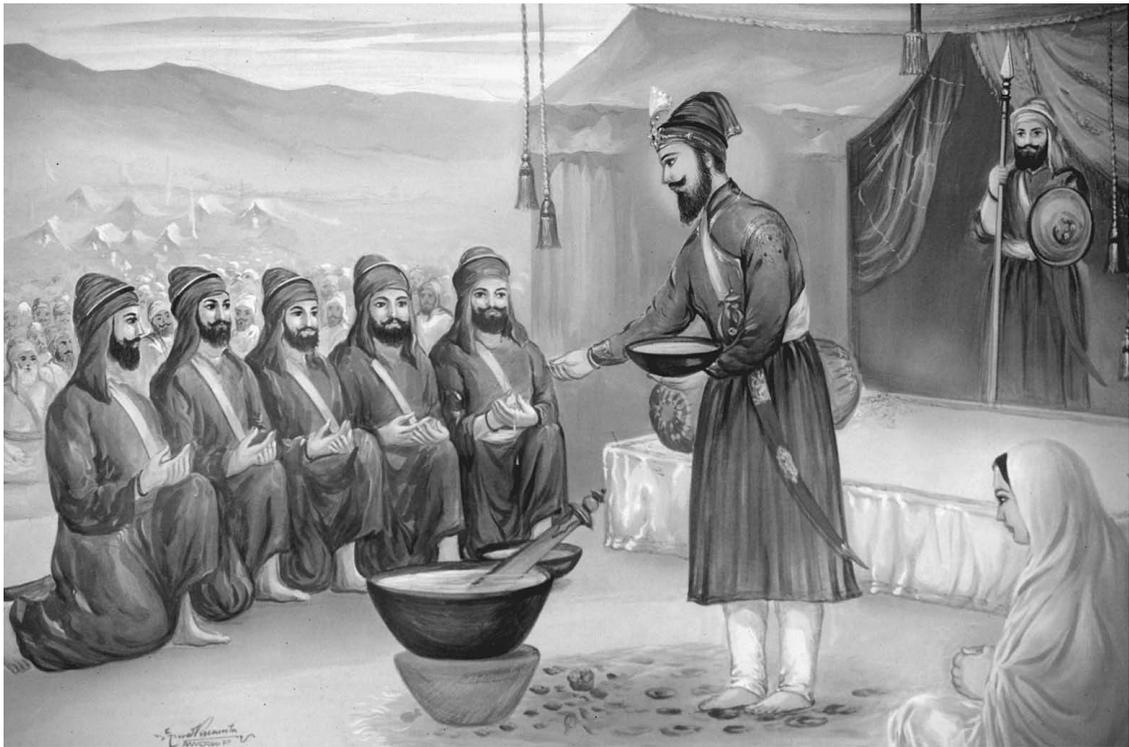
“The Divine Guru hath sent me for religion’s sake / On this account, I have come into the world; / Extend the faith everywhere/ Seize and destroy the evil and sinful.”

Gobind Singh was the tenth and last living guru, or teacher and leader, of Sikhism. Sikhism is practiced by some twenty-three million people worldwide, with most living in the state of Punjab in India. Sikhism aims to create a close, loving relationship with God, particularly through prayer and meditation, or quiet reflection or thought on a single point. Gobind Singh was born Gobind Rai Sodhi on December 22, 1666, in the Indian city of Patna, and served as guru from 1676 until his death in 1708. His father was Sikhism’s ninth guru, Teg Bahadur (1621–1675).

Gobind Singh is best remembered for two major accomplishments. The first was the establishment of the Khalsa, a militant brotherhood that helped define Sikhism and empowered Sikhs to resist persecution. (Persecution is when a person or group is mistreated because of their beliefs or other characteristics.) The other was proclaiming himself the last of the living gurus of Sikhism. He declared that after his death, the sacred Sikh scripture, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib, would represent the leader and final guru of the Sikh faith.

Political climate of the seventeenth century

Sikhism was founded 1499, after the faith’s first guru, Nanak Dev (1469–1539), had a revelation, or vision of divine truth. He set off on



Gobind Singh offers amrit, the elixir of life, to the Five Blessed Ones. It was through this ceremony, where five men of different social standings all shared from the same bowl, that Gobind Singh illustrated the Sikh belief in the unity of all men. © DESAI NOSHIR/CORBIS SYGMA.

a pilgrimage to seek enlightenment, eventually returning to northern India in 1520. Enlightenment is a state of awareness in and understanding of spiritual matters than bring one closer to God. He began to share his teachings with followers he referred to as Sikhs. Following Nanek's death, leadership of the Sikh faith passed to a succession of gurus through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Prior to the creation of the Sikh religion, the Punjab region in India was dominated by Muslims, followers of the Islamic religion, who had drifted eastward from Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the time of Sikhism's first four gurus, Muslim emperors remained tolerant of Sikhism and other religious beliefs practiced in India. That changed, however, in the early seventeenth century, under emperor Jahangir (1569–1627). Jahangir was a fierce opponent of Sikhism and was determined to convert its followers to Islam. One of these followers was the fifth guru, Arjan Dev (1563–1606), who refused to convert and was put to death

by the emperor. His successor, Guru Har Gobind (1595–1644), took steps to increase the military readiness of the Sikhs, who armed themselves and trained in various methods to defend their faith. Violent battles between Sikh and Muslim armies then frequently erupted. In the city of Kashmir at least half of the population, including both Sikhs and Hindus, were forced to convert to Islam.

In this climate of ongoing conflict, a delegation of Kashmiris (those from the Kashmir region in India) approached Gobind Rai's father, Guru Teg Bahadur, and asked for protection. In response, the guru traveled to Delhi, India, to meet with the Muslim emperor, Aurangzeb (1618–1707), in hopes of persuading him to abandon his persecution of Sikhs and Hindus. His effort, however, met with no success. The emperor offered the guru the same choice that he had offered the people of Kashmir and other cities: He could either convert to Islam or die. Even after being forced to witness the brutal execution of three of his close supporters, Guru Teg Bahadur chose to die rather than renounce his religion. His body was left exposed in the public square as a warning to others. This caused many Sikhs to become frightened and deny their faith. The religion began to lose its sense of identity and purpose.

Early life of Gobind Rai

As a child Gobind Rai showed an early interest in military activity, organizing mock battles with his friends. In 1672 Gobind Rai was taken to the town of Anandpur to begin his education. In school he learned not only the Punjabi language but also Hindi, Sanskrit, and Persian. After his father died on November 11, 1675, he was formally installed as guru on March 29, 1676. At just nine years of age, Gobind was already resolved to fight the persecution of the Sikhs. He maintained this resolve throughout his life, later saying famously that he would “train the sparrow to fight the hawk” and “teach one man to fight a legion.”

Some Sikh leaders wanted to avenge the death of Guru Teg Bahadur, but Gobind seemed content to wait until the religion could attract more followers and be prepared to defend itself. Meanwhile, he continued his education. At age sixteen, he left Anandpur and founded the city of Paonta on the banks of the Yamuna River, where he remained for four years. During these years he devoted much of his time to physical pursuits such as swimming, archery, wrestling, horseback riding, and martial arts. He also wrote and translated a considerable amount of

poetry that centered on religious issues, social justice, the equality of people, and the need to lead an ethical and moral life, or a life lived according to standards of proper and good behavior. Much of his poetry also dealt with military and warlike themes. Although some of his work seems to glorify warfare, the guru saw fighting as a way to achieve both self-respect and divine justice, not simply as a form of aggression.

Sikhism unsheathes the sword

As Gobind became more popular, he began to alarm the *rajjas*, or local chiefs, in the surrounding areas. These rajjas tended to support the emperor and used their own power to demand tributes, in the form of money, from surrounding communities. Furthermore, they objected to the teachings of Sikhism, especially the Sikhs' opposition to idol worship (the worship of a physical object as a god); their insistence on the equality of all people; and their rejection of the Indian caste system, which divides people into hereditary social classes. These beliefs were seen as threats to previously established traditions.

One of the chiefs who was angered by Gobind was Bhim Chand, the raja of the region surrounding Anandpur. Bhim Chand made repeated attempts to force Gobind out of power, in part by demanding that the Sikh community pay "rent" for the land they occupied. In response the guru hastened the buildup of his military force while keeping a close eye on Bhim Chand and his followers. Tensions between the two groups finally erupted into armed conflict when Bhim Chand's son was about to be married and the raja learned that Gobind was a close friend of the bride's father, Fateh Shah. Bhim Chand threatened to break off the wedding unless Fateh Shah joined him in battle in order to eliminate the Sikh threat. The two men then gathered an army of thirty thousand men and confronted the Sikhs, who numbered just four thousand men, in the October 1686 Battle of Bhangani. Despite having significantly fewer warriors, the Sikh forces emerged victorious.

Formation of the Khalsa

Gobind continued to earn the confidence of the people with his strength and leadership. Parties of Sikh pilgrims arrived in Anandpur almost daily to seek his advice and assistance. The leader of one such party reported being stopped on their way by a band of the emperor's



Sikhs perform Gatka, a Sikh traditional martial art, in a procession during a celebration in honor of the birth of the religion's founder, Nanak Dev. Gobind Singh established the Khalsa, a special order, in which Gatka is practiced.

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soldiers, who robbed them. The soldiers even cut off the hair of some members of the party. When they resisted, others were killed. In response Gobind instructed Sikhs to assemble in Anandpur. The atmosphere at the gathering was almost festive, with singing and music. Then the guru appeared before his people bearing a sword, and to their astonishment he asked for a volunteer willing to give up his head for the faith. A man named Daya Ram came forward. The guru led Daya Ram into a tent, and when the guru reemerged alone, his sword was covered in blood. When he asked for a second volunteer, a peasant named Dharam Das came forward and followed the guru into the tent. Again, the guru emerged with a bloody sword. The people were beginning to think that he had gone mad. He asked for a third volunteer, and Mohkam Chand came forward. Two more volunteers, Sahib

Chand and Himmat Rai, then agreed to die for their faith and followed Gobind into the tent.

The volunteers, however, were not being killed; the blood on the guru's sword was that of a goat. The volunteers emerged from the tent wearing orange robes, and Gobind turned to the five and said to them that there was no difference among them. He called them his "five beloved ones" and went on to say to the assembled Sikhs that through his actions, he was creating an army called the Khalsa, which would travel about and spread Nanak's message of peace. He said that the Khalsa would bring about an age of peace, raising up the virtuous and destroying those who did evil.

A ritual was then held to initiate the five "beloved ones." The five, who were members of different castes, and the guru all drank from the same bowl during the ceremony, signifying the unity of all Sikhs regardless of their social status and background. The ceremony later became known as the *amrit* ceremony, after the drink the five members shared. Gobind announced that from then on, male Sikhs would take the name Singh, meaning "lion," and women would take the name Kaur, meaning "princess." Sikhs continue to practice this tradition in the twenty-first century.

The five Ks

On that day, as many as fifty thousand Sikhs joined the Khalsa. As a way to further inspire Sikhs and strengthen their identity with the faith, Gobind instructed his people to follow a number of principles. They were to practice their military skills and never retreat from an enemy; protect the weak and the poor; look on all people as equals and reject caste; believe in one supreme God; refrain from using drugs or tobacco and from consuming meat that is slaughtered according to the Islamic ritual (where the animal is bled to death instead of being killed by one quick stroke).

Most importantly, Sikhs were to carry the "five Ks," so called because each item begins with the letter *K*. The five Ks have remained emblems, or symbols, of the faith, allowing Sikhs to identify themselves as Sikhs to the world at large. The five Ks include the following:

- *Kesh*, uncut hair, which is seen as a gift from God and a sign of God's will. A male Sikh can often be recognized by the turban that is wound tightly around the head to contain his hair.

- *Kanga*, a wooden comb, which keeps the hair neat and generally symbolizes cleanliness.
- *Kaccha*, an undergarment similar to shorts, which is worn to suggest chastity and cleanliness and serves as a reminder of the need to overcome earthly passions.
- *Kara*, a steel bracelet worn on the right wrist, which, being a perfect circle, with no beginning or end, symbolizes a connection with God.
- *Kirpan*, a saber, which is carried in readiness to defend the weak or uphold the right. The word literally means “mercy” or “grace.” In modern times the kirpan is not an actual weapon but a small symbolic reminder.

Ongoing struggles

The years following the formation of the Khalsa were ones of continuing struggle for Gobind and his followers. From 1703 through 1705 a series of battles took place, collectively referred to as the Battle of Anandpur. A local raja, Ajmer Chand, conspired with other chiefs to kill the guru, but the hired assassins were themselves killed before they could carry out their mission. The emperor Aurangzeb agreed to march against the Sikhs if the local rajas agreed to join him, which they did. The Sikhs, however, drove off the emperor’s army, which numbered ten thousand men, and killed his commander.

Numerous chiefs then met and agreed to lay siege to Anandpur. The siege lasted for months, the city was starving, and a number of Sikhs left the city, believing that the Sikh cause was hopeless. Gobind urged his remaining followers to fight on, and in time the Muslim commander grew equally weary of the fight and offered peace terms. Urged to do so by his followers, Gobind agreed to meet the commander, but the Muslim commander did not keep his word and attempted to capture the

The Shri Dasam Granth Sahib

Gobind Singh was the author of an important Sikh text, the Shri Dasam Granth Sahib, a 1,400-page compilation of prayers, mythical narratives, devotional works, and autobiographical details. Portions of the Shri Dasam Granth Sahib remain part of the daily devotions of Sikhs in the twenty-first century. One passage, the Jaap Sahib, is a prayer in praise of God:

Thou has no form or feature,
No caste no lineage;
None can describe Thy appearance,
Colour, mark or Garb.
Thou art the source of all light,
And the object of all praise;
Thou art the supreme Lord of all,
And the moon of the universe.
Perfect is Thy discernment.
All turn to Thee for refuge.
Thou art the Great Companion;
Thou art the sure Providence.

“Glimpses of Guru Gobind Singh Ji:
The Dasam Granth Sahib.” *Info-Sikh.com*.
[http://www.info-sikh.com/
PageG91.html](http://www.info-sikh.com/PageG91.html) (accessed June 1, 2006).

guru. Gobind and around forty of his followers were forced to take flight, finding refuge in the small village of Chamkaur in early December 1705. In the battle that followed, the Battle of Chamkaur, Gobind's two teenage sons volunteered to fight and were killed.

Gobind's generals, fearing for the guru's life, banded together and insisted that he and his family flee the village. Reluctantly, he agreed and departed, traveling across country sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, and sometimes disguised as a local saint and carried in a litter, or enclosed couch. At one point during the journey members of the guru's party became separated, and in the resulting confusion his two remaining sons were identified, captured, and imprisoned in a town called Sirhind. When they refused to convert to Islam, they were executed in December 1705 by the local ruler, Wazir Khan.

Gobind continued his flight. At one point he learned that the authorities knew his whereabouts, so he searched for a site where he could mount a defense. His small group was reinforced when the Sikhs who had abandoned him at Chamkaur rejoined his followers and expressed their willingness to fight. When the Muslim army approached the Sikh camp, they were driven off, and Gobind again resumed his journey. Eventually he arrived at the town of Talwandi Sabor. Then, finally, the guru was allowed to enjoy some peace, as the Islamic authorities issued orders commanding their followers to leave Gobind alone.

Wazir Khan, however, was alarmed by the peace that appeared to have been established between the guru and the Muslim emperor. He was afraid that if the two became allies, he would lose power and influence. He sent assassins to kill Gobind. One of the assassins pretended to be a Sikh worshipper and managed to enter Gobind's private apartment in the town of Nader and stabbed him. The guru lingered for a while but eventually died on October 7, 1708.

The Shri Guru Granth Sahib

In one of his last acts as guru, Gobind Singh made an unusual announcement. As he neared death, he declared that his successor would not be a living person. Rather, the final guru of Sikhism would be the sacred Sikh scripture, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib. The fifth guru, Arjan Dev, had compiled the Granth Sahib, sometimes called the Adi Granth, in 1603. It brought together the hymns and writings of Sikhism's first five gurus, particularly those of Nanak, as well as the writings of various

Hindu and Muslim saints. In the years that followed, the Granth Sahib was updated to include the writings of later gurus, and Gobind Singh had compiled all of these works into a final, complete version of the text. The Shri Guru Granth Sahib remains as the material representation of the final guru and all previous gurus, and as such is both the sacred scripture and spiritual guide of Sikhism. While the text is not regarded as the direct word of God, it is considered to be divinely inspired and is the focus of worship in Sikh temples, called *gurdwaras*.

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Ibn Khaldūn

BORN: May 27, 1332 • Tunis, Tunisia

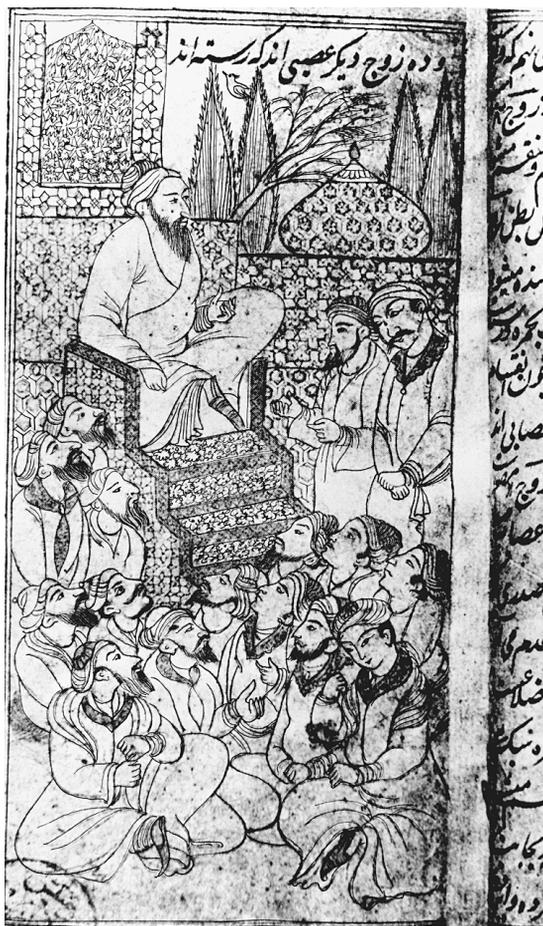
DIED: March 17, 1406 • Cairo, Egypt

Arab historian; legal scholar

“Whoever takes someone’s property, or uses him for forced labor, or presses an unjustified claim upon him, it should be known that this is what the Lawgiver had in mind when he forbade injustice.”

Abdahl-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldūn, better known simply as Ibn Khaldūn, is generally considered to be one of the greatest Arab historians. Although he was a devout Muslim, or follower of the Islamic faith, Ibn Khaldun did not focus on religion in his work. He applied reason and logic to his study of history. He has been called the father of modern sociology (the study of the origin and development of human society) because he was the first to examine how social and historical factors combine. Instead of examining history through the major battles fought by armies, or through the reigns of kings, he studied how common people have shaped the world. He also developed a theory for the rise and fall of nations and empires that is still used in the twenty-first century.

Ibn Khaldūn believed civilizations rise and fall in constant cycles. He claimed that hard work and cooperation create a civilization and bring wealth and luxury to it. But then people become lazy, selfish, and dishonest, and the civilization declines. This theory was presented in his most famous work, the *Muqaddima* (Introduction), the first volume in his seven-volume history of the Arab world, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* (Universal History).



Ibn Khaldūn closely read the works of Muslim scholars who had come before him, such as those by Ibn Sina, who is seated here surrounded by his students. © BETTMANN/CORBIS.

Childhood and early career

Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis, the capital of modern-day Tunisia in North Africa, in 1332. His family was well educated and had been part of the intellectual class for several generations. His clan, or family, originally came from Yemen, and was part of a tribe called the Hadhramaut. These people moved to Spain in the eighth century, at the start of the Muslim settlement in that region. The Khaldūn family settled in the city of Seville, where they stayed until the thirteenth century when the Islamic empire in Spain started to decline. The family then moved to the region of northwest Africa known in the Arab world as Ifriqiyah (modern-day Tunisia and eastern Algeria).

Ibn Khaldūn received a good education as a youth, studying Arabic and the holy book of Islam, the Qurʾān. He was also schooled in *fiqh*, or Islamic law; *hadith*, or the sayings and deeds of the Prophet **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; the founder of Islam; see entry); mathematics; logic; and philosophy. He read the works of famous Muslim scholars who had come before him, such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd.

When he was seventeen, Ibn Khaldūn's parents died during an outbreak of the plague, a deadly infectious disease that struck Tunis. After his parents' deaths, he took a post in a government office in Tunis. His job was to write the introductory notes to official documents. Despite this opportunity to see for the first time the inner workings of government, Ibn Khaldūn longed to leave his hometown for other parts of the Muslim world. He was given the opportunity to do so when a rival ruler, the emir, or governor, of Constantine (a city in Algeria) invaded Tunis. Ibn Khaldūn left the city and headed for Fez, Morocco, in the section of North Africa known as the Maghrib, or modern-day Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. Fez had been the capital city of several dynasties, or ruling families, and reached its high point under the Merinid *sultans*, or rulers, in the mid-fourteenth century.

Ibn Khaldūn soon earned a position as a writer of royal proclamations (announcements) for the Merinid sultan, Abu Inan, but he felt that the job was not worthy of him. He spent more time attending lectures at the Islamic *madrassa*, or college, in the city, where great scholars from all over the Muslim world came to speak. At the same time, he was suspected of plotting against the sultan and was imprisoned for two years, until the death of Abu Inan. Ibn Khaldūn was released from prison in 1358 and made the secretary to the new sultan. He also became a judge in the Islamic court in Fez. Again, however, jealous new enemies arose, and Ibn Khaldūn decided to move to Spain, where his family had once lived.

Spain and Africa

During his time in Fez, Ibn Khaldūn had befriended the sultan of Granada, Spain, Nasrid Muhammad V, who had been exiled (forced to leave) from his homeland. Ibn Khaldūn had helped Nasrid to regain his position, so he knew he would be welcome in Granada. He found a post at court with the ruling family and by 1364 had become important enough to be sent as a representative of Granada to sign a peace treaty with the Christians they had been fighting. He traveled to Seville, the original home of his family, where he went to speak with the King of Castile (a region of central and northern Spain).

The king was known as Pedro the Cruel (1334–1369) because of his harsh treatment of the enemies he fought. Ibn Khaldūn was successful in securing a peace treaty between Pedro's people and Granada, and Pedro was so impressed with the Muslim scholar and official that he offered to return his family estates if Ibn Khaldūn would join his court. Ibn Khaldūn politely refused and returned to Granada. After his return, the sultan's main advisor became mistrustful and jealous of him, so Ibn Khaldūn left Spain.

He moved back to North Africa and settled in Bougie (modern-day Bejaia, Algeria), an important port and cultural center at the time. In Bougie Ibn Khaldūn encountered an old friend, Abu Abdallah, who had been in prison with him in Fez. Abu Abdallah was now the sultan, and he made Ibn Khaldūn his prime minister, or chief political administrator. In his new position Ibn Khaldūn gained the trust of many of the Berber tribes, the native people of northern Africa. These Berbers had become Muslims when Islam spread into North Africa, but they resisted Arab rule, maintaining their independence. Ibn Khaldūn managed to collect

Berbers

The subject of several volumes of Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitab al-ibar*, the Berbers are non-Arabic tribes native to North Africa, where they number about twenty million. Berbers are also found outside the African continent. There is a large concentration of Berbers in Morocco and Algeria, and an estimated one million in France.

The Berbers speak their own language, called Tamazight, in addition to the languages of the regions they inhabit. No one is sure where the Berbers originally lived, but they have been in North Africa as long as any records show. They are Caucasoid, or white, as opposed to the black Africans who live south of the Sahara Desert.

When Islamic armies came into North Africa in the seventh century CE, the Berbers, many of whom were Christian at the time, quickly converted to Islam. Berbers then joined the armies and helped spread Islam, particularly in Spain where they created two strong Muslim dynasties. The Almoravids ruled Morocco and Muslim Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the Almohads ruled the same areas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

After the fall of these dynasties, the Berbers who lived on the plains gradually became part of the mainstream Arab culture. Other Berber tribes refused to conform and migrated to mountainous areas such as the Atlas Mountains. They have maintained their traditions for centuries. In the early twenty-first century Berber and Arab relations continue to be tense at times in Morocco and Algeria.

taxes from them, which was a major accomplishment. Again, however, a change of leadership in Bougie forced Ibn Khaldūn to alter his political loyalties. He was growing increasingly tired of all these disruptions in his political career. He longed for peace and the ability to pursue scholarly intellectual goals.

The years at Qalat ibn Salama

Ibn Khaldūn found an opportunity for such scholarly pursuits while he was working for yet another prince in the region. He was sent on a mission to a tribe of nomadic Arabs, people who had no permanent homes but who instead traveled with their herds of animals in search of food and water. On this mission he was welcomed by a branch of the tribe and decided to accept the hospitality they offered. He and his family were invited to live at an isolated castle called Qalat ibn Salama. For the next four years Ibn Khaldūn lived in the castle and began a large study on the history of the world and the Arab people. This was a turning point in his life, and his focus shifted from the chaos of political involvement to the creation of the *Muqaddima*.

In this work Ibn Khaldūn developed his theory for the rise and fall of civilizations. He based his conclusions on the concept of *asabiyya*, or group feeling and group solidarity (togetherness). *Asabiyya* can be examined in nomads such as the Bedouin tribes. These Bedouin ("desert dwellers" in Arabic) are of the same racial and ethnic background as other Arabs and are strong believers in Islam. Their lifestyle, however, isolates them from most of the population. Group loyalty is all-important for them, as they rely on each other to survive in the desert. According to Ibn Khaldūn, civilization was an eternal conflict between the

“Bedouin” type and the city dweller, or the desert versus the town. For Ibn Khaldūn, the Bedouin type represented the principle of disorder and restlessness, while the city dweller represented the idea of orderly behavior. Civilization is always a battle between these two elemental forces, he believed.

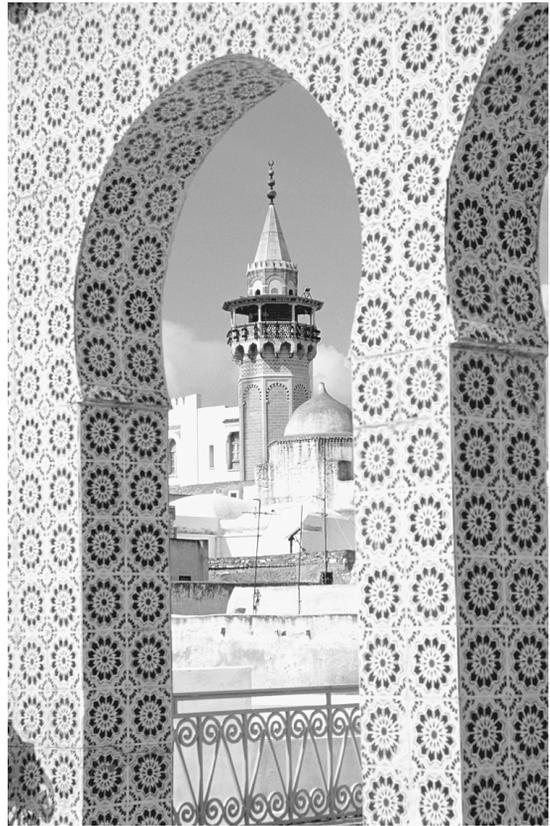
Ibn Khaldūn believed group solidarity was what made the establishment of dynasties possible. The group, family, or tribe with the strongest sense of such solidarity takes control. This solidarity can be increased by a commonly held religion, as with Islam, or with common social or cultural characteristics. Then cooperation makes division of labor in the society possible, and different people take on different jobs. The labor creates goods and services beyond the daily need of each person. This in turn leads to more free time and the growth of intellectual pursuits such as the sciences, arts, and music.

Ibn Khaldūn, however, went on to say in the *Muqaddima* that the production of such luxuries also creates a situation that causes the destruction of group solidarity. Individuals break away from the group, some people become nonproductive or lazy, and the civilization begins to fall apart. Eventually the empire is taken over by another group, usually a less civilized one with more group solidarity and energy. Then the process begins again.

This theory made Ibn Khaldūn the focus of much attention, because it traces the importance of people, rather than events, in the creation of history. Furthermore, he looked at the organization of society with relation to politics; city life; and economics, or the production, distribution, and use of goods and services in a society. This analysis of the importance of economics in history was one of the first such examinations.

Final years

Ibn Khaldūn finally left the castle and returned to his native city of Tunis in 1378, where he could find more resources to complete the



Later in life, Ibn Khaldūn moved from Bougie to his native city of Tunis, in modern-day Tunisia. It was here that he concentrated on his writing and completed most of his work.

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next six volumes of his *Kitab alʿibar*. While the *Muqaddima* served as an introduction to the entire work, the next volumes concentrated on world history and on the history of the Berbers. For this Ibn Khaldūn needed libraries where he could do research. In Tunis he stayed out of politics and concentrated on his writing. By 1382 he had completed most of the work, but his influence with the ruler and his popularity with students caused jealousies at court, which put him in danger.

He accepted the invitation of the Egyptian sultan Barquq to come and live in Cairo. For the first time in his life, Ibn Khaldūn experienced a stable Islamic state, ruled by the Mamluke dynasty (1250–1517), who were former slaves and soldiers. In Cairo Ibn Khaldūn found peace, a high level of culture, and economic wealth. He became a professor at one of the major Islamic colleges and was appointed the *qadi*, or judge of Islamic law, several different times during his fourteen years in the city. Yet his later years were also filled with sadness. His wife and daughters died in a shipwreck off Alexandria, Egypt, on their way to join him.

After the death of Barquq in 1401, the sultan's son, Faraj, came to power. Soon thereafter, there was an invasion of the Middle East by the Mongols, warriors from Central Asia, led by the great conqueror Timur (c. 1336–1405). Timur and his Mongol soldiers were marching to Damascus, Syria, and the Egyptians feared that the troops would also attack their country. Faraj took his army to help defend Damascus, and the sixty-nine-year-old Ibn Khaldūn accompanied him as a diplomat. Once in Damascus, however, Faraj received word of a planned revolt against him in Cairo and hurried home, leaving Ibn Khaldūn and a small group behind. When Timur and the Mongols arrived, Ibn Khaldūn acted as a negotiator between the people of Damascus and the Mongol warrior, gaining a favorable peace for the city. He stayed in Timur's camp for five weeks, conducting talks and taking notes on life among the Mongols. Once back in Cairo, he wrote a description of this experience.

The next five years of Ibn Khaldūn's life were relatively peaceful, as he served as a judge and worked on various scholarly projects. He died in Cairo on March 17, 1406. His works have remained relevant throughout the centuries, and his theories on history and society bear many similarities to those discussed by modern-day historians and sociologists.

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Israel ben Eliezer

BORN: August 27, c. 1700 • Okop, Poland

DIED: May 22, 1760 • Medzhibozh, Poland

Polish religious leader

“There is no act, word or thought in which the essence of divinity is not constricted and hiding. And so when you look and see with your mind’s eye . . . You will see nothing but the divine power inside all things that is giving them life, being and existence at every moment.”

Israel ben Eliezer gave new energy to Judaism in eastern Europe in the eighteenth century by reconnecting the common people to the religion. He was the founder of Hasidism, a Jewish mystical movement that emphasizes a direct connection to God through prayer and joyous experiences such as participation in the arts. For ben Eliezer, also known as Baal Shem Tov (“Master of the Good Name”), a pure heart was more pleasing to God than a great intellect. He taught that all Jews could grow closer to God by a constant focus on Him during a person’s everyday life, rather than through studying the Torah, which is the body of Jewish literature and law.

For ben Eliezer, simple and sincere religious devotion was the true path to God. This meant that the unschooled as well as the intellectual could experience God and redemption, or the forgiveness of sins. This earned him a large following in central and eastern Europe, and ben Eliezer became one of the most influential spiritual leaders of the period.

He also became the subject of many tales and legends, which makes it difficult to separate the facts of his life from the fiction.

Early years

Tradition has it that Israel ben Eliezer was born in the village of Okop (also called Okopy) in the region of Podolia, long a part of Ukraine. At the time of ben Eliezer's birth, in 1700, this area was in the process of being returned to Poland after a lengthy Turkish occupation. Due to this, opinions differ as to the nationality of ben Eliezer. Most sources call him Polish, though some list him as being of Ukrainian heritage.

Confusion also exists about his family. Most sources agree that his parents, Eliezer and Sarah, were quite old when they had Israel. Some historians, however, say that his father was a rabbi (a person trained in Jewish law, ritual, and tradition), while others claim that the family, while very religious, was a poor one. Ben Eliezer was still a young child when his father died, but he was old enough to understand Eliezer's dying words, which were either "Israel my son, you have a very holy soul, don't fear anything but God," or "Fear nothing because God will take care of all." Soon after, his mother also passed away, and young ben Eliezer was put into the care of the community. This was a typical practice in the Jewish communities of Poland at the time.

Podolia, and the entire region of the Polish Ukraine, was an area that had been dominated by Judaism since the Middle Ages (c. 500–c. 1500). In the two centuries before ben Eliezer's birth, the Jewish population grew from only fifty thousand in 1500 to about five hundred thousand in 1650. The Jewish communities in the region enjoyed a degree of self-government and freedom from the rest of Christian Poland and Ukraine. Beginning in 1648, however, pogroms, or massacres of Jews, were carried out by the Christians of Poland and Russia. These pogroms were organized by the government of Russia in an attempt to channel the political discontent felt by the workers in the region away from the *tsars* (rulers) and onto the Jews, whose unfamiliar religious practices made many uneasy. More than one hundred thousand Jews were killed during the next half century, and more than seven hundred communities were destroyed. Those who survived were taxed highly by the Christian authorities and were threatened by attacks from wandering bandits unless they could pay to win their freedom.

As a result, Judaism in Podolia was on the decline at the time of ben Eliezer's birth. The intellectual community of scholars and Talmudic teachers (teachers of the Talmud, a collection of holy writings about the Jewish faith) had fled to Lithuania, leaving the lower classes and poorer Jews with no access to the scholarly pursuits of Judaism. Also, while Jews in other regions lived in thickly settled urban areas close to centers of Jewish learning and teaching, the Jews of Poland and Ukraine tended to live in scattered villages away from intellectual centers. A class division emerged in Poland, with the wealthier Jews and Talmudic scholars leading the communities but not contributing their fair share of the community taxes. This put a financial burden on the poorer Jews. Because this practice was not criticized by the rabbis, the common people began to distrust the established leaders of Judaism in the region.

This conflict led to many unusual religious practices in Poland and Ukraine. Some Jewish commoners and peasants turned to the Kabbalah, a mystical movement in Judaism developed during the Middle Ages. This tradition claimed to have come from the prophet **Abraham** (c. 2050–c. 1950 BCE; see entry) and provided a secret interpretation of the scriptures or holy books. Others were misled by mystics claiming to be prophets (people through whom the will of God is expressed), saviors, and miracle workers.

This was the cultural and historical backdrop of the region into which ben Eliezer was born and came of age. After being adopted by the community, he was educated in the village Jewish school. He learned to read Hebrew by age four, translated the Bible by age five, and began a serious study of the Talmud by age eight. As a student, ben Eliezer seems to have drawn attention to himself only because of his frequent absences from school. He was much more comfortable in the woods and fields surrounding Okop than he was in the classroom. At an early age, he began to see God in nature, not just in the teachings of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures) and the Talmud.

When he entered his teenage years, ben Eliezer was no longer considered a dependent of the community, and it was time for him to decide on a course for his life. His teachers felt it was obvious from his lack of interest in his studies that he would never become a rabbi, so he was hired as an assistant at the school. His duties included taking the children to and from school, and teaching them songs and prayers. He loved to tell the children parables, or stories that had a moral lesson to them. Later he became a caretaker at a local synagogue, or Jewish building of worship,

where his chores included cleaning and keeping the books in order. This position gave him plenty of time for independent study, which he used to examine the writings of the Kabbalah and to educate himself in Jewish law. This study was done in secrecy, however, and the people of his village continued to think of him as a simple young man.

Ben Eliezer married at age eighteen, but his wife died not long after the ceremony. He then left Okop, traveling and working throughout the region of Galicia before settling in a village near the city of Brody. In Brody he worked as an assistant in the school and also as a mediator, or negotiator, between people with legal disputes. As a result of his efforts as a mediator, he came to the attention of Rabbi Ephraim of Brody, who was so impressed by ben Eliezer's intelligence and honesty that he promised him his daughter, Hannah, as his bride. Unfortunately, Ephraim died before the marriage could take place, and his son, Hannah's brother, was against the marriage, viewing ben Eliezer as a rough and uncultured peasant. Hannah, however, was in love with ben Eliezer, and the two eventually did marry and moved to a village in the Carpathian Mountains, far from Brody. Here ben Eliezer began working as a manual laborer, digging clay and lime.

Becomes Baal Shem Tov

Ben Eliezer's time in the Carpathians was spent in further mystical speculation and in an exploration of the woods and forests of the area. He became an expert on the plant life of the region and learned the use of herbal medicines for illnesses. Eventually ben Eliezer left his job as a laborer and became a butcher. He and Hannah, with whom he had two children by this time, also ran an inn or tavern. Soon ben Eliezer became a *baal shem*, or a healer that used medicinal herbs, and served Jews and Christians alike. He also began performing ceremonies to drive out ghosts and demons. He was said to have an angel, Achiyah HaShaloni, who taught him the mysteries of the Torah and helped him cure the bodies and souls of his patients. His fame began to spread, and ben Eliezer became known as Baal Shem Tov, with *tov*, meaning "good," added to the title to separate him from all other healers. He was also sometimes known as Besht, a name made up of the first letters of his honorary name.

At about age thirty-six ben Eliezer underwent a profound spiritual experience and began to formulate the basic principles of the movement that became known as Hasidism or Chasidism ("the pious"). These principles were a direct communion with God, a belief that even the simplest

Men dance at a Hasidic wedding. Israel ben Eliezer taught that singing and dancing to God's prayers was positive and healthy. © TED SPIEGEL/CORBIS.



human action could serve God, and a constant search for hints of godliness in the material world. He preached that salvation and redemption could be achieved through other means than an intense study of the Jewish religious texts. Ben Eliezer believed that God was present in

Hasidism in the United States

Though Hasidism has spread throughout the world, some 200,000 of its estimated 250,000 followers live in the United States. Half of these reside in the state of New York, and most live in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Williamsburg, and Boro Park. Several branches of Hasidism are represented, one of which is the Lubavitch Hasidism. Crown Heights is the central location of this group, which has about fifteen thousand members. Another branch, Satmar, holds strongly to traditional beliefs, and there is a degree of friction between the two, especially over issues concerning the causes of World War II and differing views on the state of Israel.

While the Holocaust in Poland was the main reason that Hasidic Jews left that area, there were already congregations in the United States long before that time. In 1875 Rabbi Joshua Segal, also called the "Sherpser Rov," came to New York City. He soon became the leader of about twenty Hasidic congregations, known as the Congregations of Israel, Men of Poland and Austria. By the 1960s the number of Hasidic Jews in the state had grown to between forty and fifty thousand. Forty years later this amount had doubled. Such growth was due partly to immigration and partly to the high birthrate among the Jews in New York, who averaged five or six children per family.

everything, and therefore each human had God within him and was good. Sins and misdeeds were the result of error, not evil.

Another of ben Eliezer's lessons claimed that the common practice of asceticism, or the attainment of higher spiritual development through self-denial and self-punishment, was not favored by God. Instead ben Eliezer taught that God preferred joy to sadness or weeping. He added dancing and singing to his prayers and emphasized the importance of maintaining a healthy body. He said God's presence was in all surroundings and a person should serve God with their every deed and word. Ben Eliezer began to share these ideas with others, conveying his message in short tales and parables, just as he had with the schoolchildren he once taught. His message was welcomed by the common folk among the Jews of Poland. To aid these people in their religious lives, he added a new functionary, or official, in Judaism, the *Tzaddick*. This translates to "the righteous." This person had a highly developed spiritual awareness and could serve as a leader in the Hasidic movement.

Ben Eliezer was fond of saying that everything he accomplished was through prayer rather than study. He did not use prayer to ask for special requests, but simply to communicate with God and to feel as if he were one with Him.

Ben Eliezer believed that this oneness, when a

person gave up his separate existence and joined to God, created real joy and was the foundation of any true worship.

These beliefs won ben Eliezer followers but also earned him criticism and fierce attacks from many sides. The rabbis and Talmudic scholars found his encouragement of dancing and drinking to be unholy and against tradition, and they thought his lack of emphasis on scholarship posed a threat to the intellectual aspect of Judaism. However, although ben Eliezer taught that study of the Torah was not the only way to

become close to God, he never preached that such study was unimportant or unnecessary.

The final years

In 1740 ben Eliezer moved to the town of Medzhibozh, in Podolia. He lived in Medzhibozh for the rest of his life, spreading the word of Hasidism and continuing to work as a healer. He attracted new followers, including Rabbi Joseph, Rabbi Dov Baer of Merzeritz, and Rabbi Pinchas, all of whom helped to spread Hasidism after the death of ben Eliezer. Some of his followers, such as Baer of Merzeritz, were Talmudists, proving that ben Eliezer's teachings also reached intellectuals and scholars, not just common folk. He personally instructed visiting lay people (non-clergy members) and rabbis in the teachings of Hasidism.

Ben Eliezer died in 1760, shortly after falling ill on his way to a religious debate. The Hasidic movement continued to grow after his death, and his followers published many of his sayings and teachings in their works. One well-known example of this is *Shivbei ha-Besht* (In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov) a collection published in 1815 that contains more than two hundred legends and stories about ben Eliezer.

Israel ben Eliezer gave new life to Judaism in Poland with his popular teachings. For two hundred years after his death, the Hasidic community in Poland continued to grow and prosper. As a result of the Holocaust, the mass slaughter of millions of Jews by the German government during World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan), Hasidic communities were transplanted around the world, with many relocating to Brooklyn, New York. A large and vital Hasidic community still functioned there in the early twenty-first century.

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Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī

BORN: September 30, 1207 • Balkh, Persia

DIED: December 17, 1273 • Konya, Turkey

Persian poet; jurist; theologian



“The Prophet cried with a loud voice, ‘Trust in God, yet tie the camel’s leg.’ . . . / If ye really have trust in God, exert yourselves, / And strive, in constant reliance on the Almighty.”

Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī was a thirteenth-century mystic poet and a member of the Sufi sect, or division, of Islam. His name is sometimes given as Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī. He is often referred to as *Mawhī* in Arabic, *Mawlana* in Persian, or *Mevlana* in Turkish. All of these titles mean “our lord” or “our guide.” Jalāl is widely regarded as the greatest poet to have written in the Persian language, the language of ancient Persia and modern-day Iran. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries his poetry became widely popular in the West (the countries in Europe and the Americas). His name is also associated with the Whirling Dervishes. This name describes mystical Sufi Muslims called *Mawlanīyab*, who are noted for their joyful dances as they chant the many names of Allah, as God is called by Muslims.

Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī
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Birth and early life

Jalāl was born on or about September 30, 1207, in the town of Balkh, a section of the Ghurid empire which later became part of Afghanistan.

His father, Baha ad-Din Walad, was a highly respected teacher, author, and theologian, or religious expert, whose work had strong mystical themes. (“Mysticism” has many meanings and is often associated with magic. In a religious sense, it generally refers to the notion of direct, mysterious communication with God.) Early in the thirteenth century, forces from Mongolia were invading Central Asia. Baha ad-Din recognized the threat they posed, so in about 1218 he left Balkh with his family and moved to Persia. Legend says that in the town of Nishapur, Persia, the family met a Persian mystical author named Farid od-Din Attar (c. 1142–c. 1220), who gave the eighteen-year-old Jalāl his blessing. This meeting with Attar made a deep impression on Jalāl, and when he began writing poetry himself, he thought of Attar as one of the people who inspired him.

The family continued its travels, careful to avoid both the Mongols to the east and the Christian Crusaders in Palestine to the west. (The Crusaders were soldiers who were attempting to bring the Holy Land of Palestine under Christian control.) They journeyed throughout the Middle East and made a pilgrimage to Mecca, the holiest city of Islam and the birthplace of the religion’s founder, the prophet **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry). Mecca is located in modern-day Saudi Arabia. The family then arrived in Anatolia, a part of modern-day Turkey also known as Asia Minor. In 1228 they moved to the capital, Konya, where Baha ad-Din secured a job teaching at a religious school. Jalāl was sent to the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo for his religious education. After Baha ad-Din died in 1231, Jalāl took over his father’s teaching position. He was twenty-four years old at the time, and he had already gained a favorable reputation for his scholarly, or intellectual, understanding of Islam.

Jalāl had engaged in years of study, but he had become displeased with the customary teachings about Allah and religion. He found the standard texts inadequate. He had come to believe that traditional Islam was placing too much emphasis on fine points of doctrine, or principle. In his view this method of worship was dry and without deep meaning. He was eager for something that would help him have a more intense relationship with Allah, and he did not believe that he would find that relationship in the accepted texts with their emphasis on law and tradition. In an attempt to achieve his goal Jalāl made contact with a number of well-known mystical teachers. In 1232 one of Baha ad-Din’s earlier followers, Burhan ad-Din Muhaqqiq, came to Konya. He shared with Rumi the mystical theories he had developed in Persia. Burhan ad-Din left Konya in 1240, prompting Jalāl to journey to Syria. There he met other Sufi mystics, including Ibn

al-Arabi and his stepson, Saḍr ad-Dīn al-Qunawi, who became Jalāl's lifelong friend.

On November 30, 1244, Jalāl met a ragged, wandering dervish, or holy man, named Shams (sometimes spelled Shems) ad-Dīn. In Shams, Jalāl realized he had found what he had been looking for: a person with mystical knowledge of the beauty and greatness of Allah. The two immediately established a very close relationship. Jalāl lived with Shams and neglected his followers and his family. Jalāl's followers became so jealous of Shams that they forced the dervish to leave the city in early 1246.

Jalāl became so broken-hearted at the loss of his friend that his son, Walad, traveled to Syria to bring Shams back. The jealousy of both the family and the community, however, continued to grow, and one night Shams disappeared. For many years the source of this disappearance was a mystery. Some believed that Shams had simply left again, probably for Syria. Others believed that some of Jalāl's followers murdered Shams. Some even claimed that Jalāl's own sons murdered him. Only recently has it been proven that Shams was indeed murdered and buried near a well that still exists in Konya. Who was responsible for his death remains uncertain.

Mystical poet

Jalāl was grief-stricken. His sense of loss and mourning served as the spark that turned him into a poet. He identified himself so strongly with Shams that he even signed Shams's name at the end of most of his early poems. Many scholars believe that Jalāl composed most of these and later poems while in a state of mystical ecstasy, or intense joy or delight. They suggest that Jalāl wrote while listening to the sound of drums or flutes, or to the sound of a watermill, or even while just enjoying nature with his friends and followers. He often chanted his verses while

Sufi Islam

Sufism is often referred to as a sect, or subgroup, of Islam. This is only partially true. Sufism is less a sect than a way of approaching Islam. Members of the two main branches of Islam, the Sunnis and the Shi'ites, can also be Sufis. Sufism is the esoteric division of Islam, meaning that its members believe in mystical knowledge held by a small, restricted circle of people. Sufis can be recognized by their characteristic long robes and the wound turbans on their heads.

Sufism emerged during Islam's early years in the seventh and eighth centuries, when the religion was expanding and wealth was flowing into the Islamic empire throughout the Middle East. The Sufis believed that Islam placed too much emphasis on worldly concerns, rituals, and laws. They wanted a form of religion that led to inner ecstasy, or intense emotion and communion with Allah. Sufis believe that a devoted Muslim can experience Allah only through consistent chanting, meditation (focused and concentrated thought), love for other people, self-discipline, and self-denial. They also believe that the way to achieve spiritual wealth is through owning few material goods. Excessive worldly possessions, they believe, can corrupt the soul. Sufis are well known for their charitable work. They practice patience, a total reliance on Allah's knowledge of the future, and thankfulness to Allah.

taking part in the “whirling” dances of the Sufi mystics who came to be known as the Whirling Dervishes.

In the years that followed, Jalāl had relationships with other men similar to that which he had with Shams. One of these men was a goldsmith named Salah ad-Din Zarkub, whose daughter eventually married Jalāl’s eldest son. His relationship with Salah ad-Din encouraged him to continue writing poetry. Legend holds that Jalāl would hear the sound of Salah ad-Din’s hammer and begin his whirling dance on the street outside, chanting his verses as he did so. After Salah ad-Din died, Jalāl found another spiritual companion in Husan ad-Din Chelebi. Husan ad-Din inspired Jalāl to write his most famous work, the *Masnavi-ye Maʿanavi*, often called simply the *Masnavi* or *Mathnawa*.

The *Masnavi* was written over a long period of time. It is said that Jalāl wrote the verses in it on any and all occasions, such as when he was taking a bath or just walking down a road. He was always accompanied by Husan ad-Din, who wrote the verses down. Jalāl probably completed the work sometime around 1270. In the meantime he had become a respected member of Konya society. Many students, teachers, and even Christian priests visited him, both to pay their respects and to learn what they could about Sufi mysticism.

Jalāl died on December 17, 1273. He was so well known and respected that representatives of all the religions in the city attended his funeral. Rumi is buried in a mausoleum (a building that contains burial sites) called the Green Dome in Konya. The mausoleum is also a museum and is visited by thousands of people each year. Jalāl’s son, Walad, organized Jalāl’s followers into the *Mawlawiyah*, part of the Whirling Dervishes. Thus, although Jalāl did not create the Whirling Dervishes (who could be found in Baghdad, Iraq, at least one century before he lived), his name and teachings are associated with the group, which became a specific sect shortly after his death.

Jalāl’s works

Jalāl’s earliest work was titled *Divan-e Shams-e Tabriz-i* (The Works of Shams of Tabriz). This was a collection of about forty thousand verses named in honor of Jalāl’s companion and spiritual inspiration, Shams. The poems in this collection were written primarily in the voice of Shams. Many of the poems are odes, which are a form of poetry marked by intense feeling and emotion. Some read almost like love poems to

Allah, but many readers believe that they were written as much in honor of Shams as they were to Allah.

Jalāl's major work is the *Masnavi* (Spiritual Couplets). (A couplet is a two-line poetic verse.) Written in three volumes, the book contains more than twenty-five thousand lines of poetry. It includes folktales, fables, philosophy, lyrical poetry, and parables, which are simple stories that illustrate moral or religious lessons. The book's subjects include the saints of Islam, commentaries on the Qur'an (the sacred text of Islam), and mystical interpretations of a large number of subjects, both religious and nonreligious. The *Masnavi* is the most widely read poem among Muslims. In fact, among Muslim texts, it is regarded by some as second in importance only to the Qur'an. It is sometimes even called the *Qur'an-e Farsi* (The Qur'an in Persian).

The *Fibi Ma Fih* is a collection of Jalāl's speeches. They were written down and collected by his son, Wahad. The *Majalis-i Sab-a* is a collection of seven of Jalāl's sermons.

The chief theme that runs throughout Jalāl's work, especially his poetry, is *tawhid*, meaning "unity." The unity he sought was a mystical unity with Allah and with all of Allah's creations. The poetry is dominated by a sense of longing for a complete love for and from Allah. Jalāl believed this love was at the center of everything, from the smallest details of life to the most complex philosophical theories. Much of the poetry has a double meaning. Jalāl's words could apply to his intense feelings for Shams and his other companions, but they also relate to his love of Allah.

One of the reasons Jalāl's poetry became and has remained so popular is that it does not deal with doctrine, or formal teachings. Jalāl, like most Muslims, believed in the truth of the Qur'an, but he had little interest in disputes about its meaning or which of its laws Muslims should follow. Many readers enjoy his poetry because it makes use of numerous simple, easy-to-understand symbols. He often used images of wine and



A man prays in the Rumi Mevlana Mausoleum in Konya, Turkey. The mausoleum houses Jalāl's body. Also on the grounds are a mosque, dance hall, living quarters and school. It is a popular site for Muslim pilgrims and others.

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taverns, for example, to suggest that life is like a big feast at which people celebrate out of sheer joy. He spoke of drunkenness to suggest how people might feel when they experience closeness with Allah. Other simple symbols Jalāl used include the nightingale, which represents the soul; the sun, which represents teaching and enlightenment; and winter, which suggests a soul that is somehow cut off from Allah and the joy of Allah's creations.

A representative sample of Jalāl poetry can come from virtually any page of his works. In the *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabriz-i*, he wrote an untitled ode about death. The theme of the poem, reproduced on *Poetseers.org*, is that death is not something to be feared or regretted, for it represents a unity with Allah, a "coming together." While death may look like a prison, it is really a release that allows one to experience the beauty of Allah.

On the day I die, when I'm being
carried toward the grave, don't weep.

Don't say, "He's gone! He's gone!"
Death has nothing to do with going away.

The sun sets and the moon sets,
but they're not gone. Death
is a coming together.

The tomb looks like a prison,
but it's really release into Union.

The human seed goes down in the ground
like a bucket into the well where Joseph is.

It grows and comes up full
of some unimagined beauty.

Your mouth closes here
and immediately opens
with a shout of joy there.

The Jalāl's "industry"

Jalāl and his poetry became somewhat of a commercial enterprise in the West in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Many western readers found meaning in Jalāl's poetry because of its simplicity and its efforts to find a direct connection with God. In 1995 a major publisher in the United States released a collection of his verse under the title *The*

Essential Rumi, and the book sold about 250,000 copies. Publishers regard this as an amazingly large number for a book of poetry, which tend to be published by smaller companies and academic presses. A later collection, titled *The Soul of Rumi*, also became very popular with English-speaking readers.

The Sufi mystic also became popular outside of the publishing world. Singer Madonna (1958–) set Jalāl’s poetry to music on a 1998 compact disc. Fashion designer Donna Karan (1948–) included recitations of Jalāl’s poetry in some of her fashion shows, and film director Oliver Stone (1946–) talked about making a film of Jalāl’s life. People can buy all manner of Jalāl products, including prayer books, collections of his verse around various themes, and calendars. Illustrated editions of his poems are also available, and oral readings can be found on compact discs.

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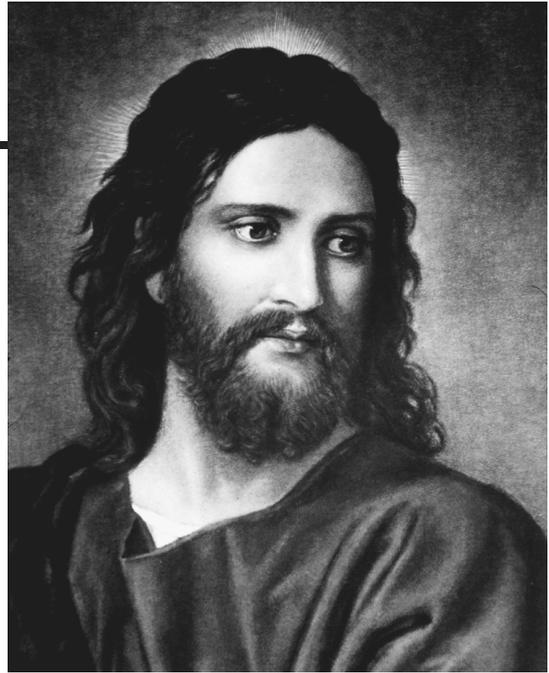
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Jesus Christ

BORN: c. 6 BCE • Bethlehem, Judea

DIED: c. 30 CE • Jerusalem, Judea

religious leader



“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Jesus Christ, originally known as Jesus of Nazareth, is the founder of Christianity and the central figure in the early writings of the religion. A Jewish healer, spiritual guide, and teacher who lived during the first century CE, Jesus is both a historical figure and a member of the Christian divine triumvirate (group of three, or Trinity). He is considered the Son of God, sent to Earth to atone, or make amends for, the sins of humanity. God and the Holy Spirit complete the Trinity.

Born approximately 6 BCE, Jesus died around the age of thirty-three after preaching for only three years. In that time, he gathered twelve followers, who were known as his disciples, and attracted the attention of much of the population in his home region of Palestine. In addition to preaching about universal love and everlasting life, Christians believe Jesus performed many miracles during his lifetime. Ultimately, he was crucified, or killed by being nailed to a cross, by the Romans, who occupied Palestine and were afraid of the power Jesus was gaining over the population. Three days after his death, Jesus was said to have risen from the dead and later he returned to heaven. His disciples spread the word

Jesus Christ.

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about his life and miraculous resurrection. These teachings formed the core of the Christian religion, which would become the largest in the world. The life of Jesus was recorded in the Gospels (“good news”), or books, of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament. The New Testament is the second half of the Bible, the primary sacred text of Christianity. The first half of the Bible is referred to by Christians as the Old Testament. To Jews (followers of Judaism), it is known as the Tanakh and may be referred to by non-Jews as the Hebrew Bible.

Historical Jesus

Despite his importance in Western religious history, Jesus is largely a mystery. The majority of his life is unrecorded, and much of the reality of his ministry and work became clouded by the myths that arose after his death. The main points of his life are detailed in the first four Gospels of the New Testament, but as these accounts concentrate more on his teachings than his personal activities, they reveal little about the actual man he was. Although thousands of authors have written about Jesus, broad areas of disagreement persist. Some focus on the miracles he supposedly performed, while others deny he possessed any supernatural powers and emphasize his message of love. Some call him a pacifist, or a person who believes disputes should be settled peacefully. Others see the attitude of a warrior in his words, such as in Matthew chapter 10, verse 34 (10:34): “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I am come not to send peace, but a sword.” Indeed, in the words recorded in the Gospels, Jesus often seems to contradict himself, making the job of a biographer even more difficult.

Jesus lived during an era of political unrest. Palestine, which was supposedly the Promised Land that God had given to the children of Israel, had been invaded by the Greeks and then by the Romans. In 63 BCE the Romans made certain areas of Palestine, such as Judea and Galilee, semi-independent kingdoms whose rulers answered to Rome. By the time Jesus was an adolescent, however, the entire region had become a province of Rome and had lost all its independence. The Jewish people of Palestine, however, often rebelled against Roman rule.

From the activities of shepherds recorded in the Gospels, Jesus would appear to have been born in the spring or summer. The birth date of December 25 is widely accepted to be a later invention by his followers, who wanted to blend his birthday with the much older festival of the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, because that festival was already widely celebrated. The estimated year of his birth did, however, establish the

Western calendar system. Dating began with AD 1, where AD stands for *anno Domini*, which is Latin for “in the year of the Lord.” Dates before Jesus’s birth were labeled BC, or “before Christ.” These designations have since been widely replaced by the more academic terms CE, meaning “Common Era,” and BCE, meaning “Before the Common Era.”

According to the Gospels, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, to Mary, a virgin (someone who had never had sexual relations). She was engaged to a much older man, Joseph, who was supposedly related to David, the second king of Israel. Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem because it was Joseph’s native town and he needed to be present for a Roman census (count of the population). Upon arriving in the town, Joseph and Mary discovered that there were no rooms to be rented, so they stayed in the stable behind the inn. There, Mary gave birth to Jesus. Signs announced his arrival. Over Bethlehem, the Star of David rose, while an angel appeared to shepherds nearby to tell them that the savior had been born. Magi, or wise men, from the East were also guided to the stable by a star.

The Old Testament refers in many places to a messiah, a savior who would come to help the Jews in difficult times. At the time of Jesus’s birth, the ruler of Judea was Herod Agrippa I (c. 10 BCE–44 CE). Herod feared the coming of the messiah, thinking that this would cause unrest among the people he ruled. When word reached him that the savior had arrived, he ordered that all male children under the age of two in Bethlehem should be killed. When he heard of this order, Joseph left with Mary and the baby Jesus for Egypt, where they remained until Herod’s death. Afterwards they returned to Palestine, to the town of Nazareth.

Joseph and Mary had a large family. In addition to Jesus, they had at least two daughters and four other sons. Some Christian scholars claim that these other children were cousins, or perhaps Joseph’s children from another marriage, and that Mary remained a virgin all her life. As a youth Jesus studied the Jewish scriptures, or holy writings. Little else is known of his childhood, aside from one event. When he was twelve, he accompanied his parents to Jerusalem for Passover, an important weeklong Jewish festival held in the spring. This was perhaps the first time that Jesus had made such a long journey (excluding those made in his infancy) or that he had visited such a large city. After the celebration, Joseph and Mary left for home, only to discover that Jesus was not with them. Hurrying back to Jerusalem, they found their son in the temple, listening to and discussing religious matters with the Jewish scholars.

The Virgin Mary

Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, has become one of the major figures of the Christian Church. The Mary cult, a smaller group within Christianity that places special focus on Mary, has been strong for two thousand years. Also known as Mariam or Miriam, Mary is “the most celebrated female religious figure in the Christian tradition,” according to historian Elizabeth A. Johnson, writing in *U.S. Catholic*. Little is known about this famed woman, however. What stories have been preserved are found mostly in the Bible’s Gospels, as are the events of the life of her son, Jesus.

Mary is believed to have been born around 22 BCE, and the year of her death is unknown. Tradition holds that she was the child of Saint Joachim and Saint Anne and that she was conceived without Original Sin. (Original Sin refers to the sin of Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God’s order and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden; it is the notion that all humans are born sinners.) Mary’s birth without this Original Sin is called the Immaculate Conception. Because of her own Immaculate Conception, Mary was able to give birth to a pure Son of God, without sin, while also remaining a virgin. She is often referred to as the Virgin Mary or the Blessed Virgin. As a young woman Mary was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. During this time she was visited by the angel Gabriel, who told her not to be afraid, for a son would be conceived by her

who would be the Son of God. When Joseph discovered that his future wife was already pregnant, he decided to dissolve the engagement. He was then visited in his sleep by an angel and told to wed Mary.

Mary plays a major role in a number of events in the New Testament, including Jesus’s birth; the time when Jesus went missing for several days at age twelve; the marriage in the town of Cana when Jesus turned water into wine; her son’s Crucifixion, when she remained by his side; her visit to Christ’s tomb after his Resurrection; and Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the twelve apostles. A tradition arose in the fifth century CE that Mary was taken, or assumed, directly into Heaven after her death, still a virgin. This event came to be celebrated on August 15 as the Assumption.

Catholic tradition holds that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. This had led to much speculation by scholars about not only the miraculous birth of Jesus but also those of his brothers and sisters. In 1854 the Roman Catholic Church made the Immaculate Conception an article of faith, while in 1950 Pope Pius XII announced that Mary’s body had not decayed in her grave. Instead, he claimed, God had taken both her body and her soul directly to heaven.

Tradition holds that Joseph was a carpenter, and that Jesus adopted the same trade. Upon Joseph’s death, Jesus assumed the role of supporting his family. Some accounts also hold that Jesus became a self-taught rabbi, or Jewish religious scholar and teacher, and devoted hours each day to study.

Becomes a healer and preacher

At about the age of thirty, Jesus encountered the prophet and preacher John the Baptist, who told people to repent for their sins and be baptized, or cleansed spiritually by immersion or dunking in water. Jesus was among the crowd who came to John at the Jordan River, and he was baptized. At this point, Jesus is said to have heard a voice from heaven telling him that he was the Son of God. He went into the desert, fasting (not eating) and meditating (thinking deeply) for forty days. During this period the devil is said to have tried to convince Jesus to worship him, but Jesus resisted.

Upon his return, he discovered that John the Baptist had been arrested, so he took up John's work, preaching repentance and the coming of the kingdom of God. Initially he preached near Nazareth, but he attracted few followers as people there had known him since he was a boy. He moved to different locations in Palestine and soon found followers among fishermen and common workers. In time he gathered twelve disciples, whom he personally educated. These disciples also claimed Jesus was the Messiah, and he was given the title of Christ, which came from the Greek word *christos*. *Christos*, like the word *messiah*, means "anointed one."

Jesus and his disciples established a headquarters in the town of Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, and from there went out to advocate love and forgiveness. Jesus taught by using parables, or stories with moral lessons. Accounts claim that he healed the sick, restored the ability to walk to the lame, and cured those with the dreaded skin disease of leprosy. Jesus had no intention of becoming the warrior messiah of Jewish tradition. He did not want to gather armies around him and defeat the Romans. Rather, he wanted to improve society by changing the ways individuals dealt with one another and establishing a community built on love and trust.

Before long, the radical preachings of Jesus began to anger the Romans who occupied Palestine. The Pharisees, a Jewish religious group that insisted on the strict observance of Jewish law, were also growing alarmed. They felt that Jesus was a threat to their position of power, especially as more and more of the populace looked to him as the Messiah. Around 30 CE Jesus entered Jerusalem for Passover week, with crowds laying palm fronds (leaves) before him and calling him the son of David and the Messiah. In the temple he overturned the tables of the merchants, who had largely overrun the holy place. During the



*The Virgin Mary cradles Jesus
in her arms.* © RICHARD
CUMMINS/CORBIS.

following days he engaged in heated debate with Pharisees and other religious scholars. These activities and disagreements further angered the priests, who then sought to eliminate Jesus.

On Thursday night of Passover week, Jesus and his disciples had a final meal together, the reenactment of which would become one of the main sacraments, or religious rituals, of Christianity: Holy Communion, also known as Mass or the Eucharist. Following the meal, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus's disciple, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus by leaking his whereabouts to his enemies. It was at Gethsemane that Jesus was arrested and taken to trial for blasphemy, or words and action that show irreverence to God. Jesus was sentenced to death and taken to the Roman authorities to have the sentence carried out. The Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, attempted to satisfy the demands of a screaming crowd by ordering Jesus's crucifixion. The punishment was carried out on Friday, later called Good Friday in Christian tradition, on the hill of Golgotha, also known

as Calvary. Among Jesus's last words were, as quoted in Luke 23:24, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The Resurrection

On the following Sunday, celebrated afterwards as Easter Sunday, when followers went to the tomb where Jesus was buried, they discovered the stone covering the entrance pushed aside and Jesus gone. His disciples supposedly shared a meal with him after he rose from the dead. Others, including his mother, Mary, were said to have seen him after this miraculous Resurrection. Forty days later, after telling his disciples to spread his teachings far and wide, Jesus was taken up to heaven.

Over time the life and death of Jesus took on a more deeply symbolic form. Though historians debate whether or not Jesus called himself the Son of God, his followers soon made this claim a fact of the budding religion of Christianity, named after Jesus Christ. In this context, he was

seen as a sacrifice on the part of a loving God, the Father, who had offered up his only Son to redeem humanity's sins. The Crucifixion of Jesus and his subsequent Resurrection became major elements of Christian belief and reflect an idea that Jesus himself preached: that by believing in God, one could have life everlasting.

Jesus led a simple, humble life, which he preached others should do as well. He lived by his words, and his life became an example of what could be achieved by loving one's fellow humans and forgiving the wrongdoings of others. The Christian religion teaches that by having faith in Jesus Christ as both the Son of God and as a man who once walked among other men, one may reach personal salvation and have eternal life.

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Khadijah

BORN: c. 555 • Mecca, Arabia

DIED: 619 • Mecca, Arabia

Arabian religious leader

“And whoever does good deeds whether male or female and he (or she) is a believer—these shall enter the garden, and they shall not be dealt with a jot unjustly.”

— *The Holy Qur’an*, 4:124

Khadijah was the first wife of **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry), the founder of the Islamic faith. She was his first convert to the new religion, and she helped him spread its teachings by using her wealth and influence. Khadijah was forty when she took Muhammad as her husband. At the time he was employed by the international trading system that she ran. She supported him when he declared he had received a vision from Allah and pronounced himself the prophet, or divine messenger, of a new religion. Khadijah has been seen as playing a significant role in Islamic history because of her loyalty to her husband. She is also a fascinating figure in her own right. Despite the fact that women were seen as second-class citizens during the period in which she lived, she became one of the world’s first successful international businesswomen.

A woman on her own

Khadijah al-Kubra, or tul Kubra, was born around 555 CE in the city of Mecca in Arabia (modern-day Saudi Arabia). At the time Mecca was an

important trading center at the crossroads of major trade routes such as India's Spice Road and Arabia's Incense Road. Spices from India, silk from China, and farm products from east Africa all arrived at the port of Yemen and were then taken by camel caravan to Mecca. From there the goods were transported to Syria and then on to the rest of the Mediterranean world.

Mecca was considered the region's trading capital, and its leading citizens were merchants. Foremost in the merchant class was a tribe of ancient and powerful Bedouins ("desert dwellers" in Arabic) called the Quraysh. In addition to their trading business, the Quraysh had gained custody of the Ka'aba in the fifth century. The Ka'aba was the central shrine for pre-Islamic Arabs. It held idols, or images used as objects of worship, and the Black Stone, a sacred stone which was said to come from heaven. The Ka'aba was a major holy site of the Arab people, and the Quraysh made money from the many pilgrims that came to worship.

Khadijah was from the Quraysh tribe. Her father was Khuwalid bin Asad bin Abdul Uzza bin Qusayy. Khuwalid was both a member of the Quraysh of Mecca and distantly related to members of the Bani Hashim clan. The Bani Hashim was the clan of Muhammad Mustafa, who would later become the Prophet Muhammad. Like the other Quraysh of Mecca, Khuwalid had made his fortune in the trading business. He sent out two caravans every year: one to Yemen in the winter to retrieve goods, and one to Syria in the summer to deliver goods.

At the age of fifteen Khadijah was married for the first time to Abu Halah Hind ibn Zarah, a member of the Makhzumi clan. The couple had three sons named al-Tahir, Halah, and Hind. Historians believe that Khadijah's first husband died and that she later was married a second time, to Ateeq ibn 'Aaith, also of the Makhzumi clan. The fate of her second husband is unclear, with some sources reporting that he also died and others that he and Khadijah divorced.

Khadijah's mother died in 575, when Khadijah was around twenty. Her father died a decade later, and the children then inherited the family's wealth. Only Khadijah seemed to inherit her father's commercial skills as well. Her brothers were apparently uninterested in the caravan business, so Khadijah took over its operation. She was advised by an uncle but made decisions on her own. This was very unusual for a woman in Arab society at the time, as women were generally considered much less important and intelligent than men. Typically only male children could inherit lands or



Mount Hira, near Mecca, is the site of the Prophet Muhammad's first revelation of the Qur'an by the angel Jabra'il. Khadija's husband would go to the mountain to meditate. © KAZUYOSHI NOMACHI/CORBIS.

businesses from their parents. Women had no rights and were thought to bring bad luck. Sometimes female infants were even buried alive by fathers who were disappointed not to have had a son.

Khadijah proved to be a worthy successor to her father, however, eventually mounting caravans as large as those of all her competitors in Mecca combined. She had a clever business sense and was able to buy and sell goods at the right time to make the most money. She was also a skilled judge of men, hiring caravan agents, or guides, who later demonstrated excellent navigation skills through the desert. The business prospered under her leadership.

Khadijah was known in Mecca as “the Pure One,” “the Princess of Quraysh,” and “the Princess of Mecca” because of her noble ancestry and the good deeds she performed. She helped provide for the poor in the city and supported all of her relatives financially. Historians believe that Khadijah, unlike her other family members and most Arabs of the

time, did not worship idols. The pre-Islamic world had many deities (gods and goddesses) to whom the people prayed, and more than three hundred of these were housed in the Ka'aba. Among these deities, Allah was considered by most Arabs to be the supreme god.

Khadijah was most likely influenced religiously by a distant cousin named Waraqah ibn Nawfal. He was a religious scholar and a believer in the unity of the creator, or in the existence of a single supreme being. Waraqah claimed that the Arabs were wrong to worship many different idols and deities. Historians believe that Waraqah's teachings caused Khadijah to reject polytheism, or the belief in many deities, in favor of monotheism, the belief in a single deity.

Wife of Muhammad

Although many men sought to wed Khadijah after her second marriage had ended, she instead devoted herself to her children and her business. One of the most important responsibilities Khadijah had as a caravan owner was the selection of caravan agents. These agents were essential to her business, as it was their duty to cross the desert to Syria in the summer leading huge caravans of camels. In the summer of 595, Khadijah had difficulty finding an agent. A relative of hers, Abu Talib, learned of her problem through the guild of merchants. Abu Talib went to her to offer the services of his young nephew, Muhammad, for whom he had become responsible after the death of Muhammad's parents. Though the young man had never led a caravan alone, he had accompanied his uncle on trips and was considered trustworthy. Khadijah hired the young man for a trial run, and the caravan proved a huge success.

Muhammad was accompanied on the caravan by a servant of Khadijah's named Maysara. They traveled by night to avoid the heat of the day and reached Syria in a month. They sold their goods, which included raisins, dried dates, perfumes, animal hides, and woven items, for cash or traded them for other goods that they could bring back for sale in Mecca. The servant Maysara observed the negotiations carried out by Muhammad and was pleased. Muhammad managed to make twice the profit of the usual caravan. When Muhammad returned to Mecca several months later, Khadijah was impressed by the stories Maysara told about him. Maysara told Khadijah how Muhammad had handled himself well in his business dealings and how absolute strangers had come to respect him quickly. Khadijah assigned him a managerial

Women in Islam

Khadijah was just one of several strong wives taken by Muhammad over his lifetime. In total he married more than twenty women. One of his favorites, A'isha, was not only a judge but also a political activist and clever battlefield commander. Another of Muhammad's wives was an *imam*, or Muslim religious leader.

Yet if these women were living in parts of the modern-day Muslim world, as Lisa Beyer observed in *Time* magazine, "they might be paying a high price for their independence." The Qur'an regards women as individuals responsible for their moral actions, and many Muslim women have taken leadership positions in religion and government. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, however, extremists in many Muslim countries have taken away women's rights,

confining them to their homes and requiring them to wear veils.

To these extremists, women are wives and mothers and should always be obedient to men. So-called honor killings, or the slaying of women who have been raped or have committed adultery (had sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse), are seldom investigated by the law. In most Muslim countries women must wear the Islamic veil at all times, are forbidden to drive, and may travel only when accompanied by a husband or male relative. Muhammad himself would likely disapprove of these restrictions to personal liberty that are occurring among followers of the religion he founded. He was a believer in strong women like his wife, Khadijah. He outlawed female infanticide and established the rights of women to obtain education and to hold property.

position until the winter, when she hired him to lead the winter caravan to Yemen and paid him three times the usual rate. The second trip was also successful.

Respect apparently turned to love, as Khadijah had either her servant or a close friend ask Muhammad if he would be interested in marrying her. She was forty at the time; Muhammad was twenty-five. He agreed to the proposal, and the two were married in 595. By all accounts the marriage was a happy one. The two lived in Khadijah's residence, which was off the main bazaar, or marketplace, in Mecca. Shortly after the marriage, the wealthy Khadijah retired from the caravan trade and focused on her husband and family. Muhammad, who had always been a thoughtful young man, also left the business world and began meditating on the nature of the world.

Together the couple had two sons, Qasim and Abdullah, both of whom died in infancy. Many sources claim that all four of Khadijah's daughters, including the youngest, Fatima (c. 605–633), were born to Khadijah and Muhammad. As Khadijah was forty at the time of her third marriage, however, it is possible some of these daughters were



Muslim women on the haj pray at Mount Arafat in Saudi Arabia. During the haj Muslim pilgrims retrace the steps of the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca to fulfill a journey of faith. © REUTERS/CORBIS.

actually from her second marriage. In 606 the couple become responsible for the upbringing of ‘**Alī ibn Abī Tālib** (c. 600–661; see entry), the six-year-old son of Abu Talib. Ali was a much younger cousin of Muhammad but was raised as his son. He later became one of Muhammad’s most famous followers and married his daughter, Fatima.

As he grew older, Muhammad became increasingly thoughtful and reflective and went on trips to Mount Hira, near Mecca, to meditate. On one such trip in 610 he experienced a powerful vision in which the angel Jabra’īl, or Gabriel, appeared to him and had him recite the words that later became part of the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book:

Recite in the name of thy Lord who created
Man from the blood coagulated.
Recite! The Lord is wondrous kind

Who by the pen has taught mankind
 Things they knew not.

Shaken by this experience, Muhammad returned to his wife, Khadijah, who assured him that he was not insane. She convinced him that he had indeed received a message from Allah. Her cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, spoke with Muhammad and also became convinced that he was a messenger from Allah, and said that his coming had been foretold in Jewish and Christian scriptures. Muhammad continued to have visions, telling only those closest to him about them.

Midwife of Islam

Khadijah's support helped Muhammad believe in his visions and establish a new faith that he called Islam, which means "submission" in Arabic. Its followers were called *Muslims*, or "ones who submit." Muhammad began to travel and spread the word of Islam throughout Mecca. He preached belief in one god, Allah, who he claimed created the world and sat in judgment over humanity. Muhammad spoke of a life after death and of a god who was fair and would reward good deeds on Earth. Many poor Meccans and some merchants responded to Muhammad's call, but the new religion quickly earned Muhammad and Khadijah enemies. Many Meccans resented Muhammad saying that the traditional gods and goddesses were to be replaced by his Allah. They were satisfied with life the way it was. The powerful Quraysh fought against the new religion because they feared that Muhammad would destroy the Ka'aba rather than embrace it for Islam.

Khadijah and her husband became increasingly isolated in Mecca as many of the new Muslim converts left the city for Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle, made clear to the town that Muhammad was under the protection of the Bani Hashim clan and that no harm should come to him. Eventually, however, Muhammad, Khadijah, their family, and their remaining followers had to hide from the powerful Quraysh in a wild mountain valley. They lived a grim and difficult life, and Khadijah was forced to use most of her money to buy water and supplies for the faithful. This isolation lasted for several years, until 619. In the end, however, the fight against Muhammad and the Bani Hashim clan was given up, and Muhammad and his family returned to Mecca. Worn out by the harsh conditions she had lived under, Khadijah died not long after returning home. Abu Talib also died soon thereafter. Muhammad remained in Mecca for three more

years before leaving for Medina, where he was welcomed as the Prophet and Islam began to thrive.

Khadijah guided the religion of Islam through its early hardships by her love and devotion to her husband. Her belief in Muhammad's visions helped give him the faith to create his new religion. She also selflessly used her wealth to insure the survival of both their family and their new faith. Khadijah has long been revered in the Muslim world as a symbol of virtue and loyalty.

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World Religions

Biographies

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Biographies VOLUME 2

Michael J. O'Neal and J. Sydney Jones
Neil Schlager and Jayne Weisblatt, Editors

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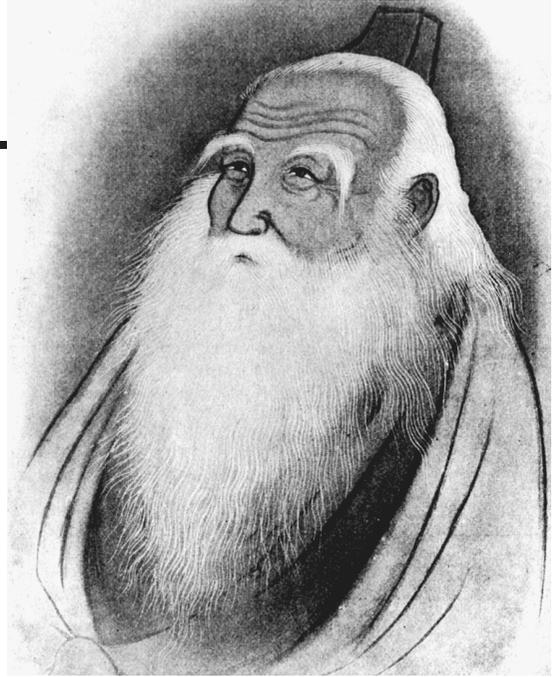
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Laozi

BORN: c. 604 BCE • Chu, China

Chinese philosopher



“The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao; / The name that can be named is not the eternal name. / The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth.”

Laozi (also spelled Lao Tzu or Lao-tzu) is the founder of the philosophical system called Daoism (Taoism), one of the three primary religions of China. The other two are Confucianism and Buddhism. Little is known about Laozi, who lived during the sixth century BCE. In fact, many historians claim that he was actually a mythical character or a mixture of several individuals. Nevertheless, Laozi is traditionally given credit for writing the primary text of Daoism, the *Dao De Jing* (also *Tao Te Ching*), often translated as “The Book of the Way and Its Virtue.” This text teaches that one needs to copy the simplicity and calm of nature and attempt to harmonize one’s life with the *Dao* (*Tao*), the eternal path of the universe, often referred to as the Way.

Laozi.

HULTON ARCHIVE/
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Historical and mythical Laozi

There are several sources of information about Laozi. The one most biographies begin with is the *Shiji* (*Shih-chi*), or *Records of the Historian*,

written by the Han dynasty court historian, Sima Qian (Ssu-ma Ch'ien). Many question the accuracy of Sima Qian's information, however, as his book was written several centuries after Laozi's death. According to Sima Qian, Laozi was born around 604 BCE in a small village in the state of Chu, which is the modern-day Chinese province of Henan (Honan). His original surname, or family name, was supposedly Li, and his given name was Er, but he was also sometimes called Dan (Tan). Li Er or Li Dan later became known as a great thinker and was given the honorary title of Laozi, meaning "old man" or "old master." Sima Qian's source for this information appears to have been a tutor for the imperial household whose family name was Li and who traced his ancestry back to Laozi.

At this point, myth and legend attempt to fill in some of the historical gaps. Laozi was said to have had a miraculous birth. In one story his mother was reported to have carried him in her womb for sixty-two years. In another story, it was seventy-two (a magical number in Chinese folk belief). One legend claims Laozi's mother gave birth to him while leaning against a plum tree, and at birth he was already white-haired and wise. The baby's first words supposedly referred to his origins: He declared that he would take his family name from the word for plum (*li* in Chinese) and then add the given name of the word for ear (*er*; or *erb*), because his ears were already very large, like those of all wise men.

Sima Qian noted that Laozi traveled to the capital city of the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty (1025–250 BCE), Luoyang (Loyang), which was established in 770 BCE. In the city he became the keeper of archival records at the court of the Zhou. In addition to compiling historical documents, he also made astrological calculations and cared for the sacred books of Chinese thought. Due to this most historians assume that Laozi was familiar with all of China's past religious traditions. Laozi married while in Luoyang, and he and his wife had a son named Tsung. Laozi's reputation as a wise man began to spread, and people from all parts of China soon sought his guidance.

Tradition holds that Laozi once met with another great Chinese philosopher, **Confucius** (c. 551–c. 479 BCE; see entry). This was recorded by Sima Qian and also in the *Zhuangzi*, another important early Daoist text. According to these sources, Laozi and Confucius met twice. At the end of their second interview, Laozi dismissed the younger philosopher with words that questioned all of his beliefs in family, social order, ritual, and education. As Sima Qian noted, Laozi supposedly told Confucius,



A seventeenth century Chinese painting shows four men of various ages studying a scroll with the yin-yang symbol on it. This symbol represents the harmony that is central to the Daoist religion. © THE ART ARCHIVE/BRITISH MUSEUM.

“The man who is intelligent and clear-sighted will soon die, for his criticisms of others are just; the man who is learned and discerning risks his life, for he exposes others’ faults. The man who is a son no longer belongs to himself; the man who is a subject no longer belongs to himself.”

Confucius reportedly later said to his own students that he knew how to trap a wild animal and how to net a fish, but Laozi was a dragon, and he did not know how to catch or understand a dragon. Several other

times, according to the Zhuangzi, Confucius consulted Laozi on the Dao, or the Way, and each time he left the older master's company confused and mystified. Further evidence that the two were possibly connected can be found in one of the classic Chinese texts, the Liji (Record of Rites). It speaks of a Lao Dan, or "Old Dan," who acted as a mentor or teacher to Confucius. Dan was one of the names by which Laozi was known.

Journey to the west

According to Sima Qian's account, Laozi grew dissatisfied with the state of society and the decline of Zhou power. The sixth century BCE was a time of disorder in China, with local nobles challenging each other and the central power of the Zhou. Warfare was a nearly permanent feature of life. This decline in societal values was what prompted Confucius to develop his ethical philosophy, through which he hoped to reconstruct society morally. To Laozi, however, no such reconstruction seemed possible. Instead, legend says that he gave up his court position and headed west, riding atop a water buffalo, in search of a better kingdom. He rode through the desert regions of the state of Qin (Ch'in) and crossed the central plains to the Hangu Pass, at the border separating China from the outside world. There, the border guard Yin Xi (Yin Hsi) stopped him.

Aware of Laozi's fame, Yin Xi begged the elderly philosopher to write down his wisdom before leaving his native country. This Laozi did over the course of several days, creating a work of five thousand Chinese characters, divided into eighty-one chapters. This work was what would become known as the Dao De Jing. After completing the book, Laozi reportedly left China and was never heard from again. While Sima Qian never suggested Laozi had divine powers, he recorded the philosopher's life span as between 160 and 200 years. Sima Qian claimed Laozi's extremely long life was a result of his beliefs and meditation practices.

Some historians believe that the mythical person of Laozi is actually three historical figures combined into one. The first of these is Sima Qian's Li Er. The second is someone with a similar name, Lao Laizi (Lao Lai-tzu), also born in Chu. Little is known about this man except that he was about the same age as Confucius and is said to be the author of a book on Daoist teachings. The third person was born more than a century after the death of Confucius. A historian of the Zhou, he went by the name of Dan (Tan).

The Dao De Jing

The Dao De Jing is the primary Daoist text. The earliest discovered copies, which were written on bamboo strips, date to about 300 BCE. It is one of the most often translated books in world literature and also one of the most confusing.

According to tradition, the book was composed by Laozi some time in the sixth century BCE, as he was about to leave China forever. Research has shown, however, that the work was probably not that of one person but of many. Literary scholars have observed that a book authored by one person can be expected to show a consistent style of writing, but many different styles exist in the Dao De Jing. In addition, the sayings gathered within do not necessarily reflect the historical period of the sixth century BCE.

Scholars maintain several different opinions on the date and authorship of the Dao De Jing, ranging from the third century BCE to the fifth or sixth century BCE. Most scholars, however, agree that the text was put together by several people.

The Dao De Jing is divided into two parts. Chapters one through thirty-seven deal with the

Dao, while chapters thirty-eight through eighty-one deal with *de*, or "virtue." The work is difficult to understand partly because of the dual meanings of many of its key concepts and terms. For example, the title itself is one problem. *Dao* means "path," or "way," but the Dao is also the essential and unnamable process of the universe. *De* can mean "virtue" or "righteousness," but it can also refer to "power." *Jing*, at least simply means "doctrine," "book," "scripture," or "classic."

There are more than one hundred translations of the work in English alone. The book is short. Each chapter is about eight to twenty lines that are written like prose but are closer to poetry. Beyond the Dao, the text deals with the concepts of nothingness; eternal return, or the cycle of nature; and detachment, or being reserved and not overly involved in trying to control life. The text also focuses on *yin*, or passive energy, often using water metaphors to show the adaptability and enduring strength of the Dao. Self-knowledge is another common theme.

Laozi's teachings

The term *dao* had been used for the way of thinking taught by many schools in Chinese tradition before Laozi. In those cases the word simply referred to their doctrine, or way of teaching. In the Dao De Jing, an attempt was made to give greater meaning to the word. In the text, the Dao, or Way, is said to have several levels. At the highest level it is the invisible force behind all creation. This constant force is the beginning and end of everything. The Dao creates everything, and everything returns to the Dao in an eternal cycle.

On another level is the Dao of nature, the rhythm of the natural world and the universe. A third level is how the Dao exists in each individual and how one's internal energy, or *qi* (*ch'i*), is kept in balance. Laozi, as well as many earlier Chinese thinkers, noted the power between

opposites and the need to balance the active male energy, or *yang*, with the inactive female energy, or *yin*. To Laozi, becoming one with the Dao was the mark of an enlightened person.

For Laozi, another major principle in Daoism is the concept of *de*, which translates as “virtue,” or sometimes as “power.” Several chapters in the Dao De Jing are devoted to explaining how *de*, specifically virtuous behavior and intelligent action, are significant in one’s life. An important Daoist concept regarding personal behavior is that of *wu wei*, which can be translated as “inaction” or even “actionless action.” Wu wei says that action should be taken at the proper time and for the proper reasons, and should be effortless.

Three types of virtue are associated with the concept of *de*: compassion, moderation, and humility. By practicing these three virtues, a person can grow closer to becoming one with the Dao, from which all people came and to which all will return. Simplicity and spontaneity (impulsiveness; acting without thought) are essential beliefs of the Daoist system. Following all of these principles leads to living in harmony with the Dao. Over time, the philosophy of Daoism, or Dao *jia* (*chia*), evolved into Dao *jiao* (*chiao*), a religion associated with many divine beings and immortals.

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Nechama Leibowitz

BORN: September 3, 1905 • Riga, Latvia

DIED: April 12, 1997 • Jerusalem, Israel

Latvian Bible scholar

“The light that had become reduced to nothing more than a tiny dot in a world of darkness now shines brighter and brighter. . . . Now we are shown a tranquil world adorned with the rainbow . . . as a sign of surety of life and peace for the coming generations.”

Nechama Leibowitz was a noted biblical scholar, teacher, and radio commentator in Israel. She was a professor at Tel Aviv University and wrote many books on Judaism, the religion of the Jewish people. She was best known for her weekly lessons on the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and for her efforts to educate Jews about their religion. She created *gilyonot*, or study pages, with information about the faith that were printed and mailed to thousands of students of Judaism around the world. In 1956 she was awarded the Israel Prize for Education and is recognized as one of the leading Torah teachers of the twentieth century. The Torah refers to the first five books of the Tanakh, also known as the Hebrew Bible, the sacred text of Judaism. To Christians, the Tanakh is known as the Old Testament.

From Latvia to Israel

Leibowitz was born in 1905 in Riga, Latvia, a country in north-central Europe. Her family was Orthodox Jewish, the branch of Judaism that holds to the faith’s traditional practices. Orthodox Judaism includes a devotion to and study of the Torah, dietary rules such as avoiding pork, and daily attendance at the synagogue, the Jewish house of

Nechama Leibowitz

Nechama Leibowitz was best known for her teachings on the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. She sought to educate Jews about their religion. © ROSE HARTMAN/
CORBIS.



worship. Nechama was the younger sister of the well-known philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994). A philosopher is someone who studies art, science, and other subjects in an effort to gain greater understanding on the workings of the world. The family left Latvia in 1919 and settled in Berlin, Germany, where Leibowitz studied. She earned a doctorate from the University of Berlin in 1930, after completing her thesis, or long paper, on Bible translations. The Bible contains the Old Testament, a sacred text in the Jewish faith, and the New Testament, which is accepted by the Christian faith alongside the Old Testament.

The political climate in Germany by 1930 was not favorable to Jews. The Nazis, members of the National Socialist Workers Party led by Adolf Hitler (1889–1949), were blaming Jews for many of the country's problems. Anti-Semitism, or discrimination against Jews, was becoming more and more common. As a result, after she earned her doctorate Leibowitz immigrated to Palestine, which was then under British control. Palestine is considered by many Jews to be their ancestral homeland. There she lectured for twenty-five years at a school that trained religious teachers. Her subject was the methodology (techniques) of teaching the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Bible.

Begins her weekly lessons

Leibowitz also began to give lessons outside the school on various topics in the Bible. In 1942 she was asked to teach a group of women from a *kibbutz*, an agricultural collective or commune, who were on a break for educational purposes. She agreed to lead the six-month class. When it was over, the women were so interested in their studies that they asked Leibowitz if they could continue the class by mail. She began sending them weekly lessons, questions that required the women to examine and analyze parts of the Bible. Then she received their answers back by return mail, corrected and graded them, and sent them back to the kibbutz. She called these lessons simply *gilyonot*, or “pages.” Soon others began requesting these weekly lessons. In 1943 there were fifty people taking part in the mailings. The next year the list grew to three hundred, and still Leibowitz was personally preparing the weekly worksheets, copying them, mailing them, and then correcting each one.

In 1954 Leibowitz began publishing her “Studies” series, which included many of the questions from her weekly lessons. In 1971 she stopped writing new material but continued to correspond with those who wrote to her with their own religious study. A wide variety of people took part in these lessons, which were translated into many different languages and sent to countries around the world. Before finally giving up the weekly lessons in 1992, Leibowitz estimated that she had corrected approximately forty thousand such lessons, and that some of her students had been with her for more than thirty years.

An example of one of her *gilyonot* concerns the first book of the Torah, called *Bereshit*. Discussing the great flood that God sent to Earth, and which Noah survived by building an ark and populating it with one of each gender of animal and man, Leibowitz provides commentary and interpretation. She draws attention to the symbolism within the story, from the darkness of the rains that killed all except those in the ark with Noah, to the renewal of life that occurs once the rains stop. She explains that the flood washed away the sins of man, such as the decline in moral behavior and the increasing glorification of things such as warfare and other violence. The Jewish Agency for Israel has reproduced her lessons online, where she says:

The light that had become reduced to nothing more than a tiny dot in a world of darkness now shines brighter and brighter, till it once again illuminates the whole of our canvas. Now we are

The First Female Rabbi

The first woman to be ordained, or officially made, a *rabbi* (the chief official in a synagogue) was Regina Jonas (1902–1944). Jonas, unlike Nechama Leibowitz, was almost a forgotten figure in twentieth-century Judaism. She was a victim of the Holocaust, the mass murder of the Jews by the Nazis during World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan), and died in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Concentration camps were camps where Jews and others were imprisoned. Millions of these prisoners were either killed or died of disease and lack of food. After the fall of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in 1989, secret state archives were opened and new information was discovered about this first female rabbi.

Jonas was born in Berlin in 1902, and after her school years she taught for a time. She then attended the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies in Berlin and graduated in 1930. She took further classes at a seminary, a college for those going into religious professions. Eventually she decided that she wanted to become a rabbi, but no woman had ever done this before. She went through all the course work necessary to become a rabbi and wrote the thesis, or long research paper, necessary to earn her degree. Her thesis topic was whether a woman could become a

rabbi according to the Talmud, the collection of Jewish law and traditions.

She concluded that, according to Jewish law, a woman could become a rabbi. At first, however, she could find no Jewish scholars or rabbis who would ordain her and officially give her this title. Many were afraid of the negative reactions of more conservative Orthodox Jews. Finally she found a rabbi who ordained her in 1935, but Jonas could still find no synagogue where she could function as its rabbi. Instead she worked as a chaplain, or religious counselor, for Jewish social clubs and institutions.

As World War II approached and persecution (mistreatment and harassment) of the Jews worsened, many rabbis left Germany. Jonas decided to stay and, because of the lack of male rabbis, was finally able to preach in a synagogue. In 1942 she was sent by the Nazis to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and in 1944 she was transferred to Auschwitz, where she was killed in the gas chambers. Jonas left behind several lectures on the history of Jewish women and other subjects. It was not until 1972 that less traditional Jewish groups in the United States again began to ordain female rabbis. The first female rabbi since Jonas to be ordained in Germany was in 1995.

shown a tranquil world adorned with the rainbow, reflecting its spectrum of colour through the clouds, as a sign of surety of life and peace for the coming generations.

The state of Israel had been created in 1948 out of much of the land that was Palestine. Leibowitz became a regular commentator on the Voice of Israel radio station, and in 1956 she won the Israel Prize for her efforts in religious education. The following year she began lecturing at the University of Tel Aviv, and in 1968 she was

made a full professor there. Yet she always preferred the more humble title, *morah*, or “teacher.”

Methodology

Leibowitz claimed there were several goals to achieve when studying religion. She believed that first, and least important, was to gain knowledge of the facts. Next was the development of independent learning skills. Most important to Leibowitz were a love of learning and a love of the Bible. In order to reach these goals, Leibowitz proposed a method called active learning. In this kind of teaching there is no formal lecture and no introduction to the material to be studied. Leibowitz thought teachers should not ask questions to which there are obvious answers that can be memorized. She further believed teachers should avoid lessons that are always organized in the same way. She claimed both of these methods only lead to students learning by rote, or by memory, and not really thinking for themselves. Instead, she said students should be encouraged to think independently and actually analyze the material they are studying rather than merely memorizing it. Finally Leibowitz believed the teacher should be a role model and should display the sort of love of learning that he or she wants to instill or place in his or her students.

Leibowitz used this active learning method in her gilyonot and in the courses she taught at the university. She helped produce a new generation of religious scholars and gave a deeper understanding of the religious works of Judaism to all levels of Israeli society. When she died in Jerusalem in 1997, she was buried with a tombstone that read simply “Nechama Leibowitz ‘Morah.’” As Moshe Sokolow noted on the Web site *Remembering Nehama Leibowitz*, “Nehama Leibowitz did not open new windows on the Torah; she simply polished the glass so we could all see inside much more clearly.”

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Ignatius of Loyola

BORN: December 24, 1491 • Azpeitia,
Guipuzcoa, Spain

DIED: July 31, 1556 • Rome, Italy

Spanish religious leader; soldier



"For the greater glory of God."

Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish nobleman who began a career as a military man. After he was wounded in battle, he converted to Catholicism, a branch of Christianity, and became a "soldier" for the pope, the leader of the Catholic Church. The wars he then fought were not on the battlefield but against the Protestant Reformation, a sixteenth century religious movement that began as an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church and resulted in the creation of Protestant churches. He argued that the only way to salvation, or life after death, was through total obedience to the church. He established the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuit order, in 1534. His book, *Spiritual Exercises*, served as a guide for leading a Jesuit life in particular and a Christian one in general. For his service to the church, he was declared a saint after his death and is often called St. Ignatius of Loyola.

From soldier to religious convert

Ignatius of Loyola was born in 1491, in the family castle near the small village of Azpeitia in northern Spain. He was the youngest of thirteen

children, and his name at birth was Iñigo. His father was a soldier. His mother died when he was still a baby. As his father was frequently absent on military campaigns, young Ignatius was often cared for by a neighbor woman who impressed on him the basic qualities of faith and loyalty. As a child Ignatius wanted to be a military man like his father, but the large family lacked the necessary resources to allow him to receive good training. Instead, when he was sixteen, Ignatius was sent to serve at the residence of the treasurer of the kingdom of Castile. This man, Juan Velasquez, was a friend of Ignatius father and promised to help the youth find a career.

The journey from Ignatius's home to the Velasquez household was a hard one. Ignatius covered the 400 miles (644 kilometers) on the back of a mule. Once he arrived, he was educated in the dress and ceremonies of the Spanish court. He learned how to use a sword and how to dance and play cards. Gambling, in fact, became a favorite pastime for the young man. He enjoyed fine clothes and riding expensive horses.

After the death of his sponsor, Velasquez, in 1517, Ignatius joined the Spanish army. The Duke of Najera (Najera is a province of Spain), took the young man on as his personal aide, although Ignatius had never had any formal military training. When war broke out with France in 1520 over a territory in the north of Spain that France had claimed, Ignatius had to learn his new trade quickly. In 1521, at the age of thirty, he was an officer helping to defend the town of Pamplona in northern Spain against the French. The Spaniards were outnumbered and wanted to surrender, but Ignatius talked them into continuing the fight for the glory of their country. During the battle a French cannonball passed through his legs, smashing his right shin and tearing the flesh off his left leg. The town fell to the French, but Ignatius was treated with respect. The French did as much as they could to set his broken bones, and he was sent home to recover.

Back at his family's castle, Ignatius began a long healing process. His injuries had been so serious that his bones needed to be rebroken and set twice. He almost died in the process. To pass the time while waiting for his legs to mend, he read. The only books available to him were religious ones that dealt with **Jesus Christ** (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry) and various saints. These books, *The Life of Christ* and *The Flower of the Saints*, provided him with a new set of goals. He was inspired by the lives of the men in these books, men who had sought to improve the world. For the next five months, Ignatius read these books many times. By the time his injuries had healed, he had determined to give up soldiering and to devote his life to God.

Years of wandering

By March 1522 Ignatius had recovered enough to leave the family castle and set out on a religious journey that would last the rest of his life. He first went to a monastery, or religious center for study, at Montserrat, Spain, where he placed his military armor and sword in front of an image of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Thereafter he dressed in sandals and a rough cloth shirt or robe. He spent several months living in a cave near the town of Manresa, Spain, practicing what is known as religious asceticism. Ascetics lead a simple life of prayer, frequently fast (go without food), and devote all of their time to religious matters. During this time Ignatius began to write his *Spiritual Exercises*. These writings ultimately took the form of a guide to a thirty-day program of prayer and focus on God that is still used by the Jesuit order in the early twenty-first century. Ignatius was often invited to the homes of other noblemen, for even though he had given away all of his possessions to follow the path of God, the nobles still considered him to be one of their own. He gave religious lessons to some of these nobles but would always sleep in their barns or in the houses of poor people.

After many months of traveling Ignatius decided to go to the Holy Land of Jerusalem, where Christ had lived and was crucified (killed by being nailed to a cross). Once he made his way on foot to Barcelona, Spain, he was able to board a ship bound for Italy and Jerusalem, despite the fact that he had no money. Ignatius had become like a wandering holy person, and people often gave him food and tried to help him. He did not stay long in Jerusalem, as the city and region were under the control of Muslims, followers of the religion of Islam. Ignatius was supposedly given a sign that he was on a divine mission when he attempted to return to Italy and was refused passage on two ships. These ships later sank in a storm. A third ship finally took him back to Venice, Italy.

Ignatius, now thirty-three years old, decided that he wanted to study to become a priest in the Catholic Church. In order to do that, he first had



At the beginning of his religious journey, Ignatius of Loyola gave up his military armor and sword in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary like the one pictured here. This signaled his new devotion to God. PUBLIC DOMAIN.

to learn Latin, the language used by educated people of the time. He went back to Barcelona and studied Latin while begging for food and shelter. He also gathered crowds to discuss religious matters and to teach them how to pray with feeling. This was during the Protestant Reformation, however, a period when followers of a reform movement that started in Germany were attempting to change some practices of the Catholic Church. The movement sought to put more power into the hands of the individual believer rather than in the officers of the church headquartered in Rome. Therefore, any sort of outside religious teaching that took place alarmed the church leaders. The Inquisition, an office set up by the Catholic Church to punish those going against its teachings, arrested Ignatius and sent him to prison for six weeks. When he was released, he was told not to teach until he became a priest. He moved on to Salamanca, Spain, where again he was thrown into prison for teaching. He did not try to defend himself when he was arrested and never complained. In fact, on one occasion, all the other prisoners broke out of prison, but Ignatius stayed behind.

In 1528 Ignatius moved on to Paris, France, and began to study for the priesthood. He remained in Paris for seven years. In addition to taking classes, he tried to teach other students his *Spiritual Exercises*. His roommates, Francis Xavier and Peter Faber, became close friends of his and his first converts. He began teaching these two his system of prayer and soon gathered six close followers around him. These young men all gave away their possessions as Ignatius had and begged for their food and lodging. Together they founded the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuit order, on August 15, 1534. The goal of the order was to serve in hospitals or as missionaries (people who try to convert nonbelievers) or to do whatever the pope in Rome might ask of them.

Ignatius's years of asceticism, however, had ruined his health. He went back to his home in Spain to recover, making the difficult journey by donkey. At Azpeitia he stayed at a poorhouse rather than at his family's castle. His health soon improved slightly, although he was never completely healthy again. By 1535 he was attracting large crowds to his teachings on the Bible (the sacred text of Christianity) and his *Spiritual Exercises*. Soon after, he left Spain and met up with his fellow Jesuits in Italy.

Although the Jesuits had gathered in Italy in preparation for a trip to Jerusalem, wars in the region prevented the group from traveling there. They remained in Italy doing charitable work and preaching. At this

point he changed his given name, Iñigo, to Ignatius, after Saint Ignatius of Antioch (50– c. 107), who gave his life for his faith.

In 1537 Pope Paul III (1468–1549) heard of the Jesuits and gave his spoken approval to their mission. After reading Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, the pope was convinced that the Jesuits could be helpful in combating the Reformation. For example, one section of the *Spiritual Exercises* is a list of rules that Jesuits must follow. As quoted on the Web site *Medieval Sourcebook* of Fordham University, rule thirteen states in part, "To be right in everything, we ought always to hold that the white which I see, is black, if the . . . Church decides it." This encouragement of such absolute obedience to the Catholic Church was appealing to the pope.

Head of the Jesuits

Ignatius presented a constitution, or basic set of rules, for his new religious order to the pope in 1538. In 1540 the new order was accepted as a legitimate Catholic group, and Ignatius was elected as its first Superior General or Father General. He then sent his followers throughout Europe and other regions to find new recruits, work in hospitals, and train the local people in correct religious practices, as laid out in the *Spiritual Exercises*. The motto of the Jesuits became "for the greater glory of God."

The Jesuits are somewhat different than other Catholic religious orders such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, or Dominicans. They demonstrate unquestioning loyalty to the pope and vow to take on any job he asks of them. This was particularly important during the years of what became known as the Counter-Reformation, or the reform movement that grew within the Catholic Church in an attempt to counteract the Reformation. The Jesuits also pledge to serve in the world, instead of living away from society, such as in monasteries, to concentrate on prayer.

Becoming a Saint

In Christianity a saint is someone who is judged to be particularly holy and worthy. Many of the early saints, such as Saint Ignatius of Antioch, were martyrs, or people who gave their lives for their faith. Other saints, such as Loyola, were people who were strong supporters of the religion. The word *saint* comes from the Latin *sanctus*, meaning "holy."

People become saints through a long and complex process called canonization. First, at least five years must pass from the time of a person's death until the beginning of the proceedings. Then witnesses are called to show that the person in question displayed heroic Christian virtues, such as faith, hope, and charity, and values, such as a sense of justice and caution. After this step the person is called a Servant of God. Next the person must be beatified, or blessed. For this to happen, it must be shown that the Servant of God performed a miracle *after* his or her death. Then the Servant of God takes on a new title, the Blessed. To be fully canonized a second miracle must occur after the beatification. Then the Blessed officially becomes a saint.

Ignatius eventually had to devote himself full time to directing his growing Society of Jesus as its missionaries were sent around the world. He made his home in Rome, where he wrote thousands of letters on behalf of the organization during the next fifteen years. He opened schools in Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, and India. These schools, however, were intended primarily for the education of new Jesuits that might be recruited in those countries, as Ignatius never thought of his society as a teaching order. Despite this, rulers and church officials throughout Europe were soon asking for Jesuit schools in their areas in order to teach what they considered the proper principles of Christianity. This led to the Jesuits gaining a reputation as educators in Catholicism.

Ignatius worked twenty hours a day despite his constant ill health. Ever since his school days in Paris he had suffered from stomach pains and fever. (After his death a surgeon would discover this was caused by buildups of minerals, called stones, in his kidneys and other organs.) In the summer of 1556 his usual poor health grew even worse, and on July 31 of that year he died. His legacy has lived on in the Society of Jesus, still one of the strongest orders in the Catholic Church in the early twenty-first century. In 1609 he was beatified, or declared blessed, and in 1622 he was canonized, or made a saint. The former soldier found his place not at the front of an army but in the records of church history.

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Martin Luther

BORN: November 10, 1483 • Eisleben,
Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

DIED: February 18, 1546 • Eisleben,
Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

German theologian; monk; religious reformer



“My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.”

Martin Luther was a Catholic monk whose teachings helped inspire and define the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe. The movement he sparked brought huge political and religious changes to the continent and made him an important figure in Western history. Those who knew him personally, however, regarded him as a thoroughly unlikable person. He was rude, self-important, insulting to opponents, and given to horrible outbreaks of temper. Many of his students found him amusing, as he punctuated classroom lectures with jokes and gross bodily noises. Members of the Lutheran Church throughout the world honor his memory and respect his teachings, but few, perhaps, would have wanted him as a houseguest.

A change of course

Martin Luther was born in the town of Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483. At the time Germany was a loose collection of independent

Martin Luther.

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states, each ruled by a noble. Shortly after Luther's birth, his father, Hans, moved the family to Mansfeld and took up the copper trade. Hans and his wife, Margaretha, wanted Martin to succeed in the civil service, so they sent him to schools in Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenach. In 1501 Luther entered the University of Erfurt, where he completed a bachelor's degree in 1502 and a master's degree in 1505. He then enrolled in the university's college of law.

On July 2, 1505, Luther's well-ordered life changed suddenly. According to legend, he was returning to school from a visit home when a storm struck and he was knocked off his horse by a lightning bolt. Grateful that his life had been spared, he cried out, "Help, Saint Anne! I'll become a monk." To the great anger and disappointment of his parents, Luther then entered the Erfurt monastery of the Augustinian monks, an order founded in 1256 and formally referred to as the Hermits of Saint Augustine. A monastery is a place set away from the distractions of the world where one goes to focus on spiritual pursuits.

When Luther became a student at the monastery, his good-humored nature began to change as he searched for an understanding of God. He devoted himself to fasting (going without food), prayers, the confessions of his sins, pilgrimages, and self-flagellation, or whipping himself as punishment. His superior decided that his excessive devoutness was a product of having too little to occupy his mind, so Luther was ordered to pursue an academic career. After being ordained (invested with the authority of) a Catholic priest in 1507, Luther earned bachelor's degrees in theology in 1508 and 1509 and a doctorate in theology in 1512. (Theology is the study of religion.) Shortly after completing his doctorate, he joined the faculty at Wittenberg University. In addition to teaching theology he served as a parish priest at the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Controversy

Over the next five years Luther grew to believe that the Catholic Church had become dishonest and overly involved with worldly, rather than spiritual, matters. He also believed that it had gone astray on a number of basic theological principles. The chief point of the church's theology that Luther disagreed with was how people achieved salvation, or life after death, in heaven. The Catholic Church taught that a person could earn a place in heaven in part through good works, but Luther believed that this was untrue. Based on his reading of the Bible,

the sacred book of Christianity, he emphasized justification by grace through faith, often phrased more simply as justification through faith. This doctrine, or principle, says that salvation is an unconditional gift of God's love and grace that one receives through his son Jesus Christ, and that this gift is based on faith alone. This doctrine became one of the most important of the Protestant Reformation, a movement that saw the rejection of many of the teachings of Catholicism and led to the formation of many different Protestant churches, including the Lutheran Church.

Luther's beliefs regarding indulgences, however, were what attracted the attention of church authorities. According to Catholic theology, when a person confesses a sin to a priest and receives absolution, or forgiveness, from God through the priest, the sin is removed. The person is then in a state of grace and is eventually eligible to enter heaven at death. The Catholic Church, however, teaches that the stain of the sin is not fully removed, even after confession. Rather, after death, a person's soul must spend time in purgatory, a midway dwelling place between Earth and heaven. In purgatory, people are denied the presence of God until they redeem themselves for past sins and become fit to enter heaven. Indulgences, granted by the church, typically in the form of prayers, can shorten the time a person's soul must spend in purgatory. A plenary, or complete, indulgence takes away all of the time a person's soul would have otherwise spent in purgatory.

In Luther's era the practice of granting indulgences was much abused. The Catholic Church often simply sold them, granting letters of indulgence to those who contributed money. One of the worst offenders was a Dominican friar named Johann Tetzel (c. 1465–1519), who traveled around selling indulgences to raise funds for the renovation of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy. Tetzel was reported to have often said, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs." Luther was deeply offended by this practice, as well as by other indications that the church had grown greedy, and preached sermons against it. He feared that Catholics would feel they did not need to confess their sins and ask for God's forgiveness when they could simply buy their way into heaven.

The Ninety-five Theses

In 1517 Luther wrote out a number of statements, called the Ninety-five Theses, about the sale of indulgences and other matters regarding

faith and salvation. According to legend, on October 31 of that year Luther nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church, probably hoping to open a public debate on the issue. Many people would later view this dramatic, defiant act as the symbolic start of the Protestant Reformation. Yet most historians say that he did not actually nail the document to the church door, but instead sent it to a small number of bishops. Importantly, none of the Ninety-five Theses questioned the right of the pope (the head of the Roman Catholic Church) to grant indulgences, nor did they in any way question the pope's authority. Soon Luther's work was translated from Latin and distributed throughout Germany and all of Europe, which was made possible by the recent invention of the printing press. The publication of the Ninety-five Theses started a great debate in the Catholic Church.

The pope at the time, Leo X (1475–1521; served 1513–21), thought that Luther was just “a drunken German” and ordered a well-known Italian theologian, Sylvester Mazzolini (1460–1523), to investigate the matter. Mazzolini concluded that Luther’s statements were in opposition to the church’s doctrine on indulgences, which had been set by Pope Clement VI (1291–1352) in 1343 in a papal bull, or an official letter from the pope. He labeled Luther a heretic, which is a person who disagrees with official church teachings. As a heretic Luther could be excommunicated, or forced to leave the church. The pope demanded that Luther submit to his authority by withdrawing his heretical statements. To that end the pope sent a representative to confront Luther at Augsburg, Germany, in October 1518.

In response to the arrival of the pope’s representative, Luther chose to deny the pope’s absolute authority over the Catholic Church. Over the next two years, the disagreement grew more intense. In his writings and theological debates, Luther stated that the papacy, or the institution of the pope and his authority, was not a part of the original fundamental makeup of the church. Thus he began to preach what would become another key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation: that the church priesthood was in the hands not of the church hierarchy—the priests, bishops, cardinals, and pope—but of the community of the faithful. In Luther’s view, people no longer needed to depend on the church’s authority for guidance in spiritual matters. Rather, they could obtain such guidance on their own from sacred scripture, the sole source of revealed truth. Again, the invention of the printing press played a key role. For the first time in history a relatively affordable copy of the Bible was available to nearly all who wanted one.

In 1519 and 1520 Luther’s writings continued to be published, and his name became widely known throughout Europe. In various books and sermons he openly questioned a number of basic doctrines of the Catholic Church. He denied that a person needed to be a member of the Roman Catholic Church to achieve salvation. He made a number of changes to the Catholic Church’s ritual of baptism (a ritual involving the symbolic use of water that results in a person being admitted to the church community) and the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, in which bread and wine are believed to be transformed into the body and blood of Christ, during a church ceremony known as Mass. In particular he urged that laypersons be allowed to share in the cup of wine rather than just the bread, a practice contrary to that of the Catholic Church.

Laypersons are those who are common worshippers and are not a part of the priesthood. He argued that confirmation (the ritual that follows a baptism, admitting a person to full membership in the church), marriage, holy orders (the ordaining of priests), and extreme unction (the applying of oil or ointment to the dying) were not true religious rites or rituals, seeing them instead as simply extensions of the ritual of baptism because they were continuations of God's grace as bestowed in baptism.

Luther also challenged what he saw as abuses of the church. He wanted the church to reduce the number of cardinals, who were the highest-ranking members of the church other than the pope. He called for reform of the universities and the priestly orders. He believed the church should promote people based on their abilities rather than on their personal connections, only concern itself with spiritual matters, and not excommunicate all those who disagreed with church doctrine. He also called for an end to celibacy, the requirement that priests cannot have sexual intercourse. He called for complete freedom of thought and conscience on the part of Christians. Luther wrote to the pope, "I submit to no laws on interpreting the Word of God."

The Diet of Worms

In 1520 the pope threatened Luther with excommunication unless he recanted, or denied, his views. In response Luther burned the papal bull that contained the warning. On January 3, 1521, the pope finally issued a bull excommunicating Luther.

That same month, Charles V (1500–1588), the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, a loose grouping of nations of which the German states and cities were a part, assembled the Diet of Worms. A *diet* (pronounced DEET) is an assembly similar to a parliament, while Worms is a small German city on the Rhine River. On April 16 Luther appeared before the diet and was confronted with a table covered with his books and writings. He was asked whether he still believed in the things that they taught. Luther asked for time to consider his answer. When he appeared the next day, he reportedly replied to the diet "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe." He then said, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

On May 25, 1521, the Diet of Worms issued the Edict of Worms. This edict, or ruling, labeled Luther a heretic and an outlaw. As such, he would have been subject to civil punishments, including imprisonment or even burning at the stake. He had left Worms, however, and taken refuge in the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach, where he lived for the next year under the protection of a German prince. He occupied his time by translating the New Testament, the second half of the Bible, into simple German that ordinary people could understand. This was another step in his efforts to free the faithful from dependence on church authority. He would wander into the nearby town to overhear people talk so that he could capture the words and rhythms of ordinary speech in his translation. Many historians and students of language credit Luther with standardizing the German language through his Bible, which was published in full in 1534.

Luther's later years

During his time in Wartburg Castle, Luther received letters from groups all over Europe asking him to comment on various matters of church doctrine or to lend his support to their own reform movements. Reformism seemed to be spreading rapidly. In many European countries, particularly in Germany, various groups rejected church doctrine and formed new Protestant branches. Luther, however, grew concerned that the revolution he had sparked would grow out of control. He preached to his followers to proceed with more caution, especially after he left Wartburg Castle and took up residence in Wittenburg, Germany.

In the final years of his life, Luther continued to preach and write. He suffered from a number of health problems and became more stubborn, rude, insulting, and bad tempered. The death of one of his daughters in 1542 was a blow from which he never recovered. Some historians believe that his unsettled state of mind is suggested by the titles of some of his late works: *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543) and *Against the Papacy at Rome Founded by the Devil* (1545).

In January 1546 Luther traveled to his birthplace, Eisleben, to help his family negotiate an agreement with a group of German counts who were attempting to take over the family's copper business. He began complaining of chest pains and died early in the morning on February 18, 1546. On February 22 he was buried at the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Passages from the Ninety-five Theses

Martin Luther distributed the Ninety-five Theses to start a discussion about the practices of the Catholic Church that he believed went against the faith and how it should be practiced. Among them was an important matter of his day, indulgences. Indulgences were granted by the priesthood to absolve people of their sins. In Luther's day, indulgences had become something that could be bought. Luther felt that if people believed they could buy their way out of sin, they would never repent and gain salvation in heaven. He spoke strongly on the matter in his Ninety-five Theses.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said *Poenitentiam agite* ["Repent,"], willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.

7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.

16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.

21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;

22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according

to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.

31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.

36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.

44. Because love grows by works of love, and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.

45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.

52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.

94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell;

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.

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Luther's influences

Luther's conflicts with the Catholic Church helped inspire the Peasants' War of 1524–25. Throughout Luther's lifetime, Europe was in a state of unrest. European peasants had been revolting against their masters since at least the fourteenth century. They saw Luther's attack on the church as an attack on the social order that oppressed, or mistreated, them as well. They believed that if they rebelled, Protestant reformers such as Luther would support them. The peasants were also aided by poor nobles who had no way to repay the debts that they owed to the Catholic Church.

Luther supported the peasants until the revolts turned into a bloody war. Many of Luther's critics blamed him for the uprisings. As a result he felt increasing pressure to criticize the peasants, which he did in 1525 in *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants*. He was motivated in part by his desire to support the German nobility who, like him, resisted the authority of the pope and had offered him protection. The revolt was put down in 1525, though parties of peasants continued to loot churches, kidnap church officials, and commit other criminal acts.

The Peasants' War was only the beginning of a long conflict. For centuries after the Protestant Reformation, Catholicism and Protestantism would battle with each other. Violence broke out in 1606 when Catholics and Protestants clashed in the German city of Donauwörth. Elsewhere, most of the European nations—many of them, such as Spain and Italy, still Catholic—eyed the growing influence of Protestant Germans with fear and distrust. In 1618 these tensions led to the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War. The war involved most of Europe and led to the deaths of nearly one-third of the German population.

These kinds of clashes continued to occur. In England a seventeenth-century uprising ended when the Catholic king, Charles I, was beheaded by Protestant revolutionaries in 1649. Later, in 1688, the Catholic James II fled England into exile and was replaced by King William and Queen Mary, both Protestants. Catholics in England were not allowed to hold public office or attend universities until the nineteenth century. Similar anti-Catholic prejudice was common in the largely Protestant United States throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth. Even in the early twenty-first century, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland continued to attack one another in bombings and assassinations.

Despite the bloodshed, conflict, and prejudice that took place during the Protestant Reformation, historians agree that the revolution launched

by Luther and others contributed significantly to the development of Europe. The continent's nations were freed from the iron grip that the Catholic Church had on most aspects of life, including government, education, scientific research, and the publication of books. The emphasis on personal belief rather than church authority gave rise to a renewed interest in learning. In turn, this new interest contributed to the rapid intellectual, social, and artistic advancement of Europe.

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Madhva

BORN: c. 1199 • Pajakaksetra, Karnataka, India

DIED: c. 1276

Indian religious leader

“There is one God, the embodiment of positive Divinity. . . .
You can address Him by any name.”

Sri Madhvacharya was born with the name Vasudeva. He eventually took the name Madhva and later became known as Madhvacharya, one of the great *acharyas*, or revered teachers, of Hinduism. During the thirteenth century he founded a sect (religious division) of Hinduism called Madhivism, whose followers are known as Sad-Vaisnavas. This sect was still in existence in the early twenty-first century, centered at a monastery at Udupi, India, as well as at two other Indian monasteries in Madhyatala and Subrahmanya, near Mangalore.

Birth and early life

Scholars disagree about the date of Vasudeva's birth, with some placing it as early as 1197 or 1199, and others claiming it was as late as 1238. He was born in a village called Pajakaksetra, near the town of Udupi, in the Karnataka region of southwest India. His father was named Madhyageha Bhatta, and his mother was named Vedavati.

As a child Vasudeva had many talents. He had a good memory and was able to learn his lessons quickly. He was also a powerful athlete and spent much of his time swimming, weight lifting, running, hiking, and wrestling. He had a pleasing voice, and many people enjoyed listening to him give religious discourses at the local temple. Some legends also attribute miraculous powers to him. One account claims he quieted the waves of the ocean so that he could bathe in peace.

Vasudeva showed interest in spiritual matters from a young age. When he told his parents that he wanted to become a monk, they were disappointed because he was then their only surviving son, and they had hoped that he would take care of them in their old age. He respected their wishes and waited until another son was born before turning his focus to spiritual matters and taking the name Madhva. The younger brother, Vishnuchitta, cared for their parents and later became a monk himself. He went on to become one of the most important teachers of his older brother's religious views.

At the time of Madhva's birth, a community of Christians lived in the nearby town of Kalyanpur. This group represented the first followers of Christianity in India. In his youth Madhva may have absorbed some of the teachings and traditions of these Christians. Many scholars note a number of significant similarities between the early life of Madhva and the story of **Jesus Christ** (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry) as recorded in the Bible, the sacred text of Christianity. For example legend holds that Madhva's birth was foretold by a messenger, just as the archangel Michael visited Jesus's mother, Mary, to inform her of the coming birth of her child. Another tale claims that as a child, Madhva disappeared for three days before his parents found him preaching to his elders in the temple, a story similar to one told about Jesus. Other stories with parallels in the Christian Bible include Madhva's ability to walk on water and to multiply food for his followers, as Jesus did when he multiplied fish and loaves of bread to feed a crowd that had gathered to hear him speak. Madhva also shared

Holy Men of Hinduism

The various titles of respect given to prominent practitioners of Hinduism can be confusing to those who are unfamiliar with them. The meanings of some of these terms overlap.

- **shri:** Taken from a Sanskrit word meaning “beauty,” or “majesty,” *shri* can be both a general term of respect, similar to “mister,” or a title with deeper religious meaning, similar to “saint.” It is sometimes used before the names of objects, books, and places.
- **sadhu:** A *sadhu* is an ascetic, meaning a person, such as a monk, who gives up earthly pleasures and leads a life of self-denial and solitude.
- **sage:** Among Hindus, a sage is a scholar and philosopher who is believed to be blessed with divine knowledge. Historically, sages were the authors of epic poems, and they were regarded as the bearers of ancient Hindu values and beliefs. *Sage* is in fact an English word; in India, sages are called *rishis*.
- **guru:** *Guru* is a Sanskrit word that literally means “venerable” but can also mean “heavy.” In Hinduism, a guru is a personal teacher or spiritual guide under whom others study the texts and principles of Hinduism.
- **acharya:** *Acharya* literally means “teacher.” The word was added to proper names as a suffix, so that, for example, Madhva became known as Madhvacharya.
- **swami:** The term *swami* which comes from a Sanskrit word meaning “lord” or “owner.” Swamis are scholars and philosophers, and the term is usually reserved for the heads of sects or schools of thought. Many swamis run educational or social institutions.

the Christian beliefs in eternal damnation and in the concept of heaven. Most importantly Madhva was regarded as an incarnation, or living form, of Vayu, the son of the Hindu god Krishna, just as Jesus was regarded as the son of the Christian God.

Madhva studied under a famous guru, Achyutapreksha. During his religious training he began to question the accepted ideas about the nature of God. After formulating his own set of beliefs, he went on a tour of India to share them with the people. He attracted many listeners and converts because of the clarity of his views and his skill as a public speaker.

Madhva’s listeners found his views comforting, particularly those regarding caste. The caste system in India ranks people by social class according to the family they are born into. At the top are the *Brabmins*, who are mostly priests, teachers, and intellectuals. These are followed by *Kshatriyas*, or warriors and rulers; *Vaishyas*, or merchants and landowners;

and *Sudras*, or laborers and farmers. In addition, a fifth caste, the “Untouchables,” includes outcasts who perform “unclean” work such as the removal of waste and of dead animals. Madhva believed that caste should be decided not by the status of one’s family but of one’s own nature or behavior. He believed that a spiritually enlightened Untouchable was better than an ignorant Brahmin, a view with which his followers agreed.

His ideas were considered somewhat radical, and Madhva made enemies on his journey. He often took part in debates with local religious leaders, and because his views were opposed to theirs, they became angry with him and some even threatened his life. At one point the contents of his library were stolen, although the texts were later returned after a local prince intervened.

Return to Udupi

After several years of preaching throughout India, Madhva returned to Udupi. There, he established eight *mathas*, or monasteries. A monastery is a religious place of solitude and learning, where monks and nuns may go to live. Each monastery was led by one of Madhva’s disciples, or followers. Madhva also installed the image of Krishna at the temple in Udupi. (Krishna is regarded either as a god or as a godlike hero in Hinduism and is worshipped as an incarnation, or form, of Vishnu, the preserver god. All gods in Hinduism are considered to be representations of the one God, Brahma.) According to legend a shipwreck took place off the coast near the town of Malpe. Madhva had a dream in which he saw an image of Krishna aboard the ship that he felt had to be retrieved. He enlisted the help of local fishermen, dove into the sea, and rescued the image of Krishna for the temple.

Madhva’s religious views became popular throughout India, particularly in the south and west. Many of the region’s Hindu saints followed his teachings, and some of his disciples became highly respected themselves. Madhva wrote some thirty-seven books on palm leaves. Most were commentaries on Hindu sacred texts, such as the Upanishads, the Rig-Veda, the Bhagavad Gita, and others. He also wrote a book on iconography, or the study of images and symbols associated with certain subjects, especially religious ones, as well as a book on mathematics.

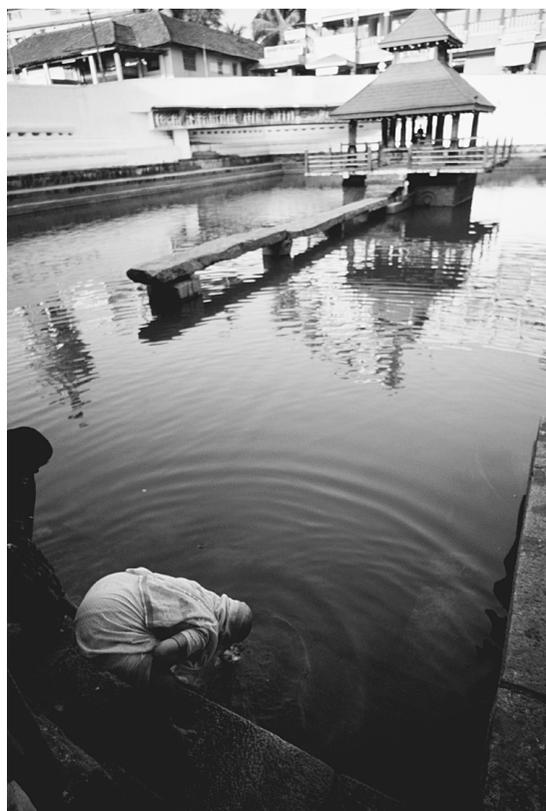
Late in life Madhva set out on a pilgrimage from Udupi to the city of Badari. One legend holds that he walked out in the middle of a sermon to

start this pilgrimage. During his journey he disappeared and was never heard from again. The date of his death is traditionally given as 1276.

Madhva's teachings

One of the chief religious debates taking place in India during Madhva's life concerned the nature of God and the relationship between God and the material world. Hindu teachers tended to fall into one of two camps. One camp preached a "monist" view of God. Monism refers to belief in the basic unity, or oneness, of God with the human soul, and indeed with all of existence, including matter. Monism was preached by another well-known acharya, Sankara (788–820), and was the most common view among Indian Hindus at the time of Madhva's birth. Monism was also the doctrine taught by the guru under which Madhva studied as a youth. This school of thought is called Advaita Vedanta. The word *Vedanta* means "end of the Vedas," referring to the Upanishads, which are the concluding portions of Hinduism's chief sacred text, the Vedas. The Upanishads contain the essence of the teachings of the Vedas. "Vedanta," then, is used in the name of various Hindu schools of thought in reference to their interpretation of the Upanishads.

The other camp consisted of those who held a "dualist" view of the world. This dualist view, which was taught by Madhva, was referred to as *Dvaita*, and the school of thought he founded is called Dvaita Vedanta. That term is more general than the name of his specific sect, Madhivism. Madhva based his beliefs on his interpretations of the Upanishads and other Hindu texts. He and his disciples taught five main points: that God was separate from the human soul; that God was separate from the physical universe; that the human soul and physical matter were different; that individual human souls were different; and that various types of matter were different. Although these distinctions may not seem surprising to modern-day readers, they were startling in the thirteenth century. Until this time Hinduism



A swami bathes in the tank, known as Madhava Sarovar, which surrounds the Sri Krishna Temple in Udupi, India. Worshippers believe the Ganga, or Ganges, River flows into the tank every ten years. Devotees purify themselves in the waters before going to pray.

© DAVID H. WELLS/CORBIS.

had only taught a basic unity among God, the human soul, and physical matter.

Madhva also taught a view of creation that was in opposition to Hindu tradition. He did not believe that creation was ordered by the god Vishnu, as was the common theory. Rather, he believed that matter existed before Vishnu and evolved in response to his will. He believed that no one could prove the existence of Vishnu, but that he could be understood through the study of the Hindu sacred texts. By studying these texts, people could ready their minds to obtain divine grace and increase their chances of achieving salvation.

Madhva shared with his followers many thoughts on the nature of God and humanity's relationship with him. As quoted on *Kamat's Potpourri* Web site, he is said to have stated, "There is one God, the embodiment of positive Divinity. He is 'Narayana.' He is also Ishwara Brahma, Vishnu, and has many other names. You can address Him by any name." He also stated "The entire nature extols God. His existence is evident in the sounds of the sea, in the wind, in singing of birds and howls of beasts. These all pay homage to God. His existence should be recognized, which is possible after self-training"

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Mahavira

BORN: c. 599 BCE • Kundagrama, Bihar, India

DIED: c. 527 BCE • Papa, Bihar, India

Indian philosopher; religious leader

“Whether I am walking or standing still/whether I sleep or remain awake,/the supreme knowledge and intuition/present with me—constantly and continuously.”

Mahavira was an Indian philosopher who lived a life of extreme piety, or devotion. He is regarded as the founder of a religion called Jainism, which is practiced primarily in India. Jains, however, would say that Mahavira did not “found” Jainism. They would instead say he rediscovered or reinvigorated Jain principles and beliefs that had always existed.

There are few biographical records of Mahavira in existence, and much of what is known about his life is more mythical than factual. The term *hagiography*, from the Greek word *hagios*, meaning “saint,” is sometimes used to refer to a biography that idealizes saintly figures. The legends that surround the life of Mahavira fall into the category of hagiography.

Birth and early life

One major uncertainty concerns exactly when Mahavira lived. Some evidence suggests that his life overlapped with that of the **Buddha** Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE; see entry), the founder of Buddhism. If this is correct, he may have been born in about 490 BCE and died in about 410 BCE. Many sources, however, give other birth and death dates. Certain Western scholars believe he was born around 540 BCE

Mahavira



A statue representing Mahavira. © THE BRITISH MUSEUM/HIP/THE IMAGE WORKS.

and his date of death was about 470 BCE. Jains believe that Mahavira was born “seventy-five years before the fourth descending period of the current era,” referring to Jain measurements of historical time. This would put his birth date at 599 BCE and his death date at 527 BCE.

Mahavira was born in Kundagrama, a village in Bihar, a modern-day Indian state in the north-east whose capital city is Patna. His birth name was Vardhamana, which means “prospering.” He was given that name because soon after he was conceived, his family and the people around him began to experience good fortune.

Vardhamana came from a royal family and was considered a member of the warrior caste, called the *Kshatriya*. Castes are hereditary Indian social classes. His mother, Trishala, was related to the ruler of the nearby city of Vaisali, and his father, Siddhartha, was a local king. According to legend Vardhamana was originally conceived by a *Brahmin* mother, Devananda. (Brahmins are the highest Indian caste and are usually priests, religious teachers, and intellectuals.) The embryo was then moved into Trishala’s womb. The

legends also hold that Vardhamana’s conception was foretold to his mother in a series of dreams. These dreams, called “auspicious dreams” (favorable or lucky dreams) included images of a lion, the full moon, the rising sun, an ocean of milk, a white bull, and a white elephant. These dreams are described in Jain literature and are often depicted in temples.

As a child Vardhamana received an education that was suitable for a prince. According to one of the two main sects, or divisions, of Jainism, he married a princess named Yasoda, and the couple had a daughter. The other major sect of Jainism denies that he married and had a child. This sect believes that he had no ties to other people in the world.

Renunciation

The most important event in Vardhamana’s life was his decision at about age thirty to renounce, or give up, his worldly possessions. After the

Jain Sects

There are two main sects, or divisions, in Jainism: the *Digambara*, which translates as "sky clad," and the *Svetambara*, which translates as "white clad." The original division between the two sects resulted from disputes over which of Mahavira's teachings were the true ones and how those teachings were to be interpreted. This problem arose in part because Mahavira's teachings were not written down until well after his death, so followers had no reliable texts to use as references.

The Digambaras are the more austere, or morally strict, sect of Jainism. Unlike Svetambaras, Digambaras do not believe that women can achieve freedom until they have been reborn as men. This is partly because Digambara monks do not wear clothing. Because they believe remaining naked would be more impractical for women, they claim women have to be reborn as men in order to lead completely austere lives.

The two sects also have different views about the nature of *Jinas*, who are godlike enlightened

ones. Unlike the Svetambaras, Digambaras believe that Jinas do not require food, do not have bodily functions, nor do they carry out any functions in the world. Additionally the religious images of the two sects differ. Digambara images of the *Tirthankara*, the revered Jain teachers, always have downcast eyes, signifying meditation (deep and concentrated thinking). The figures are always plain and naked. In contrast Svetambara images are always highly decorated, and the statues of the Tirthankara have wide, staring eyes, signifying preaching.

Another difference between the two sects is their views on worldly possessions. Digambaras believe that a person can achieve spiritual freedom only by completely abandoning worldly possessions. Monks of this sect are not even allowed to own a bowl for eating. All gifts they accept have to fit in the hands. A Svetembara monk, however, is allowed to wear a simple, plain white robe and may also own a begging bowl, a broom to sweep insects from his path, and writing tools.

death of his parents, he gave away all of his property, pulled out his hair, and became a wandering ascetic, or *sadbhava*, meaning that he lived a life of total self-discipline and piety. He traveled around the country begging for food. At first, his only possession was a single robe, but he eventually gave up even that and went naked. He never stayed in one village for more than a day at a time and refused to shelter himself from either cold or heat. When he walked or sat, he was careful never to injure any living thing. For this reason, he traveled less during the rainy seasons, when paths would be filled with life forms that he did not want to injure. As part of this determination, Vardhamana was a vegetarian, or a person who does not eat meat. He even strained his drinking water to ensure that no creatures were living in it.

Vardhamana supposedly lived in this ascetic fashion for twelve years, six months, and fifteen days. Then, on a summer night, he sat on the

bank of the river Rjupalika under a tree and achieved omniscience, or knowledge of everything. He gained a complete understanding of the world, including its past, present, and future. According to one sacred Jain text, he saw all things about all living beings, including what they thought about, said, or did. At this point Vardhamana acquired the name Mahavira, which means “great hero.”

He began to attract many followers. He preached to large crowds and engaged other religious leaders in debates about spiritual matters. He organized the Jain religion into societies of nuns, monks, female laity, and male laity. The term “laity” refers to ordinary members of a religion, or those who are not monks, priests, or nuns. According to Jain tradition, by the time of his death, Mahavira had established a community of some 14,000 monks, 36,000 nuns, 159,000 laymen, and 318,000 laywomen.

Mahavira died in the town of Papa, near Patna. His followers believe that he was alone at the time, reciting religious texts. The Jains list his death as occurring in 527 BCE. As noted earlier, however, scholars offer different dates for this event. Some place it at 467 BCE, others at about 477 or 476 BCE, and still others at 490 BCE.

Mahavira as Tirthankar

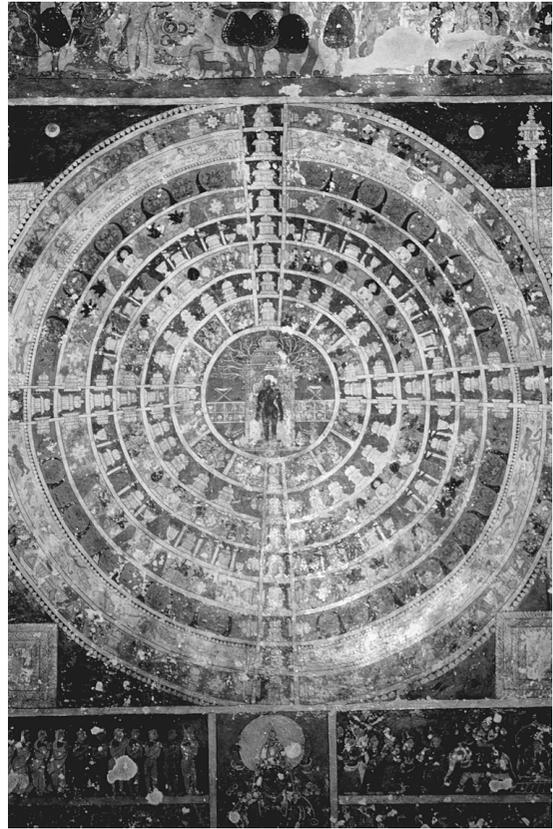
Jains regard Mahavira as the twenty-fourth *Tirthankar*. This title, the plural of which is *Tirthankara*, means something like “maker of the ford,” or “maker of the ocean crossing.” It refers to building or creating ways to cross the “ocean” of rebirth. In this way a *Tirthankar* can be thought of as similar to a prophet (divine messenger) in other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or Zoroastrianism.

To understand the significance of the *Tirthankara* in the history of Jainism, the Jain concept of time must be understood. Jains believe that the principles of their religion have always existed. Sometimes, however, those principles become less important in the minds of the people and the religion dies out for a time before it is reborn. To Jains, therefore, the concept of time is cyclical, and can be pictured much like the rotation of a wheel. The rotation includes a series of upward movements, *utsarpini*, and downward movements, *avarsarpini*. A complete turn of the wheel is called a *kalpa* and covers an immense span of time. According to Jain beliefs, a *kalpa* is a unit of time equal to approximately 4.32 million years.

Each of these cycles, or kalpas, is divided into six ages, which can be thought of as divisions between spokes on the wheel. Three of the ages are considered to be a kind of golden era, which is followed by a decline that continues until Jainism dies out. The process is then reversed, as the religion is reborn and eventually reaches a new golden age. Jains believe that in the current time cycle, the world has passed through the first four ages of the cycle and is currently in the middle of the fifth age, with a sixth and final age to come. Each complete kalpa is long enough for twenty-four Tirthankara to live. These twenty-four make up a “set” of Tirthankara that Jains worship.

The present cycle is said to have witnessed the passing of all twenty-four of these enlightened ones, with Mahavira being the last. No historical records prove the existence of the first twenty-two. Some evidence suggests that the twenty-third Tirthankar, Parshva, did exist and lived about 250 years before Mahavira. Mahavira did not oppose or change the teachings of Parshva. Rather, Jains believe that he came to Earth to complete and fulfill those teachings and to renew Jainism.

Jains believe that some enlightened individuals can reach the perfection of a god. These people are called *Jina*, which means “conqueror” and is the source of the word *Jain*. Jains regard Mahavira as one of the Jina. Jina are perfectly happy, having conquered earthly desires, and their spirits live eternally, so they are worshipped as “gods.” Although the Jina are thought of as gods, they are neither creators nor destroyers. They do not affect the laws of the physical universe. Humans also do not exist because of the Jina’s actions and cannot have any kind of relationship with them, for the Jina do not interfere in the affairs of humans. They do not reward people for good actions or forgive their sins. Humans regard them only as a source of inspiration. Because of these characteristics, Jains are sometimes referred to as atheists, meaning that they do not believe in any gods, but this is true only in a limited sense.



This Jain cosmic wheel depicts at its center the figure of Mahavira. Jainism believes that the universe is eternal, and teachings on life within the universe are central to the religion. © CHARLES & JOSETTE LENARS/CORBIS.

Mahavira's teachings

Mahavira is referred to by two titles. As a Tirthankar, he was one of the great teachers of Jainism. He purified and organized the religion in the present age. He was also a Jina, a person who has gained enlightenment and understanding to such an extent that he is to be worshipped. Mahavira achieved this position in large part by living and teaching the Five Vows of Jainism. These vows are still practiced by Jains in the early twenty-first century. The Five Vows are as follows:

1. *Abimsa*: neither killing nor injuring any living thing.
2. *Satya*: speaking only the truth.
3. *Asteya*: not stealing things or being greedy.
4. *Brahmacharya*: practicing celibacy, or not having sex, and giving up all sensual pleasure.
5. *Aparigraha*: being detached and being neither delighted nor disturbed by any outward experiences.

Another central belief of Jainism, related to *abimsa*, or nonviolence, is that since all creatures contain living souls, all deserve to be treated with respect.

The Five Vows can be thought of as somewhat similar to the Ten Commandments of Judaism and Christianity and to the Five Pillars of Islam, which provide the followers of these religions with basic guidelines or laws for living. The vows provide Jains with a moral and ethical code to follow. The principle that is particularly associated with Jainism is the first, *ahimsa*, the vow to not injure or kill any living thing. This vow not only bans such extreme actions as murder and assault but also extends into everyday life. All Jains are vegetarians, as was Mahavira, and strict Jains go to great lengths to avoid harming anything that is alive. Some Jains even avoid eating after dark in order to be certain they do not accidentally consume small living creatures that they cannot see.

Mahavira accepted the Hindu belief in reincarnation, or being reborn into another living body after death. He taught that the *jiva*, or soul, is conscious, immaterial, and eternal. Because the soul is eternal, it is subject to the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Mahavira also taught the Hindu concept of karma. *Karma* refers to the effects of a person's actions in one life on the nature of his or her next life. A person who earns positive karma by doing good deeds can be reborn on a higher plane of existence, while one who earns bad karma by being immoral or unethical will likely be

reborn on a lower plane of existence. Mahavira taught that karma represents a kind of bondage or entrapment. The goal of every person is to stop earning new karma and to get rid of past karma. The result of doing so is *siddhi*, or perfection. He preached that a soul that has gotten rid of all karma can become spiritually pure. Unlike Hindus, Jains believe that karma is an actual physical substance, like dust, that attaches itself to the soul.

Mahavira warned that freeing the soul from karma was not easy, and could only be accomplished by mastering the “three jewels.” Like the Five Vows, the three jewels form an ethical code. They are right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. The first of these, right faith, or *samyak darshana*, means seeing clearly. It is sometimes translated as “right perception.” The term refers to avoiding superstition and preconceptions (opinions formed in advance of adequate knowledge) and being determined to find the truth. The second jewel, right knowledge, or *samyak jnana*, refers to knowing and understanding the universe. The third, *samyak charitra*, or right conduct, refers to leading one’s life ethically. An ethical person avoids doing harm to living things and frees himself or herself from impure desires, attitudes, and thoughts by following the Five Vows.

Regardless of the uncertainties surrounding the facts of Mahavira’s life, he was an important religious figure in India in the centuries before the start of the Common Era. Though his home village of Kundagrama no longer exists, in 1956 the government of Bihar created a memorial to Mahavira near its former location. The memorial is home to the Research Institute of Prakrit, Ahimsa, and Jainology, an institution in which the principles of Jainism are studied.

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Moses Maimonides

BORN: March 30, 1135 • Córdoba, Spain

DIED: December 13, 1204 • Cairo, Egypt

Spanish rabbi; physician; philosopher; writer



“Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, and quite possibly of all time.”

— Shlomo Pines as quoted on the *Jewish Virtual Library* Web site.

Moses Maimonides, one of the most well-known scholars and theologians (people who study religion) in Jewish history, was born on March 30, 1135. Most commonly his name is given simply as Maimonides, which is Greek for “son of Maimon.” He is also frequently referred to as the Rambam, a loose acronym, or short form, of his title and name, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon.

Early life and wanderings

Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. His father was a judge in the Jewish court and shared with his son his vast knowledge of the Talmud. The Talmud is a set of religious principles that explains and interprets the Hebrew Scripture, the portion of the Christian Bible called the Old Testament. These principles were first written down in the second century in a text called the Mishnah. From an early age Maimonides was

fascinated by the Talmud. His father also encouraged him to study science and philosophy, and his earliest ambition was to be a doctor, though he gave up that ambition for a time in the face of family misfortune. By the time he was a teenager Maimonides had acquired a broad education, covering not only Jewish law and history but also the works of classical Greek philosophers, those who seek to understand fundamental beliefs of values and reality.

The early years of Maimonides's life overlapped with the height of the golden age of Judaism in medieval Spain, when Jewish learning, art, architecture, science, and philosophy were at their peak. The region of Spain in which Maimonides lived was under Muslim (Islamic) rule. Persecution did occur at times, such as in 1066, when the Jews were forced to leave the city of Granada and many Jewish families were killed. Persecution is to harass a person or people because of their beliefs. In general, however, Jews were accepted into the region's economic, cultural, and social life. Many Jewish families enjoyed considerable wealth.

The situation changed abruptly in 1148, when a radical sect of Islam called the Almohads conquered Córdoba. The Almohads took Jewish property, shut down Jewish schools, destroyed Jewish temples, and seized Jewish women and children and sold them into slavery. Jews, as well as Christians, were given a choice: They could convert to Islam, be forced into exile (forced to leave their homes never to return), or, if they remained in Córdoba and refused to become Muslims, face death. Some stayed and pretended to become Muslims while still secretly practicing Judaism. Most chose exile. For the next ten years Maimonides and his family wandered from city to city in Spain, staying one step ahead of the Almohads, who proceeded to seize control of other cities and regions. Finally Maimonides and his family joined a group of Jews who set out for North Africa in 1159. They settled in the city of Fez, the capital of modern-day Morocco, where they remained for five years.

In Fez, Maimonides and his family continued to face persecution. They eventually left and moved to Palestine, where they stayed in such cities as Jerusalem and Hebron. The political and social climate in Palestine was not friendly to Jews, largely because of the disorder and devastation caused by the Crusades (the two centuries of continuing conflict between Muslims and European Christians fighting for control of Palestine). Maimonides's family moved once more, traveling south to Egypt. They lived for a time in Alexandria before settling in Fostat, the first capital of Egypt under Arab rule, which in modern

times is part of the “Old Egypt” district in Cairo. In Fostat the family finally found a home. Although Egypt was under the control of Muslims, the Fatamid dynasty (909–1171) that then ruled Egypt was tolerant of other religious groups and allowed Jews to practice their religion with complete freedom.

Misfortune struck soon after the family reached Egypt. First Maimonides’s father died. Maimonides was determined to carry on the tradition of scholarship in his family. His father and generations of ancestors had been scholars before him, so he remained devoted to his studies. Meanwhile his brother, David, a jewel merchant, became responsible for the family financially. The family then encountered more bad luck when David died at sea while on a trip to India to purchase jewels. Maimonides was so affected by David’s death that he became ill and had to stay in bed for several months. When he recovered, he realized that he needed to support his family. He did not believe, however, that he should make any money from his theological studies, as he had gained his vast knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, or holy texts, solely for the love of God. Accordingly he resumed the medical studies that he had once begun and became a physician. In time he was so successful that he was appointed personal physician to the grand vizier, or ruler, of Egypt, as well as to other important figures in the capital city.

Physician and scholar

In addition to running his medical practice Maimonides also served as a respected *rabbi*. A rabbi is a person trained in Jewish law, ritual, and tradition who is often the head of a synagogue, or Jewish house of worship. He soon became the unofficial leader of the Jewish community in Egypt. As such, he was responsible for overseeing community administration and donations to charity. He also acted as a judge, all without accepting pay. In 1177 he was officially appointed head of Cairo’s Jewish community.

For the remainder of his life Maimonides worked to balance his job as a physician with his interest in Judaism. He wrote numerous commentaries and theological works. In 1187 his son Avraham was born. Avraham himself went on to have a noteworthy career as the head of Cairo’s Jewish community and wrote several works that added to his father’s knowledge. Maimonides died on December 13, 1204.

Moses Maimonides

A page from the Mishnah Torah, a systematic code of Jewish law that was completed by Maimonides around 1178.

Any study of Jewish law includes the Mishnah Torah in some way. © NATIONAL LIBRARY, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL/LAUROS/GIRAUDON/THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY.



The thirteen principles of faith

In the twenty-first century, nearly one thousand years after his death, Maimonides is still regarded as one of the leading figures of Jewish theology and philosophy. He perhaps remains best known for his “thirteen principles of faith,” one of the earliest attempts to define the meaning of being a Jew. These principles include the following:

1. God exists.
2. God has unity; that is, God does not have parts or different personifications, but exists as a single being.
3. God is spiritual and incorporeal; that is, He has no material existence or body.
4. God is eternal. He has always existed, since before He created the universe, and He will continue to exist after the end of time.
5. Only God should be the object of worship (an idea stated by Maimonides to discourage idol worship, or the worship of physical objects as gods).
6. God revealed his intentions through His prophets (divine messengers), and their prophecies were revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, primarily in the section called Prophets (Nevi'im). This section consists of twenty-one books, including 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.
7. **Moses** (c. 1392–c. 1272 BCE; see entry) was the greatest among the prophets. Moses was the dominant figure in the biblical book of Exodus, which details the story of the formation of the Jewish nation after he led the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses has also traditionally been regarded as the author of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, although modern biblical scholars dispute this belief.
8. God gave His law to man in the form of the Ten Commandments and other principles. God's law was first revealed to Moses in the book of Exodus. The law is detailed in the biblical book of Leviticus, although Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy also contain principles that remain part of Jewish law.
9. The Torah, as God's law, is unchangeable. (Maimonides put forth this idea in response to the growing belief that God's law could evolve or change according to current conditions. This is perhaps the one of the thirteen principles of faith that has been and remains most widely disputed.)
10. God has advance knowledge of human actions.
11. God rewards good and punishes evil.
12. A Jewish messiah, or savior, will someday appear.
13. The dead will be resurrected (brought back to life) at the end of time.

The Mishnah

Gentiles, or those who are not Jews, can sometimes find the terms used to refer to Jewish scripture and traditions confusing. The most important Jewish scripture is the Bible's Old Testament, which Jews refer to as the Tanakh. ("Old Testament" is a term used by Christians.) The most essential part of the Tanakh is the Torah, the first five books in the Tanakh: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books detail the principles of Jewish law, the formation of the Jewish nation, and God's covenant, or agreement, with the Israelites as his "chosen people." These five books are often referred to as the "written Torah." In addition to the written Torah is the "oral Torah," which consists of interpretations of the written Torah and methods with which to apply its laws. The oral Torah, the first part of the Talmud, was written down in the second century and called the Mishnah.

The Mishnah consists of six sections, called *seders*, which means "orders." They are:

1. *Zeraim*, or "Seeds," deals with agricultural laws.
2. *Moed*, or "Festival," concerns with festivals and Shabbat observances. Shabbat is Saturday, considered in Judaism to be the seventh day of the week and a day of rest and worship.
3. *Nashim*, or "Women," discusses such issues as marriage and divorce.
4. *Nezikin*, or "Damages," details laws regarding financial matters and torts, or wrongful acts that injure or harm others.
5. *Kodshim*, or "Holy Things," deals with temple worship and sacrifices.
6. *Tohorot*, or "Purities," provides laws regarding ritual purity.

Each of the *seders* includes further divisions called tractates, or *masekhtots*. The total number of tractates is sixty-three. Each tractate deals with specific issues in Jewish law. Thus, when rabbis want to examine and rule on a particular issue regarding any aspect of Jewish life, they turn for guidance to the tractate that discusses that issue.

These principles were not universally accepted among Jews, particularly during the first few centuries after Maimonides created them. In modern times, however, they have been reworked as poetic prayers appearing in the Jewish prayer book. They remain important because they define the basic beliefs of Judaism. These thirteen principles of faith are still followed by Orthodox Jews, who strictly follow religious laws and beliefs as traditionally held.

Commentary on the Mishnah

While the thirteen principles of faith are of major significance, Maimonides's most important works, especially to Talmudic scholars, are the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, the *Mishneh Torah*, and *Guide of the Perplexed*. Writing the first

of these, the *Commentary*, occupied Maimonides from about 1158 to 1168. He wrote the work in Arabic, and it was translated into Hebrew in sections over the next two centuries. Because of this, it did not have an immediate impact on Jewish thought. In later centuries, however, the *Commentary* became the starting point for virtually every study of the Mishnah, the first part of the Talmud, which explains Jewish tradition. The *Commentary* consists of an in-depth examination of the Mishnah and discussions on a wide range of theological problems. The central problem addressed is the nature of oral law, which originated on Mount Sinai when God established His covenant, or agreement, with the Jewish people through the Ten Commandments and other principles. Maimonides was especially concerned with how that law was to be passed on and interpreted.

Another problem discussed by Maimonides in the *Commentary* is that of the Old Testament prophecies, particularly whether the words of prophets after Moses could be considered as having the force of law in Judaism. Maimonides believed they could not. Elsewhere in the text, he tries to reconcile (make compatible or consistent) the findings of science with the biblical account of Creation in the book of Genesis. Similarly, he tries to reconcile notions of free will with belief in predestination, or fate. He rejects any fields of study, such as astrology, which he claims undermine, or take away, free will. (Astrology is the study of the movement of the stars and their affect on events on Earth.)

Within the *Commentary* Maimonides also reflects on the nature of reward, punishment, and immortality in the afterlife, offering his thoughts on ethics in a section entitled “Ethics of the Fathers.” In this section he explains his idea of the golden mean, or a balance between extremes. His theory of the golden mean led him to reject asceticism (living a life without worldly possessions or earthly pleasures) and to criticize Jews who gave up the joys of life, which he believed were gifts from God. He also wrote about such matters as medicine, magic, the history of religion, and the nature of miracles.

The *Mishnah Torah* and *Guide*

Maimonides completed his second major work, the *Mishnah Torah*, in about 1178. The *Mishnah Torah* is a detailed, complete explanation of Jewish law, written in a simple style that can be understood by those who are not experts in Talmudic studies. Modern-day scholars and theologians are still impressed by the work’s rich combination of ethics, philosophy, and

theology. Virtually all study of Jewish law in some way involves the *Mishnah Torah*.

Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* was written between 1185 and 1190. While his earlier works deal with Jewish law, the *Guide* is chiefly philosophical. Maimonides discusses a wide range of complex issues, including the relationship between religious faith and reason; the relationship between philosophy and sacred scripture; the nature of God and His relationship with the world; revelation as a means of communication between God and man; free will; and the nature of human destiny.

The work had a significant influence on later thinkers such as the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274). It also influenced followers of Scholasticism, a philosophical method that sought to reconcile the thinking of ancient classical philosophers with medieval Christian theology. Scholastic philosophers and theologians closely examined texts such as the Bible and attempted to resolve contradictions by examining the language of the original version. Historians of philosophy regard Maimonides as one of the most important contributors to Scholastic thought.

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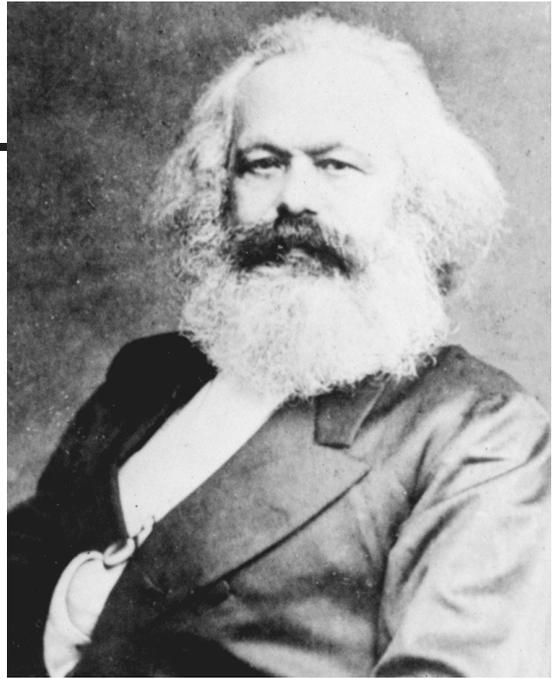
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Karl Marx

BORN: May 5, 1818 • Trier, Prussia

DIED: March 14, 1883 • London, England

Prussian philosopher; economist; writer



“Religion is the groan of the oppressed, the sentiment of a heartless world, and at the same time the spirit of a condition deprived of spirituality. It is the opium of the people.”

Karl Marx was an economist, journalist, historian, philosopher, and atheist (a person who does not believe in a God or gods) who played a major role in shaping the intellectual atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was born in Trier, Prussia, on May 5, 1818, to Hirschel and Henrietta Marx. Prussia was a separate kingdom that later became part of a unified Germany. Prussia’s state religion was Protestant Lutheranism, a branch of Christianity, but Marx’s family was Jewish, and his ancestry included rabbis (persons trained in Jewish law, ritual, and tradition) on both sides of the family. Around 1816 or 1817, the Prussian parliament passed an order saying that Jews could not practice law. Hirschel, who was a lawyer, converted to Lutheranism and changed his first name to Heinrich. His son, Karl, was then baptized as a Lutheran in 1824.

Karl Marx.
ARCHIVE PHOTOS/
GETTY IMAGES.

Marx's early years and education

Marx grew up in a home that was Lutheran in name but essentially non-religious. Like many liberal Protestants of that era and region, the family did not hold strong religious beliefs. From a cultural standpoint the family's conversion to a Protestant religion alienated them from their Jewish background and community. Young Karl did not think of himself as either Protestant or Jewish. He attended religious schools as a child, but only because his parents believed he would receive a better education than in a nonreligious school.

After attending school in Trier from 1830 to 1835, Marx enrolled at the University of Bonn (Germany) to study law. To his father's dismay, however, he spent most of his time socializing and getting into debt. Determined that his son should get a good education, Heinrich paid off his son's debts and forced him to transfer to Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin, a more academically challenging school.

Over the next few years Marx dropped his bad habits and succeeded in his studies. He focused on law at first, but soon became more interested in history and philosophy because of the influence of one of his teachers, the political radical Bruno Bauer (1809–1882). A political radical is someone who supports extreme change in views, conditions, and institutions. Bauer introduced Marx to the work of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Marx joined a university group called the Young Hegelians, who met to discuss and debate the philosopher's views.

Marx was especially drawn to Hegel's view of history and historical progress, which was based on his theory of the "dialectic." According to this theory, in any area of human activity, such as history, law, and economics, a thing cannot exist without its opposite. For example the upper classes cannot exist without the lower classes, poverty cannot exist without wealth, and an oppressed class (one kept down by the use of unjust force or authority) cannot exist without a class of oppressors. In Hegel's view, human history consisted of the clash of these opposites. One thing, which Hegel called the "thesis," always clashed with its opposite, the "antithesis," to create a new social order, the "synthesis." This view of the progression of history would later influence much of Marx's own writings.

Outcast journalist and writer

In 1838 Heinrich Marx died, and Karl had to support himself financially. His first goal was to become a university teacher. He had hoped that after he completed a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Jena, Bruno

Bauer would help him find a teaching post. Bauer, though, was unable to help because his radicalism had led to his being fired from his own job. Since he was unable to secure a teaching position, Marx decided to try journalism. Most magazine and newspaper editors, however, were unwilling to publish his work because of his radical political views.

After struggling as a journalist Marx moved to Cologne, Germany, where he joined the city's large population of liberals and radicals and became involved with a group known as the Cologne Circle. Among these political rebels was Moses Hess (1812–1875), who organized socialist meetings and introduced Marx to the city's working-class population. Socialism is an economic system in which the production and distribution of goods is owned collectively by the people or by a centralized government. Marx published an article in the German newspaper, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and readers were so impressed by it that he was appointed editor of the paper in 1842. Marx proceeded to write articles that were sharply critical of the government. In reaction to this, government censors shut the newspaper down in 1843.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the lower classes of Europe began to revolt against the wealthier citizens. These clashes occasionally erupted into violence. Many people, particularly those in government and members of the upper classes, lived in daily fear of the possibility of what they called “mob rule.” Government authorities attempted to suppress radicals, freethinkers, socialists, and all others who posed threats to the established order. A freethinker is someone who forms opinions independent from authority figures.

Capitalism vs. Socialism

Any discussion of Karl Marx's life and thought involves reference to certain major economic systems. The system that Marx opposed was capitalism. Capital, in this circumstance, refers to wealth stored in the hands of individuals. In a capitalist economic system, individuals own the methods of producing goods, such as factories and raw materials. Workers supply labor to capitalists for pay, which is determined by market forces of supply and demand. If supply for a particular product is high but demand for it is low, the capitalist will not make much money and will pay his workers less. If supply is low and demand is high, however, the capitalist will have more wealth to pass on to the workers.

Nineteenth-century liberals and radicals called for an end to capitalism, which they believed created unemployment and poverty. A liberal is someone who is open to new methods and does not rely on tradition to guide views or actions. A radical is someone who advocates for extreme changes in views, organizations, and ways of doing things. They supported a different form of economic organization called socialism. In a socialist economic system, the government takes over the methods of production and provides people with a wide range of social benefits, such as health care and education. The goal is to lessen the differences between the rich and the poor, especially in terms of income. Communism can be thought of as an extreme form of socialism. Under a communist economic system, there is no private property. Factories, goods, raw materials, and land are considered to be owned collectively by the people and are given out by the government according to people's needs.

Partners with Engels

As one of these freethinkers, Marx feared that he would be arrested. After he married his longtime sweetheart, Jenny von Westphalan, he fled to Paris. Given the growing radicalism of Marx's political opinions, his marriage seems a strange one, as Jenny was a member of an aristocratic, or socially privileged, family. The marriage in fact had been opposed by both their families. In Paris Marx took a position as editor of a new political journal. He also met Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), the radical communist son of a wealthy industrialist (owner of a manufacturing industry), who would become his lifelong friend and coauthor. A communist supports an economic system under which all goods are owned collectively by the people and managed by the government according to need. Engels increased Marx's awareness of the poverty and misery of the French working class, and Marx found Engels's communist views compatible with his own.

Once again, Marx's political beliefs placed him in danger, and the French government eventually ordered him to leave the country. In 1845 he and Engels moved to Brussels, Belgium, another European capital that had attracted a large number of radical thinkers. There Marx wrote some of his earliest major works, including *On the Jewish Question* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. He also wrote *The German Ideology*, in which he outlined his theory of materialism, which was his belief that historical events were not the result of vague, theoretical (not practical) concepts, but of concrete human activity. These ideas provided a foundation for his atheism, or disbelief in God.

In 1845 Marx and Engels visited England. They observed the industrial city of Manchester, where large numbers of workers lived in slums in which poverty, disease, unemployment, alcoholism, and domestic violence were widespread. The next year Marx established the Communist Correspondence Committee to link socialist and communist leaders throughout Europe. After radicals in London established a secret organization called the Communist League, Marx formed a branch of the league in Brussels. In 1847 he returned to London to attend a meeting of the Communist League's Central Committee, where he described the aim of the movement, quoted on the Web site *Spartacus Educational*, as "the overthrow of the bourgeoisie [the classes that owned property], the domination of the proletariat [the working classes], the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without classes and without private property."

While still living in Brussels, Marx and Engels published their most famous work, a twelve-thousand-word pamphlet entitled *The Communist Manifesto*. Engels had written an earlier draft of the pamphlet titled *Principles of Communism*, and Marx reworked it into its final form. The *Manifesto* begins with the now famous words, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Marx and Engels outlined a new way of examining history, arguing that history was made not through the activities of great individuals, nor by the clashes between states, but by the conflict between social classes. Marx and Engels believed that there were two such principal classes in the nineteenth century: the *bourgeoisie*, or the wealthy owners of factories, raw materials, and the means of production; and the *proletariat*, or those without money or goods who were forced to work for the capitalists and often lived in poverty. Marx and Engels looked forward to a revolutionary future when the proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie would disappear, income inequalities would vanish, and a classless society would arise.

The year 1848 was one of great political disorder in many cities throughout Europe. In France working-class revolutionaries overthrew King Louis-Phillipe (1773–1793) and invited Marx back to Paris. He accepted the invitation in part because the Belgian government had forced him to leave that country. The new French government failed, however, and in 1849 Marx was forced to leave Paris again. He returned to Cologne, where he resurrected his old newspaper as the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and reported on revolutionary developments throughout Europe. He also established a Committee on Public Safety in response to what he saw as police brutality directed against the public.

No matter where he went, however, Marx was oppressed, or treated badly by authority, because of his radical views. In 1849 he was expelled from Germany and returned to Paris, but he was soon ordered to leave France as well. He then settled in the only country that would give him entry, England. French authorities tried to persuade the British government to deny Marx admission to the country, but the British prime minister, John Russell (1792–1878), was a strong defender of the right of free speech and rejected the pleas of the French.

Marx in England

Marx spent the rest of his life in England with his growing family. They had little money, and in 1850 they were evicted from an apartment in London’s Chelsea district because they could not pay the rent. They



Communist supporters carry portraits of Friedrich Engels (from left), Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenin during a rally in Europe. Marx was an atheist who believed that religion was a method used to oppress the working man. AP IMAGES.

relocated to the Soho district, where they lived for six years in cheaper accommodations. Marx spent most of his time in the reading room of the British Museum, where he studied economic journals in an effort to understand the workings of capitalism. His debts grew, and for financial support he relied on Engels, who had returned to Germany to work for his father. For years Engels mailed money to his friend in England. To prevent the funds from being stolen during the postal process, he purchased money orders, cut them in half, and mailed the halves in separate envelopes.

Marx's fortunes took an upward turn in 1852, when the editor of the *New York Daily Tribune*, Charles Dana (1819–1897), offered Marx the opportunity to submit articles. Over the next decade, Marx delivered nearly five hundred articles to Dana, some of which were actually written by Engels. Another publisher in the United States, George Ripley (1802–1880), paid Marx to write for the *New American Cyclopaedia*.

This work, combined with a small inheritance from Jenny Marx's mother, allowed the family to move to more comfortable quarters in Kentish Town, near London. Marx's good fortune, however, was short-lived. In 1856 Jenny gave birth to a stillborn child, then was later left deaf and badly scarred by smallpox, a highly infectious disease. For much of the rest of his life, Marx himself endured a number of health problems, including a severe case of boils, an inflammation of the skin. He consoled himself by characterizing the problem as a "proletarian" disease.

In the 1860s Marx's financial problems returned when his work for the *New York Daily Tribune* came to an end. Engels continued to send him money, and he also received support from Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864), a wealthy socialist from Germany who wanted Marx to edit a new socialist journal he was planning. Marx was unwilling to return to Germany, however, so he turned the job down. Nevertheless, Lassalle continued to contribute to Marx's support until his own death in 1864.

Despite his various problems, Marx continued to work. In 1867 he published the first volume of his second major work, *Das Kapital*, a criticism of the capitalist economic system. In this book Marx presented the theory that capitalism would in time cause its own collapse. He said wealth would become concentrated in a very small number of companies. At the same time the poverty and misery of the working classes would increase. Marx looked forward to the time when the working classes would organize themselves and overthrow the capitalist system.

In 1871 Marx thought that his vision of a new economic order was coming with the formation of the Paris Commune. In March of that year socialists rose up and established a revolutionary government in Paris that introduced a number of socialist reforms. In May, however, French troops suppressed the rebellion and killed thirty thousand revolutionaries in an assault on the city. Another fifty thousand were later executed. Marx was depressed by the outcome, but he continued to work on a second volume of *Das Kapital*. Progress proved slow, and by 1881 both Karl and Jenny were ill. In December 1881 Jenny died. Two years later Marx's eldest daughter also passed away. Marx did not recover from these losses and died himself on March 14, 1883. He never completed either the second volume, or a planned third volume of *Das Kapital*. Engels later assembled the volumes from Marx's notes.

Marx and atheism

Karl Marx was an atheist nearly his entire life. As a very young man he saw himself as a child of the Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, a period of increasingly progressive intellectualism in Europe that covered roughly the eighteenth century. Thinkers during this period preferred reason and the scientific method to faith, especially religious faith. In a paper he wrote at the University of Jena, Marx commented on the notion that the concept of God would have no place in a “country of reason”: “Take paper money to a country in which this use of paper money is not known, and everyone will laugh at your subjective representation. Go with your gods to a country in which other gods are worshipped, and you will be shown that you are the victim of fancies and abstractions. And rightly.”

Later, in an 1844 book titled *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Public Law*, Marx famously stated, “Man makes religion, religion does not make man. . . . Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against it. Religion is the groan of the oppressed, the sentiment of a heartless world, and at the same time the spirit of a condition deprived of spirituality.” He concluded this passage with perhaps his most quoted words: “It [religion] is the opium of the people.” In other words, Marx saw religion as a drug that people created to help themselves hide their own misery and oppression.

Marx based his atheism on three principles. The first of these, related to the Hegelian concept, he called “dialectical materialism.” Marx believed that physical matter, not indefinite ideas such as spirit or thought, caused everything that occurs in the world. The second principle, related to the first, revolved around his view of history, which was based on materialist notions of economics and the class divisions within society created by economic systems. The third principle was that of humanism, a system of thought which says that the condition of humankind is foremost in importance. As Marx expressed in his *Critique*, “The criticism of religion leads to the doctrine according to which man is, for man, the supreme being.”

Marx’s atheism was also based on more practical considerations. Throughout his written works he frequently condemned churches as being allies of government. He saw much of religion as part of a system that created privileged classes of industrial masters who used their religion to justify their worldly success. In his view, the proletarian revolution would sweep away all such institutions that contributed to inequality.

Largely influenced by Marx's views of religion, the communist states of the twentieth century were officially atheist.

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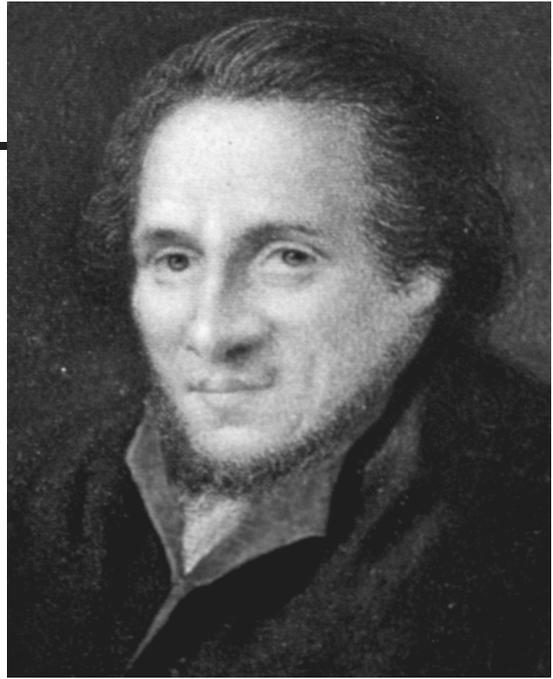
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Moses Mendelssohn

BORN: September 6, 1729 • Dessau,
Anhalt-Dessau, Germany

DIED: January 4, 1786 • Berlin, Germany

German philosopher; writer



“Let everyone be permitted to speak as he thinks, to invoke God after his own manner.”

Moses Mendelssohn, an eighteenth-century German philosopher, is often referred to as the “father of the Jewish Enlightenment.” A philosopher is someone who searches to understand values and reality. He was the author of a large number of literary and philosophical works. Mendelssohn called for reliance on reason rather than on blind faith and mysticism (direct, mysterious communication with God) when seeking religious truth. He also played a major role in unifying Jewish and secular (nonreligious) culture at a time when many European Jews desired education but were excluded from public and professional life. In German literature, he is remembered as the model for the noble title character in Gotthold Lessing’s (1729–1781) *Nathan the Wise* (1779), a dramatic poem that is essentially a plea for religious tolerance. Some Jews call Mendelssohn the “third Moses” of Judaism, following the Old Testament prophet (divine messenger) and **Moses Maimonides** (1135–1204; see entry), a well-respected scholar of Judaism.

Moses Mendelssohn.

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Early life

Moses Mendelssohn was born on September 6, 1729, in Dessau, a city in what was then the German state of Anhalt-Dessau. Because his father, a poor scribe, or copier of manuscripts and other documents, was named Mendel, Moses took the surname Mendelssohn, which means “son of Mendel.” As a child he suffered an illness that left him with a curvature, or curving, of the spine, and throughout his life he spoke with a stammer.

Although Mendelssohn was largely self-taught, he also took part in formal study under a local rabbi named David Fränkel. A rabbi is a person trained in Jewish law, ritual, and tradition who is often the head of a synagogue, or Jewish house of worship. Fränkel taught Mendelssohn the Hebrew Scriptures, or holy texts, commonly referred to by Christians as the Old Testament; the Talmud, which contains traditions that explain and interpret the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures; and the works of Moses Maimonides. One of Maimonides’s most important works, *Guide of the Perplexed*, was reprinted for the first time in two centuries when Mendelssohn was thirteen. The publication of this book signaled a growing interest in Jewish thought.

In 1743 Fränkel received an appointment as rabbi in Berlin, Germany, and Mendelssohn, then fourteen years old, followed him in order to study at his *yeshiva*, or Jewish school. Mendelssohn’s life in Berlin was one of extreme poverty, and although he earned small sums of money by tutoring, he was forced to accept meals from neighboring families. He did, however, receive a very thorough education at the yeshiva. In addition to studying Jewish theology (the study of religion), he became skilled in mathematics, philosophy, astronomy (the study of the stars and planets), and logic. He studied French, English, Italian, Greek, and Latin. He used his small income to purchase a Latin copy of *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a major work by the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704).

Mendelssohn took a job tutoring the children of Isaac Bernhard, a silk merchant in 1750. He quickly won Bernhard’s confidence, and in time Bernhard made the young scholar his bookkeeper, then his partner. In 1754 Bernhard introduced Mendelssohn to the great German philosopher, dramatist, and literary critic Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781). Lessing was one of the important figures of the Enlightenment in Germany. The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement in Europe during the eighteenth century that emphasized reason over blind faith and tradition. These ideas were expressed in Lessing’s writings. He was also a strong

believer in religious tolerance at a time when Europe's Jews were forced to live in isolated portions of cities and were the victims of widespread discrimination. Jews were denied citizenship and education, barred from most professions, regarded as unintelligent and greedy, and blamed for all sorts of social problems. Lessing's 1749 play *The Jews* was extraordinary at the time for its depictions of Jews acting morally and kindly.

The relationship between Mendelssohn and Lessing was first established through the game of chess, which they both loved. Soon Mendelssohn found Lessing's views entirely consistent with his own, and the two men became lifelong friends. Mendelssohn also developed a friendship with the renowned German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Although the two were professional rivals, Kant became one of Mendelssohn's admirers.

Mendelssohn the philosopher

During the 1750s and 1760s Mendelssohn became one of the leading philosophers in Europe and found himself at or very near the center of some of the age's fiercest philosophical debates. After he wrote his first book, *Philosophical Conversations*, he shared the manuscript with Lessing, who had it published anonymously in 1755 without telling his friend. With Lessing's encouragement, Mendelssohn continued to write philosophical treatises (papers; reports), many of them published anonymously in the 1750s.

In 1759 Mendelssohn began to write essays and letters for a journal called *Literaturbriefe*. In many of these pieces Mendelssohn defended German philosophy, especially the work of the philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716). Leibniz was a rationalist, but he also believed in a benevolent (kind) God who arranged the world as a harmonious and organized place. Mendelssohn believed that Leibniz had come under unfair attack by English and French philosophers. The French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778), for example, had savagely ridiculed Leibniz in his most famous work, *Candide* (1759), and Mendelssohn offered a defense of his countryman.

Mendelssohn encountered trouble in 1760 when he published a highly unfavorable review of a volume of poetry written by the Prussian king Frederick the Great (1712–1786; ruled 1740–86). He was critical of the king's poems because they appeared to deny that the soul was immortal. Mendelssohn also criticized the king for writing in French

The Parable of the Ring

Gotthold Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* is set during the Third Crusade, which was conducted in the early 1190s as part of Christian Europe's effort to retain control of Palestine, the Holy Land, and especially Jerusalem. The play depicts representatives of the warring parties, which include Nathan, a Jewish merchant; Saladin, a Muslim general; and a Knight Templar (a Christian warrior). The parties are shown resolving the differences between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. At the center of the play is the ring parable, which Nathan tells after Saladin asks him which religion is the true one. (A parable is a simple story that illustrates a moral or religious lesson.) Within the parable, a ring is repeatedly passed from father to most-favored son, with the belief that the ring would make the son pleasing in the eyes of God. In time the ring comes to a father who has three sons, whom he loves equally. Accordingly he has two duplicates of the ring made so that he can give one ring to each son. After the father's death, the sons quarrel about who owns the real ring. They take the matter to a judge, who gives the following decision:

If you will take advice in lieu of sentence,
This is my counsel to you, to take up
The matter where it stands. If each of you
Has had a ring presented by his father,
Let each believe his own the real ring.

'Tis possible the father chose no longer
To tolerate the one ring's tyranny;
And certainly, as he much loved you all,
And loved you all alike, it could not
please him
By favouring one to be of two the
oppressor.
Let each feel honoured by this free
affection.
Unwarped of prejudice; let each endeavour
To vie with both his brothers in displaying
The virtue of his ring; assist its might
With gentleness, benevolence, forbearance,
With inward resignation to the godhead,
And if the virtues of the ring continue
To show themselves among your children's
children,
After a thousand thousand years, appear
Before this judgment-seat—a greater one
Than I shall sit upon it, and decide.

The three rings, of course, represent Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, all gifts from God the Father in heaven.

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rather than in German, the language of his own people. In response to this review, the king's censor banned the journal in which it was published.

Nonetheless, Frederick evidently came to set aside whatever sense of personal insult he had felt. In 1763 Mendelssohn entered a competition held by the Prussian Academy of Sciences. He had become increasingly troubled by the effect that science was having on religious belief. To address this, he wrote an essay in which he argued that certain mathematical problems could be applied to metaphysics, or the branch of

philosophy that deals with reality that lies beyond the senses. After the essay won the academy's first prize, Frederick awarded Mendelssohn the status of "Jew under extraordinary protection." As such, Mendelssohn enjoyed the right to live in Berlin undisturbed.

In 1767 Mendelssohn's major work *Phädon* was published. Mendelssohn wrote the text in response to the age's growing materialism, or focus on the physical world rather than the spiritual one. He structured the book as a philosophical dialogue modeled on *Phaedo*, by the ancient Greek philosopher **Plato** (427–347 BCE; see entry). *Phädon*, which was written in German, became a huge success. Before long, it was translated into nearly all European languages and gave rise to the "Phädon movement," a number of published treatises on the same topic by various authors. Many people called Mendelssohn the "German Plato" or the "German Socrates." He became a popular figure, and anyone of intellectual stature visiting Berlin would set aside time to pay him a visit.

Controversy with Lavater

Up until this point in his career Mendelssohn had paid little attention to Judaism in his published writings. Indeed, in most of his work he engaged in the same scientific debates that preoccupied virtually all Enlightenment philosophers, regardless of religion. From his early years, he had been troubled by the popularity of Jewish mysticism in Germany, especially a movement known as Hasidism, founded by Rabbi **Israel ben Eliezer** (1700–1760; see entry). This movement featured a mystical view of Judaism, with followers focusing more on personal experience than on reason and formal education. Mendelssohn, a rationalist, opposed such mysticism, which he believed was a rejection of human reason.

Mendelssohn's largely secular approach to philosophy underwent a transformation, however, after August 1769. That month the Swiss theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) published a German translation of an essay by the Swiss theologian and naturalist (a person who studies natural history) Charles Bonnet (1720–1793) entitled *Christian Evidences*. This essay argued that Christianity was superior to other religions. Lavater believed that Christians would only be able to achieve salvation if they somehow managed to convert Jews to Christianity. He was a central figure in a group of religious enthusiasts informally known as *Schwärmer*, or "fanatics."

In the introduction to Bonnet's text, Lavater, although he greatly admired Mendelssohn, issued a challenge to him: disprove Bonnet's

ideas or convert to Christianity. Mendelssohn refused to engage Lavater in public debate. He believed such debate would only heighten religious passions and make the climate of intolerance worse. Instead he published pleas for open-mindedness regarding religion. Other *Schwärmer* then began to bother Mendelssohn with the same challenge. They believed that if Mendelssohn was an advocate of proving things through the use of reason, he had no alternative but to either defend his views or accept Christianity as the one true religion.

Mendelssohn felt considerable strain as a result of these and other disputes. In 1771 he experienced an illness that left him partially paralyzed. He underwent medical treatment for five years, and during these years he withdrew from public debate and did not publish. He did, however, begin to believe that he could best put his powers of reason to use by opposing the *Schwärmer* and bettering the condition of Europe's Jews. From the mid-1770s until his death, Mendelssohn devoted himself to issues that affected the welfare of the Jewish community.

The Jewish Enlightenment

Mendelssohn believed that the main problem faced by Jews in Germany and throughout the rest of Europe was that they were isolated. They were separated from the surrounding Christian culture because their children went to Jewish schools and they conducted their affairs in Yiddish, a form of German written in Hebrew and spoken mainly by northern European Jews. To improve the cultural, social, and economic status of German Jews, Mendelssohn took steps to mix them into the surrounding culture. To that end, one of the chief projects that occupied him in his later years was a new translation of the Torah, as well as other portions of the Bible, into German. While preparing the translation, Mendelssohn attracted a number of helpers, all of whom worked on various portions of the project.

The translation was published in 1783. Because of its grace and clarity, this translation has often been considered largely responsible for the standardization of the German language. More importantly, by having scripture written in the local language, German Jews began to see themselves as Germans rather than as aliens wandering in a foreign land. German Jews began to engage themselves in German culture and society by reforming education, studying secular disciplines such as the sciences, and adding their voices to Enlightenment thought. The period of the

Moses Mendelssohn



A man places a stone on the gravestone of eighteenth-century philosopher Moses Mendelssohn in Berlin, Germany. Mendelssohn called for reason rather than blind faith when seeking religious truth. AP IMAGES.

German Jewish Enlightenment is referred to as the Haskalah, literally, “enlightenment” in Hebrew. In time the movement spread throughout much of Europe.

Mendelssohn continued to publish works that invited debate, which were then as much political as philosophical. People in Europe were paying attention to the struggle of Americans to achieve independence from the British Empire. Growing discontent in France would lead to the French Revolution late in the 1780s. In 1781 Mendelssohn published *On the Civil Amelioration of the Condition of the Jews*, a plea for religious tolerance and a call for the freedom of Jewish people from the cultural limitations that suppressed them. His most important work during this period was *Jerusalem; or, On Religious Power and Judaism* (1783). *Jerusalem* was a forcefully written work that asserted freedom of conscience and the view that the state should play no role in determining the religious beliefs of its citizens. This doctrine would become a part of the First

Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which established “separation of church and state” in American government. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn takes the position that many truths exist. Just as governments may differ depending on the needs of their people, people themselves may differ in their understandings of religious truths according to their own situations.

During his later years Mendelssohn became an outright activist on behalf of Jewish political rights. In time his writings, as well as those of other prominent figures during the Haskalah, began to have far-reaching effects. He campaigned on behalf of the Patent of Toleration, issued in Austria on October 19, 1781. This proclamation called for “better instruction and enlightenment of [Jewish] youth, and its employment in the sciences, arts, and crafts.” Joseph II (1741–1790), the emperor of Austria, had come to believe that the only way to improve the condition of Jews was to ensure that they enjoyed the same political rights as other citizens of the empire.

Mendelssohn lived to see the publication of *Morning Hours; or, Lectures about God's Existence* in 1785. His final work was a book defending Lessing, who had been widely and viciously criticized for *The Jews* and *Nathan the Wise*, which called for toleration of Jews at a time when large numbers of people in Europe strongly disliked Jews. Mendelssohn carried the work to his publishers, caught a cold, and died of complications on January 4, 1786. He left behind his wife, Fromet Gugenheim, whom he had married in 1762. The couple had six surviving children, several of whom went on to distinguished careers.

Mendelssohn's views faced intense criticism during his lifetime and afterward, from both Jews and non-Jews. Mendelssohn is widely regarded as the spark behind modern Reform Judaism, which does not accept many of the traditional Jewish beliefs, such as that God gave Moses the Torah, but does adhere to the central practices of the religion. As such, conservative Orthodox Jews feared that Mendelssohn's reforms would alienate Jews from their traditional culture and law. They were partially right. In response to the Haskalah, many European Jews discontinued their practice of Jewish law. Many converted to Christianity, including all of Mendelssohn's children and his grandson, the pianist and composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847). Many immigrated to the United States, while others initiated the Zionist movement, which eventually led to the formation of a Jewish state in Israel. Judaism in Europe was forever changed because of the work of Moses Mendelssohn.

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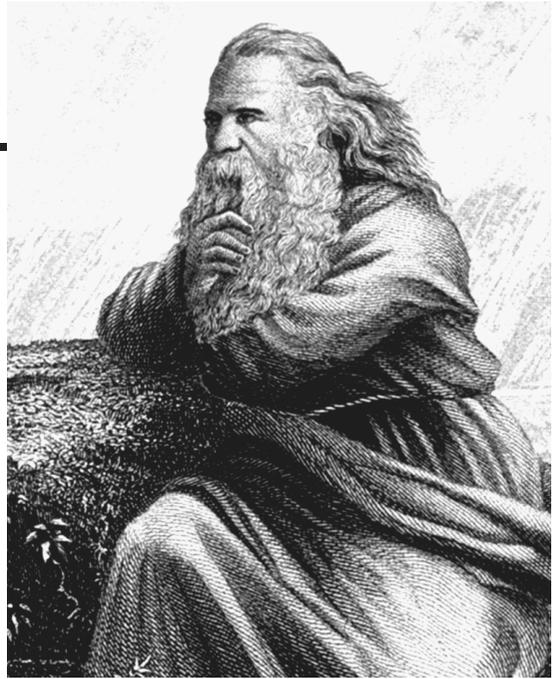
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Moses

BORN: c. 1392 BCE

DIED: c. 1272 BCE

prophet; religious leader



“May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew . . . / For I will proclaim the name of the Lord. / Ascribe greatness to our God.”

Moses ranks as one of the major leaders, prophets (divine messengers), and lawgivers in the Jewish and Christian traditions. He is best remembered for leading the Israelites, or the Jewish people, out of slavery from Egypt in about the thirteenth century BCE. The account of this journey is detailed in the Hebrew Scriptures in the book of Exodus. The Hebrew Scriptures, or sacred texts, are often referred to by Christians as the Old Testament of the Bible. They are called the Tanakh by Jews. Jews refer to the first five books of the Tanakh, which are Exodus, Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as the Torah. Orthodox Jews and conservative Christians traditionally believe that these five books were written by Moses himself, although many modern biblical scholars dispute this notion. They believe the Torah was written by a number of authors over time.

Moses.

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As a lawgiver among the Israelites, Moses handed down many of the beliefs, traditions, and institutions that would become part of the foundations of Western government, law, and religion. He was one of the earliest supporters of monotheism, or the belief in one supreme God. The official religions of most of the empires in the region at the time were polytheistic, meaning they worshipped many gods, and large numbers of people practiced idol worship, or the worship of physical objects as gods. Due to this monotheistic view, Islam also reveres Moses as a great prophet, one of the earliest in a line of prophets ending with **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry), the founder of Islam, who likewise preached belief in one God.

Biographical information on Moses

Virtually everything known about Moses and his life comes from the Torah. No other historical or biographical records exist. Confirming the events narrated in these books is difficult, if not impossible. Jewish rabbinical scholars have primarily been responsible for reconstructing Moses's life, although many others have also contributed to the effort. Rabbinical scholars are those studying to be rabbis, or people trained in Jewish ritual, law, and tradition. Along with the Tanakh, these scholars have drawn on various sources of biblical interpretation and detailed, critical examinations of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Talmud, the authoritative body of Jewish tradition, contains many such examinations. The Talmud has two parts: the Mishnah, which consists of oral interpretations of the Torah compiled about the second century, and the Gemara, which consists of comments on the Mishnah.

Rather than simply believing the biblical accounts of Moses's life to be true or not true, rabbinical scholars analyze the text in various ways to form a more educated opinion. They take into account the geography described in scripture; the general cultural atmosphere during Moses's lifetime; the histories of other religious systems that emerged before, during, and after Moses's lifetime; and the findings of archaeologists (people who study the remains of past cultures), who have located ruins, artifacts, and other objects that can be connected to the biblical account. Despite all this, factual evidence is scarce, and separating the true stories of Moses's life from the legends is a highly difficult task.

Moses's birth and early life

Moses was born around 1392 BCE to Amram and his wife, Jochebed. According to legend, Moses lived to be 120 years old, dying in the year 2488 of the Hebrew calendar, or 1272 BCE. The story of his birth and infancy is one of the most widely known tales from the Hebrew Scriptures. During this period Egypt was a powerful nation. Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt had been united under a new line of pharaohs, or kings. Throughout much of the thirteenth century BCE Egypt was ruled by Ramses II (c. 1304–c. 1237 BCE), and many historians believe that Ramses is the pharaoh referred to in the Hebrew Scriptures.

During his reign Ramses undertook a major building program in the delta region, where the Nile River flows into the Mediterranean Sea. Prior to this, the Israelites had found refuge from a severe food shortage in Egypt along the Nile River. The river's annual floods watered the nearby land and nourished it with rich silt, creating a 4,000-mile-long area of agricultural land surrounded by harsh desert. The Egyptians considered the Israelites to be gypsies, homeless wanderers who were nuisances and disgraced their nation. Ramses did not know what to do with the Israelites until the building program began. Since he needed large numbers of laborers to dig mud and make bricks for new buildings, he enslaved the Israelites and forced them to perform the manual labor. Part of his intention was to work as many of them as possible to death, so as to shrink their numbers. Despite his efforts, the Israelite population continued to increase. Frustrated, Ramses ordered that all sons born to Israelite couples be thrown into the Nile River and drowned.

Amram and Jochebed were Israelites living in Egypt. They were members of the Levite tribe, which had traditionally been the source of the Israelites' priestly class. To save her baby, Jochebed hid him, but after three months, when she could hide him no more, she set him adrift on the Nile in a waterproof basket made of reeds, a tall grass that grows in wet areas. The pharaoh's daughter happened to discover the basket and the baby, still alive. She rescued the infant, named him Moses, which means "to draw out," and raised him as her own son. Moses's sister, Miriam, followed the basket as it traveled down the river. When the pharaoh's daughter found the baby, Miriam offered to find an Israelite woman to nurse the child; in this way, Jochebed, Moses's actual mother, became his nurse.

The pharaoh's daughter was most likely not a princess of the royal bloodline but rather the daughter of one of the concubines (women

who have sexual relations with a man they are not married to) in the pharaoh's harem, or the group of women he claimed as his own. The young woman probably took Moses back to the harem, where he was raised under the supervision of all the women. There he learned to read and write Egyptian hieroglyphics (ancient pictorial script) and probably received training in other social, administrative, and military skills. Foreign children were commonly raised in this way, enabling them to enter careers in the military or the civil service.

In this way, Moses grew to manhood. One day he reportedly witnessed an Egyptian abusing an Israelite slave. Angered, he killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand, thinking that no one would discover it. Later, however, as he tried to break up a fight between two Israelites, one taunted him about the Egyptian he had killed. Moses then feared for his life, particularly after he discovered that the pharaoh had also learned of his murderous act. He fled to the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula, where he lived for forty years with the Midianites, who were descendants of the prophet **Abraham** (c. 2050–c. 1950 BCE; see entry). Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midian priest, and lived the life of a shepherd, learning how to survive in the harsh deserts. His son, Gershom, was born of this union.

Moses's commission from God

One day Moses was tending his flock on Egypt's Mount Horeb, the precise location of which is uncertain but may be modern-day Mount Sinai. He observed a bush that was on fire but not being destroyed. When Moses neared the burning bush, God announced his presence and commanded Moses to serve as his messenger to the pharaoh and to lead the Jews out of slavery from Egypt. This astonished the humble shepherd, and Moses expressed great reluctance. He told God that he would be unable to explain God's identity to the people, that the people would not believe him, and that he would be unable to carry out such a huge task. God answered each of Moses's objections, and Moses eventually relented.

Moses then returned to Egypt. When he arrived he met his older brother, Aaron, whom God had already informed of Moses's coming return. The two met with the elders of the Israelites and, with Aaron doing most of the talking, informed them of God's intentions. Aaron would later become Moses's chief general.

The Plagues of Egypt and Other Miracles

In claiming that a miracle has taken place, one suggests that God has chosen to involve Himself in the affairs of humans. Belief in miracles requires strong religious faith. Many people find it difficult to accept the idea that God has ever intervened in human affairs, such as with the plagues of Egypt and other events recorded in scripture.

In studying biblical history, many scholars look for natural ways to explain apparently miraculous events. In the case of the plagues, some claim that usually high flooding of the Nile River could have pulled red-tinted earth into the water, creating the impression that the water had turned to blood. Further, this flooding could have polluted the water, perhaps with microorganisms that killed the fish. In turn, the high flood tides could have swept frogs and insects into communities, where they could have multiplied rapidly, spreading disease (especially skin disease, because of the excessive moisture) and ruining crops. In addition, the sun sometimes disappears behind clouds of dust during sandstorms, which could explain the three days when the sun was not visible in the story about

the plague in Egypt recounted in the Tanakh, or the Old Testament.

Several events occurred when the Israelites were fleeing the Egyptian army that again raise the issue of God's possible miraculous intervention on behalf of the Jews. According to the book of Exodus, God parted the Red Sea, allowed the Jews to escape on foot, then released the walls of water so they rushed down onto the pursuing Egyptians. Again, potential natural explanations exist. One holds that the events did not take place at the Red Sea but at the Isthmus of Suez, an arm of water that extends inland from the Mediterranean Sea. An earthquake could have caused a tsunami, a massive wave of water that engulfed the Egyptians after the Israelites passed by safely. An alternative explanation claims that the "Red Sea" as specified in Exodus was in actuality a large marsh that was thick with reeds. On foot, the Israelites would have been able to make their way through the marsh, but the Egyptians' horse-drawn chariots would have become stuck in the soggy ground, and, as the horses struggled, the Egyptians might have lost their lives.

These elders attempted to persuade the pharaoh to release the Israelites, but he refused. To show his support for the Israelites, God unleashed a series of plagues on Egypt over the course of a year. The water in the Nile turned to blood, killing the fish; frogs were driven from the river and invaded homes; gnats and flies blanketed the land; skin infections broke out on both people and their livestock; hail and storms destroyed crops; the wind carried in swarms of locusts; and the sun was blotted out for three days. The pharaoh and his magicians were not able to stop these plagues, which ended with the death of all firstborn sons of the Egyptians. (The Jewish feast of Passover honors this event, when God "passed over" the homes of the Israelites and



Moses receives the tablets containing the Ten Commandments from heaven on Mount Sinai (top). He presents these laws to the Israelites (bottom), who accept them and enter into a covenant, or agreement, with God. THE ART ARCHIVE/
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spared their sons.) The Egyptians became so terrified that they not only released the Israelites but ordered them to leave Egypt.

The Exodus

The story that dominates the book of Exodus is that of the wandering of the Israelites in the desert after their escape from Egypt. According to Exodus, the Israelite men numbered some six hundred thousand; adding in women and children would bring the total number of travelers to perhaps two million. Under the leadership of Moses the Israelites followed a route southeast to the town of Succoth, then northeast to the Isthmus of Suez, southeast again along the Sinai Peninsula to Mount Sinai, and finally northeast to Hebron, in Palestine. This journey took place over a period of forty years.

Early on in the flight of the Israelites, referred to as the Exodus, the pharaoh apparently changed his mind about ordering the Israelites out and sent his army in pursuit. The Israelites achieved a great victory at the Red Sea, which is said to have miraculously parted, allowing them to walk across safely and then swamping the pursuing Egyptian army. Another key event concerned the hunger and thirst of the people in the desert. They began to grumble and question Moses, but God met their needs by providing water and food. The source of the water was probably porous (having pores, or holes, that allow liquid through) limestone rock. No satisfactory explanation has been offered for the source of the food, called *manna*, though it has been speculated that it was the juice of a plant or perhaps a lichen, a kind of moss.

God's covenant with the Israelites

After the Israelites crossed the Egyptian frontier, Moses became their chief lawgiver. At Mount Sinai he climbed the slopes and met God. God then gave Moses the Ten Commandments, written on two stone tablets. In a section of Exodus called the “book of the covenant,” God, through Moses, outlined his covenant, or agreement, with the Israelites and

established a basic code of law. This code provided instructions regarding worship and a number of other matters. The code included many civil laws, such as those relating to the rights of slaves; to manslaughter and other injury to human life; to theft and damage of property; to social and religious duties; and to justice and human rights. It also included laws regarding major feasts, such as the requirement that Jews eat unleavened bread, or bread made without yeast, to celebrate the feast of Passover and the Jews' Exodus from Egypt. (Presumably, they left too quickly to be able to bring leaven for their bread.) The book after Exodus, Leviticus, lists in further detail God's laws for his people. These laws governed most aspects of life as it would have been lived in an agricultural society, covering such matters as rules for priests; the treatment of food; hygiene; medicine; sexual behavior; and other topics. While Leviticus is the chief law book, the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy outline additional Jewish laws.

The Israelites remained at Sinai for about a year. During that time Moses communicated with God frequently. As a sign of his covenant with his people, God gave Moses instructions for constructing the tabernacle, a elaborate tent that served as a shrine and signified that God lived among them.

The last chapters of the book of Exodus detail the continued wanderings of the Israelites. From Sinai, Moses led the people to Kadesh in modern-day northern Lebanon. From there, at the urging of the people, he sent scouts ahead to the promised land of Canaan, on the other side of the river Jordan, which was the Israelites' ultimate goal. The promised land was the land that God had promised to Abraham would belong to his people, the Jews. The scouts, however, returned with terrifying tales about what they observed, such as that Canaan was a land of giants who devoured their own people, and the Israelites refused to move on. The Israelites then remained in the area around Kadesh for thirty-eight years. During these years Moses faced challenges to his leadership, including one from his own brother, Aaron, and one from his sister, Miriam. He survived these challenges until his people resumed their journey. They detoured around the kingdom of the Edomites and the land of Moab, both of which refused to allow the Israelites passage. When they encountered the land of the Amorites, they fought, conquering the Amorites and seizing their territory.

Moses had been warned by God that he would never be able to lead his people on the final stage of their journey, when they would cross the river Jordan and enter the promised land. As the people approached the

end of their travels, Moses assembled the tribes of Israelites and delivered a parting address, recorded in Deuteronomy, chapter 32, verses 1–3, which begins as follows:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak:
and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.
May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill
as the dew, as the gentle rain upon the tender grass,
and as the showers upon the herb.
For I will proclaim the name of the Lord.
Ascribe greatness to our God.

Moses then climbed Mount Nebo, where he looked out over the country before him and died.

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Muhammad

BORN: c. 570 • Mecca, Saudi Arabia

DIED: June 8, 632 • Medina, Saudi Arabia

Arabian prophet; religious leader

“The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth, and God will show mercy to you.”

The world’s one billion Muslims believe that Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was sent to Earth by Allah (God) as his final prophet, or divine messenger. His name can also be spelled Mohammad, Mohammed, or Mahomet, but he is generally referred to as the Prophet. He was born Muhammad ibn Abdullah in the city of Mecca, in the Hejaz region of modern-day Saudi Arabia. The exact date of his birth is uncertain. Some believe he was born on April 20, but Muslims belonging to the Shi’a sect, or division, believe the date was April 26. The year is variously given as 570 or 571 CE, although some scholars have argued for both earlier and later dates, 567 and 573, respectively.

Biographical information

Islamic scholars are uncertain of many of the details of Muhammad’s life. The main sources of information on the subject include Islam’s sacred scripture, the Qur’an; the sayings of Muhammad, called the *hadiths*, which were written down by his closest followers; and the *sira*, more formally referred to as the *sirat nabawiyya*. The *sira* are the traditional Muslim biographies of Muhammad, written during the golden age of Islam, from about 750 to 1500.

Problems exist with all of these sources. The Qur’an is not meant to be biographical, although it does contain some biographical details. During



Muslim pilgrims on the haj circle around the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. All Muslims are expected to make the haj to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. AP IMAGES.

the era when the hadiths were written down, Islam was breaking into different sects and schools of thought, each with its own traditions. This leads modern Muslim scholars to agree that some of the hadiths might be unreliable. Qur'anic Muslims, also known as "Qur'an alone" Muslims, reject the authenticity of the hadiths entirely. The most famous compiler of hadiths, Muhammad ibn Isma'il Bukhari (810–870), gathered 600,000 supposed sayings of Muhammad, but he was able to confirm the authenticity of only about 2,600. Finally, some of the sira were written more than a century after Muhammad's death, so determining what is fact and what is based on possibly unreliable oral tradition is difficult.

Muhammad's early life

Muhammad was born into a relatively wealthy Meccan family. His father, Abdullah, died before he was born, and he was raised by his paternal

grandfather, Abd al-Mattalib. His mother, Amina, who had continued to live with her own family after her marriage to Abdullah, died when Muhammad was six. After Muhammad's grandfather died when he was eight, responsibility for his care fell to his uncle, Abu Tālib. Abu Tālib had recently become head of the most powerful tribe in Mecca, the Quraysh.

During the sixth century Mecca was an important center on the east–west trade routes. Many merchants and traders stopped in Mecca to visit the Ka'aba, a shrine controlled by the Quraysh in which many idols were worshipped. Idols are objects, such as statues, that are worshipped as divine, or god-like. Meccans had a financial interest in encouraging this idol worship, for it kept travelers in the city, where they made donations and spent money on food and lodging. During these pilgrimages, warfare between tribes was forbidden so merchants could visit the Ka'aba and conduct business safely. As a result, while he was growing up Muhammad had contact with people who came from many different cultures and who practiced many different religions.

When still in his teens, Muhammad became a merchant himself. He soon gained a reputation for complete honesty, and his nickname became al-Amin, meaning “the trusted one.” One of his employers was a wealthy widow, Khadijah, who may have been as much as fifteen years older than he. Khadijah offered Muhammad her hand in marriage, and the two were wed in 595. It was this marriage that made Muhammad a wealthy man, since, as a minor child, he had not been able to inherit from his father. Some stories say that Khadijah bore Muhammad four daughters and a son who died in infancy. Shi'a Muslims, however, claim that the only daughter of this marriage was Fatima and that the others either had been born during a previous marriage or were the children of Khadijah's sister.

The seeds of Islam

Muhammad often withdrew to a nearby cave called Hira to meditate (engage in quiet and focused reflection) and pray for guidance in religious matters. After spending a night in the cave in about 610, Muhammad returned to his family with an astonishing story. He said that during the night he had been visited by the archangel Jabra'il. He also said that he heard a voice saying, “Read in the name of your Lord the Creator. Read, and your Lord is the Most Honored. He taught man with the pen; taught him all that he knew not.” Other visions and visitations like this

Muhammad and the Ka'aba

Most of the traditional accounts of Muhammad's life emphasize the high regard in which he was held in his community during the years before his revelations (public expressions of divine will or truth). One legend addresses his role in the renovation of the Ka'aba, a shrine that contained idols worshipped by the people, although the story has likely been exaggerated. According to the legend, the Ka'aba was in great need of repair, but no one wanted to perform the necessary work out of fear that the idols contained in the shrine would somehow release their supernatural powers against the people of Mecca. In addition, materials and skilled workmen were unavailable. This changed, however, when a capsized Greek ship washed ashore carrying high-quality wood and a skilled carpenter who had survived the wreck.

Work began on the Ka'aba and proceeded quickly. In one corner of the Ka'aba was a sacred stone called the Black Stone. During the repairs this stone had to be moved to a different location, and each of the four most powerful tribes in Mecca desired the honor of moving it. A heated argument broke out, but eventually all agreed to abide by the decision of the first man to enter the Ka'aba. That man turned out to be Muhammad. Muhammad settled the dispute by calling for a large cloak. He placed the Black Stone in the center of the cloak, then had a representative of each of the tribes grasp one corner of the cloak and carry the stone to its new position. In this way, he preserved peace among the four tribes.

supposedly continued until Muhammad's death. At first, Muhammad was puzzled by these revelations and was not sure that he wanted to take on the role of a prophet. With the encouragement of his wife, however, he eventually accepted his mission.

With these visitations Muhammad claimed there was only one true god, Allah, and that he, Muhammad, was the last of several prophets that Allah had communicated with. According to Muhammad, when previous prophets had failed to follow Allah's instructions to reform the religious and social beliefs of their nations, those nations had been destroyed. Khadijah became the first convert to Muhammad's new religion, which was called Islam. The second was a ten-year-old cousin, and the third was Muhammad's closest friend, Abu Bakr (c. 543–634). Beginning in about 613, Muhammad began to preach his beliefs and to recite verses from his revelations. These verses became the Qur'an, a word that literally means "the recitation." Over time he attracted a small but growing number of followers.

Many members of the community ridiculed Muhammad and his followers, often beating them and throwing garbage at them. They strongly disagreed with Muhammad's views about social justice, including his claim that the condition of slaves needed to be improved. Social justice is an ideal in which all people have the same rights and opportunities. They also objected to his belief that people should replace their deeply held tribal and clan loyalties with the Islamic faith. He was seen as a threat by

local religious leaders, who depended on the Ka'aba for their power and income. If the people did as Muhammad preached and stopped worshipping the idols in the shrine, the city would lose trade from traveling merchants. Making matters more difficult for Muhammad was the fact that

his own tribe held the position of guardian of the Ka'aba. Despite these pressures from the community, Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle, continued to support him, although he did try to restrain his nephew somewhat.

In 620, a decade after Muhammad's first revelation, he reportedly made an announcement to his followers. He said that the previous night, Jabra'il had appeared to him with a winged horse called the Buraq and had escorted him on a miraculous journey. The first part of his journey, the Isra, took him to the holy city of Jerusalem and to the Dome of the Rock on the city's Temple Mount. During the second part of the journey, the Miraj, he was taken to heaven, where he toured paradise and spoke with Allah and some previous well-known prophets. Tradition holds that Allah instructed Muhammad to tell his followers to pray fifty times each day. The Prophet Moses, however, told Muhammad that no one would agree to pray that often and that he should go back to Allah and ask if the number could be lessened. Muhammad persuaded Allah to reduce the requirement to five times each day, a practice that Muslims still follow in the early twenty-first century.

Departure from Mecca

Muhammad and his followers endured more than a decade of persecution, with life for them becoming increasingly dangerous. Persecution is when a person or persons are harassed for their beliefs. A number of the chapters of the Qur'an, often referred to as the Meccan revelations, date from this period and document this ill treatment. In 615 Muhammad ordered a number of Islamic families to migrate to Ethiopia for their safety. Six years later, after he learned of a plot to kill him, Muhammad decided to relocate to Yathrib, some 186 miles (299 kilometers) to the north, where a number of converts to Islam lived. This city would later become called Medina. Muslims call this event the *hijrah*, which translates as "emigration" or "flight." The Muslim calendar begins with this event. Muslim dates include the letters AH, meaning *anno begirae*, or "year of the hijrah." After Muhammad and his followers fled, the Meccans seized all the property they left behind.

Life in Yathrib was an improvement for Muhammad. He had been approached by a delegation from that city about moving there to help settle disputes between tribes. Given considerable authority, he put an end to the disagreements and absorbed the tribes into Islam, forbidding Muslims to shed the blood of other Muslims. Yathrib was also home to a number of Jewish tribes that Muhammad hoped to convert to Islam,



A sign above a mosque reads in both English and Arabic, “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.”

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but his efforts were unsuccessful. Around this time, tradition holds, Muslims began to turn to Mecca during prayer rather than to the Jews’ historical homeland, Jerusalem.

As he established his Islamic community in and around Yathrib, Muhammad taught that tolerance should be extended to all “people of the book.” This term was used to refer to Jews and Christians, and the book referred to was the Bible, including its two halves, the Old and New Testaments. In contrast to many of the region’s empires, Islam was tolerant of other religious faiths, although their members were heavily taxed. Muhammad established the specific terms by which Jews and others could live in his Islamic state in a constitution written in 622–623.

Khadijah, Muhammad’s first wife, had died in 619, and in Yathrib Muhammad married A’isha, the daughter of his friend Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr would assume the leadership of Islam as caliph, which means “successor” of Muhammad after Muhammad’s death. Muhammad also took a second wife, Hafsa, the daughter of a man named Umar, who would in time become Abu Bakr’s successor. Muhammad’s daughter Fatima married Muhammad’s cousin **‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib** (c. 600–661; see entry), who also became a leader of Islam after Muhammad. In this way, Muhammad created a network of family ties that not only strengthened his own position but, he believed, ensured the continuation of the religion he had founded.

Warfare

Relations between the residents of Mecca and Yathrib continued to worsen. Although Muhammad strengthened his power around Yathrib

by signing treaties with various other tribes, the Muslims who had relocated from Mecca had no source of income. They relied on charity and some payment they received for manual labor. Eventually they began to assault caravans headed toward Mecca and to take control of the goods being carried. In March 624 Muhammad himself led a party of three hundred followers on one such raid, but they were driven off. The Meccans then sent an army of eight hundred to eliminate the ongoing threat to the caravans. Despite being badly outnumbered, the Muslims emerged victorious in a battle that took place on March 15. This was the first in what would be a long line of military victories for Islam.

The conflict continued, and in 625 a Meccan general named Abu Sufyan led a force of eight thousand men against Yathrib. A battle took place in Uhud on March 23, ending with no winner. In 627 Abu Sufyan attacked again, but Muhammad had ordered a trench dug around the city, and the Muslims successfully repelled the Meccan invaders. By this time the surrounding tribes and cities understood that Islam was a source of strength. The religion grew rapidly as more and more people converted.

By 628 Muhammad's forces were strong enough to reclaim Mecca. Muhammad marched on the city with sixteen hundred troops. Meccan leaders met him at the border and negotiated a treaty that would bring an end to the hostilities. Just two years later, however, Mecca violated the treaty. Muhammad then marched on the city with ten thousand men. Faced with such an overwhelming force, the city leaders surrendered without a fight. Muslims took the city, cast the idols out of the Ka'ba, and converted most of the city's residents to Islam. The Ka'ba was turned into a place of Islamic worship. It remains a central part of Islam that all Muslims are expected to make a *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once during their lives.

Final years

In the years that followed, Muhammad secured power over the entire Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad's authority was not the result of formal agreements or treaties. He ruled through personal relationships, and Islam was the institution that cemented the growing empire.

Late in life, Muhammad took more wives. In addition to A'isha and Hafsa (and the deceased Khadijah), he married eight other women, for a total of eleven wives, ten of whom were living at the time of his death. Some of these women were the widows of followers of Muhammad

who had died in battle. Others were the daughters of political allies. Muhammad's marriages have been the subject of considerable debate. Some historians believe that A'isha was only nine years old when he married her. Others have noted that he violated Islamic law by marrying the ex-wife of one of his adopted sons and by taking more than the four wives allowed by the Qur'an.

Muhammad died unexpectedly at about noon on June 8, 632, in Yathrib. His death touched off a disagreement about who would succeed him. According to Sunnis, who constitute the largest sect of Islam, Abu Bakr was chosen as caliph (leader successor) freely and openly by the leaders of the Islamic community. Members of the Shi'a sect, however, dispute this, arguing that Muhammad had promised leadership to 'Ali, the husband of his daughter Fatima, and that Abu Bakr and others conspired to deny 'Ali the position. The dispute continues to divide Sunni and Shi'a Muslims into the twenty-first century.

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Nichiren

BORN: February 16, 1222 • Kominato, Awa, Japan

DIED: October 13, 1282 • Ikegami, Japan

Japanese religious leader

“If you wish to free yourself from the suffering of birth and death you have endured through eternity and attain supreme enlightenment in this lifetime, you must awaken to the mystic truth which has always been within your life.”

Nichiren was a Buddhist prophet (divine messenger) and monk who lived in thirteenth-century Japan. He gave his name to a sect, or subgroup, of Buddhism called Nichirenshu, or the Nichiren sect. He did not, however, think of himself as its founder. Nichiren is best known for his belief in the importance of one of Buddhism’s sacred texts, the Lotus Sutra. This text describes the virtues of the Buddha and teaches that all people can attain enlightenment. (Enlightenment is the realization of the true nature of reality and the universe.) He helped to unite Buddhists in Japan by calling for the establishment of Buddhism, especially Nichiren Buddhism, as the Japanese state religion. In the twenty-first century many schools of Buddhism continue to practice the form of the religion that Nichiren taught.

Birth and early life

Born in 1222, Nichiren was the son of a fisherman who lived in the village of Kominato in the Awa Province of Japan. At birth his name was Zennichimaru (or sometimes just Zennichi). In addition to fishing Nichiren’s father worked at a manor house, or a house occupied by the owner of an agricultural estate. Nichiren was such a talented student that the lord of the manor encouraged him to begin his formal

education at the Tendai monastery called Kiyosumidera in 1233. Tendai refers to a sect, or subgroup, of Buddhism practiced by the monks who lived there and their followers. After he was ordained, or officially made a monk, in 1237, Nichiren changed his birth name to Rencho. He left the monastery for the city of Kamakura, where he continued his studies, focusing on other forms of Buddhism.

He moved from Kamakura to Mount Hiei, the center of the Tendai sect of Buddhism, and then to Mount Koya, the center of another school of Buddhism. He studied in each of these places, learning more about Buddhism and its various practices in Japan. In 1253 he returned to Kiyosumidera, where he began a mission to bring to Japan what he believed was true Buddhism. It was at this time that he took the name Nichiren. The name Nichiren comes from the Japanese word *nichi*, meaning “sun.” He interpreted this name to mean “standing for the Light of Truth as well as for the Land of the Rising Sun,” wherein the Land of the Rising Sun was Japan. The syllable *ren* means “lotus” and refers both to the lotus flower and to the Lotus Sutra.

On April 28, 1253, Nichiren publicly declared that all other forms of Buddhism were false. He claimed that only by following the teachings of the Lotus Sutra could one practice true Buddhism. The Lotus Sutra is the most popular Mahayana text. Mahayana Buddhism is one of the two main branches of Buddhism. Nichiren Buddhism is a subgroup of Mahayana. The Lotus Sutra discusses the importance of realizing one’s essential Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is present in every person and allows him or her to grow and obtain greater understanding and ultimately achieve enlightenment.

That same year, Nichiren was banned from Kiyosumidera, and he traveled to Kamakura to spread his teachings. This marked the start of a life filled with banishments and pardons. Nichiren would spend the rest of his life traveling around Japan, in conflict with other schools of Buddhism and with the government.

Banishment

In 1260 Nichiren presented to the government a treatise, or essay, titled “Establish the Right Law and Save Our Country.” He wrote the document in the form of a dialogue between an ordinary citizen and a visitor. The dialogue examined the nature of the times in Japan. Nichiren claimed that floods, famine, political conflicts, and other difficulties were increasing because of the government’s refusal to accept the Buddha’s true teachings as detailed in the Lotus Sutra. He proposed that his version of Buddhism become the state religion of Japan. He also warned that rebellions and foreign invasions would occur if the government did not adopt the true Buddhism.

In the treatise Nichiren divided Japanese history into three eras since the time of the **Buddha**, Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE; see entry), the founder of Buddhism. Nichiren saw the world of the thirteenth century as the third age, an age of collapse called End of the Law. He believed that only by following the teachings of the Lotus Sutra could Japan survive and prosper.

The government responded in 1261 by exiling Nichiren to the province of Izu, in Japan’s main island of Honshu. Two years later, however, he was pardoned and continued to preach his form of Buddhism. From 1264 to 1268 Nichiren traveled around Japan preaching and winning converts, but he continued to have conflicts with government authorities.

In 1268 Mongols from Central Asia arrived in Japan and demanded tribute, or payments one government makes to another for protection or to acknowledge submission to the other country, to the Mongolian ruler Kublai Khan (1215–1294). Nichiren had predicted in his 1260 essay that such an event would take place. Once again he called on the government to establish his form of Buddhism as the state religion. He believed that by doing so, the government could unite the Japanese people and protect itself from foreign invaders such as the Mongols.

The government ignored both Nichiren and the Mongols. Many Japanese people, however, were alarmed that Japan was under threat from foreign invaders. They turned increasingly to Nichiren’s teachings. In 1271 he was arrested after Buddhist monks from other groups brought charges against him. He was put on trial, convicted, and sentenced to banishment again. In December of that year he was taken to the island of Sado, where he remained until 1274.

Nichiren Practices

Nichiren Buddhists continue to practice many of his teachings. For example they believe that the benefits of this sect of Buddhism can be achieved by chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, “Myoho Renge Kyo.” By this and other words from the Lotus Sutra, a person can supposedly reach “Buddhahood,” which is an awakening to the true nature of life. He or she can then see how all of creation is connected and how people have the ability to change and influence the world.

Additionally, Nichiren Buddhists respect the Gohonzon. This is a scroll, written in Chinese characters, that contains the laws of the sect. Many individuals have such a scroll in their homes, and it becomes a focal point for their daily rituals and prayers. The Gohonzon is thought of as a spiritual mirror. By sitting before it and chanting words from the Lotus Sutra, a person is said to be able to recognize his or her own Buddhahood. A devout Nichiren Buddhist does this chanting each morning and evening.

While on Sado, Nichiren wrote *Kaimoku Sho* (Eye-Opener or Liberation from Blindness), in which he continued to express his views about religion and the state. In the book he made three vows: that he would be the pillar, or support, of Japan; that he would be the eyes of Japan; and that he would be the “vessel” of Japan, meaning that he would contain the truth in the form of his teachings.

Final years

Nichiren was released from Sado in 1274. He returned to Kamakura, where he continued to preach his views about the Lotus Sutra and about the need for a more militant state religion. The government of Kamakura by this time was willing to be more tolerant towards him, so he was left alone. He settled near Mount Fuji, and in his final years he built temples there and in other locations. These temples continue to be sacred sites for Nichiren Buddhists into the early twenty-first century. He died in 1282 in the town of Ikegami while he was reciting verses from the Lotus Sutra.

On October 12, 1922, the emperor of Japan conferred on Nichiren the posthumous (after death) title of Rissho Daishi, which can be translated as “Master of the Establishment of Righteousness” or “Great Teacher of the Right Dharma.” “Dharma” refers to the path to enlightenment detailed in the Buddha’s teachings. Nichiren is also called Daishonin, which means “Great Holy Man.”

Nichiren Buddhism

To understand the significance of Nichiren and his teachings, it is necessary to have some understanding of Buddhist sects in Japan and the place of the Lotus Sutra in Buddhist thought. During the Buddha’s lifetime none of his teachings were written down. After his death his followers gathered on at least three occasions to refresh their memories of these teachings. Only after one century had passed did the Buddha’s words begin to be written down in texts called *sutras*. Because the lessons had



Nichiren Buddhist followers, called Sokagakkai, engage in a display of gymnastics during an annual cultural festival in Tokyo, Japan. Nichiren Buddhists believe the Lotus Sutra to be among the most important of the Buddha's teachings. © BETTMANN/CORBIS.

been passed along orally for so long, each of the sutras begins with the words "Thus have I heard."

During the early centuries of Buddhism, people began to interpret the Buddha's teachings in different ways. This was another reason that Buddhists were determined to write down the Buddha's teachings, to avoid reinterpretation. Nevertheless, the differences that had already emerged resulted in a split in the religion, and two major branches emerged. These are Theravada and Mahayana. Although each individual Buddhist varies, some rough distinctions can be made between the two branches.

Theravada Buddhism is the most traditional form of Buddhism. Its practices and beliefs are based on a literal interpretation of the original, early teachings of the Buddha. Theravada places great emphasis on self-awareness and meditation. Theravada monks were the first to

write down the Buddha's teachings, and they believe these to be the most accurate accounts of his lessons.

The other main branch of Buddhism is called Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhists are less strict in their interpretation of the Buddha's teachings, and they recognize more sutras, or sermons, than do Theravada Buddhists. While Theravada Buddhists give reverence, or great respect, only to the Buddha, Mahayana Buddhists recognize many enlightened beings, called *bodhisattvas*, who help people on the path to enlightenment.

Nichiren Buddhism is a subgroup of Mahayana, as are the other schools of Buddhism that Nichiren studied before he started spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. These other schools include Pure Land Buddhism, which is ruled over by the Buddha Amitabha. Buddhists who do not achieve *nirvana*, or the end of suffering, upon their death can be reborn into the Pure Land, where they will be helped on their path. Another subgroup studied by Nichiren is Zen Buddhism. Zen places great emphasis on meditation and simplicity. Zen Buddhists learn by a question-and-answer session between masters and students, called *koans*. The koans often seem illogical and require intense thought and self-examination to understand. They are believed to help people achieve greater spiritual knowledge and move closer to enlightenment.

The Lotus Sutra, which is a shorthand name for the text, is a sacred writing of Mahayana Buddhists, although different Mahayana subgroups may place greater emphasis on other teachings. In the original Sanskrit language, the Lotus Sutra is called the Suddharma-Pundarika Sutra. In Japanese it is called Myohorengekyo, often written as separate words: Myoho-enge-kyo. This name is often shortened to Hokekyo. In English the translation of the title would be "White Lotus of the True Dharma."

Nichiren believed that the Lotus Sutra contained the essence of the Buddha's wisdom. He accepted the teachings of Tendai Buddhism, the sect popularized by the Chinese philosopher and teacher Chih-i (538–597). Tendai Buddhists claim that the teachings of the Buddha, and therefore the sutras, can be divided into five groups, ranging from the earliest to the latest. The earlier sutras are followed by Theravada Buddhists, but the Mahayana branch believes that only the later sutras, including the Lotus Sutra, contain the truth that the Buddha wanted people to follow.

One of the chief doctrines, or principles, of the Lotus Sutra is that any person can achieve "Buddhahood." This means that enlightenment

and salvation are open not just to monks, but to any person who follows the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and other late sutras. One reason that Nichiren accepted the Lotus Sutra as the true teaching of the Buddha was that in the previous sutra, the Innumerable Meaning Sutra, the Buddha had said, “In the past forty odd years, I (Sakyamuni Buddha) had not yet expounded [given or set forth] the truth.” Nichiren and his followers believed that the Lotus Sutra, which followed this declaration, then must represent the truth about enlightenment that the Buddha was finally revealing to his followers.

Two additional points about the Lotus Sutra should be noted. One has to do with the significance of the lotus flower. For Buddhists, the lotus flower represents purity. The flower became a symbol in Buddhism because it thrives in clear water, so it is never muddied or soiled. The belief is that a Buddhist, like the lotus flower, should avoid being “soiled” by the circumstances of life. The second has to do with the structure of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra consists of twenty-eight chapters. The first fourteen deal with the “historical” Buddha, that is, the real human being who lived in the physical world. The last fourteen chapters deal with the “enlightened” Buddha, the Buddha who is eternal because his teachings will live forever.

Nichiren Buddhism in modern life

The early twentieth century was a difficult time for Nichiren Buddhism, and Buddhism in general in Japan. Beginning in the late nineteenth century Shinto was declared the state religion. The purpose of this was to unite Japanese culture and society as the country tried to establish an empire in Southeast Asia and throughout the Pacific. This desire for empire eventually led to Japan’s involvement in World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan). Buddhists had little choice but to go along with the government’s decision. Some dealt with the new order by creating a form of Buddhism called Imperial Way Buddhism. This form of Buddhism supported the Japanese state and the nation’s emperor, partly by declaring Japanese Buddhism superior to all other forms of the faith, such as those practiced in China.

After World War II ended, Buddhists in Japan were able to reassert their religion. In the decades that followed, Nichiren Buddhism became primarily a lay movement, or one practiced more by ordinary people than

Nichiren

by monks and other religious devotees. The term *Nichirensbu* is generally used to refer to some forty religious institutions, lay associations, and new religious movements in Japan and throughout the world that follow the teachings of Nichiren. Little focus is placed on ritual or formal teachings. Nichiren Buddhists put more emphasis on making a difference in the world through social action, such as campaigning for world peace.

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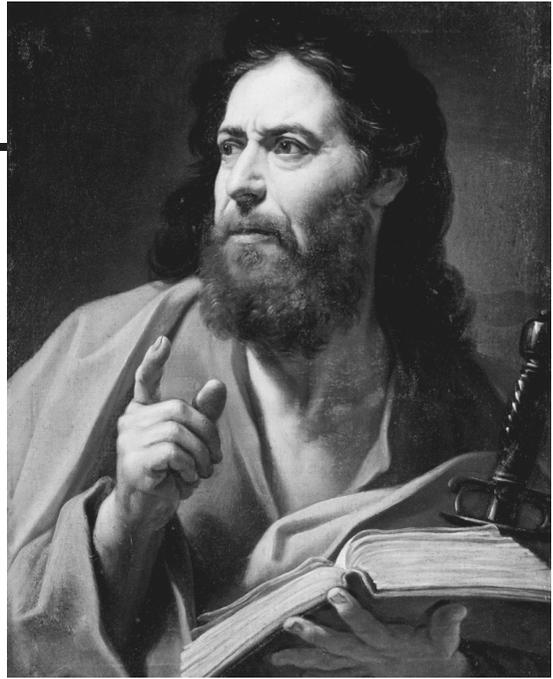
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Saint Paul

BORN: 3 • Tarsus, Cilicia

DIED: c. 67 • Rome

Cilician theologian; preacher



“So, as much as is in me, I am eager to preach the Gospel to you also. . . . For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.”

Saul of Tarsus, better known to Christians as Saint Paul, was born a Jew. He later came to believe in the teachings of **Jesus Christ** (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry) and converted, or changed his religious affiliation, to Christianity. Paul played a central role in the development of Christianity. He composed many doctrines (principles or rules) of the church and interpreted the words and teachings of Jesus for his followers throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and other areas around the Mediterranean Sea. Some historians suggest that the early Christian Church might not have survived had it not been for Paul’s tireless efforts on its behalf. In the late twenty-first century Christian churches continued to assert that “Pauline Christianity” is the official Christianity, rather than a number of competing forms of the religion preached by other groups during Paul’s lifetime. Included among these groups were the Ebionites, who denied the divinity of Christ, and various other sects.

Saint Paul.

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Paul is perhaps best known as the undisputed author of several important books of the New Testament of the Bible, the sacred book of Christianity. These books are generally referred to as the Epistles, which means “letters.” They include Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Traditionally Paul has also been regarded as the author of other books in the New Testament, including Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. A number of biblical historians, however, suspect that someone else wrote some or all of these books.

It is virtually impossible to construct an accurate picture of Paul’s life. This is mainly because the only two sources of information known to exist on his life are Paul’s own Epistles, mostly written from the years 50 to 58 CE, and the New Testament book, Acts of the Apostles. The Acts contain a number of passages informally referred to as the “we passages,” which were apparently narrated by an observer, likely one of Paul’s followers. Most modern-day biographers regard Paul’s Epistles as their primary source but also draw on information contained in Acts. Two other books from the New Testament, Acts of Paul and Thecla, also contain information on Paul’s life. Elements within these books, however, are considered less reliable by scholars, or researchers. As a result, no reliable timeline of the events in Paul’s life can be constructed.

Early life

Saul was born in the year 3 CE in the town of Tarsus, Cilicia (pronounced ki-LIK-ya), a region on the southwestern coast of Asia Minor along the Aegean Sea in what is now modern-day Turkey. Saul identified himself as an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, and his name was a common one among that tribe because it honored the first king of the Jews. People who lived within the Roman Empire typically had two names. In the case of Jews, one name would be Hebrew and the other either Latin or Greek. Thus, Saul also had the Latin name of Paul. He referred to himself as a Pharisee, or a member of a major sect, or division, of Judaism that placed great emphasis on tradition and biblical scholarship, or study of the Tanakh. He had one brother, Rufus, and was unmarried. Saul may have suffered from epilepsy, a brain disorder that at the time was thought to produce religious visions.

Saul received a Jewish education and may have studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a famous scholar of Jewish law. As a young man Saul

Was Paul the First Protestant?

The Protestant Reformation was a religious reform movement in sixteenth-century Europe. Many Protestant Christian groups emerged from this period, such as Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists, in response to criticism of the Catholic Church. Much of the opposition to the Catholic Church was based on the greed of the church's institutions and their focus on worldly rather than spiritual matters. There was also debate over basic Christian doctrines, or policies, and beliefs. One of the chief points of disagreement concerned the manner in which a person can achieve salvation, or deliverance into heaven.

The Catholic Church had traditionally taught that salvation was achieved through a combination of faith and good works. The key biblical text in support of this view is contained in the second chapter of the New Testament book of James: "man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." **Martin Luther** (1483–1546; see entry), a German Catholic monk and one of the leaders of the reform movement, disputed this point of view. He instead preached a doctrine called justification by grace through faith, often shortened to "justification through faith."

According to this view, people cannot earn a place in heaven through good works. Salvation is an unconditional gift of God's love and grace that one receives through Jesus Christ by faith

alone. In support of this view, Protestants cite several biblical texts, particularly the first chapter of one of Paul's major Epistles, Romans:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Through statements such as this, Paul provided support for one of the major doctrines of Protestantism and helped to spark a revolt against the very church he helped establish. The Catholic Church, meanwhile, holds that these words can only be understood in the context of the debate over Jewish law. During Paul's lifetime Judaism was a religion based on "works," meaning that Jews believed that they could achieve salvation only by strictly following Jewish law as outlined in the Hebrew religious texts. Paul, the church argues, was simply trying to lessen the role of following Jewish law and focus instead on belief in Christ's atonement, or punishment, for the sins of humanity through his death and resurrection.

supported himself by making tents and working as a traveling preacher. Some historians believe he had a patron, or financial supporter, named Phoebe, who may have been a deaconess in the early Christian Church and delivered some of his letters to the church in Rome. A deaconess, or deacon, is someone who assists the bishops and priests in the Christian faith. Saul may have acquired citizenship in the Roman Empire, and later relied on that citizenship to defend him when he encountered legal difficulties. Some Christian sects believe that he was actually a Greek-born Roman citizen and that he tried to convert to Judaism so that he

could court and marry a Jewish woman, the daughter of a high priest. This theory, however, is not widely accepted.

Saul's conversion

A key event in Saul's life was his conversion to Christianity. In his youth he had been an enthusiastic supporter of, and participant in, the oppression and harassment of Christians. In his letter to the Philippians in the New Testament of the Bible, Paul describes how he had "laid waste to the Church, arresting the followers of Jesus, having them thrown into prison, and trying to get them to blaspheme [curse]" the name of the Hebrew God. He had also taken an active part in the trial and execution of Saint Stephen (died c. 36), the first Christian martyr, or one who willingly dies rather than reject his religious faith.

One day Saul was traveling along the major road to Damascus, Syria. He carried letters that gave him the authority to apprehend any people he found practicing Christianity and bring them to Jerusalem for trial and probable execution. His goal, he said, was to wipe out the "sect of the Nazarene," referring to Jesus of Nazareth. (Nazareth is the town from which his mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph, traveled before Jesus was born.) Along the road, however, Saul had a miraculous experience, as described in the ninth chapter of Acts of the Apostles:

Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute [mistreat] me?" and he said, "Who are you, Lord?" and he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." . . . Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing.

Although some biblical scholars dispute that Paul, as he then called himself, underwent such a dramatic experience, he was nonetheless transformed from a strongly loyal Hebrew into one of the most enthusiastic leaders of the new Christian faith.

After his conversion, which probably took place sometime around the year 35, Paul lived in a trading kingdom along the border between Syria and Arabia. He later returned to Damascus. After perhaps three years he was forced to flee the city again when he heard of a plot by Jews there to kill him for preaching that Christ had been the long-awaited

savior, that is, the messiah whose coming had been predicted by the Old Testament prophets. He then traveled to Jerusalem, where he met Saint Peter (died c. 64) and Saint James the Just (died c. 62). Peter was the leader of the Christian church. In effect, he could be considered the first pope. He and James, who some believe was Christ's brother, were two of Christ's twelve apostles. The apostles were followers that Jesus Christ had chosen to help him spread his teachings.

Paul's travels may have then taken him to Antioch, a city in Asia Minor, then to Cyprus, a Mediterranean island south of Asia Minor. During this journey, often referred to as his first missionary journey, Paul preached Christianity and established Christian communities. Over the course of this and later missionary journeys, he endured many hardships, faced persecution, and was imprisoned. On at least one occasion he was almost murdered. On some of these trips, he took along a number of his followers.

The Council of Jerusalem

In the year 49 Paul traveled back to Jerusalem, where he met with leaders of the Christian Church, including Peter, James, and another apostle, Saint John (died c. 100). This meeting is generally called the Council of Jerusalem. The precise purpose of the council remains unclear. It most likely revolved around the ongoing issue of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. In the early decades of the Common Era (the years after Jesus's birth and death), Christianity was a sect of Judaism. Christ himself was born a Jew, as were most of his followers. As a result, considerable thought was given regarding the extent to which Christians were obligated to obey Jewish law. Indeed, some early Christians believed that one could not be saved without following Jewish law, a belief that persisted until at least the fourth century.

At the council Paul took the position that the death and resurrection of Christ freed people from Jewish law. (The resurrection is the belief that Christ rose from the dead three days after being crucified on the cross.)



Saint Paul is depicted spreading the Gospel to others in this illuminated manuscript. Saint Paul was a Jew who converted to believe in the teachings of Jesus. PUBLIC DOMAIN.

He believed that the emphasis of the Christian Church should be the preaching of Christ's words, not following Jewish law. After considerable debate the council took a middle position, concluding that Gentiles, or those not born Jews, should follow some restrictions of Jewish law but should not place great emphasis on doing so. Some Jewish laws made sense in purely practical terms, such as those dealing with hygiene and health in an agricultural community.

Despite the agreement of the council Paul later had an argument with Peter, an event sometimes referred to as the "incident of Antioch." Paul believed that Peter placed too much emphasis on Jewish law, to the degree that Peter refused to share a meal with Gentile Christians. Perhaps because of this disagreement, Paul set out on his second missionary journey, revisiting some of the towns that he had visited on his first journey. His travels took him through Asia Minor and into Macedonia, where he established the first Christian church in Philippi. In this city he was imprisoned for theft because he supposedly exorcized, or drove out, a demon from a slave woman. The woman's owner claimed this reduced her value to him because she had supposedly been able to read fortunes before the exorcism, but could not afterwards. After his release Paul traveled to Athens, Greece, and then to the Greek region of Corinth, where he wrote 1 Thessalonians, the first of his surviving Epistles.

In Corinth, Paul once again encountered legal difficulties, as Jews brought charges against him for preaching Christianity. In the year 52 he was called before an official named Gallio, who concluded that the matter was unimportant and dismissed the charges. The event is of some significance because it is one of the few in Paul's life actually documented with archaeological evidence as having taken place. Archaeological evidence are physical remains from history, such as ancient records. Afterward Paul began his third missionary journey, which again took him through Asia Minor to Macedonia and Antioch. In Ephesus, a region of Greece, he caused an uproar when he spoke out against the practice of worshipping statues of the Greek goddess Artemis. Many of the city's silversmiths earned their living making and selling such statues. Paul and his companions almost lost their lives to an angry mob of Ephesians.

Final years

Paul eventually arrived back in Jerusalem, bringing money that he had gathered on his travels for victims of a food shortage in the region. Outside the Jewish temple, he was recognized and nearly beaten to death by a

mob of people who believed that he had made the temple unclean by entering with a Greek companion. The Romans rescued Paul from the mob, only to imprison him, and for two years he remained in custody awaiting trial. He insisted that as a Roman citizen he had the right to be tried in Rome. After a new governor took office, the governor agreed and ordered Paul sent back to Rome.

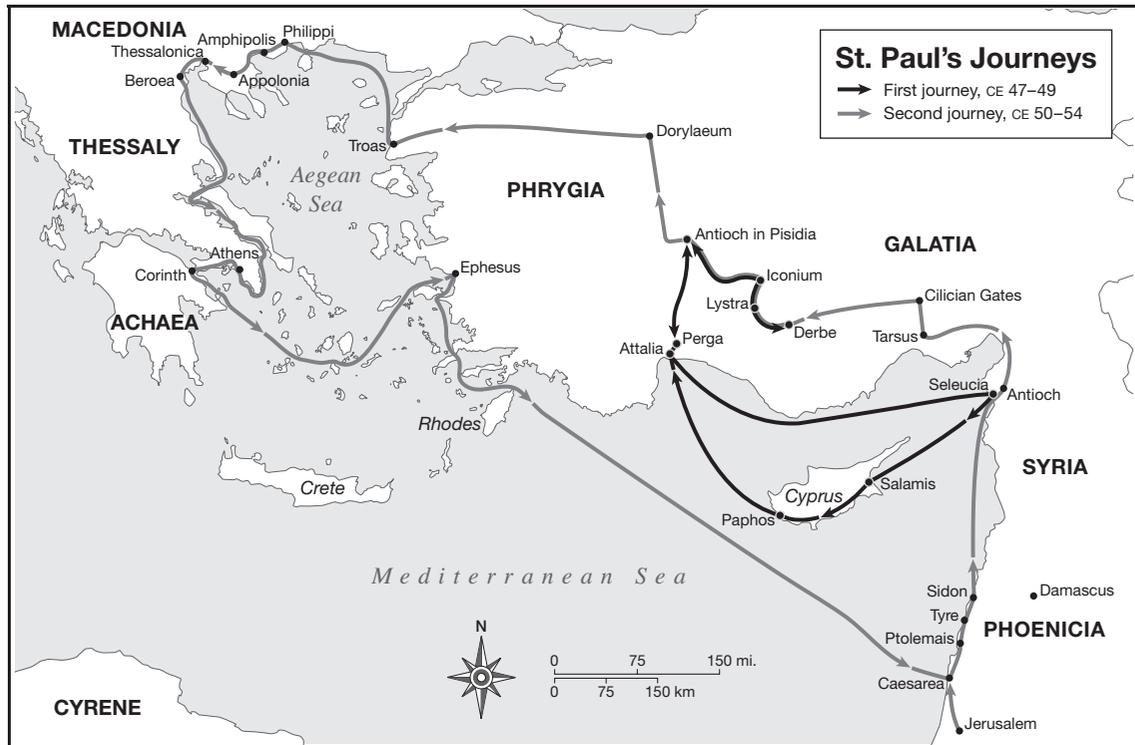
Paul's journey to Rome by ship was unpleasant. The voyage was made difficult by uncooperative winds, and the ship floated aimlessly for two weeks before being wrecked in a storm off the coast of Malta. The ship's party spent three months there before resuming the journey in the spring. Finally they arrived in Rome, probably in the year 61. Paul appears to have spent two years in a Roman prison, during which time some historians believe he wrote the books of Ephesians and Philémon. After being released from prison, he may have traveled to Spain and Britain on a fourth missionary journey, although the evidence for this is inconclusive.

Information about Paul's death is equally uncertain. A fourth-century bishop named Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–c. 341), often called the "Father of Church History" because he was one of the first Christians to document events involving the early church, wrote that Paul was beheaded by the Roman emperor Nero in either 64 or 67. (The later date is traditionally given for Paul's death.) A third-century writer named Gaius wrote that Paul was buried in Rome in a cemetery on the Via Ostiensis, an important road in the city. Neither of these claims can be confirmed. According to the Venerable Bede (c. 672–735), a prominent historian and author of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, in 665 the pope, Vitalian, gave Paul's remains to Oswy, the king of Britain.

Paul's theology

For hundreds of years Christian theologians (people who study religion) have attempted to explain and interpret the teachings of Paul. These teachings essentially created the primary doctrines of the Christian faith. The chief belief of Pauline Christianity is the importance of religious faith in and through Christ. Paul vocalized the central beliefs that Christ suffered and died to atone for humanity's sins and that people could achieve spiritual salvation through faith in Christ. Indeed, Paul was one of the first New Testament writers to comment on the nature of

Saint Paul



Saint Paul traveled throughout the Middle East and parts of Europe, seeking to spread the word of God and gain followers to Christianity. THOMSON GALE.

Original Sin, the concept that all of humanity is born in a state of sin due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the first humans, in the Garden of Eden. He stated that people could achieve salvation in heaven only by overcoming their basic sinfulness through faith in Christ.

Paul was a principal figure in the debate over Jewish law and the extent to which followers of Christ were obligated to obey it. While Paul himself followed some elements of Jewish law, he argued that salvation was to be achieved through faith in Christ, not through the law. Related to this issue was the question of whether Christianity was intended just for Jews or also for Gentiles, many of whom at the time practiced polytheism, or the belief in more than one god. Paul took the position that Christianity provided a new path to God for Gentiles, earning him the nickname "Apostle to the Gentiles."

Paul also gave prominence to the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit, a representation of God's divinity, became part of a person with

conversion to or baptism into the faith. Baptism is a religious ritual marked by a symbolic use of water that results in a person being admitted into the church community. By insisting on the Holy Spirit's divinity, Paul was in large part responsible for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the concept that God exists in three "persons": the Father in heaven; the Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit.

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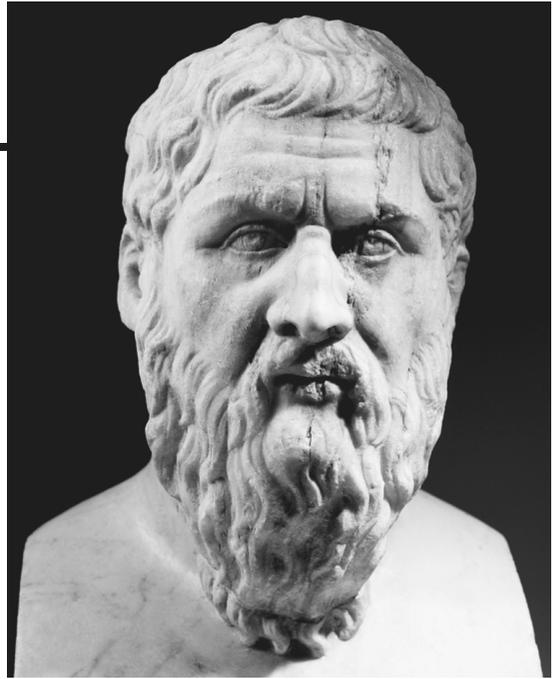
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Plato

BORN: c. 427 BCE • Athens, Greece

DIED: 347 BCE • Athens, Greece

Greek philosopher; writer; teacher



“Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings . . . until political power and philosophy entirely coincide . . . cities will have no rest from evils . . . nor I think will the human race.”

Plato was one of the most influential philosophers of the Western world. A philosopher is someone who studies logic, ethics (moral values), and other subjects for greater wisdom and experience. Along with his teacher, Socrates (469–399 BCE), and his student, **Aristotle** (384–322 BCE; see entry), Plato pioneered the classical philosophy of ancient Greece. He was the first to write about the legend of the mythical lost continent of Atlantis. He formulated the well-known concept of platonic love, or love that is spiritual rather than physical. In such works as *The Republic*, he wrote about a wide range of subjects, including ethics, politics, psychology (the study of the mind and behavior), and morality (a system of right conduct). Modern readers continue to explore his works for their understanding of epistemology, the branch of philosophy that explores how people gain knowledge and arrive at the truth, and metaphysics, which examines reality that exists beyond the senses.

Plato.

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Platonic Love

In modern-day times, even those who know little or nothing about Plato are likely to be familiar with the expression “platonic love” or “platonic relationship.” When two people, generally members of the opposite sex, say that they have a platonic relationship, they mean that they are friends and are not involved romantically. Plato, however, never used the term. It was coined in the fifteenth century in reference to the relationship between Socrates and one of his male students. Originally it referred to homosexual love, or the physical love between two people of the same sex. The concept of platonic love is taken from Plato’s book *Symposium*. In this book Plato outlines the concept of love as an ideal of good. This love, then, leads to virtue and goodness. By putting aside romantic passion for another individual, a person is able to contemplate universal and ideal love.

Birth

Historians are uncertain about the exact dates of Plato’s life. The traditional date for his birth is 428 or 427 BCE, and for his death, 348 or 347 BCE. The cause of this uncertainty is the lack of reliable written records. Much of what is known about Plato comes from his own works, including his books and some letters. These works are not autobiographical, however, meaning that they do not contain information about his own life, so historians can only pick up hints and suggestions from them.

One source that historians use for information about the lives of ancient Greek philosophers, including Plato, is a ten-volume work called *Lives of the Philosophers*. This work was written by Diogenes Laertius, a historian who lived in the third century BCE. Diogenes copied his information from many different sources. He particularly enjoyed recording gossip and scandalous or amusing stories about the philosophers whose biographies he wrote. Modern historians do not

regard him as a reliable source, although they trust him somewhat on matters of simple fact.

Diogenes, quoting other sources, wrote that Plato was born in the same year that Pericles, an Athenian statesman, died, which was 429 BCE, and that he lived to the age of eighty-four. Diogenes also said, however, that Plato was twenty-eight when Socrates was put to death in 399 BCE, which would put his birth date at 427 BCE. These details show how difficult it can be for modern historians to create a clear and accurate biographical record for people who lived in ancient times.

Early life

Plato was born in Athens to a wealthy family. His father, according to Diogenes, was named Ariston, and was descended from a line of early kings of Athens. His mother, Perictione, likewise came from a notable line, which included the sixth-century BCE legislator Solon. Family tradition held that they were descended from the sea god Poseidon. Plato had two older

brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, and a sister, Potone. Ariston died when Plato was a young child, and Perictione married her uncle, Pyrilampes. The couple had a son, Antiphon.

At birth Plato's name was Aristocles, the name of his grandfather. He apparently acquired the nickname Plato later in life. Plato comes from the Greek word *platos* and means "broad." It is thought that his wrestling teacher, or possibly his fellow students, may have given him the name because of his strong build, which enabled him to win the regional wrestling championship. Other theories are that he was given the name because of the wide range of his thought or even because he had a broad forehead.

Plato's family was politically active and closely involved with many of the most important events of the day. These years were exciting ones in the city-state of Athens, which was at the height of its power around the time of Plato's birth. (During this period Greece was a collection of smaller kingdoms called city-states, each organized around a major city.) Twice during the century, the Greeks, led by Athens, had defeated the feared Persian Empire under King Darius the Great (c. 550–486 BCE) and his successor, Xerxes (c. 520–485 BCE). Many of the islands and coastal cities in and around the Aegean Sea looked to Athens for protection.

The city-states of ancient Greece had a history of rivalry and armed conflict. Sparta was Athens's chief rival. Although Athens ruled the sea with its naval power, Sparta had an army that outnumbered that of Athens two to one. While the Athenians favored democracy, or rule by majority, as their form of government, the Spartans were an oligarchy, which placed power in the hands of a small number of men. The Spartans were warlike, whereas Athens was more concerned with culture and encouraged the growth of art, architecture, education, and philosophy. War broke out between the two very different powers in 431 BCE, just a few years before Plato was born. This war is known as the Peloponnesian War.

The war ended in defeat for Athens in 405 BCE. In the disorder following this loss the Athenian empire fell into a state of decline and its democratic institutions came under attack. One of Plato's uncles, Charmides, was a member of a group called the Thirty Tyrants, of which Charmides's uncle, Critias, was the leader. This group overthrew the democratic government in 404 BCE and ruled as an oligarchy, although their control lasted for just eight months. Plato's stepfather, Pyrilampes,

was a leader of the democratic faction of Athens, which defeated the Tyrants and restored democratic rule to the city-state.

Finds philosophy

In response to these events and to the rapid changes they produced in Athenian society, Plato's mother and stepfather tried to persuade him to enter politics. For a time it looked as though Plato would agree to this and become a statesman and legislator. But in about 409 BCE, Plato and his brothers met the philosopher Socrates. Plato rejected a political career and, with the encouragement of Socrates, became a passionate student of philosophy. Plato was especially inspired by two of Socrates's most famous statements: "Know thyself" and "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Socrates never authored any published works or founded a school or an organized philosophical movement. He wandered about the city, stopping people on the street and engaging them in philosophical dialogue. Then, through questions and answers, he would challenge their ideas, especially with regards to ethics and morality, and expose the errors in their positions.

The Thirty Tyrants tried to involve Socrates when they seized power in Athens, but he refused to assist them. Due to their efforts, however, Socrates gained a reputation for being an opponent of democracy. After the democratic government of Athens was restored, he was tried and executed in 399 BCE on a number of charges, including corrupting the youth, atheism (not believing in any god or gods), introducing new gods, and engaging in strange religious practices. Plato watched these events closely. As an admirer of Socrates, he became increasingly displeased with the state of Athenian politics. That displeasure reached its climax with Socrates's death. Plato recorded the events surrounding the trial and death of his teacher in his book *Apologia*.

Since he was a student of Socrates, Plato feared he might be put to death as well. Additionally, he knew that he could not serve the state that had executed his teacher. He left Athens and for the next twelve years traveled widely, visiting such places as Cyrene (a city on the north coast of Africa), Italy, Sicily, and Egypt. In Egypt he came across the water clock, an invention he later brought back to Greece. In Italy he became familiar with the works of the mathematician Pythagoras (569–475 BCE). His growing interest in mathematics sparked a fascination with science. During his travels he sought out philosophers, priests,

and prophets (divine messengers) to learn all that he could about religion, morality, ethics, science, and philosophy.

During this period Plato wrote his earliest books, including *Apologia*, *The Crito*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Hippias Minor and Major*, *Gorgias*, *Ion*, and *Protagoras*. These books were in the form of dialogues, the method of teaching that Socrates used with his students to encourage them to search out truth for themselves through questions and answers. Socrates himself would become a leading character in all of Plato's books except one, his last, entitled *Laws*. Other philosophers also wrote their books in dialogue form, with Socrates playing a principle role. In the early twenty-first century many teachers still use the Socratic method of questions and answers in the classroom.

At one point Plato lived in Syracuse on the island of Sicily, where he became a tutor to Dion (409–354 BCE), the brother-in-law of the island's

king, Dionysius I (c. 430–c. 367 BCE). Legend holds that at some point Plato offended Dion, who then made arrangements to have Plato sold into slavery. Most historians regard this story as doubtful, for Plato and Dion had very similar personalities and became good friends.

The Academy

In 387 BCE, at age forty, Plato ended his travels and returned to Athens. Just outside the city he founded a school called the Academy. This school was named after the sacred site on which it was located. The site, in turn, was named after a legendary Greek hero, Academus (sometimes spelled Hecademus). More than two thousand years later the word “academy” continues to be used in the name of some schools, and it became the source of the word “academic,” the name given to those who studied at the site. Plato delivered lectures, and his students studied philosophy, mathematics, astronomy (the study of the stars and planets), political theory, and science, all with to the goal of creating a class of philosopher-kings to rule the state. During this period Plato wrote a number of important books, including *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*, *Menexenus*, *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, and much of his most important and widely read work, *The Republic*. The Academy, in effect the first university in Europe, operated for nearly a thousand years until it was shut down by the Roman emperor Justinian in 529 CE.

Later life

When he was in his sixties, Plato’s quiet life at the Academy was interrupted. In Sicily, Dionysius I died and his teenage son, Dionysius II (c. 384–344 BCE), became king. At this point Dion urged the young king to invite Plato to Sicily, where he could help the ruler become a philosopher-king as modeled in *The Republic*. Because he had become disappointed with Athenian politics and was disgusted with the city’s rulers, Plato had written in this work that politics could be saved only if “either true and genuine philosophers attain political power or the rulers of states by some dispensation [indulgence] of providence [preparation] become genuine philosophers.” Despite being busy with teaching and the administration of the Academy, Plato agreed and made the trip. After he arrived, however, Dionysius II, who saw Dion as a rival, ordered Dion into exile for treason. Exile is the enforced removal from one’s native country. Plato, because of his association with Dion, was held in Sicily under house arrest, although officially he was a “guest” of the king.

Plato was eventually released and returned to Athens, where he and Dion were reunited and remained from 365 to 361 BCE. During this time Plato refused an invitation from Dionysius II to return to Syracuse, in Sicily. A year later Dionysius sent a ship with one of Plato's close friends, Archdemus, on board. Archdemus urged Plato to accept the king's invitation. Dion agreed with the plan, so once more Plato departed for Syracuse. His goal was to resolve the rivalry between Dion and Dionysius. Again, he was held there effectively against his will and was released only after his friends spoke on his behalf with the king. Dion, by this time, had lost patience with Dionysius. He assembled an army of mercenary soldiers, or soldiers for hire, and invaded Sicily. He gained control of the island in 357 BCE, but was killed three years later.

Plato remained at the Academy for another thirteen years, until he died quietly in his sleep in 348 (or 347) BCE. During this period he wrote the last of his books, including *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and, uncompleted at the time of his death, *Laws*. Plato's most famous student, Aristotle, entered the Academy during these later years. Diogenes claimed that Plato was buried at the Academy, but archaeologists (people who study the remains of human civilizations) have not been able to discover his grave site.

The Republic

While many students of philosophy admire Plato's dialogues, especially his later works, *The Republic* remains the most well known. It is difficult to date Plato's works, but he probably wrote the first of the ten books, or sections, of *The Republic* some time between the death of Socrates and his first trip to Sicily. He then wrote the remaining nine books between 380 and 360 BCE.

The Republic explores such topics as justice, the ideal city, the nature of heroism, poetry, money and private property, the wisdom and methods of philosophers, war, tyranny (absolute rule), and happiness. Book VII of the work is generally the most read. This book contains the "Allegory of the Cave." An allegory is a representation of abstract ideas by characters, figures, or events in story form. In this allegory, Plato described his theory of "Forms," which says that the world humans know through their senses is only an imitation of a pure, unchanging world of ideal Forms. As a philosopher might put it, a chair that can be seen and touched is only an imperfect imitation of an ideal Form, "chairness," that cannot be

duplicated on Earth. A better example might be the idea of a straight line. Plato would say that ideally, there is such a thing as a line that is perfectly, absolutely straight. In the physical world, however, it is impossible to achieve this ideal; every line, no matter how precisely drawn, will deviate from an ideal of “straightness.” The same holds true for any worldly phenomenon. There is an absolute “honesty,” for example, that humans can never achieve. These absolutes are called Forms.

In the “Allegory of the Cave,” Plato writes that people are like men who have been imprisoned in a cave since childhood. They cannot see out of the cave. Behind them is a fire, and between the fire and the men is a walkway, where objects can be carried. The fire casts a shadow of the objects on the wall of the cave that the men face. Plato’s conclusion is that men lacking education would come to believe that the shadows they see are the real thing. They would believe that any voices they hear behind them are sounds made by the objects going past. Plato claimed a man allowed to leave the cave would be similar to a man who has received education and enlightenment about the real nature of the world.

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Rābiʿah al-Adawiyah

BORN: c. 713 • Basra, Iraq

DIED: c. 801 • Basra, Iraq

Iraqi religious leader; poet; mystic

“If I adore You out of fear of Hell, burn me in Hell! / If I adore You out of desire for Paradise, / Lock me out of Paradise. / But if I adore You for Yourself alone, / Do not deny to me Your eternal beauty.”

Rābiʿah al-Adawiyah was an eighth-century Muslim mystic, or a person concerned with religious mysteries. She is considered a saint of Islam, a virtuous and holy woman who was also able to perform miracles. Rābiʿah, a founding member of the branch of Islam called Sufism, established the principle of mystical love, or the pure love of Allah, as a path to knowing Allah. She rejected the notion that punishment or heavenly reward motivated religious devotion. Rābiʿah was also one of the most prominent early Sufi poets, leaving behind many verses and prayers that became part of the literature and oral tradition of Islam.

A Life of poverty

Rābiʿah was born about in 713 CE to the Al-Atik tribe of Qays clan and died, by most accounts, in 801. Her name means “fourth daughter” in Arabic. Other variations of her name include Rābiʿah al-Qaysiyya and Rābiʿah al Basri (Rābiʿah of Basra), after her hometown.

Little was written about Rābiʿah during her lifetime. Much of the legend in existence comes from the thirteenth century and the writings of Sufi mystic and poet Farid al-Din Attar. In his *Tadbkirat al-Awliya* or *Biographies of the Saints*, he related the words of Rābiʿah, who left no written documents herself. Attar says that Rābiʿah was “on fire with

love and longing” and that she was considered “an unquestioned authority to her contemporaries.”

Most sources note that Rābiʿah was born into a poor household. Indeed, the family was so poor that on the night of Rābiʿah’s birth, her father was sent out to beg for oil for the lamps. He had made a promise, however, to ask for assistance from no one but Allah and came back without any oil. That night, the Prophet **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry) came to Rābiʿah’s father in his sleep and told him not to worry, for his newborn daughter was destined to be a great Muslim saint. The prophet also told him that the local emir (high official) had failed to pray as a good Muslim should and that Rābiʿah’s father should demand money from the emir as punishment. The money was supposedly paid, but it seems that this was the last bit of good luck the family had. Soon after, Rābiʿah’s parents both died, famine struck Basra, her three older sisters moved away, and Rābiʿah was left on her own.

Some time later Rābiʿah was sold into slavery as a house servant, although accounts vary as to how this occurred. Some sources claim she was traveling in a caravan when it was attacked by robbers and taken prisoner. Most others report that she was walking down the streets of Basra one day and was kidnapped. After Rābiʿah finished her daily chores, she would turn to prayers and meditation on Allah. Her religious calling was confirmed one day when she fell in the street and dislocated her wrist. She was trying to avoid allowing a stranger to see her without her veil, which was forbidden for pure Muslim women. Praying to Allah at that moment, she was answered with a voice that said on the day of reckoning she would be among the select to sit near Allah in heaven.

After this experience Rābiʿah became increasingly religious. She practiced asceticism, or self-denial, living in a very simple manner as a means of gaining higher spiritual powers. Some ascetics wore clothing that scratched their bodies in order to remind them of their duty to God. Some also fasted or ate very little. Rābiʿah, according to legend, fasted during the day while working and then prayed much of the night. On one such night, her master happened upon her in the midst of prayer. He saw her bathed in a golden light called the *sakina*, something like a halo that marks a Christian saint. The next day he gave Rābiʿah her freedom, and she left to meditate in the desert.

Life of meditation

Rābi'ah soon established herself in the desert not far from Basra, where she lived a quiet life of prayer. She did not feel it necessary to have a teacher or other holy person direct her in her quest for Allah. Rather, she went directly to Allah for such teachings and inspiration. Rābi'ah found no comfort in organized religion with its officials and rituals. She once said of the Muslim House of God, the famed Ka'aba, in Mecca, that she had no use for a house. It was the master of the house who interested her.

This belief in a direct knowledge of Allah placed her in the early ranks of mystical Sufis. From the time of the founding of the Islamic religion, there were believers who wanted a deeper experience than that provided by the simple adherence to the five pillars of Islam: professing faith, saying prayers five times daily, giving support to the poor, fasting during Ramadan, and making pilgrimage to Mecca. These people, like Rābi'ah, wanted direct communication with Allah. They attempted to establish it through continual prayer, reading of the Qur'an, and focusing on Allah. They fasted, did not engage in sex, and repented for their sins.

What makes a Sufi

The term *Sufi* most likely comes from the Arabic word for the coarse wool many of these ascetics used for their robes. It was first seen in the literature of Islam during the eighth century, during Rābi'ah's lifetime. As Sufism evolved, two main concepts came to dominate that branch of Islam: *tawakkul*, or a total reliance on God, and *dhikr*, a continual remembrance of, or focusing on, Allah. Sufism combined elements of Christianity and Hinduism with its own distinctive Islamic concepts.

Early Sufism had a harsh, gloomy tone. Rābi'ah, however, brought joy to the obedience to and love of Allah. Rābi'ah looked to Allah not only as a master but also as a friend and companion. She was the first Sufi to preach that love and only love was the key to the mystic path. She also scorned the reward and punishment system of heaven and hell. One of her poems, translated by Charles Upton and published in *Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Rābi'ah*, states, "I love God: I have no time left / In which to hate the devil."

Rābi'ah was also famous for a legend in which she was reportedly seen carrying a flaming torch in one hand and a bucket of water in the

Hasan al-Basri

Rābīʿah was a resident of the city of Basra, located in the far southeast of modern-day Iraq, near the Persian Gulf. Founded in 636, the city was an important military and trading site. Also called Bassorah, the city was mentioned in *Thousand and One Nights* as the place where Sinbad the Sailor began his voyages. The city was called the “Venice of the Middle East,” because of the series of canals that once flowed through the city at high tide. Basra was also a center for the cultivation of dates and date palm trees.

During Rābīʿah’s lifetime, Basra was only about a century old, but was already famous in Islam as a home to many well-known Sufis. One of the most famous of these was Hasan al-Basri (642–728). Hasan was born one year after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and moved to Basra when it was still a primitive military encampment. As a young man this famous mystic scholar served as a soldier of Islam from 670 to 673 and participated in the conquest of eastern Iran.

Upon his return to Basra, Hasan quickly became a well-respected religious figure, preaching the importance of a permanent state of anxiety in the true believer. He claimed that such anxiousness was caused not by the certain knowledge of death, but by an uncertainty about what awaited a person after death. He also preached religious self-examination, which

he said led to an avoidance of doing evil and an emphasis on doing good. Most importantly, Hasan believed that humans were responsible for their own actions and could not, therefore, blame such actions on the will of Allah.

Hasan appeared in many of the legends dealing with Rābīʿah. Her belief in the importance of love was the opposite of Hasan’s emphasis on fear and hope as twin motivators for the faithful Muslim. According to one legend, Hasan asks Rābīʿah to marry him. When he is unable to answer a series of questions she puts to him, she declines the offer. Another legend tells of how Hasan, seeing Rābīʿah near a lake, decides to display his miraculous powers. He throws a prayer rug onto the water and invites her to pray with him on it. Unimpressed, she responds, as quoted by Farid al-Din Attar, “Hasan, when you are showing off your spiritual goods in the worldly market, it should be things which your fellow men cannot display.” Then she throws her prayer rug into the air and flies up to sit upon it, inviting him to join her. The old man simply looks at her sadly. She feels badly for him then, and says, “Hasan, what you did fishes can do, and what I did flies can do. But the real business is outside these tricks. One must apply oneself to the real business.” There is little chance these tales are true, however, as Rābīʿah was only eleven at the time of the death of the older Sufi master and had not yet become an ascetic.

other. She explained in a poem published in *Doorkeeper of the Heart*: “With these things I am going to set fire to heaven / And put out the flames of hell / So that voyagers to God can rip the veils / And see the real goal.” Rābīʿah meant that a person should not worship Allah out of fear of hell or in hopes of heaven. One should worship because one loved Allah. The emotions of fear and hope were like veils that kept the true vision of Allah hidden.

Rābi'ah's teaching

Such wisdom won Rābi'ah followers, though she never developed a system of teaching. Later thinkers, however, found a logical organization in Rābi'ah's way of seeking Allah. This path began with *tawba*, or repentance, asking forgiveness of one's sins and turning from wrong actions to right ones. However, such repentance deals only with individual actions: each sin is repented after being committed. Instead, Rābi'ah focused on a more general, divine *tawba*, seeing repentance as a gift from God, whom she called the Healer of Souls. "If I seek repentance myself," Rābi'ah taught, "I shall have need of repentance again."

In order to achieve real "tawba," two qualities were needed: *sabr*, or patience, and *shukr*, or gratitude. Patience, in turn, required an end to complaint and desire. Rābi'ah's prayers were free of desires and expressed a simple, grateful acceptance of whatever happened in life.

Rābi'ah put little emphasis on *raja'*, or hope, and *khawf*, fear, as motivating factors on the path to spiritual enlightenment. Instead she focused on *mahabba*, or love, the ascetic principle of *faqr*, or poverty, and *zuhd*, the giving up of anything that distracted one from the path to Allah. She believed that all of this led to *tawhid*, or the joining of the personal self with Allah.

Though Rābi'ah maintained a solitary existence throughout her life, she did have conversations with some of the other Muslim thinkers of the day and advised people who came to visit her. As an old woman, she possessed only a cracked jug, a mat made from stiff plants, and a brick that served as her pillow. She slept little at night, instead praying and meditating, and became angry with herself if she fell asleep for a short time and thus lost precious minutes or hours of devotion to Allah. In one tale, Rābi'ah refused to go out and admire nature on a fine spring day, saying that she would rather contemplate the beauty of Allah in the darkness of her dwelling. She never married, though it was reported she had many proposals.

The miraculous

Despite her disregard for the rituals of Islam, Rābi'ah went on at least one pilgrimage to Mecca (now in Saudi Arabia) in order to visit the House of God, the Ka'aba, the most sacred place in Islam. It also lies in the direction toward which Muslims face to pray each day.

According to legend, while Rābiʿah was on her way to Mecca and traveling in the company of other pilgrims, her donkey died and she was left without transportation. She told the others to continue on their way, refusing their offers of help. She said she would rely solely on Allah for assistance. One version of this tale claimed the donkey came back to life after Rābiʿah prayed for a week. Another stated that the Kaʿaba actually came to her. She was unimpressed, however, saying that she wanted the master of the house and not simply the house. Though reportedly capable of performing miracles, Rābiʿah distrusted them and believed them to be the devil's temptations.

Toward the end of her long life, Rābiʿah became recognized as a saint. Islam, like many religions, has a high opinion of such holy people. They are called *awliya*, which literally means "Friends of Allah." Unlike the Catholic Church, Islam has no official process for conferring sainthood, but there are certain beliefs as to which conditions lead to sainthood. To be considered, a person must have a strong faith, follow the traditions laid out by the Prophet Muhammad, possess an excellent moral character, display an ability to perform certain miracles or marvels, and, finally, be accepted by other Muslims as a saint.

When she died in 801, Rābiʿah passed into legend. Many stories have been told of her great deeds and the thousand times each day she knelt to pray. Movies have been made of her life. Her name is still used by followers of Islam to praise an exceptionally religious woman.

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Ramanuja

BORN: c. 1017 • Sri Perumbudur, Tamil Nadu, India

DIED: 1137 • Sri Rangam, Tamil Nadu, India

Indian theologian; writer

“We uphold unity because Brahman [Brahma] alone exists with all other entities . . .”

Sri Ramanujacharya is the name by which one of the great Hindu teachers of medieval India is known. He was born as Ilaya Perumal around 1017. At some point he changed his name to Ramanuja. After he became one of the most admired teachers of the era, the word *acharya* was added to his name. This word means “teacher” or “guru.” It was added as a term of respect to the names of only a handful of India’s most prominent and respected teachers and theologians (those who study religion) during this period. The parts of Ramanujacharya’s name can also be written separately, as Ramanuja Acharya. *Sri*, which means “beauty” or “fortune” in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit, is also a title of respect.

Early life

Ramanuja was born into a *Brahmin* family in the town of Sri Perumbudur, India. Brahmins, mostly priests, teachers, and intellectuals, are the highest caste, or hereditary social class, in Indian society. Both Ramanuja’s father, Asuri Kesava, and his mother, Kantimati, were descendants of aristocratic families.

At the age of sixteen Ramanuja married Rakshakambal. Soon after the wedding, Asuri Kesava died, leaving his son in charge of the

household. Ramanuja decided to move the family to the city of Kanchi, which was regarded as a holy city and was well known for its many temples and scholars.

Education

In Kanchi the young Ramanuja studied under the famed guru Yadava Prakash. A guru is a teacher and guide in spiritual matters. Yadava was a supporter of the doctrines, or principles, of an earlier famous acharya, Sankara (also spelled Sankaracharya; c. 788–c. 820). Ramanuja soon became one of Yadava's best pupils. In time, however, he began to reject some of the central doctrines taught by his master. Ramanuja then set up his own school in his home and attracted a number of followers.

Yadava grew angry with his pupil and began to see Ramanuja as a threat to his beliefs and to the central teachings of Hinduism. His anger and jealousy grew until he conspired with a group of his younger and most faithful students to kill Ramanuja. He planned a pilgrimage to the sacred Ganges river and invited Ramanuja to join him and his pupils. Ramanuja agreed, but he brought along his cousin, Govinda. After the party arrived at the site, Yadava's students took Govinda aside and told him of their plan to eliminate Ramanuja. Shocked, Govinda informed his cousin of the plan and urged him to flee. Govinda returned to the group and claimed that while he and his cousin were in the forest, they had been attacked by a tiger. The tiger, he said, had dragged Ramanuja away. Yadava and his fellow conspirators were relieved that the tiger had killed Ramanuja for them.

After Govinda's deception Ramanuja made his way back to Kanchi. He later claimed that along the way he fell into a deep sleep, had a vision of God, and awoke on the outskirts of Kanchi without knowing how he had arrived. He then resumed his life in Kanchi. Several months later Yadava and his students returned from their pilgrimage and were astonished to find Ramanuja there, conducting his school as he had before. They gave up their plans to kill him.

Ramanuja, the teacher

Ramanuja continued to teach, and his fame soon spread. At one point he was approached by a saint named Yamunacharya from the town of Sri Rangam, who begged for money. The two engaged in lengthy discussion, and Ramanuja quickly recognized that Yamunacharya's religious

Sankara

Ramanuja was one of a succession of three major *acharyas*, or teachers, in medieval India. The first of these was Sankara, or Sankaracharya, while the third was Madhva, or Madhvacharya (c. 1199–c. 1276). Sankara was born around 788 and died around 820. When he was born Hinduism was at a crossroads. The religion was breaking apart into a large number of sects (divisions) and cults (religious offshoots), many of which were blending magic, superstition, and mysticism into their belief systems. They placed great emphasis on rituals and animal sacrifices. Sankara almost single-handedly reformed Hinduism and restored some of its ancient teachings and intellectual foundations. In the twenty-first century the version of Hinduism promoted by Sankara is often referred to as “intellectual Hinduism.”

Sankara was born to a poor Brahmin couple in southern India. After studying under the guru Govinda Bhagavatpada, he became an ascetic, meaning he gave up all worldly comforts in pursuit of spiritual knowledge. He possessed great skill as a speaker, and he put this skill to use in winning scholars over in debates. He was able to persuade his listeners to set aside their rituals

and cultish practices and place their faith in the study of the ancient Hindu scriptures, especially the Vedas, the most sacred Hindu texts. At the time, the Vedas were written in an ancient language and were not very accessible to ordinary Hindus. Sankara changed that, reinterpreting and representing the teachings of the Vedas in a way that the average person could understand.

He conducted missionary work throughout the region of India, which at the time consisted of many kingdoms. During his travels Sankara established four monasteries in the four corners of the Indian subcontinent: in Kashmir to the north, in Dwaraka to the west, in Puri to the east, and in Sringeri to the south. All of these monasteries remained in operation into the twenty-first century, and over the centuries many pilgrims have visited them. The leaders of each of these monasteries are called *Shankaracharyas*, and because of their influence, they hold a good deal of political power in India. To distinguish themselves from the original Sankara, they refer to him, their first teacher, as either *Adi Sankaracharya* or as *Jagadguru*, meaning “universal teacher.”

views were compatible with his own. He asked to be accepted as Yamunacharya’s disciple, or person who assists in spreading the teachings of another. Yamunacharya agreed, then left to return to Sri Rangam, the site of a temple to the Hindu god Vishnu.

A messenger arrived in Kanchi with news that Yamunacharya was ill and near death. Ramanuja immediately set out for Sri Rangam, but he failed to arrive before the guru died. Legend holds that after Ramanuja arrived at the temple where Yamunacharya’s body lay, a miracle took place. Reportedly the guru’s left hand was in the Hindu position for peace, with three fingers extended and the tips of the thumb and last finger joined. His right hand, however, was clenched in a fist. Yamunacharya’s followers were baffled by the fist. Looking at the hands, Ramanuja

concluded that the guru had three wishes he wanted Ramanuja to fulfill. Ramanuja deduced the first wish, and the first finger of the dead guru's right hand extended. The guru then extended his second and third fingers as Ramanuja guessed the other two wishes. All those in attendance were amazed and accepted Ramanuja as their teacher. Yamunacharya's wishes were vows that he wanted Ramanuja to carry out for him.

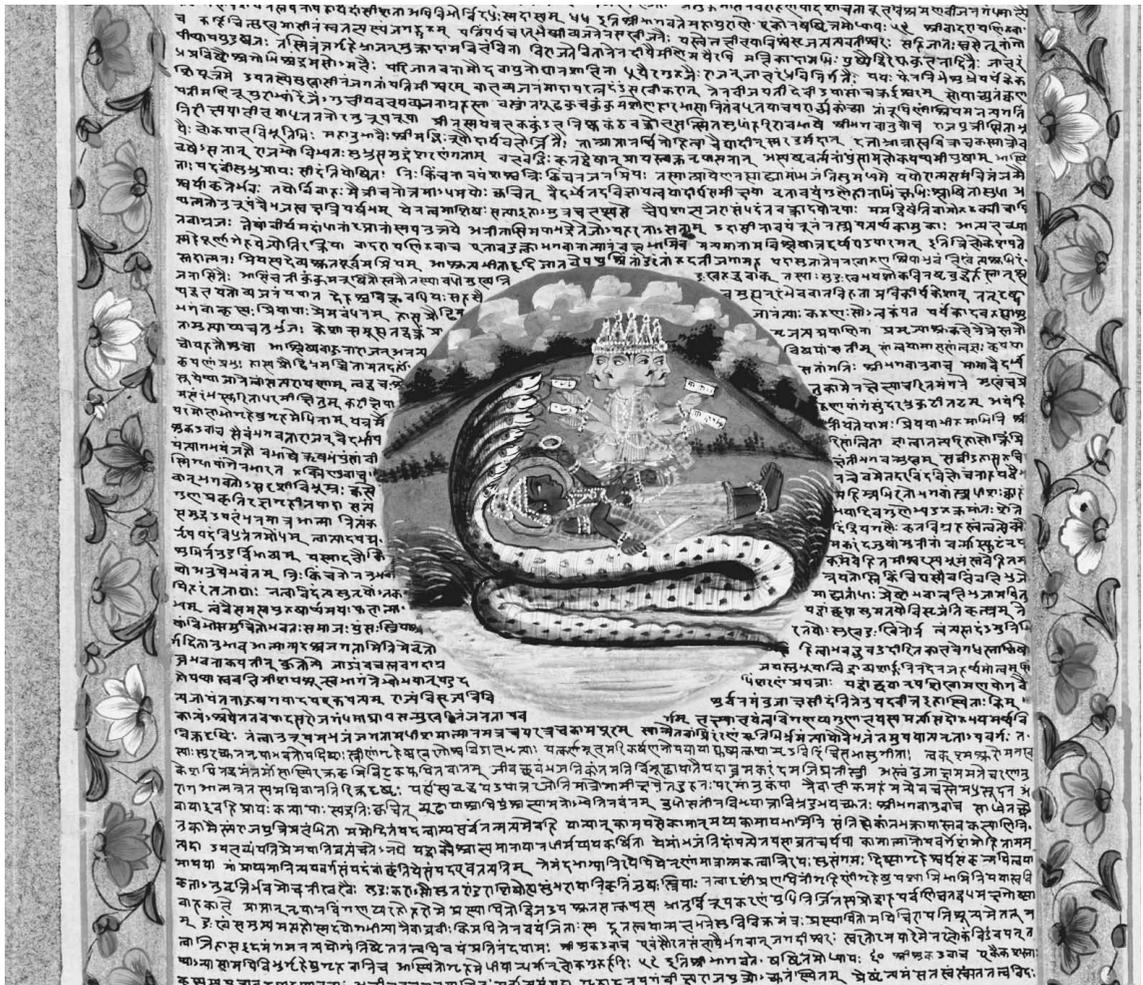
Ramanuja decided to remain in Sri Rangam, where he spent the remainder of his life. By this time his teachings had become so popular that even Yadava and his students had converted to Ramanuja's way of thinking. Ramanuja became one of the most respected teachers in India.

Final years

Until his arrival in Sri Rangam, Ramanuja was a "householder," the term Hindus used to refer to people who practiced Hinduism but were not ascetics. Ascetics are people who have given up their worldly goods and devote themselves completely to spiritual pursuits. After relocating, he led a life of renunciation, giving up worldly comforts and living as an ascetic. Although he attracted followers and disciples, he also made enemies. Some followers of the earlier views of Sankara appealed to the king of Kanchi to silence Ramanuja. The king agreed and commanded Ramanuja to come to Kanchi to take part in a theological debate with him. The king's goal was to convert Ramanuja, by persuasion if possible and by force if necessary.

One of Ramanuja's disciples, Kuresh, distrusted the king. He persuaded Ramanuja to allow him to go to Kanchi in his place, in disguise. At Kanchi the king at first treated Kuresh with respect, believing that he was Ramanuja. Yet when Kuresh refused to change his religious views, the king had him imprisoned and blinded. Later, with the help of some local people, Kuresh was able to gain his release from prison and return to Sri Rangam. There, according to legend, another miracle occurred. Ramanuja prayed to God on behalf of Kuresh, who had been willing to sacrifice his sight, and even his life, for his guru. Ramanuja prayed for his disciple's sight to be restored, and at that moment a wind blew across Kuresh's face and his sight indeed returned.

Ramanuja reportedly lived a very long life, dying in 1137 at the age of 120. According to tradition, he announced his desire to leave the world to his followers, who were very upset. Over the next three days he issued instructions to those followers, and on the third day, with his head lying in the lap of his cousin, Govinda, he died.



This page from the Bhagavad Purana, a part of the Vedas, depicts the gods Vishnu, Brahma, and Sesha Nag. Ramanuja wrote many essays on Hindu religious practices based on the Vedas, often challenging core beliefs. © ARCHIVO ICONOGRAFICO, S.A./CORBIS.

Ramanuja's teachings

Ramanuja produced a number of treatises, or essays, on Hindu theology. Many of these treatises were on Hindu sacred texts, including the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedas, Hinduism's chief sacred scripture. Others were manuals for his followers. In these treatises and in his teachings Ramanuja challenged many of the core beliefs of Hinduism as it was practiced at the time. Such challenges were why such people as Yadava opposed him so vigorously.

During the twelfth century Hindu theologians debated the nature of God and the relationship between God and both the human soul and physical matter. Two major positions were taken. One was the position that had been outlined by Sankara in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Sankara looked at the state of Hindu practice and belief and opposed what he saw as meaningless ritual and animal sacrifice. Based on his interpretation of the Vedas, he adopted a monist position about the nature of God. The monist view, called Advaita Vedanta, said that there was a fundamental oneness to everything in creation, including God.

According to the monist view, all of creation is in truth just one entity. The supreme God does not have any form or characteristics and indeed does not even have a name. Thus, monists deem it impossible to be in any meaningful way “devoted” to God, because God is both nowhere and everywhere, and humans are incapable of understanding God’s nature. Further, everything in creation is alike (which to Sankara made animal sacrifice unacceptable). That is, the human belief of individuality in creation is an illusion. This view was preached by Sankara and was the most widely accepted among Hindus at the time of Ramanuja’s birth. Ramanuja’s rejection of this view, in particular, made his teacher, Yadava, angry.

The other major point of view taken in this era was the dualist position, which would later be taught by another acharya, **Madhva** (c. 1199–c. 1276, see entry), in the thirteenth century. The dualist view (with the prefix *duo-* meaning “two”) sees a complete distinctness, or difference, between God and physical matter. The dualist view also says that the distinctions between forms of physical matter that people can see are real and not illusions. Physical matter came before the existence of God, and then the universe evolved in response to God’s will. Because God was separate from creation, people could come to know His names, His characteristics, and His form. Also, because God was separate from His creation, He could become the object of worship and reverence.

The monist and dualist positions represented the most opposing views that were preached on these matters. Ramanuja’s lifetime fell between those of Sankara and Madhva, so the fact that his own position was a blend of the two different opinions seems appropriate. Modern-day religious scholars refer to his views as a “modified nondualist position,” or, among Hindu scholars, as Visishtadvaita, a compromise between the two opposing positions.

Ramanuja began with the belief that one cannot have knowledge about anything unless that thing has characteristics that make it different from other things. If humans claim to know something about an object, then that implies that the object has characteristics. Ramanuja applied this principle to knowledge of God. If humans are to reach God, they have to somehow know God, as much as possible. To know God implies that God has form and characteristics and is different and separate from the human soul and from physical creation.

He believed that God did have an identity and that people could on some level come to know it. For Ramanuja, the chief characteristics of God were intelligence, truth, and infinity. God was not cursed with the ignorance of humans and other living things. He was never untruthful, and he had unlimited energy. Ramanuja rejected the accepted notion that a *jiva*, a lesser spirit, could somehow be equal to God, as the monist position held. Yet, departing from a strict dualist position, Ramanuja also argued that a *jiva* or any other living thing was a “particle” of God. Its purpose was to serve God and the common whole, just as a hand is part of the body and serves the rest of the body. He concluded that if the purpose of living things was to serve God, then the physical world could not be an illusion.

Ramanuja also believed in “personality,” that is, the idea that all things in creation are different. Thus, each person’s soul would be different. Because each soul is different, each has to have free will. Otherwise, without freedom of will, souls could not be manifestations of God, or indications of God’s existence. In Ramanuja’s view the only way that God and humans could have a relationship that made any sense was if God gave people the freedom to choose. The human soul could not in any meaningful way serve God if it was not free to do so.

Both Ramanuja and his successor, Madhva, were strong supporters of the *bhakti* movement, a loosely organized movement of Hindu sects that emerged in medieval India. The word *bhakti* comes from the Sanskrit word *bhaj*, which means something like “to revere or adore.” The word *bhakti*, therefore, is usually translated into English as “devotion.” The meaning the word suggests is much deeper, however, signifying a total, intense devotion to God. It refers to both an attachment to God and a way of reaching God. It was through *bhakti* that Hindu Indians overcame divisions of birth, caste, gender, and race to become a united people.

The original *bhakti* movement had a significant influence on Indian religion and society. Over the centuries, many figures preached the

principle that bhakti was the only way to achieve salvation, which led to several large-scale bhakti movements. One of these figures was Ramanuja. In practicing complete devotion to God, he and his Hindu followers put aside the rituals and animal sacrifices of the ancient traditions, which placed emphasis on the outward form of religion. The bhakti movements instead relied on an intense worship of a separate, identifiable God.

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Mother Maria Skobtsova

BORN: December 21, 1891 • Riga, Latvia

DIED: March 30, 1945 • Ravensbrück, Germany

Latvian nun; poet

“Mother Maria is a saint of our day and for our day; a woman of flesh and blood possessed by the love of God, who stood face to face with the problems of this century.”

— Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, as quoted in “Mother Maria Skobtsova—A Saint of Our Day.”

Mother Maria Skobtsova, a saint of the Eastern Orthodox Church, a branch of Christianity, is honored for her single-minded devotion to the poor and oppressed in France in the years before and during World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan). Near the end of the war she died in a Nazi concentration camp, possibly after offering her life in exchange for that of a Jewish prisoner. Throughout her life of service as an Orthodox nun her primary goal was to embody the Christian ideal of love for fellow human beings.

Birth and early life

Mother Maria Skobtsova was born Elizaveta Pilenko in Riga, the capital city of Latvia, on December 21, 1891. At that time Latvia was part of the Russian empire, and Pilenko grew up in Anapa, a town in southern Russia on the shore of the Black Sea. Her family was relatively wealthy and belonged to society’s upper class. Her father directed a botanical

garden and school, and for a time he served as the mayor of Anapa. Her mother was a descendant of the last governor of the Bastille prison in Paris, which fell at the start of the French Revolution (1789–99; a rebellion resulting in the overthrow of the monarchy and the rise of a democratic government). The home Pilenko's parents provided was a devout Eastern Orthodox one. Eastern Orthodox Christianity believes in the complete authority of the Bible, the Christian holy text, and that Jesus's teachings were preserved in them without error. After her father's death in 1906, her mother took the family to St. Petersburg, the political and cultural center of Russia at the time. The untimely death of Pilenko's father affected her deeply, and for a while she questioned her belief in God.

The early twentieth century was a time of great political unrest in Russia. During her years in St. Petersburg, Pilenko was drawn into radical and revolutionary circles. She was attracted to goals such as the overthrow of the repressive monarchy and the desire to help lift the crushing poverty of many Russians. Even as a teenager she longed to do something great with her life, in the service of others. In 1910 she married a revolutionary poet named Dimitri Kuzmin-Karaviev. Pilenko soon gave birth to a daughter, Gaiana, but the marriage proved short-lived and the couple divorced in 1913.

During this period Pilenko began to rethink her uncertainty about God and was drawn back to Christianity. She wrote a great deal of religious poetry, publishing a collection entitled *Scythian Shards* in 1912. She even applied for admission to study religion at the Theological Academy of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. The application of a woman at that time was considered shocking, but she was nevertheless accepted.

Revolution and flight

In the mid-1910s Pilenko was growing impatient with the revolutionaries with whom she associated. In her view, they only talked about their political ideals, never actually acting on them, and these ideals had little to do with the lives of ordinary Russians. Then, in 1917, Russia's political unrest erupted into revolution and the overthrow and eventual murder of the *tsar*, the monarch of Russia, Nicholas II (1868–1918). The Russian Revolution led to the rise to power of the Bolsheviks, the extremist wing of Russia's Social Democratic Party, which later evolved into the Communist Party. Pilenko initially agreed with the party's radical views, such as the revolutionary belief that the *tsar* should be replaced by a more democratic government that represented the interests of common

people which had led to the revolution. During the civil war that followed from 1918 to 1920, however, she came to see the revolution as an event that did more harm than good. The new political leadership seemed just as cruel as the old one. As she traveled back and forth between Anapa and St. Petersburg, she witnessed all around her signs that Russia had descended into terror, mass murder, destruction, hunger, homelessness, and criminal rule.

Pilenko was in Anapa in 1918 when the town was overtaken by the White Army, the counter-revolutionary force that opposed the Bolsheviks. When the mayor of the town fled, Pilenko took his place, but the White Army believed that she was a Bolshevik and arrested her and put her on trial for treason. She narrowly escaped a guilty verdict and execution because the judge, Daniel Skobtsov, had formerly been one of her teachers. She was cleared of the charges. That year she and Skobtsov were married and she became Elizaveta Skobtsova. (In Russian, *Skobtsov* is the masculine form of the name while *Skobtsova* is the feminine.)

It soon became clear that the Bolsheviks were winning Russia's civil war. Skobtsova and her family, including her mother, decided to flee the country. Their first destination was the nearby country of Georgia, where Skobtsova gave birth to a son, Yuri. The family then went to Yugoslavia, where a daughter, Anastasia, was born. Finally, the family landed in Paris, France, where Daniel Skobtsov took a job as a schoolteacher. After having witnessed immense suffering in Russia, Skobtsova had grown more deeply religious, and she became actively involved with the spiritual and social work of the Russian Student Christian Movement. Before long she was dedicating herself to theological (religious) studies and to helping the poor in Paris, especially refugees from Russia and other countries.

In the mid-1920s the Skobtsov family fell apart. Tragedy struck in 1926 when Anastasia died of the flu. Soon after, Gaiana left to attend school in Belgium. Then Skobtsova and her husband separated, and Yuri went to live with his father in Paris. By this time Skobtsova was



People cross a snow-covered bridge near the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St. Petersburg, Russia, where Maria Skobtsova studied theology in the 1910s. © STEVE RAYMER/CORBIS.

devoting so much of her energy to helping the poor that the Orthodox bishop in Paris urged her to become a nun. She agreed, but only on the condition that she would not be required to live in a convent. The bishop agreed, and in 1932, after she was granted a divorce from Skobtsov, she took her vows as a nun. At this time she took the name Maria.

Service to the poor and oppressed

Throughout the 1930s Mother Maria continued her intense dedication to the welfare of the poor. As cited by Jim Forest on the *Traditional Catholic Reflections and Reports* Web site, she wrote that she wanted an “authentic and purified life” among “paupers and tramps.” She saw the world as her convent and offered help and spiritual comfort to anyone who approached her. The door of her small room in central Paris was open to all those who needed help or simply wanted to talk, especially about religion. She wrote, as quoted by Forest, “If someone turns with his spiritual world toward the spiritual world of another person, he encounters an awesome and inspiring mystery. . . . He comes into contact with the true image of God in man.” Indeed, perhaps in part because of the death of her daughter, she came to see herself as a universal mother figure, providing maternal comfort and aid to any who needed it. Her motto, according to Forest, was, “Each person is the very icon [representation] of God incarnate [in bodily form] in the world.”

With the moral and financial support of the bishop, Mother Maria was able to expand her assistance to the community. She moved into larger quarters in a section of Paris where many Russian immigrants lived. She also rented other buildings, one to house single men, another to help families in need. She soon became a common sight around Paris, approaching street vendors and produce merchants to beg for grocery items, many nearly spoiled, that she could serve to the people in her care. In 1939 she acquired a partner, Father Dimitri Klepinin (1904–1944), who loyally served by her side during the early years of World War II.

The war years

In 1939 Germany, led by the Nazi Party, launched World War II by invading Poland. In 1940 German troops marched into France, seizing Paris on June 14 and the rest of France a week later. The German occupiers largely turned their attention to France’s Russian immigrants. Many were rounded up and arrested, including one thousand on a single day in

Mother Maria Skobtsova



Flowers in honor of the dead lie over an oven at Ravensbrück concentration camp's crematorium. Mother Maria's body was probably disposed of in one of these ovens after she was killed in the camp's gas chambers. © IRA NOWINSKI/CORBIS.

June 1941. A number of these people had become close friends with Mother Maria and had assisted with her charitable work. Also targeted by the Nazis were Paris's Jews, many of whom were also Russian. The Nazis were sending their prisoners to concentration camps, where millions died in gas chambers or from starvation and disease. Concentration camps were locations where Germany sent Jews and other people it did not like to be contained and, eventually, put to death. Jews in Paris began showing up at Mother Maria's door, asking for certificates showing that they were Christians, with the hope that having such certificates would protect them from the Nazis. Mother Maria and Father Klepinin gladly agreed to help.

In the months that followed, conditions for Jews in Paris became steadily worse. By 1942 they were denied access to most public places. In July of that year nearly thirteen thousand were arrested, and more than one-half of them were taken to a Paris sports stadium, where they were held captive under horrible conditions. As a nun Mother Maria was still allowed some freedom of movement, so she was able to gain access to the stadium. She brought what food she could, comforted many of the prisoners, and even managed to smuggle some children out by hiding them in garbage cans. Meanwhile, she and Father Klepinin created escape routes for Jews, providing them with fake documents, food, and any other help they could.

By this time Yuri was helping his mother in her activities. On February 8, 1943, the Nazis arrested him after discovering a letter proving his involvement. The following day Father Klepinin was arrested. Then, on February 10, Mother Maria was arrested and taken to a prison in the town of Compiègne. There she met with Yuri one last time before he and Father Klepinin were taken away to the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. Later, the two men were transferred to the Mittelbau-Dora camp, where they died in early 1944.

Life in the concentration camp

Mother Maria was taken to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, located north of Berlin, Germany. As prisoner number 19,263, she managed to survive for nearly two years, toughened by the poverty she had long endured. During her time at Ravensbrück she served as a counselor and mother figure to other prisoners. She often gave away portions of her tiny food rations so that others could cling to life. As cited by Forest, one of people imprisoned with Mother Maria later recalled:

She exercised an enormous influence on us all. No matter what our nationality, age, political convictions—this had no significance whatever. Mother Maria was adored by all. . . . She took us under her wing. We were cut off from our families, and somehow she provided us with a family.

The conditions endured by Mother Maria were terrible. Food rations were repeatedly cut. Prisoners were forcibly removed from their lice-infested beds at three o'clock in the morning and made to stand outside for hours in the cold and snow for roll call. Blankets, shoes, and socks were taken away. Medical care was nonexistent. Dozens of prisoners died each day from infectious diseases such as dysentery and typhus. Mother Maria's health began to decline, but she continued to survive with the help of other prisoners, who often had to hold her up as they stood during morning roll calls.

In March 1945 Nazi authorities ordered the camp commander to kill any prisoner who was unable to walk. Each morning the guards separated the prisoners into small groups and selected those marked for death in the gas chambers. Mother Maria continued to survive with help from friends. On some occasions guards would enter the barracks at night to make further selections. Mother Maria's friends frequently hid her in a space above the ceiling so that she would not be selected.

During the spring of 1945 the Russian army was invading Germany from the east. The German army was in retreat, and with American and other forces advancing from the west, the end of the war seemed near. Germany's defeat did not come soon enough for Mother Maria, however, and she died on March 30, 1945. According to some accounts, she was simply one of the prisoners selected for death in the camp's gas chamber that day. According to others, she volunteered to take the place of a Jewish prisoner who had been marked for death.

Canonization

During her lifetime, especially before World War II, Mother Maria was a somewhat controversial figure. Some authorities in the Eastern Orthodox Church were disturbed by her independence and outspokenness. She challenged nationalistic views about religion, meaning a nation's use of religion to encourage patriotism, and she offered aid not only to Christians but also to Jews and others in need. Her refusal to live in a convent and her active involvement with the world of the streets of Paris made some of her critics nervous.

After her death, however, Mother Maria and her life attracted widespread attention and growing respect. Biographies were written, and her many essays and poems were translated into English. In 1982 a Russian film titled *Mother Maria* was released. Orthodox Christians campaigned for her canonization as a saint. (Canonization is the term for the process a person must go through to officially be designated a saint.) On January 16, 2004, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, the church's governing body, canonized her as Saint Mary of Paris. Later that year, her son Yuri, Father Klepinin, and one of her dedicated coworkers were also canonized. July 20 is the feast day honoring their lives.

Mother Maria the Poet

Mother Maria wrote a considerable amount of poetry, virtually all with religious themes. In 1942, while she was still living in Paris, the Nazi authorities ordered all Jews to wear yellow stars identifying them as Jews. In response Mother Maria wrote the following poem, which hints at her deep spiritual convictions about the role of suffering:

• • •

Two triangles, a star,
The shield of King David, our
forefather.
This is election, not offense.
The great path and not an evil.
Once more in a term fulfilled,
Once more roars the trumpet of
the end;
And the fate of a great people
Once more is by the prophet
proclaimed.
Thou art persecuted again, O Israel,
But what can human malice mean to
thee,
who have heard the thunder from
Sinai?

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Malidoma Patrice Somé

BORN: 1956 • Upper Volta

Burkinan teacher; writer

“Spirit expresses itself in a way we cannot map, cannot tell ahead of time, and has its own plan—a plan not known to us.”

In the late twentieth century Malidoma Patrice Somé became well known in the United States and other Western countries as a speaker and author. Through his books and the workshops he leads, he has sought to make Westerners more knowledgeable about the indigenous religions of Africa. The term *indigenous* describes anything (people, art, culture, religion) that has been native to a geographical region over a long historical period.

Somé describes himself as a “man of two worlds.” One of his worlds is the West, where he received a formal education and lives much of the time. The other is West Africa, where he is an elder and shaman, or traditional healer, of the Dagara tribe. Living in both of these worlds, Somé has tried to bridge the gap between them.

The religion practiced by Somé is called shamanism, a term that can refer to any faith featuring an unseen world of spirits and demons that respond only to shamans. Shamanism places emphasis on ancestral spirits that continue to play roles in the affairs of the living, providing guidance and wisdom. The history of shamanism dates back to the earliest eras of human history. In many cultures throughout the world, including that of the Dagara, a principal role of the shaman is to cure the sick. A shaman is able to fulfill this role by obtaining secret knowledge from the spirit world.

Birth and early life

The people of the Dagara tribe live along the borders of three African countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Ivory Coast. Malidoma Somé was

Malidoma Patrice Somé

A shaman from West Africa is dressed in traditional attire and holds a rattle during a ceremony. Malidoma Somé practices the indigenous religion of shamanism, which includes an emphasis on ancestral spirits and a connection to nature. © PAUL ALMASY/CORBIS.



born in Burkina Faso, which was then known as Upper Volta, the name given to the region by French colonists. Somé does not know the exact date of his birth, but government records list it as 1956. His father, Elie, was a farmer and miner. His mother was Colette Dabire.

French colonists, from a primarily Catholic country, did everything they could to convert the people of West Africa to their religion, which is a branch of Christianity. Thus, Somé's father followed the customs not only of his tribe but also of French Catholicism. He gave his son the Christian name Patrice. In the boy's naming ceremony, however, held shortly after his birth, his grandfather gave him the name Malidoma, which means "be friends with the stranger," or "with the enemy." This name became appropriate for the course that Somé's life later took.

Grandfathers among the Dagara are typically storytellers, sharing their knowledge of life and spirit with their communities and especially

with their grandsons. Fathers begin to play important roles in their sons' lives only later. In the Dagara culture ancestors are seen as a link between people and the spirit world. Children are believed to have just come from the spirit world, while grandfathers will soon return to that world. As a result, the Dagara claim a bond is formed when the grandfather and the grandson share what they know about the soul and the spirit. Such was the case with Somé and his grandfather, an elder and spiritual leader of the community. The two enjoyed a close relationship almost to the exclusion of Somé's father.

Somé spent the first four years of his life in his village, living the traditional life of a Dagara. When he was four years old, his grandfather died, and soon thereafter he was taken from his village by French Jesuit priests living in a nearby town. (Jesuits, who belong to an order of Catholic priests called the Society of Jesus, are best known for their extensive education, especially with respect to the principles of Catholicism.) In later life Somé would say that the Jesuits had kidnapped him. He was taken to a French missionary school in Nansi, where he lived for the next fifteen years. He rose every morning at 5:30 and followed a strict schedule of study and prayer until bedtime at 10:30 in the evening. In the school he was forced to adopt the ways of thinking of white society. He recalls learning about the West's "temperamental God," whose anger the students were taught to fear. The West refers to those countries in Europe and the Americas. He claimed that he suffered years of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of priests who were determined that he should become a wholehearted Catholic and eventually a priest.

Return to the village

When he was twenty years old, Somé escaped from the boarding school and returned to his village on foot, traveling a distance of 125 miles (201 kilometers). His homecoming, however, was not without problems. While his mother and an older sister greeted him with tears of joy, the villagers looked upon him with fear and suspicion. They considered him a "white black," meaning that he had become too much like the people from the white culture in which he had lived. They believed that he had contracted the "sickness" of French colonialism. He could no longer speak the Dagara language well and found communication with the villagers difficult.

Cultural Roles in Indigenous African Communities

Members of indigenous African tribes such as the Dagara typically fulfill different roles within their communities. These roles are associated with features of the natural world, and each has its characteristic symbolic color. For example, the color of “fire people” is red. Fire people serve as important links between the people and their ancestors. They act as conduits, or channels, through which the energy of the ancestors passes to the village.

The color of “mineral people” is white. Mineral people are the storytellers who use their vast memories to remember and recite stories about the people and their history. Through these stories, they connect communities with their pasts and with their ancestors.

The color of “nature people” is green. Nature people are those who can read nature and see

order in its apparent chaos. They provide the villagers with a gateway to the spirit world and help people become more conscious of themselves and their spiritual reality. They are also the medicine men who can cure disease.

“Earth people,” whose color is brown, serve the community by channeling the earth’s energy into the village. They are the ones who make people feel comfortable in the community. They empower the villagers and nurture them.

Finally there are “water people,” whose color is blue. Somé’s uncle acted in this role by “carrying water” to his nephew. The water was not actual water, but a kind of spiritual “drink” that helped Somé make peace with his return to village life and helped the villagers overcome their suspicions and fears of him.

For the first few months after his return Somé was visited each day by his “male mother,” his mother’s brother. In Dagara culture the maternal uncle plays the role of “water person,” or peacemaker, and tries to maintain serenity and goodwill in the village. Water persons are also thought of as reconcilers, resolving conflicts and restoring friendships. In Somé’s case, many hoped that his uncle could find a way to fold him back into the tribe. The elders subjected Somé to a number of divinations, which are efforts to interpret omens (signs) and uncover secret knowledge or foretell the future. The elders determined that Somé had not fully returned to the village. They claimed part of his soul was missing, still back at the school and the world of white people. They said that his only hope was to undergo an initiation ritual called a *baor*, which would restore his entire soul to the village.

Initiation

In his 1994 autobiography *Of Water and the Spirit*, Somé details his initiation experience. The purpose of the ritual, typically undergone by boys upon entering manhood, was to allow him to learn once again to

see the natural world through the eyes of the Dagara. The ritual lasts a month and requires the initiate to make a journey alone, away from the village. Somé had to sleep in the jungle and find his own food. Normally this would not be a terribly frightening experience. Most Dagara boys who undergo the ritual have spent their entire lives living in the jungle, so the environment is familiar to them. For Somé, however, the journey was terrifying, as he had spent so long living in an urban area that to him the jungle was a strange and dangerous place. He stated that he almost died during the experience.

During the initiation Somé learned a great deal about his own personal abilities, as well as about the supernatural world of the Dagara. He declared that he saw spirits from the underworld and had visions of his grandfather and that he made contact with the beings that inhabit the natural world. In his autobiography he details his first night at the initiation camp, where a fire ritual gave him insight into the world of his ancestors. In a chapter entitled “Trying to See,” he makes clear the importance of learning to see the world in new ways and describes his initial resistance to the elders’ instructions. He admits he even tried to lie to them to convince them that he was making progress.

Eventually Somé achieved a breakthrough, as detailed in a chapter entitled “In the Arms of the Green Lady.” During his experience, he had a vision of a yila tree, the “Green Lady” of the chapter’s title. By intensely focusing on the tree, he came to see it in a new way, the way of the Dagara, who see little difference between the worlds of reality and imagination. In their view, only by imagining something and intensely focusing thought on it can that thing be truly brought into being. In Somé’s words, “If one can imagine something, then it has at least the potential to exist.” To most people a yila tree is simply a biological, or natural, specimen; to the Dagara, such a tree can become a “Green Lady.” When Somé focused on and truly saw the Green Lady, his vision of the natural world was transformed.

Back to the Western world

After the initiation the village elders decided that Somé should leave the village once again in order to tell the Western world about the world of Africa. Somé was reluctant to go, but he agreed. He first enrolled at the university in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology, literature, and linguistics in 1981, then a master’s degree in literature in 1982. He then went to



A shaman's fly wisk and talismans, similar to the talisman that Somé carries. Somé believes that the talisman is a source of strength and power and that it helped ensure his success both as a student and in his professional life. © ROGER DE LA HARPE; GALLO IMAGES/CORBIS.

the Sorbonne, a world-famous university in Paris, France, where he earned a master's degree in political science in 1983. Finally he attended Brandeis University in Massachusetts in the United States, where he earned yet another master's degree in 1984 and a doctorate in literature in 1990. Somé later wrote that he found school easy because of his initiation ritual. He even claimed that he knew the answers to the professors' questions just by looking at their auras, or the energy fields surrounding them.

The Dagara elders wanted Somé to live in the United States. They believed that in the United States he could be fully immersed in the Western world. In fact, Somé has said that he finds he can be "more African" in the United States than he can in Africa. He explains that because of his extensive education, he has found it difficult to be accepted in Africa, as many Africans think he has turned his back on the customs and beliefs of

his tribal culture. In the United States he claims he feels relatively free to be an educated man who also believes in his ancient African religion.

After completing his doctorate at Brandeis, Somé took a job teaching at the University of Michigan, where he was a professor of literature and French from 1990 to 1993. He also worked as a visiting professor at Stanford University in California during the 1992–93 school year. Afterward he earned a living as a writer, lecturer, and speaker. With his wife, Elisabeth Sobonfu, he gives workshops and conferences in which he explores African spirituality with participants and helps Westerners see the value of indigenous cultures. He also returns to the Dagara people to teach them about the West.

Elder and shaman

In Somé's view, the West suffers from a kind of spiritual sickness. He claims this sickness shows itself in many ways: materialism (desiring to have material objects), consumerism (the buying of such objects), damage to the environment, the unequal distribution of wealth, prejudice against (or mistreatment of) people of color, and, especially, a sharp divide between the physical and spiritual worlds. Somé believes that indigenous religions such as shamanism can return people to a sense of oneness and connection with the world, with nature, and with one another.

As an elder in the Dagara tribe, Somé acts as one of its spiritual leaders as well as a shaman. He points out that in contrast to Western religions, shamanism does not view the supernatural as separate from the material world. He notes, for example, that the Dagara have no word for “supernatural.” The closest word, *yieibongura*, is best translated into English as “the thing that knowledge can't eat.” In other words, the supernatural is that part of human experience that the logical, rational mind cannot destroy or consume. The Dagara and other practitioners of shamanistic religions resist dividing the material and spiritual worlds and instead see them as one. They believe the material world simply gives form to the spiritual world.

Somé always carries with him a talisman, an object believed to give its bearer supernatural powers or protection. He describes this talisman as an oval-shaped pouch that contains stones from the underworld and other secret objects from the wild. He believes that the talisman is a source of strength and power and helped ensure his success both as a student and in his professional life. He also uses the talisman to educate people in the West regarding his religion and culture.

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Mother Teresa

BORN: August 27, 1910 • Üsküb, Kosovo

DIED: September 5, 1997 • Calcutta, India

Kosovar nun



“In these twenty years of work among the people, I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience.”

Mother Teresa was a Catholic missionary nun who became known for her work with the poor. Although she assisted poverty-stricken people throughout the world, she is most closely identified with her work in the crowded slums of Calcutta (modern-day Kolkata), India, which earned her the informal title “Saint of the Gutters.” In 1982, during the siege of Beirut, Lebanon, she negotiated a cease-fire between Israeli and Palestinian forces. This cease-fire allowed her to evacuate mentally handicapped patients from a hospital on the front lines of the battle. During her lifetime she received several major awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize. After her death she was beatified (blessed) by the Catholic Church. Beatification is an early step in the canonization process, after which one becomes recognized as a saint. She is now formally referred to as Blessed Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa.
AP IMAGES.

Early life

Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu on August 27, 1910, in the town of Üsküb, in Kosovo, which at the time was a province in the Turkish Empire. (In modern times the town is called Skopje and is the capital of the Republic of Macedonia.) She was the youngest of three surviving daughters born to Nikollë Bojaxhiu, a successful contractor, and his wife, Dranafilë. Both parents were Albanian. Although most Albanians are Muslims (followers of the Islamic faith) and most of the people of Kosovo Province were Christian and members of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Bojaxhiu family was Roman Catholic.

Agnes's early years were relatively uneventful and her family life happy. She later noted that she felt a strong religious calling at age twelve and wanted to help the poor by becoming a missionary. A missionary is someone who undertakes a religious task. At age eighteen she received permission from the Vatican, the seat of authority of the Roman Catholic Church, to join the Sisters of Loreto, more formally referred to as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Sisters of Loreto, located in Rathfarnham, a residential suburb of Dublin, Ireland, was an order of nuns whose chief mission was the education of girls. When Agnes completed her training, the order sent her to Darjeeling, India. At this time she was a novice, or a person who has received religious education but has not taken her vows to the order. She took her first vows in 1931, when she adopted the name Sister Mary Teresa in honor of Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) and Thérèse de Lisieux (1873–1897), both Catholic saints. In 1937 she took her final vows and became Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa began her career at St. Mary's High School in Calcutta, where she taught catechism (the teachings and principles of the Catholic faith), history, and geography from 1930 to 1944. From 1944 to 1948 she served as principal of the school. The people she worked with at St. Mary's would later recall little about her, stressing that she seemed ordinary, quiet, and humble. During these years she would look out upon the streets and slums of Calcutta and think about her early goal of performing missionary work among the poor. In 1946 she was riding on a train when she experienced a calling from God to serve among the poorest of the poor.

Founded the Missionaries of Charity

In 1948 Mother Teresa petitioned the pope, Pius XII (1876–1958), to live as an independent nun. She resigned her position at the high school and traveled to Patna, India, where she completed a course with the Medical

Mission Sisters. She then returned to Calcutta, where she took up residence with the Little Sisters of the Poor. She established an outdoor school for poor children, and in time she attracted both volunteer help and financial support from church groups and city officials in Calcutta.

Mother Teresa's next step in her mission to help the poor was to petition the Vatican in 1950 for permission to establish a new order of nuns. The Vatican agreed, at first calling the order the Diocesan Congregation of the Calcutta Diocese. (A diocese is a district.) Soon the order took the name Missionaries of Charity. The goal of the Missionaries of Charity, according to Mother Teresa, was to provide care for the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, and those affected by the skin disease leprosy. She sought to assist all those people who were unwanted, unloved, and uncared for by society. She located an abandoned Hindu temple and, with the help of local authorities, converted it into a hospice called the Kalighat Home for the Dying. A hospice is a facility that provides care to the dying. Later she opened three additional institutions: another hospice, called Nirmal Hriday, which means "pure heart"; a hospital for lepers called Shanti Nagar, which means "city of peace"; and an orphanage.

Continued growth

By the 1960s Mother Teresa's order had attracted numerous financial donations and recruits, and maintained a full network of charitable institutions throughout India. The humble and soft-spoken nun had become, in effect, the chief executive officer of a large and growing organization in India, one that was destined to become international in scope. In 1965 Mother Teresa received permission from the pope, then Paul VI (1897–1978), to expand her order of nuns to other nations. The first Missionaries of Charity house outside of India was established in Venezuela. It was followed by houses in Tanzania and Italy. Soon the Missionaries of Charity had houses throughout Africa, Asia, and western Europe. In the early 1990s Mother Teresa was also able to introduce operations to eastern Europe. The first such house in the United States was established in the Bronx section of New York City.

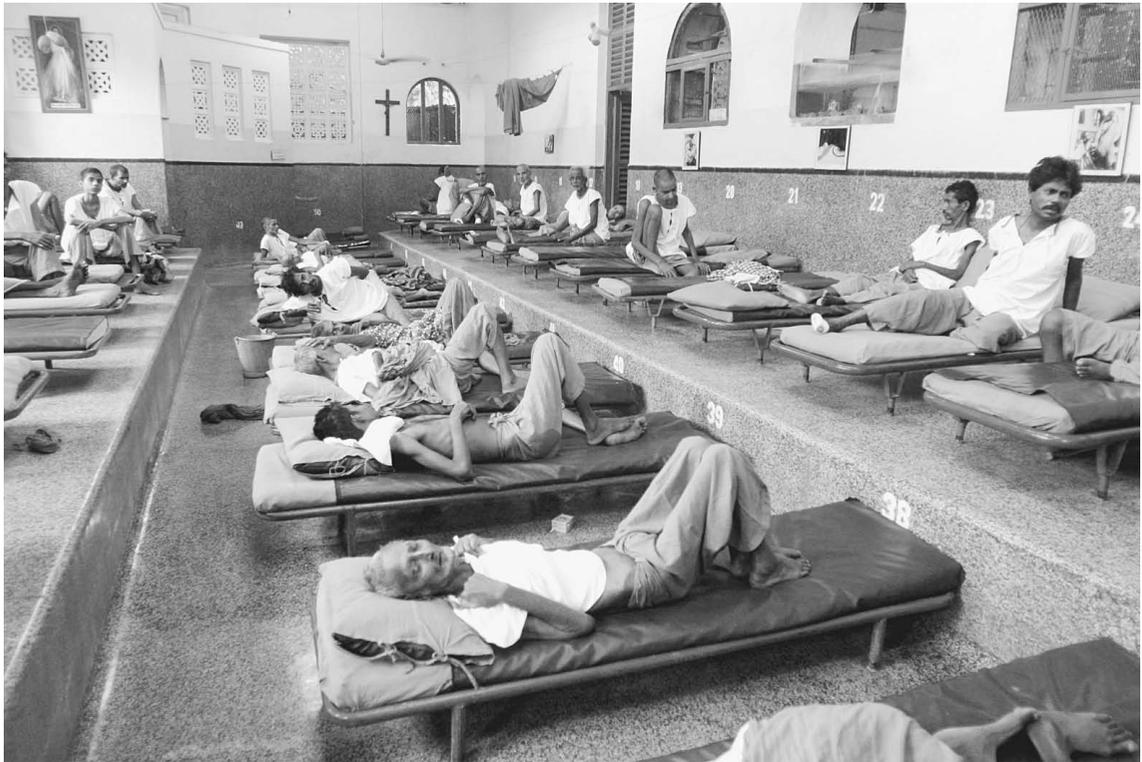
As the organization's charitable work expanded, so did its influence as a religious order. In 1963 the Missionaries of Charity Brothers was established. (In the Catholic Church, brothers are members of religious orders who are not priests; usually, orders of brothers, like nuns, perform work in schools, hospitals, missions, etc.) In 1976 a contemplative branch

of the nuns was formed, in which members devote themselves to prayer and penance, often maintaining silence and living in convents. Lay workers (people who were not members of the clergy) and volunteers were organized into three groups: the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, the Sick and Suffering Co-Workers, and the Lay Missionaries of Charity. In 1981, with the support of the pope, Mother Teresa launched the Corpus Christi Movement, a movement to create spiritual renewal among diocesan priests, or priests attached to local dioceses rather than to specific religious orders. As part of the movement, nuns spiritually “adopt” priests, something Saint Thérèse de Lisieux had done in nineteenth-century France.

Mother Teresa and her work became more familiar to people throughout the world due to the 1969 documentary film *Something Beautiful for God*, which was produced by the well-known British writer and social critic Malcolm Muggeridge (1903–1990). A book by the same title followed in 1971 and remains in print in the early twenty-first century. One story told about the production of the documentary concerns filming that took place at an Indian hospice. The film crew believed that the lighting in the building was so poor that the footage they shot there would turn out to be of little use. When they developed the film, however, they found that everything appeared brightly lit. Muggeridge, who later converted to Catholicism, claimed that the lighting was the product of “divine light” from Mother Teresa herself. Some members of the crew argued that it was simply the result of a new, improved type of film. Muggeridge was not alone in his belief, however, as throughout her lifetime many people testified that they witnessed a mysterious light associated with Mother Teresa.

Awards and prizes

The 1970s and years following brought many awards and much recognition for Mother Teresa and her work. In 1971 Pope Paul VI awarded her the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize. She sold the Lincoln Continental automobile given to her by the pope and used the money to help the poor. Mother Teresa also won the Kennedy Prize in 1971, the Nehru Prize in 1972, the Albert Schweitzer International Prize in 1975, and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, “for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress, which also constitute a threat to peace.” She donated all of her prize money to the poor of Calcutta. Also in 1979, she won the Balzan Prize, given to those who promote brotherhood and



Mother Teresa's hospice Nirmal Hriday, in Kolkata, India. Mother Teresa is best-known for her work with the poor and homeless and has been called "Saint of the Gutters." © BALDEV/CORBIS.

peace among nations. Later awards included the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1985 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1994. In 1996 an act of the U.S. Congress made her an honorary citizen of the United States, a gesture of respect extended to only six people throughout U.S. history.

Decline and death

The 1980s marked the beginning of the final stages of Mother Teresa's life. In 1983, while visiting Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) in Rome, Italy, she suffered a heart attack. A second heart attack followed in 1989, and in 1991 she was stricken with pneumonia while traveling in Mexico. She offered to resign as head of the Missionaries of Charity, but when a vote was taken among all members of the order, the only ballot supporting her resignation was the one she cast herself.

Mother Teresa's health continued to decline through the 1990s, and she eventually became unable to continue with her work. On March 13, 1997, she resigned as the head of her order, which by then included 4,000 nuns, 100,000 lay volunteers, and 610 missions in 123 countries. The next month she fell and broke her collarbone. Later that year she contracted malaria and also had to undergo heart surgery. She died on September 5, 1997. The Indian government gave her a full state funeral, an honor usually reserved for such dignitaries as prime ministers. Religious and political leaders around the world commented on the sadness of her passing.

The twenty-first century: beatification

Mother Teresa's story continued after her death, with her beatification (blessing) and the drive mounted by Catholics to persuade the Vatican to name her a saint. In the Catholic faith a saint is a person whose admirable life makes it certain that his or her soul is in heaven. Members of the Catholic Church are said to "venerate" saints, meaning that saints are honored and are thought to be able to speak with God on behalf of the living. Catholics do not worship saints, however, as worship is given only to God.

After the death of a person such as Mother Teresa, a local bishop or other church authority begins the process of canonization (the process leading to sainthood) by conducting an investigation into the person's life. The first step toward sainthood is to be regarded as a servant of God; the second is to be regarded as venerable, or commanding of respect and reverence. Then the Vatican takes over the investigation. According to church law, for the next step, beatification, to occur, the candidate for sainthood has to have performed one documented miracle. Historically, the church has beatified many people who were not later made saints, including the emperor Charlemagne (742–814), of France. For the final step, canonization, to occur, at least one additional miracle has to be documented. The chief difference between beatification and canonization is that while beatification represents the church's "permission" for the faithful to venerate the person, canonization transforms that permission into a matter of universal church law. Therefore, beatification typically involves veneration by members of a local community, such as a region or a country, while a canonized saint is venerated worldwide as a matter of church principle.

The miracle attributed to Mother Teresa concerned a woman named Monica Besra, who is said to have been healed of cancer when a locket

containing a picture of Mother Teresa was applied to her tumor. The issue of the miracle became controversial when Besra and her husband later denied that she had been healed by a miracle, and when her hospital records could not be found. Later, however, the husband supported the claim of the miraculous healing, and Mother Teresa was formally beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 19, 2003.

Controversy

Mother Teresa's life was not without controversy. Many people, including Catholics and non-Catholics alike, criticized her for her strict opposition to artificial birth control, especially in consideration of the massive overpopulation of such places as Calcutta. She also attracted some criticism for her uncompromising opposition to abortion, or terminating pregnancy. Others found fault with a statement she made in the mid-1970s, after the Indian government suspended civil liberties in the country. She said the people were happier without their liberties because there were more jobs and no strikes. Comments such as these led some observers to believe that Mother Teresa was more interested in maintaining a close relationship with the Indian government, which provided her with financial support, than in speaking out against its abuses.

Other criticisms include financial mismanagement of funds, with donations not going to the projects for which they were intended, and the number of people served by the Missionaries of Charity. Some investigators claim to have found that the largest of its missions served a few hundred people at most. While Mother Teresa received worldwide praise for her work, other religious organizations in India serve up to tens of thousands of people each day and receive little attention. Such criticism has created a level of controversy about Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity, but she continued to carry out her lifelong goal of working with the poor.

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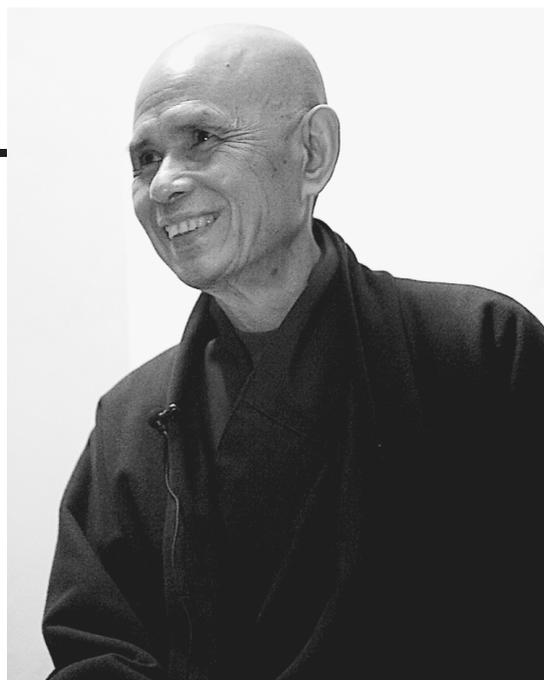
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Thich Nhat Hanh

BORN: 1926 • Vietnam

Vietnamese religious leader; writer



“Meditation is about awareness of what is going on—not only in your body and in your feelings, but all around you.”

Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced tik not hawn) is often referred to as the most beloved and respected Buddhist teacher in the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas). He was forced into exile from his native Vietnam in 1966, while on a speaking tour in the United States. He was trying to promote peace between the warring parties of the U.S.-supported South Vietnam and the communist-supported North Vietnam. Communists support an economy in which all goods are owned collectively by the people and distributed by the government according to need. Communists may support the overthrow of the government by the masses, or working class. While Thich Nhat Hanh was in the United States, both Vietnams banned his return. Since his exile he has made his home in France, at the Plum Village Buddhist Center, which he founded. He has continued to travel and teach Buddhism and peace in the West, and is the author of close to one hundred books. He has also spoken and written widely about bridging the religions of Buddhism and Christianity.

Thich Nhat Hanh.
AP IMAGES.

Vietnamese roots

Thich Nhat Hanh was born in 1926 in central Vietnam. He left home as a teenager to become a Buddhist monk and was officially taken into the religious order in 1942. At that time he took the religious name of Thich Nhat Hanh. The word *thich* is a title for monks and nuns in Vietnam, which is taken as their new “family name.” *Nhat* means “of the best quality,” and *hanh* means “good nature” or “right conduct.” Thich Nhat Hanh’s followers also sometimes refer to him as Thay, or “teacher.”

At the time of Thich Nhat Hanh’s birth, Vietnam had been ruled by the French since the late nineteenth century. The Japanese invaded the country in 1940, during World War II (1939–45; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States, and their allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan). A communist revolutionary group called the Viet Minh, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969), saw this as a possible opportunity to be freed of French rule. After Japan surrendered in 1945, the Viet Minh declared the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The French refused to leave, however, and a long period of unrest and warfare between local rebels and the French began. The French finally withdrew in 1954, and Vietnam was divided into North Vietnam, the stronghold of Ho Chi Minh’s communist forces, and South Vietnam, where the French had been centered around Saigon and which was essentially democratic. The Cold War (1945–91; a period of political hostility between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies) then brought about the involvement of the United States, which was fearful of a communist takeover of South Vietnam. The Vietnam War (1954–75), during which the United States fought with South Vietnamese forces against the North Vietnamese, was another long and bloody war in the country’s history.

Thich Nhat Hanh grew up during this long period of warfare. Early in his career, he helped create a movement known as Engaged Buddhism to try to make positive changes to Vietnamese society. The movement paired nonviolent civil disobedience with more traditional Buddhist practices, such as meditation, a focusing of thoughts on a single point, usually to gain greater understanding. One result of these efforts was the 1950 founding of a major center of Buddhist studies in South Vietnam, the An Quang Buddhist Institute. Speaking in 2003 with John Malkin of the *Shambala Sun*, Thich Nhat Hanh explained the principle of engaged Buddhism: “Engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism. When bombs begin to fall on people, you cannot stay in the meditation hall all of the time.

Meditation is about awareness of what is going on—not only in your body and in your feelings, but all around you.” He further explained, “When I was a novice in Vietnam, we young monks witnessed the suffering caused by the war. So we were very eager to practice Buddhism in such a way that we could bring it to society. That was not easy because the tradition does not directly offer Engaged Buddhism. So we had to do it by ourselves. That was the birth of Engaged Buddhism.”

In 1961 Thich Nhat Hanh was invited to the United States to both study and teach comparative religion at Columbia University and Princeton University. Two years later, however, South Vietnamese monks asked him to return home to help try to put a stop to the warfare among the United States and Vietnamese troops. Back in his native country Thich Nhat Hanh assisted in organizing a nonviolent resistance movement. He also spread the concept of Engaged Buddhism through the 1964 creation of the School of Youth for Social Service. This program sent more than ten thousand young people to the countryside to help Buddhist monks and nuns build schools and health clinics. It was sometimes compared to the Peace Corps, established several years earlier by the U.S. president John F. Kennedy (1917–1963).

La Boi Press, which became one of Vietnam’s most important publishing houses, was established by Thich Nhat Hanh in 1964. His messages of peace were then printed in books and articles. They called for an end to hostilities and a search for common ground between the warring parties. Both South Vietnam and North Vietnam, however, censored his writings.

In exile

The Fellowship of Reconciliation and Cornell University invited Thich Nhat Hanh to the United States again in 1966. He traveled and spoke at many private and public meetings, even holding conversations with officials from the presidential administration. His efforts on behalf of peace, however, resulted in his being banned from returning to either North Vietnam or South Vietnam. At forty years of age, he was effectively left without a home country.

During his extended stay in the United States, Thich Nhat Hanh became friends with civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968). King was a fellow advocate of nonviolent resistance, which he had used during his fight for equal rights for African Americans in the

Buddhism in Vietnam

Buddhism is Vietnam's primary religion and is practiced by more than half of the population. Buddhism came to Vietnam around the first century CE, from India. By the end of the second century Vietnam had developed a major Buddhist center, Luy Lau, north of modern-day Hanoi. This became a popular stopover for many Indian Buddhist monks on their way to and from China. Over time the principles of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism became dominant in Vietnam. Both of these are divisions of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism and are heavily practiced in China and Japan. The Mahayana branch of Buddhism formed after a doctrinal split (a split over beliefs) about one hundred years after the Buddha's death.

While more traditional Buddhist doctrines, or beliefs, hold that the achievement of supreme knowledge and understanding must take several lifetimes to achieve, Zen Buddhism focuses on enlightenment for the student by the most direct means possible. Followers seek to accomplish this usually through meditation and the study of *koans*, or question-and-answer sessions between

masters and students that often seem illogical and require great effort to understand. Pure Land Buddhism also seeks enlightenment in one lifetime. In Pure Land Buddhism, a sort of heaven, *Sukhavati*, is ruled over by Amitabha, a *buddha*, or enlightened one. Pure Land Buddhism also emphasizes meditation and the saying of *mantras*, or chanted prayers. In Vietnam, Zen is practiced largely by monks and nuns. Pure Land is practiced mostly by the laity, or the general populace.

Because of the influence of neighboring China, both Daoism and Confucianism also became popular in Vietnam. Indeed, Confucianism became more dominant than Buddhism for several centuries. Also, the French who colonized the land in the nineteenth century discouraged the practice of Buddhism, which they saw as a threat to their authority. They imported their own religion, Roman Catholicism, a branch of Christianity. By the twentieth century, however, Buddhist revival movements began to spread across Vietnam, with many of the religion's beliefs undergoing modernization.

United States. In 1967 King nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Thich Nhat Hanh traveled to Europe, where he met with the Catholic pope and several heads of state. He then remained in France, forming the Unified Buddhist Church in 1969 and leading a Buddhist delegation to the Vietnam peace talks. The war finally ended in 1975, with the victory of communist North Vietnam. Thich Nhat Hanh was still denied permission to return to his homeland, and so he instead set up a small Buddhist community, Sweet Potato, about 100 miles (161 kilometers) south of Paris. He continued to work for peace and organized rescue operations for those fleeing Vietnam, which was then unsafe for anyone who had supported the south. Resistance to his

operations from the governments of Thailand and Singapore, which were overwhelmed by the arrival of the Vietnamese refugees, made it impossible for him to continue his operations. Thich Nhat Hanh thereafter went into semi-retreat at Sweet Potato, where he meditated, gardened, and continued to write.

In 1982 Thich Nhat Hanh established a much larger retreat center and Buddhist community, Plum Village, in southern France. He began to travel extensively in the United States, speaking to a wide variety of groups, including environmental activists, businessmen, prison inmates, police officers, and even members of the U.S. Congress. His practice of “mindfulness,” or being aware not only of world affairs but of the consequences of one’s own actions, appealed to people of all faiths and nationalities. In 1993 he spoke at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and attracted a crowd of twelve hundred people. Berkeley, California, named a day in his honor. He opened the Green Mountain Dharma Center and Maple Forest Monastery in Vermont in 1997 and founded the Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, California, in 1999.

Thich Nhat Hanh played an important role in getting the United Nations to pass several resolutions on peace and nonviolence. When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, Thich Nhat Hanh’s voice was again among the strongest that called for peace and an end to the fighting. He told Bob Abernathy of *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, “Using violence to suppress violence is not the correct way. America has to wake up to that reality.”

In the interview Thich Nhat Hanh also observed, “There are ways to transform and to reduce the amount of suffering in our families, in our schools. We, as practitioners of transformation and healing, we know how to do it, how to reduce the level of violence.” To this end, Thich Nhat Hanh developed fourteen rules for good living:

1. Do not be bound by doctrines and theories.
2. Do not think there is one changeless or absolute truth.
3. Do not force others to accept your views.
4. Do not close your eyes to suffering.
5. Do not become wealthy while others go without food.
6. Do not hold on to anger and hatred.
7. Do not say things that cause discord.
8. Do not say untruthful things.
9. Do not use Buddhism for personal gain.



Buddhist monks sit in peaceful protest on a street in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Thich Nhat Hanh was forced into exile during the war when his peace efforts took him outside of the country. He was banned from returning. © BETTMANN/CORBIS.

10. Do not do work that is harmful to humans or nature.
11. Do not kill.
12. Do not possess things harmful to others.
13. Do not mistreat your body.
14. Finally, do not assume that your teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, is able to follow each of these rules perfectly.

Homecoming

Thich Nhat Hanh was finally allowed to visit his native Vietnam in 2005, almost forty years after he was exiled. Writing in *Time International*, Kay Johnson called his return “a homecoming more fitting for royalty or a rock star than a monk.” Indeed, Thich Nhat Hanh’s work for peace and religious tolerance has made him well-known, if not famous, throughout the world. Yet his fame has not weakened the convictions he holds as a Buddhist monk.

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Desmond Mpilo Tutu

BORN: October 10, 1931 • Klerksdorp, South Africa

South African religious leader; politician; writer



“Sometimes strident, often tender, never afraid and seldom without humour, Desmond Tutu’s voice will always be the voice of the voiceless.”

— Nelson Mandela as quoted on the *University of the Witwatersrand* Web site.

As an archbishop of the Anglican Church in South Africa, Desmond Mpilo Tutu was one of the foremost opponents of the apartheid policies of that country’s government in the 1970s and 1980s. *Apartheid* means “apartness” in the Afrikaans language, which is one of the official languages of South Africa. The word is most often used to refer to the former government policy of racial separation and discrimination directed against non-Europeans in the country. Discrimination is unfair treatment to a person or group because of perceived or real differences. At the time of Tutu’s birth, this discrimination had been going on in South Africa since the region had become a Dutch colony in the seventeenth century. It continued after South Africa achieved independence as a nation in 1910. In 1948 apartheid became the official policy of the white South African government.

Desmond Mpilo Tutu.

PETER KRAMER/
GETTY IMAGES.

Under apartheid each person was assigned to a specific racial group: white, black, “coloured” (of mixed race), and Asian. Laws were passed to separate the races, with each assigned separate living areas and public facilities such as parks, restrooms, and beaches. A separate educational system was set up to ensure that blacks could not receive an education equal to that of whites. Travel for non-Europeans was severely restricted. Interracial marriage, or marriage between two people of different races, was strictly forbidden. Blacks had no representation in the nation’s parliament, and only whites enjoyed full civil rights. The police had broad powers to arrest and imprison anyone who protested the government’s policies.

Eventually the world community spoke out against apartheid. The policy officially ended in South Africa in 1990–91, when the laws were repealed and blacks were finally given an equal voice in the nation’s government. One of the major figures who helped bring about this change was Desmond Tutu.

Birth and early life

Desmond Tutu was born on October 7, 1931, in the South African mining town of Klerksdorp. His father, Zachariah, was a schoolteacher. His mother, Aletta, was a domestic servant. Tutu’s earliest recollections of discrimination date to his childhood, when white children regularly shouted racial insults at him and other black children. He saw firsthand the harsh results of government discrimination among the mine workers, who labored for low wages and typically lived in shacks with no running water or sanitary facilities. Tutu also felt the effects of discrimination at school, where, for example, the government provided free meals for white children, who often threw them away because they preferred the food that their mothers had packed for them. The black children, whose families lived in poverty, often went through the trash bins to scavenge the discarded food.

In 1943 Tutu’s family moved to Johannesburg, South Africa’s largest city, where Tutu enrolled in Johannesburg Bantu High School. (The Bantu are an African tribe.) In the city Tutu met Father Trevor Huddleston, a white priest who was an outspoken critic of racial discrimination. During this period Tutu contracted tuberculosis, an infectious disease that affects the lungs, and spent nearly twenty months in a hospital. Huddleston visited him nearly every day and would prove to

be a major influence on Tutu's own opposition to apartheid. Apartheid became official after the 1948 election victories of the National Party, a political party whose members had run for office on a promise to separate the races.

Following his recovery Tutu enrolled in the school of medicine at Witwatersrand University, with the goal of becoming a doctor. He was forced to leave the university, however, because he and his family did not have enough money to pay tuition. He then enrolled at the Pretoria Bantu Normal College to train as a teacher and earned his diploma in 1953. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Johannesburg in 1954. For the next three years he worked as a high school teacher in Johannesburg and in Krugersdorp. In 1955 he married Leah Nomalizo Shenxane, with whom he eventually had four children.

Tutu resigned from his teaching jobs in 1957 after the government revealed its Bantu Education Act, a plan to institute a new educational system for blacks that would be inferior to that provided for whites. At this point Tutu felt a calling from God and came to believe that he could best serve his people as a priest. He began to study theology (religion) with the Community of the Resurrection, the Anglican community in Johannesburg of which Father Huddleston was a member. The Anglicans are a sect, or branch, of Christianity.

Career in the Anglican Church

After being ordained, or officially made, an Anglican priest in 1961, Tutu worked in a number of small parishes (religious communities) first in South Africa, then in England. While working in England he earned a bachelor's degree in divinity in 1965 and a master's degree in theology in 1966, both from King's College in London. He then took a position in England with the Theological Education Fund, which required him to travel throughout Africa and Asia to award scholarship money from the World Council of Churches. During these years he also spent time in South Africa lecturing on theology. By the 1970s resistance to South African apartheid was growing, and in 1975 Tutu decided to return to his country permanently to help with the struggle for freedom from discrimination.

Tutu continued to rise in the Anglican Church. In 1975 he was appointed dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg, the first black ever to hold that position. In 1976 he became a bishop in Lesotho, a

small country about the size of the U.S. state of Maryland that is entirely surrounded by South Africa. At the time the small nation was dominated by its larger neighbor so thoroughly that it was virtually a part of South Africa. Because of this it was one of the “homelands” designated by the South African government as a place where blacks could live. Throughout the late 1970s Tutu used his position to try to ease some of the racial tension that threatened both Lesotho and Soweto, a black township just outside Johannesburg. In trying to serve as a peacemaker, he took part in discussions with many different people about the racial problems dividing the country.

Opponent of apartheid

On June 16, 1976, a key event in the history of apartheid took place when a riot erupted in the Soweto township. A number of high school students protested the government’s new policy requiring that classes at the schools be taught in the Afrikaans language. Afrikaans was the language of the Dutch settlers who had initiated the discrimination against black Africans, and the students rebelled against the idea of having to take classes taught in the language of their oppressors. Police arrived and responded with tear gas and gunfire. As the rioting spread, a number of government buildings were set ablaze. In the weeks that followed, protestors and government security forces clashed on numerous occasions. By the time the rioting ended, five hundred people were dead, most of them from gunshot wounds. Thousands were arrested, and thousands more fled the country.

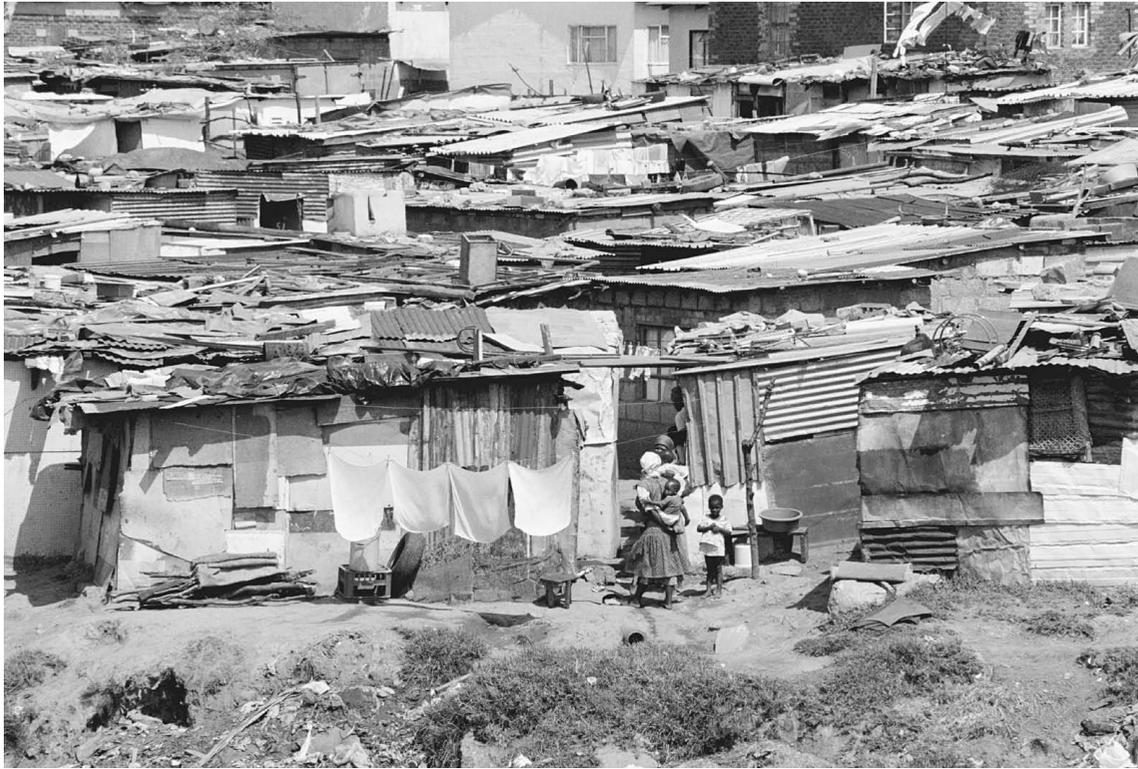
The Soweto riots were a turning point in Tutu’s life. Although he continued to call for peaceful protest and change, he became more militant in his outlook. He concluded that only intense pressure would force the government to change its policies. He resolved to use his influence and visibility to initiate talks between blacks and the government, and for the next fifteen years he spoke out publicly and forcefully against apartheid. In 1978 he became the first black secretary general of the South African Council of Churches, an organization of churches with thirteen million members collectively, 80 percent of whom were black. Tutu used his position on the council to promote antigovernment protest. In response, the government repeatedly harassed Tutu and other Council of Churches members, often charging them with small crimes they had not committed.

In 1979 Tutu challenged the government over a law called the Group Areas Act. The act gave the government the authority to forcibly move blacks from South African cities to tribal homelands. Throughout the 1980s some 3.5 million people were relocated by the government, a process that denied blacks access to better-paying jobs in the cities and left them to work on low-quality farmland. Tutu openly protested the act, comparing it to laws hostile to Jews that were passed by the Nazi leadership in Germany during the 1930s before World War II (1938–45).

In the fall of 1979 Tutu took part in a television interview in Denmark, during which he proposed that Denmark stop buying coal from South Africa as a way to protest apartheid. This was the first time that anyone had ever proposed using economic measures to try to force the South African government to change its policies. Over the next decade, people, organizations, and governments throughout the world began to boycott (refuse to buy) South African products. In the United States and other countries, many universities, local and state governments, and labor unions decided not only to stop investing funds in South African companies and companies that did business with South Africa, but also to withdraw funds that were already invested. During this period South African currency lost half of its value on the world market. In order to curb some of the unrest, the South African government allowed blacks to form labor unions for the first time.

Tutu's efforts to end apartheid were met with continued harassment. The South African government took away his passport, a move that often preceded imprisonment. Without his passport, Tutu could leave the country only with the government's permission. In 1982 he was denied permission to travel to the United States to accept an honorary degree from Columbia University in New York. In response the president of the university personally traveled to South Africa to present Tutu with the degree.

In 1984 Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which helped to further publicize his efforts. In the words of the commission that selected him, as quoted on the *Nobelprize.org* Web site, the prize was given “not only as a gesture of support to him and to the South African Council of Churches of which he is leader, but also to all individuals and groups in South Africa who, with their concern for human dignity, fraternity and democracy, incite the admiration of the world.” Tutu used the recognition to draw more attention to the injustices committed by the South African



Blacks were forced to live in townships such as this one during the apartheid years in South Africa. Desmond Tutu protested against apartheid and used his position on the South African Council of Churches to promote antigovernment protests. © DAVID TURNLEY/CORBIS.

government. He was eventually allowed to travel to the United States, where he addressed a congressional committee and urged the country to join the fight against racism. Thousands of Americans answered his call by holding protests at South African embassies in the United States.

Tutu continued to call for peaceful solutions to South Africa's racial problems, but tensions kept building. On several occasions protests erupted into violence, and hundreds of people were killed. In response to the violence, the South African president declared a state of emergency, which deprived black citizens of what few rights they had. Among the activities that were outlawed were funeral marches to cemeteries, which the government believed could turn into riots. On one occasion armed government security guards surrounded the funeral of a young woman who had been killed in the rioting. Tutu personally appeared to conduct the funeral service and to keep tempers from rising.

In September 1986 Tutu was elected as the archbishop of Cape Town and the primate, or leader, of the Anglican Church for all of southern Africa. He continued to pressure the governments of other nations to condemn South African apartheid and to impose economic penalties. Meanwhile, the state of emergency was maintained. The government continued to ban more activities, such as the signing of petitions calling for the release of the thousands of political prisoners being held, many of whom were minors (people under age 18). Even wearing shirts with slogans opposing the confinement of the prisoners was outlawed. Nevertheless, Tutu and many of his followers defied some of these laws.

Success

By the early 1990s South Africa had become an outcast among the nations of the world, and economic pressures on the government were threatening to destroy the country. It was during this decade that apartheid crumbled. This is largely because of the leadership of Tutu and other important South African figures, such as Nelson Mandela (1918–), who had been imprisoned for twenty-six years. At last, a new government, led by F. W. de Klerk (1936–), abolished South Africa's racist policies. The country's black majority, able to vote for the first time, elected Mandela as South Africa's first democratically-elected president in 1994. Tutu's dream had become a reality.

In the years that followed, Tutu continued to speak against human rights abuses throughout the world, such as those in the African nation of Zimbabwe and the Asian nation of Burma (Myanmar). In 1995 he was appointed chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This body was formed to investigate claims of human rights abuses under the nation's apartheid system. In 1996 Tutu retired from his position as archbishop of Cape Town to devote his energies to the work of the commission. In 1998 he stepped down as commission chair to accept a position teaching theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2002 he accepted a job as a visiting professor at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His name reappeared in the news that same year when he expressed his intense opposition to the invasion of Iraq planned by the United States and Great Britain.

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Usuman Dan Fodio

BORN: December 15, 1754 • Maratta, Gobir

DIED: April 20, 1817 • Sokoto, Gobir

Gobirian religious leader; writer

“A kingdom can endure with unbelief, but cannot endure with injustice.”

Usuman Dan Fodio was a political and Islamic religious leader during the early nineteenth century in the African city-state of Gobir, in modern-day Nigeria. He was a member of the Fulani people. The Fulani are light-skinned herders and nomads, or people who have no fixed homes and move according to the seasons in search of food, water, and grazing lands for their animals. Usuman Dan Fodio led a *jihad*, or holy war, against the state of Gobir. Gobir was part of an empire controlled by the rivals of the Fulani, the Hausa, a dark-skinned ethnic group native to the region. Usuman Dan Fodio sought to reform the religious practices of the Hausa kings and was joined by an army of Fulani who were tired of being considered second-class citizens. After winning the battle against the Hausa, Usuman Dan Fodio established a caliphate, or Islamic state, that eventually covered 200,000 square miles, making it the largest state in Africa. His empire lasted for a century, from 1804 to 1904, when it was conquered by the British. Usuman Dan Fodio was also a respected Muslim scholar who wrote more than one hundred works that influenced the intellectual, political, and religious development of West Africa.

Growth of a religious leader

Usuman (also spelled Usman or Uthman) Dan Fodio was born on December 15, 1754, in the small village of Maratta. The village was

located in the ancient kingdom of Gobir, one of seven city-states that were collectively called Hausaland. Hausaland was located in the center of northwestern Africa, just south of the Sahara Desert, and its origins dated back to the eleventh century. The six other city-states in Hausaland were Daura, Biram, Kano, Katsina, Rano, and Zaria. By the late fourteenth century the region was introduced to the religion of Islam, whose followers are known as Muslims. The new religion did not become popular in Hausaland, however, until the middle of the fifteenth century, when the Fulani began immigrating into the region. They came in large numbers to escape the increasingly dry conditions to the north. The Fulani herded cattle that depended on vegetation for food, so the lack of rain had a strong impact on their livelihood. The Fulani were very faithful Muslims, and they brought along texts in order to set up Islamic schools throughout the region.

Usuman Dan Fodio was part of the educated Fulani class, as his ancestors had left the nomadic life and settled in urban areas many years before his birth. His father, Muhammad Fodio, was a religious scholar and *imam*, or Muslim spiritual leader, in the village. As a youth, Usuman Dan Fodio moved with his family southward to the town of Degel. There he studied the Islamic holy book, the Qur'an, with his father. Usuman Dan Fodio's special spiritual abilities were evident from an early age. For example, the residents of Degel even thought he could control the *jinn* (from which the word genie is derived), supernatural beings that can change shape and influence the affairs of humans.

He was sent to Islamic scholars in the region to continue his education. One of these scholars, Jibril ibn 'Umar, initiated him into the Sufi order, a mystical branch of Islam whose followers seek to directly experience God, known as Allah in the Islam religion. Usuman Dan Fodio also learned from Jibril ibn 'Umar the responsibility of a religion to establish the ideal society, one free from oppression and vice, or immoral behavior.

Usuman Dan Fodio completed his education in about 1774, and began to teach and preach in his native Gobir and in the far northwest of what is modern-day Nigeria. He led a simple life of study and contemplation, or deep and concentrated thinking, as he wandered and preached about the renewal of the Islamic faith. To support himself, he occasionally made and sold rope.

At the age of thirty-six, Usuman Dan Fodio had his first mystical experience: Allah allowed him to truly see the world as it is. He felt he had power over distant objects, that he could actually reach out and grab

something far away. His sense of smell, hearing, and touch all increased. He became aware of every muscle and bone in his body. Four years later, Allah supposedly gave him the Sword of Truth, with which he was to fight the enemies of Islam. Usuman Dan Fodio's fame as a scholar and a man of Allah spread throughout the region and he attracted many followers. His main aides were his son, Muhammad Bello, and his brother, Abdullahi. People began calling Usuman Dan Fodio *shehu*, or *shaykh*, a title of respect for a teacher and scholar in the Sufi tradition. Though he generally made a point of not interacting with the kings of the region, he did visit the court of Gobir, where he was able to win favors. These included the freedom to teach and spread the word of Islam and to establish a Muslim community in his hometown of Degel. Historians also believe that while at court Usuman Dan Fodio taught a youth named Yunfa, who later became king.

Religious leader to political leader

Usuman Dan Fodio created a theocracy in Degel, just as **Muhammad** (c. 570–632; see entry), the founder of Islam, had done in Medina (a city in modern-day Saudi Arabia). A theocracy is a government subject to religious authority. The community slowly became a state within Gobir, ruled by its own laws and offices. Usuman Dan Fodio used the Islamic principles of equality and justice for the benefit of all, and this attracted many followers from his own Fulani people and also from the Hausa peasantry, or poor farmers. These peasants felt they were being unfairly taxed by the king of Gobir and were happy to shift their loyalty to Usuman Dan Fodio. In time, the king of Gobir grew alarmed at the expansion of Usuman Dan Fodio's community, and he began to see it as a threat to his own rule.

When Yunfa became king of Gobir 1802, he sought to destroy the community in Degel. The final break between the new king and Usuman Dan Fodio came when Usuman Dan Fodio's followers freed some Muslims who had been taken prisoner by government forces. Usuman Dan Fodio and Degel were then directly threatened by the king's forces. These hostilities caused Usuman Dan Fodio to lead his supporters to a new home in Gudu, a small town about thirty miles to the northwest, on the border of Gobir. Usuman Dan Fodio compared this migration to that of Muhammad and his followers when they left their native Mecca in 622 to escape oppression.

Once the community was settled in Gudu, Usuman Dan Fodio was elected imam and his rule of the new Islamic state was established. He was also given the title *amirul momineen*, or "leader of the people." This

Usuman Dan Fodio

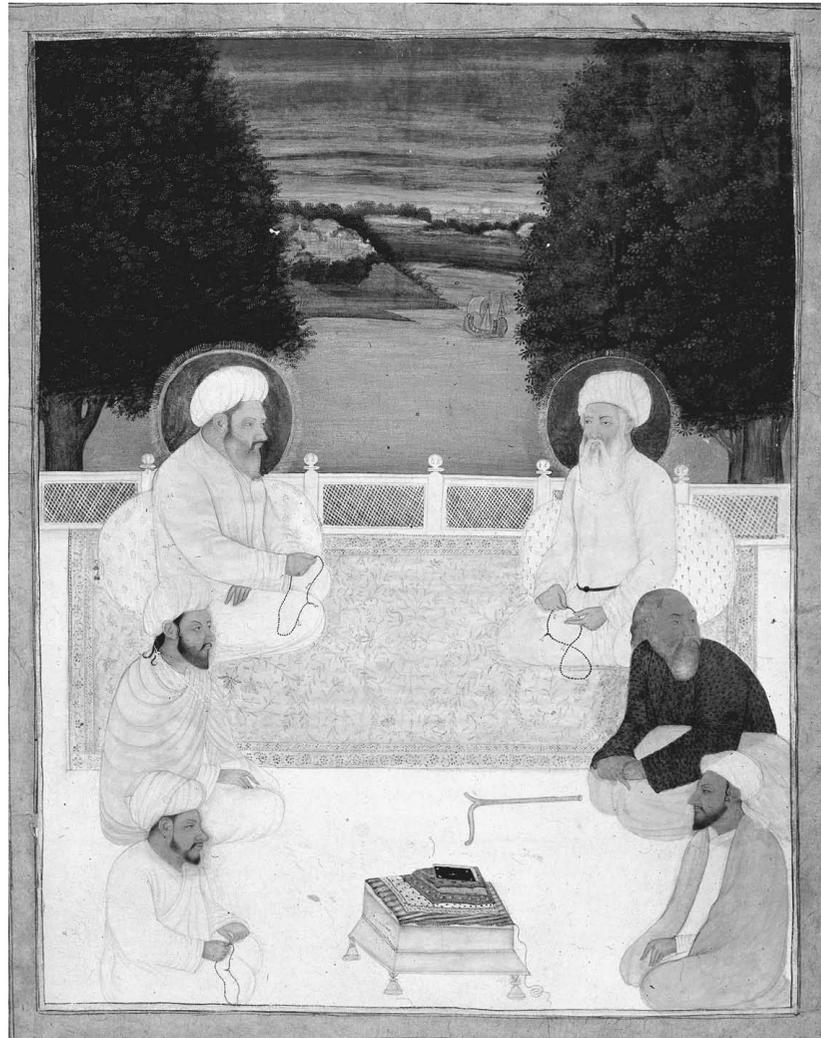
Sufi saints sit on a verandab.

Usuman Dan Fodio was initiated into the mystic Sufi branch of Islam by Jibril ibn

'Umar. © THE BRITISH

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IMAGE WORKS.



made him both a religious and a political leader and gave him the authority to wage a jihad, just as Muhammad had done more than one thousand years earlier. Usuman Dan Fodio gathered an army from among the Hausa and the local Fulani nomads, who were excellent horsemen. Yunfa, in Gobir, sought help from other Hausa states, telling them that Usuman Dan Fodio's jihad was a danger to them all. Indeed, such a war had the potential to topple all of the region's rulers. The Hausa governments often acted dishonestly and unfairly towards the poorer citizens, who were becoming more and more resentful of such treatment.

For the next five years, Usuman Dan Fodio's troops fought those of Yunfa in what was known as the Fulani War (1804–09). Dan Fodio himself did not participate in the battles, although he directed the military campaign while organizing his new caliphate. The word “caliphate” comes from the term *khalīfatu ar-rasul*, or “deputy of the messenger.” The “messenger” in this case is Muhammad, the messenger of Allah. In English, the title for the ruler of a caliphate is “caliph.” After Muhammad died in 632, the leaders of Islam who came after him took this title. Usuman Dan Fodio established his caliphate to resemble that of Muhammad, imitating the political structure of that original Islamic state.

At first, things went badly for Usuman Dan Fodio's army. In December 1804 they were defeated in the first major encounter with Yunfa's forces, the battle of Tsuntua, and Usuman Dan Fodio lost two thousand of his best fighters. In 1805, however, Usuman Dan Fodio's troops captured the major regions of Kebbi and Gwandu, which gave his soldiers a permanent base. Slowly, his army gained additional support from the peasants throughout the region. Usuman Dan Fodio wrote widely about his jihad, noting that the king of Gobir had attacked him, a faithful Muslim, first. He labeled the king an unbeliever and claimed it was the duty of all true Muslims to pursue the jihad against Yunfa and anyone who aided him.

As the war proceeded, Usuman Dan Fodio continued to structure his new Islamic state. He listed its principles in one of his most famous works, *Bayan Wujub al-Hijra* (Exposition of Obligation of Emigration upon the Servants of God). He explained that the central bureaucracy, or the ruling officials, of his caliphate would be small in number and would be loyal and honest Muslims. Local administration would be in the hands of *emirs*, or governors. These would be chosen from among the class of Muslim scholars noted for their sense of justice and honesty and for their religious belief. As his state began to take shape, Muslim leaders in other Hausa states began to formally recognize the authority of Usuman Dan Fodio.

The caliphate

In 1808 Usuman Dan Fodio's men finally overran the king's forces in the Gobir capital, Alkalawa. Yunfa was killed in the fighting. After Gobir was defeated, the Fulani warriors moved against other Hausa states. Eventually they had captured all of the land from modern-day Burkina Faso in the west to the nation of Cameroon in the south. The Fulani troops

The Mahdi

Usuman Dan Fodio believed he had been chosen by Allah to bring about the renewal of Islam in order to prepare for the coming of the *Mahdi*, which translates to “he who is guided aright.” Muslims believe the Mahdi is the expected messiah, or divine spiritual and political ruler, who will appear on Earth and establish a reign of righteousness over the world. They believe that this rule will last for one thousand years, until the Day of Judgment (the end of the world), when believers in Allah will go to paradise, the Islamic heaven.

Many men throughout Islamic history have claimed to be the Mahdi. One of the best-known was Muhammad Ahmad (1844–1885), a Muslim leader in the region then known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, in northeastern Africa. After declaring himself the Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad raised an army to fight the Egyptian occupiers of his land. He captured the city of Khartoum and for a time established Islamic rule. Though Muhammad Ahmad was killed in 1885, his army continued to fight for the movement. The British finally defeated these Islamic soldiers in 1898.

The Mahdi remained a powerful idea within Islam in the early twenty-first century. Dozens of books have been printed on the topic, many of them since the 1980s. As recently as 2003, the Muslim religious leader Moqtada al-Sadr, while fighting U.S. forces in Baghdad, Iraq, called his followers the Mahdi Army.

were blocked from advancing to the far south, as the cavalry was not effective in the more heavily wooded areas of southern Nigeria. The horses sickened and died from diseases carried by mosquitoes. Usuman Dan Fodio divided the rule of the immense empire between his two most loyal generals and aides. His brother, Abdullahi, was installed in the west, at Gwandu, while Muhammad Bello established his capital at Sokoto. This city soon became the center of the Fulani Empire, which was also known as the Sokoto caliphate.

The rule of Usuman Dan Fodio and his followers began a period of prosperity in the region. Government was centralized, roads were built, and trade routes were secured by troops. Education was provided for all, even women, who had formerly been denied this opportunity. The empire was particularly noted for its educational methods and teachings. Usuman Dan Fodio, Abdullahi, and Muhammad Bello were respected as writers and scholars, and all were authors of poetry and texts on religion. Soon, scholars from throughout the Islamic world came to the court at Sokoto. Arabic and local languages, including Hausa, were used in writing the laws and literature of the state, and these documents were made available to the common people so that they could know their rights. The power of the African tribal chiefs was broken under the rule of Usuman Dan Fodio, who replaced that traditional system with the laws of Islam.

As time passed, the reasons for the jihad were forgotten by many. Usuman Dan Fodio slowly withdrew into private life, leaving the day-to-day matters of ruling in the hands of his son and brother. Around 1812 he built a home in Sifawa, a town near Sokoto, where he lived simply and gathered several hundred students around him. Two years before his death in 1817, he moved to Sokoto, still preaching reform and criticizing the new bureaucracy for its tendency to oppress

the common people, just as the former kings of the Hausa states had done. Usuman Dan Fodio died in Sokoto at the age of sixty-two.

Usuman Dan Fodio's legacy continued after his death. His jihad inspired similar Muslim movements in neighboring states such as Bornu and Massina, where other caliphates were later formed. He strengthened the Islamic faith throughout the region with the example of his Fulani Empire and his writings in Arabic and Fulani. These writings dealt with topics ranging from Islamic law to the establishment of just, or fair, societies.

The Sokoto caliphate lost some of its religious purity after Usuman Dan Fodio's death, and scholarship declined after his son, Muhammad Bello died in 1837. The empire remained an economic success throughout the nineteenth century, however. Additionally, although the British conquered the empire in the early twentieth century, they ultimately had to leave Usuman Dan Fodio's administrative system in place in order to rule the region's fifteen million people efficiently. After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the caliph of Sokoto continued to influence political decisions. In 2004 the Sokoto caliphate, by then a religious confederation (a group united for a common purpose) rather than a political empire, celebrated its two-hundredth anniversary.

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Swami Vivekananda

BORN: January 12, 1863 • Calcutta, West Bengal, India

DIED: July 4, 1902 • Calcutta, West Bengal, India

Indian religious leader; philosopher



“The Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce—him the fire cannot burn—him the water cannot melt—him the air cannot dry.”

During the nineteenth century Hinduism was largely unknown in the West (the countries in Europe and the Americas). Swami Vivekananda, one of Hinduism’s great modern teachers, is credited with almost single-handedly changing that view by introducing the teachings and philosophy of the religion to the West. Philosophy is the study of ideas through which to gain a better understanding of values and reality. Originally named Narendra Nath Datta (or Narendranath Dutta), he was born into an educated, wealthy family in Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, on January 12, 1863. Indians now celebrate this date as National Youth Day in his memory. His father was Viswanath Dutta, a successful lawyer, and his mother was Bhuvaneshwari Devi.

Swami Vivekananda.
BY PERMISSION OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA
VIVEKANANDA CENTER
OF NEW YORK.

Early life and education

Narendra grew up in a home in which learning was encouraged. From childhood he showed an impressive skill for absorbing and remembering

what he read, including, by some accounts, the contents of the entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In addition to his studies he organized a theatrical troupe and enjoyed rowing, fencing, wrestling, and other athletic pursuits. He also practiced meditation and even as a child began to ponder spiritual matters and the nature of God. Meditation is quiet, focused thought to gain greater spiritual awareness and understanding. Narendra was stubborn, temperamental, and given to playing pranks on others. Later in life he was usually seen wearing an unusual turban, which he claimed he styled after the turban worn by a poor taxi driver he had seen during his childhood.

In 1879 Narendra enrolled in Presidency College (formerly called Hindu College), a liberal arts institution associated with the University of Calcutta. After a year he transferred to another University of Calcutta organization, a Christian missionary institution called the Scottish Church College. At both of these schools he acquired a broad education in science, philosophy, European history, and religion. He learned to speak several languages, including English, and was particularly attracted to the study of Western logic. He was also an accomplished musician, singer, and poet.

During his years in college Narendra began to see many similarities between the principles and beliefs of Western science and philosophy and those found in Hindu sacred texts written thousands of years before. Indeed, he came to see little conflict between the teachings of Hinduism and the findings of modern science. For example, Hinduism sought to understand the fundamental building blocks of the universe and the energy that existed throughout all of creation. In this respect, it was seeking the same ends as scientists such as Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), the Yugoslavian physicist (a scientist who studies the interactions between energy and matter) who used Sanskrit words to refer to matter and energy because he believed that the Hindu concept was accurate. He also began to question the nature and presence of God and to reject some of the features of Hinduism, primarily its acceptance of castes, the social classes into which Indians are born.

For a while Narendra followed the system of thought of the Brahmo Samaj, a social and religious movement that had been founded in Calcutta (now Kolkata) earlier in the century. The movement rejected the caste system, believed in the authority of the Vedas, the oldest of Hindu sacred texts, and sought to bring worshippers together to read from these texts

in a group setting, which was new to Hinduism. The Brahmo Samaj, however, ultimately failed to provide Narendra with the answers he was seeking.

At the feet of the master

A turning point in Narendra's life came in 1881, after one of his professors at the Scottish Church College told him about the great religious teacher Shri Ramakrishna (1836–1886). At this stage in his life, Narendra was doubtful about religion and was unsure about the existence of God. He was not prepared to accept Ramakrishna as a spiritual *guru* (guide or teacher), as he did not believe that the guru could truly experience and understand the nature of the divine. Narendra's opinions would change, however, after he underwent a dramatic experience during his second meeting with Ramakrishna. He later said, as quoted on the *Manas: Religions* Web site of the University of California–Los Angeles:

My eyes were wide open, and I saw that everything in the room, including the walls themselves, was whirling rapidly around and receding, and at the same time, it seemed to me that my consciousness [awareness] of self, together with the entire universe, was about to vanish into a vast, all-devouring void. This destruction of my consciousness of self seemed to me to be the same thing as death. I felt that death was right before me, very close.

Narendra's words express the essence of the branch of Hindu philosophy taught by Ramakrishna, called Advaita Vedanta. As *advaita* means “not two,” this school of philosophy rejected existential dualism, or the separation of the self from the universe. The school instead taught monism, or the “oneness” of the self with the universal whole, called Brahma (or Brahman). *Vedanta* means “end of the Vedas,” referring to the Upanishads. The Upanishads are texts that are included within the Vedas and contain the core of Hindu beliefs. Later, in his address to

Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts on Women

Early in his life, Swami Vivekananda shared the viewpoint of many Hindu holy men regarding women, seeing them as an obstacle to purity of thought and action. Later in life, after he had examined many of the social problems that affected India and tried to help correct them, he changed his attitude, at one point saying, “The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.” He believed that no country could develop and progress if it continued to treat its women badly.

He based his belief on the teachings of the Vedanta, which makes no distinction between men and women and indeed teaches that all people, of either sex, take part in the same universal soul. One reason that he changed his thinking about the role of women was that in the United States, he came to admire the greater education and achievement of women compared to women in his native India at that time.

the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, Narendra would state the principle of the unity of the self with the universe, which he had learned from Ramakrishna, in this way, as quoted on *UniversalWisdom.org*:

The Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce—him the fire cannot burn—him the water cannot melt—him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference [boundary] is nowhere but whose center is located in the body, and that death means the change of the center from holy to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter.

For five years Narendra studied under Ramakrishna, who recognized the remarkable abilities in his new student and patiently tried to help him “see God.” To expand Narendra’s knowledge, he read to him from the Christian Bible, placing emphasis on passages dealing with Mary, the mother of **Jesus Christ** (c. 6 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry), as an example of divine love. During these years Narendra explored the basic principles of Hindu thought: Brahma, the nature of the soul, meditation, yoga (a discipline aimed at preparing the mind for perfect spiritual insight), karma (the belief that one’s destiny is affected by the sum total of one’s deeds), and reincarnation (the belief that one’s soul is reborn in another body). He also studied the Hindu sacred texts, particularly the Vedas and the Upanishads.

After Ramakrishna’s death in 1886, Narendra inherited the elder’s role as a spiritual master. He and a group of Ramakrishna’s followers took vows as monks and lived in a house in the Indian city of Baranagar. At this point Narendra took the monastic name Vivekananda, formed from the words *vivek*, meaning “conscience” or “mind,” and *ananda*, meaning “joyous.” The title *swami*, which means “owner” or “lord” in Hindi, is used to identify a teacher and ascetic, or one who gives up worldly possessions and lives a life of self-denial. During this period Vivekananda and his fellow monks survived by begging.

In 1890 Vivekananda and some of his fellow monks set out on a two-year pilgrimage throughout India. At times he stayed in palaces, and at other times he stayed in the huts of the poor. During his travels he became more aware of the poverty and hunger that affected many of his countrymen. He also came to recognize that under British rule and the forces of modernization, Indians were losing their faith in their ancient religion. (The British had established control of India in

the mid-1800s.) On December 24, 1892, Vivekananda arrived at Kanyakumari, a town at the tip of southern India. According to his followers, he swam out to a small island in the ocean, where he meditated for three days. When he returned he expressed his determination not only to help improve the condition of Indians but also to preach the message of the divine unity of humankind. The island became the site of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial.

World Parliament of Religions

Vivekananda then traveled to Madras, India, where he attracted a larger number of followers. The young men of Madras had learned about the upcoming first-ever meeting of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois, which was scheduled for September 1893, at the same time as the Chicago World's Fair. They urged Vivekananda to attend the parliament as a representative of Hinduism. He agreed, and with the financial help of his followers he made the trip to the United States.

When he arrived in Chicago Vivekananda did not even know the exact dates when the World Parliament of Religions was scheduled to be held (September 11–27), nor did he carry any credentials, or documents establishing authority, that entitled him to speak. Nonetheless, as a highly respected guru, he was given permission on three occasions to address the seven thousand people in attendance, at times bringing his listeners to their feet in applause. In the eyes of many observers, including the newspaper reporters who covered his speeches, Swami Vivekananda was the most dominant figure at the parliament.

Vivekananda delivered his most important address on September 19, when he presented the “Paper on Hinduism.” In this speech he expressed a number of views that were new to most people in the West. He explained the concept of reincarnation, in which souls are believed to last through many bodily lives, and why people are unable to remember their past lives. He stated that the universe was eternal, not something that had been created at a given point in time, which was the Jewish and Christian belief. He also stated his philosophical belief that the goal of human life was to realize the divinity that lies within and express that divinity through concern for the welfare of others. Perhaps most importantly, he rejected the concept, prominent in Christianity, that all people are naturally sinners.



Vivekananda Illam, located along the waterfront in Madras, India, is an important pilgrimage site for every student and follower of Swami Vivekananda. © CHRIS LISLE/CORBIS.

His primary goal in attending the parliament was to promote religious tolerance. In his address, Vivekananda quoted from the Bhagavad Gita, a well-known Hindu text, and recounted at *SriRamakrishna.org*: “As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.” In later years historians would assert that Swami Vivekananda’s appearance at the World Parliament of Religions, and specifically his “Paper on Hinduism,” marked the beginning of Western interest in Hinduism and of the awareness that India’s ancient religion had something to teach the West.

Realizing the greatness of the opportunity before him, Swami Vivekananda spent the next four years in the West, traveling and giving lectures at universities. He became a great admirer of the United States and England, and he opened centers for the study of Vedantic philosophy

(the philosophy of the Vedas) in New York City and London. After returning to India he toured the West again from early 1899 to late 1900.

Vivekananda's views and actions sometimes sparked controversy: Some observers believed that he exaggerated the impact that he was having on Western thought, especially since he claimed to have "conquered" the West with Vedantic philosophy. He also attracted opposition from Christian missionaries in India, whom he fiercely criticized. Devout Hindus believed that he had discredited himself by traveling in the West, which they believed was impure and overly concerned with material goods. They felt that he had abandoned his monastic life for fame and celebrity. Indian nationalists, who were calling for independence from Great Britain, resented the fact that he was on such friendly terms with the British.

Final return to India

Despite these criticisms, Swami Vivekananda returned to India at the end of 1900 to great acclaim. Many Hindus were proud of his accomplishments in the West. During the remainder of his life he devoted himself to addressing the difficulties of the poor in India and to speaking out about social problems. With the help of the Ramakrishna Math, the order of monks formed after the death of Ramakrishna, he established the Ramakrishna Mission. Among its many other accomplishments, the mission provided care for Indians during an outbreak of the deadly infectious disease called the plague, saving many lives.

Although Swami Vivekananda died at the age of thirty-nine, on July 4, 1902, the work of the Ramakrishna Mission continued throughout the world into the early twenty-first century. Its motto, *Atmano mokshartham jagad-hitaya cha*, means "For one's own salvation, and for the good of the world." Under the alternate name of Vivekananda Vedanta Society, the organization maintains more than one hundred missions worldwide, including twelve in the United States.

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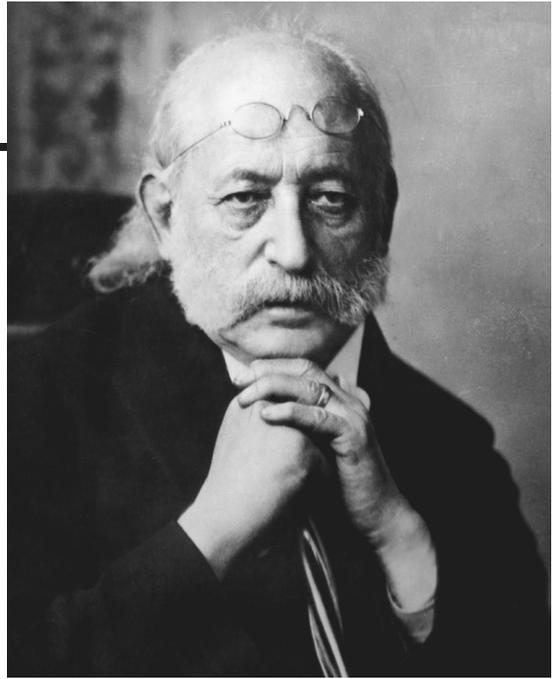
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Isaac Mayer Wise

BORN: March 29, 1819 • Steingrub, Bohemia

DIED: March 26, 1900 • Cincinnati, Ohio,
United States

rabbi; editor; writer



“Had the Hebrews not been disbursed in their progress a thousand and more years ago, they would have solved all the great problems of civilization.”

Isaac Mayer Wise was one of the most well-known Jews in the United States during the nineteenth century. He was a *rabbi*, a person trained in Jewish law and tradition who is often the head of a synagogue, a Jewish house of worship. He was also an editor and the author of several books and plays about Judaism. He created three religious organizations: the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; the Hebrew Union College, of which he served as president; and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He is regarded as a major figure in the development and organization of Reform Judaism in the United States. Reform Judaism believes that the Torah, the Jewish holy book, was written by several authors, rather than just one. Its followers do not adhere to many of the commandments, or laws, laid out in the Torah, unlike some other branches of Judaism.

Isaac Wise.

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Birth and early life

Isaac Mayer Weiss was born to Leo Weiss, a schoolteacher, and Regina Weiss on March 29, 1819, in Steigrub, a town in Bohemia. Bohemia was at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but later became a part of the Czech Republic. As a youngster Weiss was a gifted student who showed interest in a range of subjects. His father tutored him in Jewish scripture, collectively known as the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, and the Talmud. The Talmud consists of traditions that explain and interpret the first five books of the Jewish scripture, which are referred to as the Torah.

By the time Weiss was nine, his father had taught him all he could, so Weiss then studied with his grandfather for three years. After his grandfather died, he went to the city of Prague, the capital of the modern-day Czech Republic, and enrolled at a *yeshiva*, or Jewish school. He then studied at a well-known rabbinical school, where Jews prepare to become rabbis, in the town of Jekinau. Weiss next attended the University of Prague for two years and the University of Vienna in Austria for one year. In 1842, at age twenty-three, he was ordained, or officially made, a rabbi. He married Therese Bloch two years later, and the couple eventually had ten children. A later marriage produced four more children.

A controversial rabbi

Weiss first served as a rabbi in Radnitz, Bohemia, but he found the environment there unpleasant because of the discrimination against Jews in the region. Discrimination is unfair treatment against a person or group because of differences such as religion and other characteristics. During this period European Jews were the victims of widespread religious intolerance and prejudice, or mistreatment. They were typically regarded as outsiders in the largely Christian communities. Weiss believed that the United States held the promise of more religious freedom, so he left Bohemia for and arrived in New York City on July 23, 1846. At this point he changed the spelling of his name from Weiss to Wise. He accepted a job as rabbi at an Orthodox temple in Albany, New York, where he remained for four years. Orthodox Judaism is a traditional form of the religion, based on a strict interpretation of the Torah.

Wise quickly became known as a highly controversial figure within his congregation. Orthodox Jews strictly follow the traditions and laws of Judaism. Wise, however, had already concluded that some of these

traditions and laws no longer made sense in modern life. He introduced a number of reforms, which many members of the congregation resisted. A congregation is a group of worshippers who, in this instance, are members of the same synagogue. Wise ended the practice of chanting both prayers and readings from the Torah, the central part of the Orthodox service. He also formed a choir made up of both men and women and ended the practice of women and children sitting in different pews from men. He substituted confirmation, a ceremony marking the completion of a young person's religious training, for the *bar mitzva*, a coming-of-age ceremony for Jewish boys. Many members of Wise's congregation found these and other changes disturbing.

In 1850 Wise ordered the members of the congregation's board to close their businesses on Saturday, which is considered the Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest. One of the board members, however, refused to follow the order. Many feared that the board member, whose preaching was popular, would be dismissed. The congregation became evenly split between supporters and critics of Wise. The board met and voted to fire Wise, but he refused to go. On the next Sabbath, a fight broke out in the temple between Wise and the board president. A riot eventually erupted among the congregation, and the police had to restore order.

After these events Wise resigned and started his own temple in Albany, New York, and his supporters from the previous temple followed him. Indeed, many welcomed his reforms, and his congregation grew rapidly. He remained in Albany until 1854, when a congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio, invited him to become their rabbi. He accepted and remained at the Cincinnati temple, Beth Jeshurun (also Yeshurun), for the rest of his life. This congregation, like his first Albany congregation, was somewhat traditional. Still, Wise introduced his reforms, though more slowly and tactfully than he had in the 1840s, and again his congregation grew rapidly. Under Wise's leadership, the congregation constructed an immense temple in the 1860s that remains in use in the twenty-first century.

Wise and Reform Judaism

Wise had both an impressive talent for organization and a great desire to unify Judaism in the United States. In the 1850s he began to use this talent and desire to complete several large projects. He created a Jewish prayer book and formed the Union of American Hebrew Congregations,

Denominations of Judaism

In the modern era Judaism consists of three major denominations, or subdivisions: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative Judaism.

Orthodox Judaism is the most traditional in its practice of the religion. Orthodox Jews believe that God gave Moses the Torah, part of the Jewish Old Testament, and that Moses was the Torah's only author. They also believe that the 613 *mitzvot*, or commandments contained in the Torah, must be followed by Jews everywhere.

Reform Jews, in contrast, are less traditional and do not strictly follow all of the *mitzvot*. They do not accept that God gave Moses the Torah. Instead, they believe that several different authors wrote the Torah. Reform Jews do retain the culture of Judaism and many of its values, ethics, and practices.

Conservative Judaism was established in an attempt to bridge the divide between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Conservative Jews believe that God did reveal the Torah to Moses, but that human authors recorded and transmitted it, so it contains elements from these authors as well as from God. Conservative Jews believe that Jewish law should be followed but that it should change and adapt to the surrounding culture.

the Hebrew Union College, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Over time he emerged as the major spokesperson for Reform Judaism in the United States.

The prayer book In 1847 Wise was asked to become a member of an advisory board. This board was to make recommendations on various matters to Jewish congregations throughout the country, although it would not have power over them. At one board meeting Wise submitted a copy of a prayer book he had compiled. He was troubled by the common practice of rabbis compiling their own prayer books for use with their congregations. He wanted Jewish congregations in the United States to adopt a common prayer book used by all.

No action was taken on Wise's proposal until 1855. That year a committee was formed to edit Wise's prayer book, nearly all of which he had written himself. The book was then published as the *Minhag Amerika*. Although Wise had attempted to find a balance between traditional and more modern Jewish religious practices in the book, many Orthodox congregations in the East and Northeast areas of the country still found it departed from tradition too much, and they would not use it. Some Reform congregations, on the other hand, did not adopt the book because they found it to be too traditional.

Other than these few exceptions, the prayer book became widely used, primarily in the South and West, and represented a first step towards the greater unification of American Judaism.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations Wise believed that Judaism in the United States was generally too disordered. Each congregation throughout the vast and still-growing country was taking its own direction. There was no unity in Jewish thought and teaching. As early as 1848 Wise proposed the formation of a union that would have some

authority over Jewish congregations throughout the nation. For more than two decades he tried to convince others of the importance of such a union, mostly through the newspaper he founded in 1854, the *American Israelite*, which remains in publication in the early twenty-first century.

His goal was accomplished in 1873, when the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was formed in Cincinnati, Ohio. Wise avoided using the word *reform* in the name of the union because he still felt that Orthodox and Reform Jews could be united. Wise believed that Jews could enjoy religious freedom in the United States that they could not enjoy anywhere else in the world. For this reason in particular he wanted to see a strong and united American Judaism.

Hebrew Union College Wise was also behind the formation of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. He believed that too many rabbis leading American congregations were not knowledgeable enough in Jewish law and tradition. For many years he published articles in the *American Israelite* calling for the establishment of a rabbinical school. Such a school would provide the intense training and education that Wise thought rabbis needed. Hebrew Union College opened its doors in 1875, with Wise acting as president.

In 1883 the college graduated its first class, and a banquet was held to celebrate the event. Wise was disappointed when the Orthodox rabbis in attendance walked out because the food served did not conform to the strictest Jewish dietary laws. Believing that Wise's college was simply too liberal, or accepting of practices that did not strictly follow traditional practices, a group of these rabbis formed the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, a more conservative school. At this point Wise realized that his hopes of unity among American Jews would never be fulfilled. From this point until his death, he was a major spokesman for Reform Judaism.

Wise played a dominant role at a conference of Reform rabbis held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1885. This group issued the Pittsburgh Platform, a document that defined Reform Judaism in the United States. The document noted that Judaism was not a nationality but a religion. It also claimed that nothing in Jewish belief was at odds with the discoveries of science. The platform called for the elimination of Jewish dietary laws and distinctive Jewish dress. The platform was also anti-Zionist, meaning that it opposed the formation of a Jewish state or homeland.

Central Conference of American Rabbis A final major accomplishment of Wise's was the formation of a central ruling body for American Judaism. Again, he had campaigned for such a body for years, but relations between his followers and more Orthodox rabbis from the East were strained, making it difficult to reach an agreement. Finally, in 1889 the Central Conference of American Rabbis was formed. Wise served as president of this organization for the final eleven years of his life.

Wise and American politics

Wise was outspoken on a variety of political issues, especially those affecting Jews. He had seen firsthand the discrimination against Jews that existed in Europe, and he wanted to ensure that American Jews did not suffer in the same way. In 1856 the governor of Ohio issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation to the "Christian people" of Ohio. Wise immediately reminded the governor that the people of Ohio were neither Christian nor Jewish but free and independent. In 1862 Wise challenged General Ulysses S. Grant's (1822–1885) order that all Jews be discharged from the army department that he headed. Wise also fought efforts to bar Jewish (and Catholic) chaplains from serving with troops during the American Civil War (1861–65; a war between the Union [the North], who were opposed to slavery, and the Confederacy [the South], who were in favor of slavery). He openly opposed a U.S. treaty with Switzerland because he believed that the Swiss government discriminated against American Jews living there.

Wise was criticized for not taking a stand on the issue of slavery, which dominated political discussion in the 1850s and led to the Civil War. Some American rabbis defended slavery, citing passages from Jewish scripture that they believed supported the practice. Other rabbis strongly opposed it. Wise did not adopt a clear position. Many of those who subscribed to the *American Israelite* lived in the South, where slavery was widespread, and he may have feared offending his readers by opposing it. He may have also believed that stating a position on slavery would cause further divisions among American Jews.

Major works

In addition to all his other activities, Wise was also an author. Early in his career he wrote eleven novels, in English and in German, as well as two plays, both in German. Some of his novels were serialized, or published

in parts over an extended period of time, in the journals that he edited. The earliest, published in 1854, was *The Convert*. This was followed by *The Catastrophe of Eger*, *The Shoemaker's Family*, and *Resignation and Fidelity, or Life and Romance*, all three of which were published in 1855. He published several other novels later in the 1850s.

Wise also wrote about history, theology (the study of religion), and Judaism. Some of his major works on these subjects include *The History of the Israelitish Nation from Abraham to the Present Time* (1854), *The Essence of Judaism* (1861), *The Origin of Christianity, and a Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (1868), *Judaism, Its Doctrines and Duties* (1872), *The Cosmic God* (1876), and *Judaism and Christianity, Their Agreements and Disagreements* (1883). Many of these books remain in print in the early twenty-first century.

Death

On March 24, 1900, Wise preached his last sermon at his temple. That afternoon, he suffered a stroke. Soon thereafter he slipped into a coma and died on March 26. As Wise was perhaps the most prominent Jew in the United States, his passing was widely noted, and his funeral in Cincinnati was a major public event. His legacy has since survived. The course of American Judaism was profoundly influenced by the efforts and beliefs of Isaac Mayer Wise.

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Zarathushtra

BORN: Persia

Persian religious leader; teacher



“Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world-religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith.”

— Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*.

Zarathushtra was a prophet, or divine messenger, who founded and gave a version of his name to the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. In the early twenty-first century the religion is practiced by an estimated 2 million to 3.5 million people, most of whom live in Iran and India, where they are called Parsis. The prophet’s full original name was Zarathushtra (or Zarathustra) Spitama, although he is most widely known as Zoroaster, the Western adaptation of the ancient Greek version of his name, Zoroastres. The modern Persian version of his name is Zartosht, or Zardosht.

He is often credited with founding the world’s first monotheistic religion, that is, one in which a single supreme God is worshipped. Disagreements about the era in which he lived make this conclusion uncertain, however. Some historians believe that Zarathushtra lived before the

Zarathushtra.

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emergence of Judaism, in which case the monotheism he preached would stand first historically. If this is true, many of Zoroastrianism's principles likely had a major impact on the development of Judaism and on Christianity, which evolved from Judaism. Other historians believe that Judaism came first, and so it was Judaism that influenced Zoroastrianism.

Zarathushtra's teachings challenged the traditional religious views in ancient Persia (modern-day Iran). He promoted the belief in one God, called Ahura Mazda, which means "wise lord" or "lord of wisdom." Many other Zoroastrian concepts, such as those regarding the soul, heaven and hell, the arrival on Earth of a savior, resurrection (the act of rising from the dead), final judgment, and guardian angels, are similar to those found in Jewish and Christian traditions.

Historical uncertainty

Estimates of when Zarathushtra lived vary widely. Persian mythology places the dates of his life as early as 10,000 BCE. The writings of ancient Greek and Roman historians suggest that Zarathushtra lived some time between 7000 and 6000 BCE, which are the dates accepted by traditional Parsis. Findings by archaeologists (people who study the remains of past human cultures) suggest that he lived around 2000 BCE. One Zoroastrian text, the *Bundahism*, which means "creation," claims that Zarathushtra was alive 258 years before the defeat of Persia by the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), which would be 588 BCE. Many nineteenth-century historians took this date as authoritative. Modern historians questioned it, however, and most now accept that Zoroaster probably lived between 1500 and 1000 BCE, perhaps more precisely around 1200 BCE.

Historians arrived at this last estimate after close examination of the language of the Gathas. The Gathas, a collection of divine songs in seventeen chapters and 241 verses, form a sacred Zoroastrian text believed to record the actual words of Zarathushtra. They are contained within a work called the Yasna, which is in turn part of the sacred Zoroastrian text called the Avesta. The Gathas were written in an ancient Persian language called Old Avestan, which was similar to Sanskrit, the classical language of India and Hinduism.

Experts have compared the Gathas to other Sanskrit writings known to have been written around 1200 BCE, especially the Rig-Veda, one of the four books that compose the Vedas, the sacred literature of Hinduism.

Language similarities suggest that the Gathas were most likely written around the same time. Some scholars, however, remain open to the later date of around 600 BCE mentioned in the *Bundahism*. These scholars note that the Old Avestan language may have been preserved solely for religious writings and was no longer in common use by 1200 BCE. An example of this would be Latin, which remained the official language of Christianity even after it was no longer spoken. Others reject this possibility by noting that the language of the Gathas suggests that they were transmitted orally and thus could not have been written in a language that was no longer spoken.

Further support for the earlier dates can be found in references in the Gathas to social customs that were followed roughly between 1200 and 1000 BCE. These social customs were those of a rural, nomadic (having no fixed home) society. If the Gathas had been written much later, they would have likely reflected a more urban lifestyle centered around the Persian court.

Many Zoroastrian religious texts were partly or entirely destroyed, some by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE, others by Arab and Mongol invaders beginning in 650 CE. As a result, very few written records of the religion and the life of its founder still exist. One of the greatest losses was that of the thirteenth section of the Avesta, the *Spena Nask*, which contained a summary of Zarathushtra's life.

Early life

Zarathushtra's name is composed of two words in Old Avestan that translate to something like "keeper of old camels," "keeper of feeble camels," or perhaps "keeper of yellow camels." Efforts have been made to suggest a more dignified translation for Zarathushtra's name, such as "bringer of the golden dawn." People living in ancient Persia, however, often had names composed of root words that reflected the ownership of camels or horses, which were signs of wealth and status.

Textual evidence can be used to support claims for a variety of possible birthplaces for Zarathushtra. Most historians agree he was probably born and lived in northeast Persia, though the Greeks claimed that he was born in Bactria, an ancient Greek kingdom whose borders lay in modern-day Afghanistan and Tajikistan. His mother was named Dughdova, which means "milkmaid." His father was Pourushaspa, which means "many horses." The family name was Spitama, or "white."

According to legend, Zarathushtra was an unnaturally wise, thoughtful, and serious child, although one tale claims that he laughed at the time of his birth. He spent an extended period living in the wilderness, and by age fifteen he had decided to devote himself to contemplation and religious beliefs. Traditional accounts hold that when he was seven years old he was the target of an assassination (murder) plot. The plot was supposedly formed by some Persians who believed him to be the prophet of a new faith that would threaten already established religious beliefs.

At about age twenty Zarathushtra left his parents' house and lived for seven years in a cave, where he practiced meditation, or focused thinking aimed at attaining greater spiritual knowledge and awareness. When he returned he was prepared to preach a new religion, one that placed less emphasis on ritual and more on thought and intellect. Zarathushtra declared his religion would be inclusive of all of Ahura Mazda's people. He also stressed the purity of the earth, which has earned the religion the title "the world's first ecological [environmental] religion."

In the kingdom of Bactria

At first Zarathushtra met with little success in trying to convert people to his religious beliefs. Outside of his immediate family, his first convert was a cousin (or perhaps a nephew) named Maidhyoimangha. Many people in Zarathushtra's community thought he was insane and did all they could to keep away from him. Even the residents of his mother's hometown rejected him, a remarkable insult in the tribal culture of the time, when kinship ties were especially strong. At one point he was imprisoned, but escaped. The rejection was in large part because Zarathushtra demoted the Daevas, or evil spirits, from gods to mere workers on behalf of Angra Mainyu. Angra Mainyu is the name Zarathushtra gave to the primary evil spirit of Zoroastrianism, who is locked in an ongoing cosmic battle with Spenta Mainyu, an aspect of Ahura Mazda who represents good.

Zarathushtra tried to find acceptance for his beliefs for about twelve years. Frustrated, he finally left his community and took refuge in Bactria. In the text of the Yasna, within the Avesta, he commented with sorrow on his departure from his home:

To what land should I turn? Where should I turn to go?
They hold me back from folk and friends.
Neither the community I follow pleases me,
nor do the wrongful rulers of the land . . .

The Three Wise Men

According to Christian tradition, after the birth of **Jesus Christ** (6 BCE–c. 30 CE; see entry) he was visited by three *magi* from the east who are often referred to as the three wise men. The three had followed a bright star, the star of Bethlehem, and arrived at Jesus's birthplace bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Frankincense and myrrh are oils used to make perfume or incense.) The three magi have become a fixed aspect of modern Christmas celebrations in the West (the countries of Europe and the Americas), and most displays of the nativity scene, or the birth of Jesus, include depictions of the magi paying their respects to the Christ child.

The source of the story is one of the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament. According to the Gospel of Matthew, the magi had been sent by Herod, the Roman governor of Judea, as spies to discover the birthplace of the prophesied Messiah, or Saviour. The Roman Empire, which occupied the region of Palestine, saw the arrival of a Jewish messiah as a threat to the established Roman control and order. In a dream, however, the magi were warned not to return to Herod, so they traveled home by another route. Herod ordered the murder of all boys in and around Bethlehem ages two and under in an effort to ensure that the child destined to be the Messiah did not live to assume his role.

The phrase “three wise men” may be a mis-translation. Many biblical scholars use the word

magi, which comes from the Greek word for “magic.” The magi may have been “magicians” in the sense that they practiced astrology, which is the study of celestial bodies in the belief that they have an influence on the lives of humans. Some historians suggest that the magi were Zoroastrian astrologer-priests. In Western custom they have been identified by the names of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, but they are known by other names in other traditions. The belief that they were Zoroastrians is supported by the Syrian Christian name for one of the wise men, Hormisdas. This is a variation of a Persian name, Hormoz, later spelled Hormazd, which is the name of the patron angel of the first day of each month in Zoroastrian tradition. This name is also similar to the alternative name for Ahura Mazda, which is Ormazd.

Many biblical historians doubt that the story of the magi has any truth to it at all. They point out, for example, that Bethlehem was only a few miles from Jerusalem. Herod would not have had to send spies; he could have simply ordered his army to the area. They also note that Herod, as a high Roman official in command of Judea, would not have allied himself with people like the magi, foreigners who practiced a religion that was entirely alien to someone like Herod and whom Herod would have regarded as beneath him. Additionally, the star of Bethlehem is mentioned in no other records from the time.

I know . . . that I am powerless.

I have a few cattle and also a few men.

In Bactria, King Vishtaspa and his queen, Hutosa, heard Zarathushtra debate local religious leaders. They decided to adopt his beliefs, especially after Zarathushtra was able to cure the king's horse of an illness. Zarathushtra then established close ties with the family of the king and

Zarathushtra



A Zoroastrian head priest offers prayers at a wall of stone carvings near a fire temple in Mumbai, India, during the Parsi New Year. © REUTERS/CORBIS.

queen, whose sons were named Frashaoshtra and Jamaspa. Frashaoshtra's daughter, Hvovi, would become Zarathushtra's wife, and the two would have six children: three daughters, Freni, Friti, and Pourucista, and three sons, Isat Vastar, Uruvat-Nara, and Hvare Cithra. In turn Zarathushtra's daughter, Pourucista, would become the wife of the king's son, Jamaspa.

After a time the king and queen made Zoroastrianism the official religion of the kingdom, and they named Zarathushtra court prophet. At first Zoroastrianism was as much a military order as a religion, since its members were forced to fight persecution (mistreatment towards a person or group because of differences) and fend off attacks from other tribes. Zarathushtra himself denounced the Karpans, the priests of traditional Persian religion, enraging them and perhaps leading to his murder. One legend holds that Zarathushtra died during a battle with a central Asian group called the Turanians, under the leadership

of the general Arjaspa. This legend claims Zarathushtra was killed as he tended the sacred fire in a temple at Balkh, a town in modern-day Afghanistan, where he was then buried. Other legends hold that Zarathushtra died peacefully.

In the Persian Empire

The religion founded by Zarathushtra spread rapidly, and the battles ceased. Zoroastrianism became dominant in the Persian Empire, particularly during the Achaemenid dynasty (529–323 BCE). This dynasty ruled over a vast region, from eastern Europe through the Middle East and into both North Africa and central Asia. One of the most prominent Zoroastrian figures from this period was King Darius I, also called Darius the Great, who ruled from 521 to 485 BCE. When Darius secured the kingdom by seizing the throne, he introduced reforms in law, the monetary system, trade, and weights and measurements. Some stories claim that King Vishtaspa was the father of Darius the Great, which, if true, would support the estimates of Zarathushtra having lived around 600 BCE.

Alexander the Great conquered the Achaemenids beginning in the 330s BCE. The empire was then ruled by the Seleucid and Parthian dynasties, but few Zoroastrian records from this time remain. During the Sassanid Dynasty (224–651 CE), Zoroastrianism spread aggressively throughout the Persian Empire. By the sixth century it had moved into northern China, though it died out there by the thirteenth century.

In the seventh century the Sassanid Dynasty was overthrown by Arab Muslims, who were believers in the Islamic religion. Because its followers were often the victims of persecution, Zoroastrianism began to lose influence and membership in the Arab world. During the eighth and ninth centuries large numbers of Zoroastrians fled Persia for India. Zoroastrians living in modern-day Iran continue to be persecuted in the twenty-first century. Members are known as *Gabars*, meaning “infidels,” or unbelievers, and the government strongly encourages Zoroastrians to marry within their own faith as a way of keeping the religion’s membership from growing. Even in Iran, however, Zarathushtra is seen as a central figure in the development of the nation’s culture. Many people in the central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, including Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, began to show renewed interest in their Zoroastrian roots after the fall of the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century.

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Reader's Guide

Religion influences the views and actions of many people in the world today in both political and personal ways. In some instances religious fervor compels people to perform selfless acts of compassion, while in others it spurs them to bitter warfare. Religion opens some people to all humanity but restricts others to remain loyal to small groups.

In general, religion can be described as a unified system of thought, feeling, and action that is shared by a group and that gives its members an object of devotion—someone or something sacred to believe in, such as a god or a spiritual concept. Religion also involves a code of behavior or personal moral conduct by which individuals may judge the personal and social consequences of their actions and the actions of others. Most of the time, religion also deals with what might be called the supernatural or the spiritual, about forces and a power beyond the control of humans. In this function, religion attempts to answer questions that science does not touch, such as the meaning of life and what happens after death.

Perhaps one of the most amazing things about religion is that there is no commonly held way of looking at it. Yet most of the

world's population participates in it in one way or another. Though hard to define, religion seems to be a universal experience and need. Of the nearly 6.5 billion people on Earth, only about 16 percent (about 1.1 billion) say they do not believe in a god or do not believe in a specific religion. The rest of the world's population belongs to one of more than twenty different major religions.

Features and Format

World Religions: Primary Sources offers eighteen excerpted writings, speeches, and sacred texts from across the religious spectrum. The selections are grouped into three thematic chapters: Creation Stories and Foundation Myths; Characteristics of the Divine; and Religion as a Guide to Living. The first explores the creation stories of religions, such as those relayed in Judaism's Tanakh and Islam's Qur'an, and the foundation myths, such as the one relayed by Black Elk, which provide a unifying cultural basis for many people. The second chapter, Characteristics of the Divine, explores the aspects and personalities of God or the gods as revealed through religious documents such as the *The Epic of*

Gilgamesh, Sikhism's Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and Swami Vivekananda's "Paper on Hinduism." The third chapter examines how religion provides guidelines that people can use in their everyday lives. These include selections from the Christian Bible; the Daoist text *Dao De Jing*; Buddhism's *Dhammapada*; the *Avesta*, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism; and Emma Goldman's essay "The Philosophy of Atheism."

The following additional material accompanies each excerpt:

- An **introduction** places the document and its author in a historical context.
- **Things to remember while reading** gives important background information and directs the reader to central ideas in the text.
- **What happened next . . .** gives an account of later historical events.
- **Did you know . . .** cites significant and interesting facts about the document, the author, or the events discussed.
- **Consider the following . . .** poses questions about the material for the reader to consider.
- **For More Information** lists sources for more information on the author, topic, or document.

World Religions: Primary Sources includes numerous sidebars highlighting interesting, related information. More than fifty black-and-white images illustrate the text. A glossary running alongside each primary source document defines terms, people, and ideas contained in the document. The volume begins with a timeline of events and a listing of important words to know. It concludes with a subject index of people, places, and events.

World Religions Reference Library

World Religions: Primary Sources is only one component of the three-part World Religions Reference Library. The set also includes two almanac volumes and two biographies volumes:

- *World Religions: Almanac* (two volumes) covers the history, traditions, and world-views of dominant and less prominent religions and their sects and offshoots. This title examines the development of religions throughout history: their philosophies and practices, sacred texts and teachings, growth into modern times, influences on society and culture, and more. The set features eighteen chapters on today's prominent world religions and also explores ancient beliefs, smaller movements, and the philosophies of agnosticism and atheism. In addition, an introductory chapter explores the concept of religion in more depth.
- *World Religions: Biographies* (two volumes) presents the biographies of fifty men and women who have played a critical role in the world's religions throughout history. Among those profiled are Abraham, whose influence is seen in three of the modern world's most influential religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Muhammad, considered the final and most important prophet by Muslims; and Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha. Modern figures include the Hindu teacher Swami Vivekananda and Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í faith. Women who made significant impacts on religion are also featured, including Mother Maria Skobtsova, an Orthodox Christian nun who worked to save many during the Holocaust.

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Comments and Suggestions

We welcome your comments on *World Religions: Primary Sources* and suggestions for other topics in history to consider. Please write to Editors, *World Religions: Primary Sources*, U•X•L, 27500 Drake Road, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48331-3535; call toll-free 800-877-4253; send faxes to 248-699-8097; or send e-mail via <http://www.gale.com>.

Timeline of Events

- c. 2000 BCE Shin-eqi-unninni writes *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, about a king who lived in Babylonia around 2700 BCE. One story in the poem tells of a great flood, for which one man prepares by building a boat and gathering all living things into it. A similar story (Noah's Ark) would appear in the Bible.
- 1700–400 BCE Period during which the **Avesta**, sometimes referred to as the Zend-Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism, is compiled. The core of the Avesta is the Gathas, a collection of religious songs believed to have been composed by the prophet of Zoroastrianism, Zarathushtra.
- c. 800 BCE The Greek poet Homer writes *The Odyssey*. This epic poem offers a detailed view of the role of gods in human affairs as it was conceived by ancient Greeks.
- 604–531 BCE Life span of Laozi, a Chinese wise man who in Daoist tradition is thought to be the author of the **Dao De Jing**. This text is one of the sacred writings of Daoism.
- c. 490–c. 410 BCE Life span of Mahavira, considered the main founder of Jainism. He establishes the main beliefs of Jainism, which are passed down orally and later compiled in writings such as the Akaranga Sutra found in the **Gaina Sutras**.
- c. 479–221 BCE **The Analects**, thought to be written by the Chinese philosopher and politician Confucius or his disciples, is compiled. The book is a guide to moral behavior and conduct.

- 440 BCE** Possible date for the writing of the book of Genesis found in the **Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)**. Orthodox Jews believe the book was written by Moses much earlier than this. Regardless of its date, this creation story remains a vital part of the Judeo-Christian tradition even today.
- c. first century BCE** Date marking the writing of **The Dhammapada**, a Buddhist text thought to contain the actual sayings of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE).
- c. 60–100 CE** Period during which the Gospel According to Saint Matthew was likely written. This text features accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, including the Sermon on the Mount. It is a key part of the Christian **Bible**.
- 610–632** The **Qur'an**, the holy book of Islam, is revealed to the prophet Muhammad by the archangel Jabra'il.
- 712** **The Kojiki**, a Japanese Shinto text, is compiled. It is the earliest surviving document written by the Japanese. Part scripture, part history, and part folktale and myth, it represents an effort to document much of the history of early Japan. It also contains an account of the creation of the world.
- 1603** The Sikh sacred scripture, **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**, is compiled by the guru Shri Arjan Dev Ji (1563–1606).
- c. 1857** Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í faith, writes **The Hidden Words**. The purpose of the book is to take the most important elements from the teachings of all religions to find their “inner essence,” or true meaning.
- 1889** The British scholar Thomas Henry Huxley discusses his belief in agnosticism in his essay “**Agnosticism and Christianity**.”
- 1893** Swami Vivekananda delivers his “**Paper on Hinduism**” at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. His speech sparks interest in Hinduism in the Western world.
- 1916** The American political activist Emma Goldman writes “**The Philosophy of Atheism**.” In this essay, she rejects belief in such ideas as heaven, hell, sin, and other religious ideas and principles.

- 1932** The publication of *Black Elk Speaks* brings the traditional religious practices of the Lakota Sioux tribe to a wider audience.
- 1988** In *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, Scott Cunningham offers a description of the neo-pagan religious movement known as Wicca, a form of modern witchcraft.

Creation Stories and Foundation Myths

Nearly every culture in the world has a creation myth. A creation myth is a story that explains the origins of the world, the creation of humans, and the relationship between a god or gods and humans. In these stories, the origins of the world are generally the act either of a single supreme being (in the case of monotheistic religions, which believe in a single god) or of a group of gods (in the case of polytheistic religions, which believe in more than one god). One noteworthy exception among major religions is Buddhism, whose scriptures, or holy writings, often refer to “beginningless time.” This suggests that Buddhists do not believe in a single creation event or a single creator-god.

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Foundation myths differ from creation myths in that they do not necessarily focus on the creation of the world, but they have many characteristics in common with creation myths. Foundation myths in some way define the cultures that produced them. As a foundation myth develops over time, it becomes a way for people to understand the nature of the world they live in and their place within that world. It provides support for the culture’s way of viewing the world, in much the same way that the foundation of a house supports the structure.

These creation and foundational stories are often referred to as “myths,” a word that implies something fanciful or untrue. Theologians (those who study religious beliefs and practices) and other scholars, however, use the word *myth* in a way that is not intended to dismiss a narrative as untrue. Rather, the word suggests a culture’s specific way of explaining the world and its origins, expressed in terms that were understandable even to people in a culture with no written language. Used this way, *myth* connects more with “story,” “narrative,” or “explanation” than with “untruth.” A myth expresses a deeper, more fundamental truth that actual facts do not always capture.

In the major monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, creation is seen as what theologians call *ex nihilo*. *Ex* means

An African Creation Story

Virtually every culture in the world has a creation story that explains how the world came about. The cultures of Africa present a rich collection of such stories. Here is one from the Fulani people of Mali.

At the beginning there was a huge
drop of milk
Then Doondari (God) came and he
created the stone.
Then the stone created iron;
And iron created fire;
And fire created water;
And water created air.
The Doondari descended a second
time. And he took the five elements
And he shaped them into man.
But man was proud.
Then Doondari created blindness and
blindness defeated man.
But when blindness became too proud,
Doondari created sleep, and sleep
defeated blindness;
But when sleep became too proud,
Doondari created worry, and worry
defeated sleep;
But when worry became too proud,
Doondari created death, and death
defeated worry.
But when death became too proud,
Doondari descended for the third time,
And he came as Gueno, the eternal
one
And Gueno defeated death.

“Unit Three: Exploring Africa through the
Humanities. Module Fourteen: Religion in Africa.”
Exploring Africa. [http://exploringafrica.
matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/lm14/
creationstories.html](http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/curriculum/lm14/creationstories.html).

“out of” and *nibilo* means “nothing.” In other words, it is believed that nothing existed before God, who not only formed and structured the universe but also created from nothing the materials of which the universe is made. This process is seen as having occurred over a period of time, often expressed as “days.” This reference of *day* is generally interpreted in symbolic terms to refer to some span of time. In the book of Genesis in the Christian and Judaic scriptures, for example, creation occurred in stages over a six-“day” period, with God resting on the seventh day. This is depicted in the Hebrew Bible, the **Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)**. The creation account in the **Qur’an**, the scripture of Islam, is similar: “Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods.” Allah is Islam’s name for God.

Common themes

Despite the difference in creation myths throughout the world, they tend to have a number of elements or themes in common. The first of these elements is the idea of creation as a kind of birth, often from an egg. For example, in some versions of the Japanese Shinto religion’s creation myth, contained in the sacred text called **Tales from the Kojiki**, the chaotic mass of elements that existed at the time of creation was in the shape of an egg. In Greek mythology, the god of love, Eros, emerged from an egg laid by the bird Nyx. The shell pieces became Gaia, the goddess of Earth, and Uranus, the god of the sky. The egg especially stands out in the creation myths of early Chinese Daoists, who told the story of a great cosmic egg from which the god Pangu emerged when the shell split. The top half of the shell became the sky, and the bottom half became Earth.

A second common theme found in creation myths is the concept that the universe has both a father and a mother. Again, in Greek mythology, Gaia and Uranus produced children, who in turn produced grandchildren, giving rise to plants, the stars, and other elements of creation. In the Shinto creation myth, Izanagi and Izanami gave birth to the islands of Japan and then gave birth to Amaterasu, the sun goddess, and Tsukiyumi, the moon god. Among the Aborigines of Australia, the Father of All Spirits awakened the Sun Mother and gave her instructions for waking the spirits and giving them life and form. She repeatedly tried to follow his instructions, but when she returned to the Father, he told her to do more, until he was finally pleased with her work. Similarly, Wiccans worship a god and a goddess, masculine and feminine principles of creation and renewal.

Common to most creation myths is the notion of a supreme being. The creation accounts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam see a single supreme god as responsible for all creation. Similarly, Zoroastrianism attributes creation to its supreme deity, Ahura Mazda; the ancient Babylonians to Marduk; and Hindus to Krishna, the “cause of all causes.” Interestingly, while the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as Mormons) is Christian, its followers believe that the physical universe is eternal, so it was not created by a supreme being; God, however, organized and arranged the physical universe in the act of creation.

Yet another theme that runs through the world’s creation myths is the question of whether creation took place from above or below. In Shinto, for example, creation took place from above, in a world beyond the clouds. In the Sioux foundational myth relayed in *Black Elk Speaks*, a record of the tales told by a holy man of the Oglala Lakota Sioux, Black Elk narrates a vision of a cloud world where he encounters the Six Grandfathers who empower him. In contrast, the creation and foundational myths of the Bushmen of Africa and of the Hopi Indians of North America both depict creation as occurring from below. The Bushmen, for example, believe that in times past people and animals lived below Earth but that the god Kaang planned a place of happiness for them on Earth’s surface. He planted a large tree with branches that spread over Earth and then dug a large hole through which people climbed to the surface. The Hopi believe that they climbed a pine tree to reach the world’s surface, to escape an unbearable world below. They also believe that life on Earth may be part of an ongoing process of climbing to achieve yet a better world.

A related theme is that of the “diver” myth, which sees creation as somehow having been pulled out from chaos or muck. In Shinto, for example, the gods Izanagi and Izanami dipped a spear into the muck and pulled it out. The drops that fell from the spear became the Japanese islands. Similarly, the Iroquois believe that a Sky Woman fell to Earth, which was covered by water. After the water animals seized her and took her to the bottom, she brought up mud, which she spread on the back of a turtle and which grew into the North American continent.

Creation without a god

Of course, not all people believe in a god or gods. Some people, called atheists, do not believe in a god at all. Others, called agnostics, say that they are not sure whether a god exists. Agnostics typically argue that no concrete evidence proves that there is a god who created the world. Thomas Henry Huxley, a nineteenth-century British biologist, is an example of a prominent intellectual (a person who engages in study, reflection, or contemplation) who was an agnostic, a term he himself coined. A biologist studies the processes of plant and animal life. In his essay “**Agnosticism and Christianity**,” he argues his position that “it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty.” In Huxley’s view, there simply is no evidence that supports the existence of a creator-god.

During the nineteenth century, many scientists were studying geology and other branches of science that indicated that evolution, not creation, was the driving force behind the creation of the world and of humankind. Evolution is the theory that living beings evolved, or changed, over time to take on the forms we know today. This contrasts with the belief that God created all beings. Perhaps because he was a biologist, Huxley viewed issues involving creation, the soul, the afterlife, and other religious concepts from the standpoint of a scientist rather than a believer.

All these creation and foundational myths represent an effort on the part of the cultures that produce them to find a link between the present and the past, including the past of their ancestors. It is a part of being human for people to question where they came from and where they are going. Creation and foundational myths attempt to answer these questions in ways that reflect the cultural realities of a people at a given time and in a given place. Even science shares this wonder.

Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)

*“Bereshit—Genesis,” from the The Holy Scriptures,
available online from the Jewish Virtual Library at
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/Genesisistoc.html>*

Written in about the first century BCE

Published in 1917 by the Jewish Publication Society

“IN THE beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth.”

Non-Jews use the word *Bible* to refer to the Judeo-Christian scriptures, and Christians divide it into the Old and New Testaments. Jews, however, refer to their sacred scripture as Tanakh. This word comes from the Hebrew letters used to refer to its three parts. The first part is the Torah, which comprises five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The second is called *Nevi'im*, or Prophets, and includes twenty-one books, such as I Kings, II Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. The third is called *Ketuvim*, or Writings, and consists of a number of the more “literary” or story-like books, including Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and others. The Tanakh is also referred to as the Hebrew Bible. For Christians, the Hebrew Bible is the Old Testament.

The epic story of creation is contained in the first book of the Hebrew Bible. This book, consisting of fifty chapters, is generally called Genesis, but in the Hebrew tradition it is called *Bereshit* (sometimes spelled *Bereishit*; pronounced Buh-RAY-sheet). This word means “in the beginning” and is taken from the book’s opening words: *Bereshit Bara Elokim Et Hashamayim Veet Haaretz*, meaning “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.”

The account of the creation of the world and of human beings is detailed in the first two chapters of Genesis, ending with the fourth verse of chapter 2. In vivid, simple language, it tells of the creation of

The Jewish Shabbat

Central to the Jewish tradition is Shabbat, the source of the English word *Sabbath*. While usually the word is interpreted as “rest,” it comes from a Hebrew word meaning something closer to “cease” and is typically interpreted to mean “cease working,” just as God ceased his creative activity. Shabbat commemorates God’s “resting” on the seventh day after six days of creation. It is the only Jewish holiday mentioned in the Old Testament. Indeed, the seventh day of creation is regarded as the first celebration of Shabbat, and the obligation to celebrate Shabbat is one of the Ten Commandments.

In strict Jewish tradition, Jews are obligated to honor Shabbat by not engaging in any creative activity, or any activity that somehow affects or changes the environment. For example, writing would be considered a violation of Shabbat. In modern life, however, many Jews have modified their interpretation of activities that would be a violation of Shabbat; thus, creative writing might be considered a “leisure” activity that would add to the holiness of Shabbat.

Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday, when the new day is thought to begin, and continues until sundown on Saturday, when the day ends. Christianity moved its Sabbath to Sunday as part of its break with Jewish traditions. This order was made by the Church Council of Laodicea in 364 CE.

light and darkness on day one; of the firmament (the sky) on day two; of the seas and dry land as well as plants and trees on day three; of the sun, moon, stars, seasons, day, and years on day four; of sea creatures and birds on day five; and of land animals and man on day six. On the seventh day, God rested.

The creation story contains a number of important principles that survive in the Judeo-Christian tradition. First, Judaism believes in a creator-god, who made all there is. Second, the story of creation emphasizes that all God created was good. Third, the greatest of all God’s creations was humankind. Fourth, humans are distinguished from all other creatures because they are made in God’s likeness—they have the potential to achieve God’s goodness and creative energy—and because they have “dominion” over the rest of God’s creatures, that is, they have control over their environment. Finally, the pattern of six days of work followed by a day of rest formed the pattern for working life throughout the history of the Western world.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible):

- The account of creation in Genesis establishes Judaism as possibly the world’s first monotheistic religion, though historians of religion continue to debate this question. Monotheism (*mono-*, meaning “one”) refers to the concept of a single creator-god.
- It is conventional to number the chapters and verses of the Jewish scripture as well as the Christian New Testament. Thus, the first line of the excerpt would be referred to as Genesis 1:1, meaning Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. The verse numbers generally, but not always, correspond to a single sentence. The numbering of verses is standard, so that readers of any edition of the Bible

can find chapters and verses without having to refer to differing page numbers.

- In the excerpt from Genesis, the name “God” is written “G-d.” Omitting letters from God’s name is a common practice in Jewish tradition out of a concern that the written name of God could be defaced or erased or that the document could be destroyed. Accordingly, Jews avoid writing the complete name of God, often writing G-d or YHVH or YHWH rather than Yahweh. Modern-day rabbis have had to deal with the emergence of the computer and the fact that God’s name can be deleted from a computer text. They have determined that this is not an “erasure” or “defacement,” because a computer text has no permanence.
- The “days” mentioned in the creation account in Genesis are generally not regarded as literal twenty-four-hour days. Jewish tradition accepts the idea that notions of time are relative and that the word *day* was used because it would be simple to understand. The use of day, then is not inconsistent with modern scientific views that Earth was formed over a period of millions of years.

• • •

Excerpt from the Holy Scriptures

Genesis: Chapter 1

- 1 IN THE beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth.
- 2 Now the earth was unformed and **void**, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters.
- 3 And G-d said: “Let there be light” And there was light.
- 4 And G-d saw the light, that it was good; and G-d divided the light from the darkness.
- 5 And G-d called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night And there was evening and there was morning, one day.
- 6 And G-d said: “Let there be a **firmament** in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.”
- 7 And G-d made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so.
- 8 And G-d called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

Void: Empty.

Firmament: The sky, the heavens.

- 9 And G-d said: "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.
- 10 And G-d called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas; and G-d saw that it was good.
- 11 And G-d said: "Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth." And it was so.
- 12 And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good.
- 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.
- 14 And G-d said: "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years;
- 15 and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." And it was so.
- 16 And G-d made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars.
- 17 And G-d set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,
- 18 and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and G-d saw that it was good.
- 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.
- 20 And G-d said: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let **fowl** fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."
- 21 And G-d created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good.
- 22 And G-d blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth."
- 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.
- 24 And G-d said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind." And it was so.
- 25 And G-d made the beast of the earth after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the ground after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good.

Fowl: Birds, especially game birds.



In the creation story of the Tanakh, God rested on the seventh day. Jews rest on this day, called Shabbat, to follow God's model and devote their time to Him. © DAVID H. WELLS/CORBIS.

26 And G-d said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

27 And G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d created He him; male and female created He them.

28 And G-d blessed them; and G-d said unto them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and **replenish** the earth, and **subdue** it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth."

29 And G-d said: "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for food;

Replenish: To fill up or to restore a supply.

Subdue: To bring under control.

30 and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, I have given every green herb for food." And it was so.

31 And G-d saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis: Chapter 2

Host: A large number.

1 And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the **host** of them.

2 And on the seventh day G-d finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

Hallowed: Made holy.

3 And G-d blessed the seventh day, and **hallowed** it; because that in it He rested from all His work which G-d in creating had made.

4 These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created, in the day that **HaShem** G-d made earth and heaven.

HaShem: Literally, "the name," or another name for the Lord God.

• • •

What happened next . . .

The book of Genesis contains many of the most famous stories from the Tanakh. These stories remain important parts of the cultural heritage of the West. The first eleven chapters recount the general history of humankind over a period of thousands of years. They begin with creation of the physical world and go on to the creation of humans. After chapter 11, the emphasis in Genesis begins to change. Instead of focusing on all of humankind, Genesis concentrates on major individuals. With Abraham, the founder of Judaism, and his descendants, God hoped to renew the world through his chosen people, the Jews.

Genesis contains at least four important themes in Jewish history. The first is the concept of election, or the belief that God chooses special people to carry out his work on Earth. Thus, the Jewish people, and Christians as well, see Abraham as the founder of the Jewish nation. The second major theme is the concept of covenant. This refers to agreements between God and human beings, such as God's promise never to send another flood. This sense of covenant governed all human relationships and made both moral and ritual demands on the Jewish people.

The third theme is law. The best example is the Ten Commandments, but the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) contains other examples of laws. All are based on the belief in one supreme God and humankind's covenants with Him. The final theme is exodus, the most prominent example of which is contained in the second book of the Torah, titled Exodus (or Shemot). The escape of Jews from bondage in Egypt and their return to the Promised Land (the land of Canaan, now Israel) is a key event in Jewish history. This event is still remembered in the yearly feast of Passover.

Did you know . . .

- Traditionally, it was believed that Moses was the author of Genesis, but modern biblical scholarship has determined that the book's authorship is unknown. For centuries, the oldest manuscripts of Genesis, and of the other books of the Hebrew Bible, dated to the ninth century. Then, in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which include the books of the Hebrew Bible, were discovered by a shepherd boy in a cave near Qumran, Israel, near the northwestern coast of the Dead Sea. These scrolls were hidden by members of the clergy to protect them from invading Romans. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest manuscript versions of the Hebrew Bible known to survive now date to the first century BCE.
- The creation account of Genesis is similar to the creation stories told in numerous other cultures. Many folk stories worldwide feature a creator-god who creates the world by divine command and forms the human being in his image from clay. One remarkably similar account is the Babylonian Genesis, written late in the second millennium BCE in honor of the god Marduk. The Babylonian epic Atrakhasis also contains elements strikingly similar to events in Genesis.

Consider the following . . .

- Some religions view the physical universe as eternal. Summarize ways in which Genesis provides a different view of the physical universe.
- Explain the sequence of creation, as outlined in Genesis.
- Explain what Genesis means when it says that God gave humans “dominion” over the rest of creation.

For More Information

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Tales from the Kojiki

*“Japanese Creation Myth,” from Tales from the Kojiki,
in Reading about the World, available online at
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_1/kojiki.html
Kojiki compiled by O No Yasumaro in the eighth century
Book by Genji Shibukawa
Translated by Yaichiro Isobe
Published in 1999 by Harcourt Brace Custom Publishing*

“Before the heavens and the earth came into existence, all was a chaos, unimaginably limitless and without definite shape or form.”

The Kojiki, an eighth-century Shinto text, is the earliest surviving document written by the Japanese. Shinto is a native Japanese religion that focuses on the worship of natural spirits called *kami*. Until the end of World War II in 1945, Shinto was the state religion of Japan. Part holy text, part history, and part folktale (a story passed on through oral traditions, usually containing a timeless truth, custom, or belief) and myth, it represents an effort to document much of the history of early Japan. It also contains an account of the creation of the world, one that in many respects is similar to creation accounts contained in the scriptures, or holy texts, of other world religions.

Kojiki means “Record of Ancient Matters.” The book consists of 180 sections. The first third gives an account of the creation of the world (and of the Japanese islands, in particular), the birth of the gods and goddesses, and the descent of the gods and goddesses to Japan. The remaining sections list the line of succession of the Japanese emperors, linking these emperors to the gods and goddesses. These sections also record taboos (social or religious bans or restrictions), rituals, and ceremonies that were important to Shinto. Over the centuries, the Kojiki has become

an important part of Japanese/Shinto mythology and helps define the Japanese worldview.

The Shinto creation story relates the activities of Izanagi and Izanami, a god and goddess who created the Japanese islands out of chaos, a state of disorder or formlessness. Shinto recognizes both a male and a female principle, or element, in creation. This is in contrast to religions such as Christianity and Judaism, which see creation as the work of a male god alone. The story notes, however, that because Izanami spoke ahead of her husband at their wedding ceremony, the ceremony had to be repeated so that the male god was given priority over the female goddess. This male prominence is an important feature of historic Japanese culture and can still be found in the twenty-first century. The islands of Japan were seen as the god and goddess's children. So, too, were the kami, especially the spirits that ruled the islands. Later, the two gods produced additional gods, including Kagutsuchi, the fire god. The creation story goes on to recount Izanami's death and Izanagi's pursuit of her to the underworld, or the Nether Regions.

The creation account of the Kojiki contains a number of elements that are important to Japanese culture. The chief one is the concept of the "world." While people who practice Shinto can be found worldwide, Shinto is truly a Japanese religion. In this way it differs from religions such as Christianity, which is not identified with any particular culture or country. In order to understand why Shinto is so uniquely Japanese, it is necessary to understand the history of the Kojiki's composition.

The Kojiki is as much a political document as it is a holy work. During the seventh century Japan was greatly influenced by its much larger neighbor, China, and many elements of Japanese culture reflect this influence. The Chinese had been thorough and careful about recording their history. Under their influence Japanese writers began to do the same, although none of their works from the seventh century survive.

Then, in 673, the emperor Tenmu seized the throne of Japan. Tenmu ordered a history compiled, similar to the kinds of histories produced in China. He believed that the records of many of his courtiers (attendants), imperial officials, and the chief families in the realm had been either misrepresented or changed. His goal was to produce a history that would justify his rule by showing that he was a descendant of the gods. He commissioned a court reciter, Hieda no Are, to begin memorizing a family tree and a collection of stories. Hieda no Are was the perfect person

for the job, for he had a flawless memory. He could recite with complete accuracy any written text that he had looked at once.

Tenmu died in 686. For years the family histories and stories that Hieda no Are had compiled existed solely in the court reciter's memory. Finally in 712, during the reign of the empress Genmei, the material that Hieda no Are had memorized was compiled and written down by O No Yasumaro. Those stories formed the basis of the Kojiki. In 720 a second text, called the Nihonshoki, containing more stories that Hieda no Are had memorized, was also written down. These two books are the earliest surviving texts of any kind written by the Japanese.

The Kojiki was written partly to prove that the Japanese emperor was divine and partly to assert the superiority of Japanese culture. For this reason the Kojiki's concept of "the world" was limited to the Japanese islands. When Izanagi and Izanami create "the world," their creation was only the islands of Japan, not the rest of the world. In this respect, though, the creation account of the Kojiki is like those of other cultures in the world. The seventh-century Japanese people only knew their own home regions well. They had little contact with people from other islands or other regions. It was natural that, in their view, "the world" was their homeland and that "the people" were their neighbors.

Japan's geography helps explain some of the creation elements found in the Kojiki. Japan is an island nation, and much of its land is dominated by mountains. The sea cuts the many islands of Japan off from the rest of the world. So the story of creation told in the Kojiki takes place on a high plain, lifted above the surrounding oceans.

Shinto Kami

Shinto believes in *kami*, a word usually translated as "divinities" or "gods." Trying to define kami is difficult, however. They include not only the original creator-gods but also a host of lesser gods that, in turn, can include the spirits of ancestors and natural forces.

The origins of kami can be found in early Japanese history. Japanese society was divided into separate clans. Each of these clans was headed by a chieftain, and each clan worshipped a kami. Part of the chieftain's job was to oversee the ceremonies devoted to the kami. When one clan overran another, the kami of the defeated clan became subject to that of the conquering clan. In this way the hierarchy (classification of a group according to rank) of the kami was shifted about. Later, when the Japanese began to form a centralized government with a supreme emperor at its head, this belief helped support the emperor's authority. Because the emperor descended directly from Amaterasu, the sun goddess, the emperor's clan was more powerful than any other clan and thus possessed the right to rule Japan.

According to Shinto belief, because the world is the creation of Amaterasu, all things are part of her divinity. A better translation of the word kami would be "the sacredness in things" or even "life forces." The kami include ancestral spirits, social organization, and the natural forces that control disease and health, death and life, the stars and planets, and the physical world. Kami represent the Shinto view that the world is basically sacred and anything can be the object of worship.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from Tales from the Kojiki:

- Despite the fact that Shinto defines the Japanese character, it has been heavily influenced by cultures from the Asian mainland. Shinto originated among the peoples of Korea and Mongolia and was exported to Japan by immigrants. In the eighth century early Shinto absorbed many influences from China, including other religions, such as Buddhism and Daoism.
- Izanagi and Izanami are regarded in the Kojiki as having introduced death to the world. In giving birth to the fire god, Izanami is severely burned and dies. She leaves her husband, Izanagi, lonely in the world, so he searches for her in Hades, or the land of the dead, where she is horribly deformed. The Shinto concept of death, however, is that one's spirit goes to a realm that is little different from this life. The afterlife is seen as neither a heaven nor a hell. In contrast to such religions as Islam and Christianity, Shinto places most of its emphasis on happiness in this life. There is little emphasis on preparing for a life after death.

Eon: A period of time equal to a thousand million years or, simply, an extremely long time.

Materialized: Took physical shape.

Opaque: Preventing the passage of light, not transparent.

Precipitated: Condensed into solid form.

Medusa-like: Similar to Medusa, a female monster in Greek mythology who had living snakes for hair.

Succession: A sequence in which one thing directly follows another.

Bade: Instructed, ordered.

Nebulous: Hazy or blurred, not clearly defined.

Consolidate: To combine into a whole, to unify.

Terra firma: Solid earth.

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Excerpt from Tales from the Kojiki

The Beginning of the World

Before the heavens and the earth came into existence, all was a chaos, unimaginably limitless and without definite shape or form. **Eon** followed eon: then, lo! out of this boundless, shapeless mass something light and transparent rose up and formed the heaven. This was the Plain of High Heaven, in which **materialized** a deity called Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi-no-Mikoto (the Deity-of-the-August-Center-of-Heaven)...

In the meantime what was heavy and **opaque** in the void gradually **precipitated** and became the earth, but it had taken an immeasurably long time before it condensed sufficiently to form solid ground. In its earliest stages, for millions and millions of years, the earth may be said to have resembled oil floating, **medusa-like**, upon the face of the waters. . . .

Many gods were thus born in **succession**, and so they increased in number, but as long as the world remained in a chaotic state, there was nothing for them to do. Whereupon, all the Heavenly deities summoned the two divine beings, Izanagi and Izanami, and **bade** them descend to the **nebulous** place, and by helping each other, to **consolidate** it into **terra firma**. "We

bestow on you," they said, "this precious treasure, with which to rule the land, the creation of which we command you to perform." So saying they handed them a spear called Ama-no-Nuboko, **embellished** with costly gems. The divine couple received respectfully and ceremoniously the sacred weapon and then withdrew from the presence of the Deities, ready to perform their **august commission**. Proceeding **forthwith** to the Floating Bridge of Heaven, which lay between the heaven and the earth, they stood awhile to gaze on that which lay below. What they **beheld** was a world not yet condensed, but looking like a sea of filmy fog floating to and fro in the air, exhaling the **while** an inexpressibly fragrant odor. They were, at first, **perplexed** just how and where to start, but at length Izanagi suggested to his companion that they should try the effect of stirring up the **brine** with their spear. So saying he pushed down the jeweled shaft and found that it touched something. Then drawing it up, he examined it and observed that the great drops which fell from it almost immediately **coagulated** into an island, which is, to this day, the Island of Onokoro. Delighted at the result, the two deities descended forthwith from the Floating Bridge to reach the miraculously created island. In this island they **thenceforth** dwelt and made it the basis of their subsequent task of creating a country. Then wishing to become **espoused**, they erected in the center of the island a pillar, the Heavenly August Pillar, and built around it a great palace called the Hall of Eight Fathoms. Thereupon the male Deity turning to the left and the female Deity to the right, each went round the pillar in opposite directions. When they again met each other on the further side of the pillar, Izanami, the female Deity, speaking first, exclaimed: "How delightful it is to meet so handsome a youth!" To which Izanagi, the male Deity, replied: "How delightful I am to have fallen in with such a lovely maiden!" After having spoken thus, the male Deity said that it was not in order that woman should anticipate man in a greeting. Nevertheless, they fell into **connubial** relationship, having been instructed by two **wagtails** which flew to the spot. Presently the Goddess bore her divine **consort** a son, but the baby was weak and boneless as a **leech**. Disgusted with it, they abandoned it on the waters, putting it in a boat made of reeds. Their second offspring was as disappointing as the first. The two Deities, now sorely disappointed at their failure and full of **misgivings**, ascended to Heaven to inquire of the Heavenly Deities the causes of their misfortunes. The latter performed the ceremony of **divining** and said to them: "It is the woman's fault. In turning round the Pillar, it was not right and proper that the female Deity should in speaking have taken **precedence** of the male. That is the reason." The two Deities saw the truth of this divine suggestion, and made up their minds to **rectify** the error. So, returning to the earth again, they went once more around the Heavenly Pillar. This time Izanagi spoke first saying: "How delightful to meet so beautiful a maiden!"

Bestow: Give.

Embellished: Decorated.

August: Very important.

Commission: A task, a duty to perform a specific piece of work.

Forthwith: Immediately.

Beheld: Saw.

While: A certain length of time.

Perplexed: Puzzled, confused.

Brine: Water with salt in it.

Coagulated Changed from a liquid into a thicker substance.

Thenceforth: From that time onward.

Espoused: Married.

Connubial: Relating to marriage.

Wagtails: A kind of songbird with a long tail.

Consort: A spouse, a husband or a wife.

Leech: A bloodsucking worm.

Misgivings: Doubts or uneasiness.

Divining: Predicting the future through mystical or supernatural knowledge.

Precedence: Priority or superiority in rank or position.

Rectify: To correct.

Tales from the Kojiki

Izanami and Izanagi stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven as they prepare to dip their spear into the brine and pull out the island of Onokoro.

© PETER HARHOLDT/CORBIS.



"How happy I am," responded Izanami, "that I should meet such a handsome youth!" This process was more appropriate and in accordance with the law of nature. After this, all the children born to them left nothing to be desired. First, the island of Awaji was born, next, Shikoku, then, the island of Oki, followed by Kyushu; after that, the island Tsushima came into being, and lastly, Honshu, the main island of Japan. The name of Oyashi-ma-kuni . . . was given to these . . . islands. After this, the two Deities became the parents of numerous smaller islands destined to surround the larger ones.

The Birth of the Deities

Begetting: Giving birth to.

Preside: Rule.

Procreation: Having children.

Befell: Happened to.

Having, thus, made a country from what had formerly been no more than a mere floating mass, the two Deities, Izanagi and Izanami, [set] about **begetting** those deities destined to **preside** over the land, sea, mountains, rivers, trees, and herbs. . . .

The process of **procreation** had, so far, gone on happily, but at the birth of Kagutsuchi-no-Kami, the deity of fire, an unseen misfortune **befell** the

divine mother, Izanami. During the course of her **confinement**, the goddess was so severely burned by the flaming child that she **swooned** away. Her divine consort, deeply alarmed, did all in his power to **resuscitate** her, but although he succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, her appetite had completely gone. . . . Her **demise** marks the **intrusion** of death into the world. Similarly the **corruption** of her body and the grief **occasioned** by her death were each the first of their kind.

By the death of his faithful spouse Izanagi was now quite alone in the world. In conjunction with her, and in accordance with the instructions of the Heavenly Gods, he had created and consolidated the Island Empire of Japan. In the fulfillment of their divine mission, he and his heavenly spouse had lived an ideal life of mutual love and cooperation. It is only natural, therefore, that her death should have dealt him a truly **mortal** blow.

. . . In a fit of uncontrollable grief, he stood sobbing at the head of the **bier**. . . . Meanwhile Izanami, for whom her divine husband pined so bitterly, had **quitted** this world for good and all and gone to the Land of Hades.

Izanagi's Visit to the Land of Hades

. . . Unable any longer to bear his grief, he resolved to go down to the Nether Regions in order to seek for Izanami and bring her back, at all costs, to the world. He started on his long and **dubious** journey. . . . Far ahead of him, he **espied** a large castle. "That, no doubt," he **mused** in delight, "may be where she resides."

Summoning up all his courage, he approached the main entrance of the castle. Here he saw a number of gigantic demons, some red, some black, guarding the gates with watchful eyes. He retraced his steps in alarm, and stole round to a gate at the rear of the castle. He found, to his great joy, that it was apparently left unwatched. He crept **warily** through the gate and peered into the interior of the castle, when he immediately caught sight of his wife standing at the gate at an inner court. The delighted Deity loudly called her name. "Why! There is some one calling me," sighed Izanami-no-Mikoto, and raising her beautiful head, she looked around her. What was her amazement but to see her beloved husband standing by the gate and gazing at her intently! He had, in fact, been in her thoughts no less constantly than she in his. With a heart leaping with joy, she approached him. He grasped her hands tenderly and murmured in deep and earnest tones: "My darling, I have come to take thee back to the world. Come back, I pray thee, and let us complete our work of creation in accordance with the will of the Heavenly Gods—our work which was left only half accomplished by thy departure. How can I do this work without thee? Thy loss means to me the loss of all." This appeal came from the depth of his heart.

Confinement: The period before, during, and just after childbirth.

Swooned: Fainted.

Resuscitate: To revive or bring back from the brink of death.

Demise: Death.

Intrusion: An unwelcome entrance or presence.

Corruption: The state of being ruined or made rotten.

Occasioned: Caused.

Mortal: Powerful, severe.

Bier: A stand on which a coffin is placed.

Quitted: Left.

Dubious: Uncertain.

Espied: Caught sight of.

Mused: Thought.

Summoning up: Calling upon.

Warily: Cautiously.

The goddess sympathized with him most deeply, but answered with tender grief: "Alas! Thou hast come too late. I have already eaten of the furnace of Hades. Having once eaten the things of this land, it is impossible for me to come back to the world." So saying, she lowered her head in deep despair.

Entreat: Plead with, beg.

"Nay, I must **entreat** thee to come back. Canst not thou find some means by which this can be accomplished?" exclaimed her husband, drawing nearer to her. After some reflection, she replied: "Thou hast come a very, very long way for my sake. How much I appreciate thy devotion! I wish, with all my heart, to go back with thee, but before I can do so, I must first obtain the permission of the deities of Hades. Wait here till my return, but remember that thou must not on any account look inside the castle in the meantime." "I swear I will do as thou **biddest**," **quoth** Izanagi, "but **tarry** not in thy quest." With **implicit** confidence in her husband's pledge, the goddess disappeared into the castle.

Biddest: Ask, request.

Quoth: Said.

Tarry: Delay.

Implicit: Unspoken but understood.

Injunction: Command or ban.

Waned: Faded.

Uncanny: Mysterious, creepy.

Apprehension: Fear, dread.

Ghastly: Horrible, frightening.

Naught: Nothing.

For sooth: Indeed, truly.

Perfidy: Betrayal.

Izanagi observed strictly her **injunction**. He remained where he stood, and waited impatiently for his wife's return. Probably to his impatient mind, a single heart-beat may have seemed an age. He waited and waited, but no shadow of his wife appeared. The day gradually wore on and **waned** away, darkness was about to fall, and a strange unearthly wind began to strike his face. Brave as he was, he was seized with an **uncanny** feeling of **apprehension**. Forgetting the vow he had made to the goddess, he broke off one of the teeth of the comb which he was wearing in the left bunch of his hair, and having lighted it, he crept in softly and glanced around him. To his horror he found Izanagi lying dead in a room: and lo! a **ghastly** change had come over her. She, who had been so dazzlingly beautiful, was now become **naught** but a rotting corpse, in an advanced stage of decomposition. . . . The sound he made awakened Izanami from her death-like slumber. "**For sooth!**" she cried: "he must have seen me in this revolting state. He has put me to shame and has broken his solemn vow. Unfaithful wretch! I'll make him suffer, for his **perfidy**."

Then turning to the Hags of Hades, who attended her, she commanded them to give chase to him. At her word, an army of female demons ran after the Deity.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Izanagi, pursued by the demons and by Izanami herself, fled. The two stood face to face at the entrance to the underworld, where they agreed to divorce. They decided that Izanagi would rule the realm of the living and that Izanami would rule that of the dead. After Izanagi returned to

Earth, he bathed in a stream, where he purified himself. Out of his eyes and nose, three major deities emerged: Amaterasu, the sun goddess and ruler of heaven; Tsuki-Yumi, the moon god and ruler of night; and Susano-o, the god of violence and ruler of the ocean. Afterward, Izanagi returned to heaven and remained there. Izanami continued to rule over the underworld.

Did you know . . .

- In the Nihonshoki, the other major Shinto text from this era, the creation story is told again. In this version, however, some of the elements that reflect poorly on Izanami are not included. She does not corrupt the original wedding ceremony, nor is she banished to the underworld. This version of the story never became as popular as the version in the Kojiki.
- The story of the journey to the underworld is remarkably similar to a story told in Greek mythology. Like Izanagi, the Greek god Orpheus also made the mistake of looking at his mate against her wishes when he sought her in the underworld. Izanami made an error similar to that of the Greek goddess Persephone by eating the food of the underworld, forcing her to remain in the world of the dead.
- Records from the tenth century show that several shrines were built to Izanagi and Izanami in the Kinki area of Japan, an area that encompasses the cities of Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. Later, the Taga shrine was built for the worship of Izanagi in Omi, which is now the Shiga prefecture, or district, and this shrine became the most popular place for worshipping the couple.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain the view of divinities that emerges from the Kojiki. Note, for example, how they are similar to or different from people.
- Discuss how and why it would have been important to Japanese rulers during this period to encourage a myth that equates the creation of the world with the creation of Japan.
- The Kojiki has been described as being as much folklore as it is scripture. In other words, it is a collection of stories that were passed along orally and developed over time. Other

scriptures, such as the Islamic Qurʾan, are seen not as cultural stories but as the direct revelation of God to one of his prophets. Explain how the excerpt can be seen as either a story or as a scripture.

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Qur'an

*"The Adoration," from The Holy Qur'an,
available online from the Online Book Initiative, University of Michigan,
at <http://www.hi.umich.edu/cgi/k/koran/koran-idx?type=DIV0&byte=645764>
Written in the seventh century
Translated by M. H. Shakir
Published in 1983 by Tabrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc*

"Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and
what is between them in six periods. . . ."

The Qur'an (often written as "Koran" in English) is the holy book of Islam. *Qur'an* is an Arabic word that means "the recitation." Muslims, the followers of Islam, believe that the Qur'an is the literal word of God. God is called Allah in Islam. The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632) by the archangel Jabra'il (Gabriel) beginning in 610 and continuing until Muhammad's death.

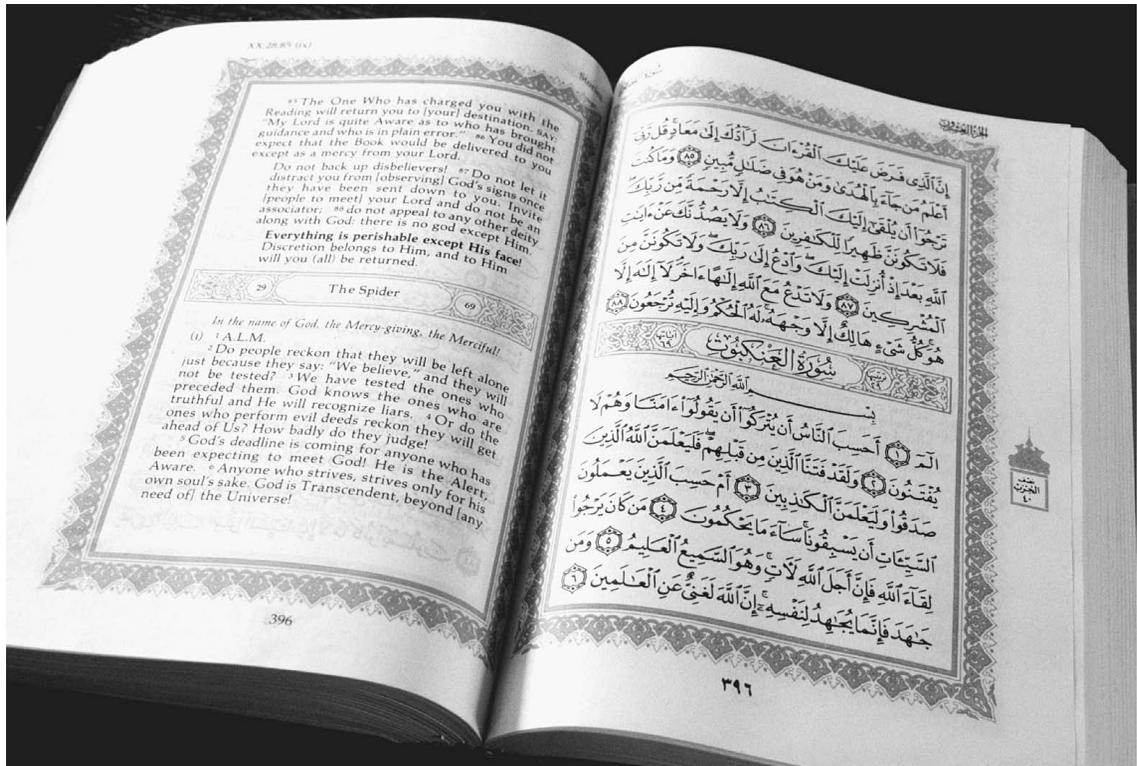
Muslims hold to a number of core beliefs. Each of these core beliefs is reflected in the excerpt from the Qur'an, titled "The Adoration." This excerpt contains verses that describe creation and the relationship between creation and Allah.

1. Belief in a single God, named Allah, a name from the Arabic *al-ilah*, meaning "the One True God." Allah created the heaven and the earth over a period of six days. As described in "The Adoration," this six-day period of creation is virtually the same as that described in the Judaic-Christian biblical book of Genesis. Unlike some religions Islam believes that God created the physical universe. The physical universe is not eternal but exists only because Allah willed it.
2. Belief in angels. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad by the archangel Jabra'il, the angel who communicates

revelations, or divine truths, to the prophets. The other major angels include Mika'il, the angel who controls the weather; Israfil, the angel who will blow the horn to signal the end of the universe; and Azra'il, the Angel of Death, who is referred to in "The Adoration." Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam recognizes that God has not withdrawn from his creation but communicates with people through angels.

3. Belief in the revealed books of God. The Qur'an does not contain just a philosophy of life. The commandments, or demands, it imposes on Muslims are laws, not recommendations or suggested ways to lead a happier life on Earth.
4. Belief in God's many prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ. ("And certainly We gave the Book to Musa [Moses], so be not in doubt concerning the receiving of it, and We made it a guide for the children of Israel.") The concept of prophets suggests a God who is in constant communication with the world he created.
5. Acceptance that the world will end and that Allah will measure and judge human affairs. In contrast to such religions as Shinto, for example, Islam sees a God who judges human conduct. People have free will, so they can choose to follow Allah or not. Daily activities in Islam are classified according to whether they are sinful or not. The term *halal* refers to permitted activities, while *haram* refers to activities that are prohibited. All actions are judged according to the Islamic halal and haram. Those considered haram are sinful.
6. Belief in life after death. Islam sees heaven as a paradise. The word used most frequently in the Qur'an for heaven can literally be translated into English as "garden." Muslims view paradise as union with God, a place of unimaginable joy. While hell is a place of punishment and torment, Islamic scholars disagree about whether the punishments of hell are eternal. Some believe that they are, but others believe that Allah, in his mercy, eventually will release souls from hell.

The Qur'an consists of 114 *suras*, or chapters, and totals just over 6,200 *ayat*, or verses, though sometimes a different number is given, because Islamic scholars dispute the authoritativeness, or accuracy, of a few verses. While it is conventional in Western translations to number the *suras*, Muslims do not refer to them by number but rather by name, such as "The Adoration." Nonetheless, "The Adoration" is sura 32, and each verse in the sura is also numbered.



Muslims believe that the true Qur'an can only be read in Arabic. They try to memorize at least a portion of the holy text as part of their devotion to Islam. © JAMES MARSHALL/CORBIS.

The Qur'an was written in a combination of prose and rhymed poetry. The language, classical Arabic, continues to be used as a literary language. Spoken Arabic is different from the language of the Qur'an. All Muslims are expected to memorize at least a portion of the Qur'an and to be familiar enough with the language to understand the meaning. Some Muslims memorize the entire Qur'an—which is the most memorized book in the world—and they are known as *Hafiz*, or "Guardian." Muslims do not regard translations of the Qur'an as the actual Qur'an. They believe that because Allah's word was revealed in Arabic, translations are more like commentaries or interpretations. The fact that the words in English can differ across translations suggests that the English translations cannot be considered the revealed word of Allah. Allah is the creator, and what he created through Muhammad was the Qur'an in the original language. For this reason, most translations are given a title such as *The Holy Qur'an* or some other variant, to distinguish them from the true Qur'an.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Holy Qur'an:

- The Qur'an became the single most important unifying factor in the early history of Islam. At a time when the region of the Middle East was populated by competing tribes, the Qur'an forged unity among them.
- The Qur'an is not written with a single narrative thread that runs from the beginning to the end. It is not meant to be read in a linear fashion, meaning from beginning to end. Readers are to memorize, meditate on, and discuss the Qur'an, and the process of trying to understand it can take a lifetime.
- The suras (often written as *suras*) are not arranged in chronological order, or the order in which they were revealed to Muhammad. Rather, they are arranged roughly according to size, with the longest ones appearing early in the Qur'an and the shortest ones at the end.
- At the heart of the Qur'an is a quest for unity. All of life is seen as divine. Allah is shown in "The Adoration" to be a God of unity and completeness, and the purpose of the Qur'an is to teach people that sense of unity and completeness, called *tawhid*, or "making one."
- The "We" that is frequently used in "The Adoration" refers to Allah himself.

• • •

Excerpt from the Holy Qur'an

"The Adoration"

Beneficent: Good.

In the name of Allah, the **Beneficent**, the Merciful.

[32.1] Alif Lam Mim.

[32.2] The revelation of the Book, there is no doubt in it, is from the Lord of the worlds.

[32.3] Or do they say: He has forged it? Nay! it is the truth from your Lord that you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you, that they may follow the right direction.

[32.4] Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods, and He mounted the throne (of authority); you have not besides Him any guardian or any **intercessor**, will you not then mind?

Intercessor: One who prays or makes a plea on behalf of another.

[32.5] He regulates the affair from the heaven to the earth; then shall it ascend to Him in a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count.

[32.6] This is the Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Mighty the Merciful,

[32.7] Who made good everything that He has created, and He began the creation of man from dust.

[32.8] Then He made his **progeny** of an **extract** of water held in light **estimation**.

[32.9] Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit, and made for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts; little is it that you give thanks.

[32.10] And they say: What! when we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation? Nay! they are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord.

[32.11] Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die, then to your Lord you shall be brought back.

[32.12] And could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord: Our Lord! we have seen and we have heard, therefore send us back, we will do good; surely (now) we are certain.

[32.13] And if We had pleased We would certainly have given to every soul its guidance, but the word (which had gone forth) from Me was just: I will certainly fill hell with the **jinn** and men together.

[32.14] So taste, because you neglected the meeting of this day of yours; surely We **forsake** you; and taste the **abiding chastisement** for what you did.

[32.15] Only they believe in Our communications who, when they are reminded of them, fall down making **obeisance** and celebrate the praise of their Lord, and they are not proud.

[32.16] Their sides draw away from (their) beds, they call upon their Lord in fear and in hope, and they spend (**benevolently**) out of what We have given them.

[32.17] So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did.

[32.18] Is he then who is a believer like him who is a **transgressor**? They are not equal.

[32.19] As for those who believe and do good, the gardens are their abiding-place; an entertainment for what they did.

Progeny: Children, descendants.

Extract: An essence or concentrate, a small part of another material.

Estimation: Opinion, assessment.

Jinn: A type of invisible spirit; also called "genie."

Forsake: Abandon, desert.

Abiding: Long-lasting.

Chastisement: Scolding or punishment.

Obeisance: A movement of the body that indicates respect, like a bow.

Benevolently: Kindly or generously.

Transgressor: Sinner or one who disobeys a law.



The name Allah is embroidered onto a cloth. Allah revealed the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammad. © KAZUYOSKI NOMACHI/CORBIS.

Abode: Residence, place where one lives.

Haply: By chance, perhaps.

Imams: Muslim scholars or leaders.

[32.20] And as for those who transgress, their **abode** is the fire; whenever they desire to go forth from it they shall be brought back into it, and it will be said to them: Taste the chastisement of the fire which you called a lie.

[32.21] And most certainly We will make them taste of the nearer chastisement before the greater chastisement that **haply** they may turn.

[32.22] And who is more unjust than he who is reminded of the communications of his Lord, then he turns away from them? Surely We will give punishment to the guilty.

[32.23] And certainly We gave the Book to Musa, so be not in doubt concerning the receiving of it, and We made it a guide for the children of Israel.

[32.24] And We made of them **Imams** to guide by Our command when they were patient, and they were certain of Our communications.

[32.25] Surely your Lord will judge between them on the day of resurrection concerning that wherein they differ.

[32.26] Does it not point out to them the right way, how many of the generations, in whose abodes they go about, did We destroy before them? Most surely there are signs in this; will they not then hear?

[32.27] Do they not see that We drive the water to a land having no **herbage**, then We bring forth thereby seed-produce of which their cattle and they themselves eat; will they not then see?

Herbage: Herbaceous, or herblike, plants such as grass.

[32.28] And they say: When will this judgment take place, If you are truthful?

[32.29] Say: On the day of judgment the faith of those who (now) disbelieve will not profit them, nor will they be **respited**.

Respited: Given rest or relief.

[32.30] Therefore turn away from them and wait, surely they too are waiting.

• • •

What happened next . . .

The Qur'an that is read and recited in the modern day is little different from the Qur'an from the seventh century and the years following Muhammad's death. Muhammad himself was illiterate; he could not read or write. His revelations were recorded by his followers, who acted as his secretaries. At that time, though, writing down the Qur'an and compiling it in book form were not thought of as important, for the goal of all Muslims was to memorize it.

During the rule of the first Muslim caliph (a successor to Muhammad as leader of Islam), Abu Bakr, a number of prominent Muslims who had memorized the Qur'an were killed in a rebellion. Abu Bakr was worried that the Qur'an could be lost, so he had one of Muhammad's chief secretaries, or scribes, record it on paper, a technique newly introduced from China. Later, the third caliph, Uthman (often spelled Usman) ibn Affan, learned that many non-Arabs were writing down their own versions of the Qur'an, with varying spellings and pronunciation marks. Uthman was concerned that among all these competing versions, the true Qur'an would be lost. Accordingly, he ordered production of an official version, with one copy sent to every major Muslim city. Scribes in those cities produced additional copies for use in that city, and faulty copies were ordered to be burned. Two of these official copies, called the Usmani Qur'ans, are preserved today in museums in Turkey and in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and they are the source of the text used in modern times.

The Qur'an and The Hadith

While the Qur'an is the central scripture of Islam, Muslims also turn to the hadith for guidance. The hadith is a compilation of Muhammad's sayings, preserved to show how to live the details of Islam in daily life. While the Qur'an is written in a poetic, literary style, with emphasis on repeated sounds and other poetic devices both to inspire the reader and to make memorization easier, the hadith is written in a simpler, more everyday style. One example is "Learning is a duty on every Muslim, male and female." These sayings, which number about 2,600, were written down by Muhammad's followers. The hadith forms the basis of another text that is important to Islam, the Sunnah, or "the Way of the Prophet," used to refer to Muhammad's life example.

Did you know . . .

- Many of the beliefs held by Muslims, including belief in a single supreme God and the existence of angels, heaven, hell, and the final judgment are remarkably similar to concepts held by Jews and Christians.
- Muslims are required to ensure that they are in a ritually pure state before touching the Qur'an. To do so, they wash their hands, face, and feet. Any copy of the Qur'an is to be handled with extreme care and reverence. Worn-out or damaged copies are to be buried or burned.
- The *sahaba* were the "companions" of Muhammad. One could be considered a sahaba if he or she heard, saw, or spent time with Muhammad. The number of

such sahaba ran to more than a hundred thousand, although only a few hundred spent any significant time with the prophet. These people are regarded as the earliest Islamic scholars, for they heard Muhammad's message directly from him. They included people from all different races and backgrounds. It was the sahaba who recorded the sections of the Qur'an as Muhammad revealed them

- Although Muslims agree on central issues of faith, there are minor points of disagreement, particularly over details of how a person should conduct his or her daily affairs. This disagreement arises because some of the verses of the Qur'an are open to differing interpretations. Muslims accordingly follow one of five different legal traditions, which provide guidance on these matters. Named for their originators, they are the Hanafi, the Ja'fari, the Hanbali, the Maliki, and the Shafi. One or the other of these legal traditions tends to predominate in a particular Muslim country or region. For example, Hanafi tends to prevail in Pakistan and northern Egypt, whereas Shafi holds sway in Syria and Iraq.

Consider the following . . .

- Summarize the image and characteristics of Allah that are presented in “The Adoration.”
- List some of the similarities between Islamic belief, as contained in “The Adoration,” and the beliefs of other religious traditions with which you may be familiar.
- Explain what, according to Islamic belief, will happen on the day of judgment.

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Black Elk Speaks

“The Great Vision,” from Black Elk Speaks:

Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux,

available online from *Black Elk’s World* at <http://blackelkspeaks.unl.edu/index2.htm>

By John G. Neihardt

Originally published in 1932

Reprinted in 2004 by University of Nebraska Press

“Behold them yonder where the sun goes down, the thunder beings! You shall see, and have from them my power; and they shall take you to the high and lonely center of the earth that you may see: even to the place where the sun continually shines, they shall take you there to understand.”

Black Elk (1863–1950) was born as Hehaka Sapa and was also known as Nicholas Black Elk (his Christian name after he was baptized). He was a traditional healer and holy man among the Oglala Lakota, a tribe that is part of the Great Sioux Nation. Born on the Little Powder River just west of present-day South Dakota, he came of age during the final years of the wars between the U.S. government and the Sioux. One of the major events in this conflict is the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, famous as “Custer’s last stand,” a reference to General George Armstrong Custer, who led the ill-fated U.S. Seventh Cavalry troops at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. The tragic events at Wounded Knee are also important in the conflict. Some three hundred Sioux and their leader, Sitting Bull, were massacred by U.S. troops at their South Dakota reservation near Wounded Knee in 1890. A reservation is land within the United States set aside for the use of native peoples.

Black Elk was baptized a Catholic at the Holy Rosary Mission near Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in 1904. Although he practiced Catholicism,

he remained part of an underground movement to preserve Sioux culture and religious beliefs during a time when the U.S. government officially banned Native American religious practices. The government at the time pursued a policy that tried to transform Native Americans into farmers and landowners who would fit into white America.

In time Black Elk grew increasingly fearful that the Sioux would be absorbed into white culture and that people would forget that the Lakota existed. He joined other Sioux in efforts to record both his personal history and that of the Lakota nation. When author John Neihardt appeared on the reservation to gather material for a long narrative poem about the American West, Black Elk met with him and shared his story. The result was Neihardt's widely popular 1932 book, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Most of the book consists of Black Elk's words, arranged and edited by Neihardt. The book was essentially a warning to the Lakota nation of the constant danger of losing its traditions and ceasing to exist as a distinct people.

Black Elk Speaks is not a creation story but is what is often called a foundation myth. A foundation myth functions in a way similar to a creation story. Like the creation stories of many of the world's religions, it is a tale passed orally through generations. And, like creation stories, it contains elements that define the culture that produced it. Different nations use their foundation myths to preserve their cultural identities: the nature of their community, taboos (bans or restrictions), codes of appropriate behavior, and their relationship with the spiritual world.

All cultures have foundational myths that shape the way the culture looks at the world and its place in creation. In the United States, stories of the Old West, the fierce independence of its gunslingers, ranchers, cowboys, and sheriffs, provides a foundational myth for the nation. This foundational myth, however, is often at odds with the worldview of the Native American tribes that were forced off their traditional lands as the United States spread westward.

In "The Great Vision," Black Elk recalls a vision he had when he was nine years old. A voice tells him that his Grandfathers are waiting for him. He is taken to a cloud world, where a bay horse, a horse of a reddish-brown color with a black mane and tail, tells him his history and that of the Sioux people. In each direction—north, south, east, and west—are twelve horses that will take Black Elk to a council of his six Grandfathers. Each of the Grandfathers then tells him a story about the people and gives him a symbolic object. In essence, the vision

Black Elk Speaks



An Oglala Sioux man stands before tepees at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, 1891. The tepee's circular shape is sacred, symbolizing the unity of the people.

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depicts the four stages of humankind as the Sioux knew it, from its happy beginnings, through its difficulties in the present and near future, to a return (in the remainder of the vision, not included in the excerpt) to a final state of happiness and prosperity.

Black Elk's vision contains a number of symbols that are important to the Sioux. One is the number four: there are four seasons, four directions, and four stages in the life of the Sioux. Also symbolic is the number twelve: in each of the four directions, twelve horses, all of the same color, greet Black Elk. The North, associated with snow and white horses, represents winter and death; the South is associated with yellow, the flowering stick, and maturity; the East, with greenness, spring, and youth; and the West, with black, black horses, and old age.

Another important symbol is that of the hoop, or circle. Native Americans did not adopt the circle for practical purposes. For example, they did not use the wheel. Instead, the circle symbolized the unity of the people. The Lakota were imagined as united, as in a circle, just as the four directions were seen as part of a vast circle that has no beginning or ending. This symbolism was used in Sioux living arrangements, where the people lived in tepees that were circular at the base. Tepees in a village

The Sioux and the Black Hills

The Black Hills of South Dakota are sacred to the Sioux. Sioux legend has it that when the universe was created, each part of it was given a song, but only in the Black Hills can the song be found in its entirety. The Sioux see the Black Hills as the “heart” of their world.

The Sioux also see the hills as a reclining female figure that provides life, and they are said to return to the hills as children return to their mothers’ arms. The Sioux believe that they originally came from the Black Hills. Because it was at Bear Butte on the eastern edge of the Black Hills that the creator-god first gave his instructions to them, the butte is an especially sacred place. Each year, many Sioux (along with the Cheyenne, another Native American nation that fought alongside the Sioux at the Little Big Horn) return to Bear Butte for religious and spiritual observances. Finally, it is believed that the souls of the Sioux dead reside in the Black Hills.

were arranged in a ring. Efforts made by whites to force the Sioux to live in square or rectangular cabins were resisted—to the puzzlement of whites, who did not understand the significance of the circle to Native Americans.

Some readers have questioned the validity, the genuineness, of Black Elk’s vision. They point out that the vision had taken place many decades before Black Elk reported it to Neihardt. They suggest that some of the details of the vision may have been the result of hindsight, looking back at the history of the Sioux people in the years between the vision and its recording on paper. Others, however, note that many of the symbols used in the vision, as well as throughout the book—have universal significance and that many other religious traditions are built on faith in the visions of their prophets and holy figures.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from *Black Elk Speaks*:

- The name *Sioux* comes from a French word, *nadouessioux*. The word is actually offensive, for it was an insulting term that meant “little snakes.” In the modern world, the Sioux prefer the names Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota. These are names given to different tribal groups based on geography and language. “Sioux” is often still used, however, by those outside the tribal groups to refer to them collectively.
- The Sioux see the universe as incomprehensible, beyond our understanding and certain knowledge. Their religious view is that life, growth, and death are mysteries that cannot be explained. The word *wakan* is used to suggest this mysteriousness and unpredictability. It also indicates the idea of a force that gives life to the universe, called *Wakan Tanka*, and is represented by the six Grandfathers.
- *Black Elk Speaks* is regarded as a holy text among the Sioux nation, for it recorded the history of the people and has served as inspiration for the people to preserve their culture and religious traditions.

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Excerpt from *Black Elk Speaks*

“The Great Vision”

What happened after that until the summer I was nine years old is not a story. There were winters and summers, and they were good; for the **Wasichus** had made their **iron road** along the Platte and traveled there. This had cut the bison [buffalo] herd in two, but those that stayed in our country with us were more than could be counted, and we wandered without trouble in our land. . . .

When we had camped again, I was lying in our tepee and my mother and father were sitting beside me. I could see out through the opening, and there two men were coming from the clouds, headfirst like arrows slanting down, and I knew they were the same that I had seen before. Each now carried a long spear, and from the points of these a jagged lightning flashed. They came clear down to the ground this time and stood a little way off and looked at me and said: “Hurry! Come! Your Grandfathers are calling you!”

. . . Then the two men spoke together and they said: “Behold him, the being with four legs!”

I looked and saw a bay horse standing there, and he began to speak: “Behold me!” he said. “My life history you shall see.” Then he wheeled about to where the sun goes down, and said: “Behold them! Their history you shall know.”

I looked, and there were twelve black horses **yonder** all **abreast** with necklaces of bison hoofs, and they were beautiful, but I was frightened, because their manes were lightning and there was thunder in their nostrils.

Then the bay horse wheeled to where the great white giant lives (the north) and said: “Behold!” And yonder there were twelve white horses all abreast. Their manes were flowing like a blizzard wind and from their noses came a roaring, and all about them white geese soared and circled.

Then the bay wheeled round to where the sun shines continually (the east) and **bade** me look; and there twelve **sorrel** horses, with necklaces of elk’s teeth, stood abreast with eyes that glimmered like the daybreak star and manes of morning light.

Then the bay wheeled once again to look upon the place where you are always facing (the south), and yonder stood twelve **buckskins** all abreast with horns upon their heads and manes that lived and grew like trees and grasses.

And when I had seen all these, the bay horse said: “Your Grandfathers are having a council. These shall take you; so have courage.”

Wasichus: White people.

Iron road: Railroad.

Yonder: In the distance.

Abreast: Side by side in a straight line.

Bade: Instructed.

Sorrel: A light brown color; sorrel horses have white manes and tails.

Buckskins: Yellow-colored horses with black tails and manes.

Then all the horses went into formation, four abreast—the blacks, the whites, the sorrels, and the buckskins—and stood behind the bay, who turned now to the west and neighed; and yonder suddenly the sky was terrible with a storm of plunging horses in all colors that shook the world with thunder, neighing back.

Now turning to the north the bay horse whinnied, and yonder all the sky roared with a mighty wind of running horses in all colors, neighing back.

And when he whinnied to the east, there too the sky was filled with glowing clouds of manes and tails of horses, in all colors singing back. Then to the south he called, and it was crowded with many colored, happy horses, nickering.

Then the bay horse spoke to me again and said: “See how your horses all come dancing!” I looked, and there were horses, horses everywhere—a whole skyful of horses dancing round me.

“Make haste!” the bay horse said; and we walked together side by side, while the blacks, the whites, the sorrels, and the buckskins followed, marching four by four.

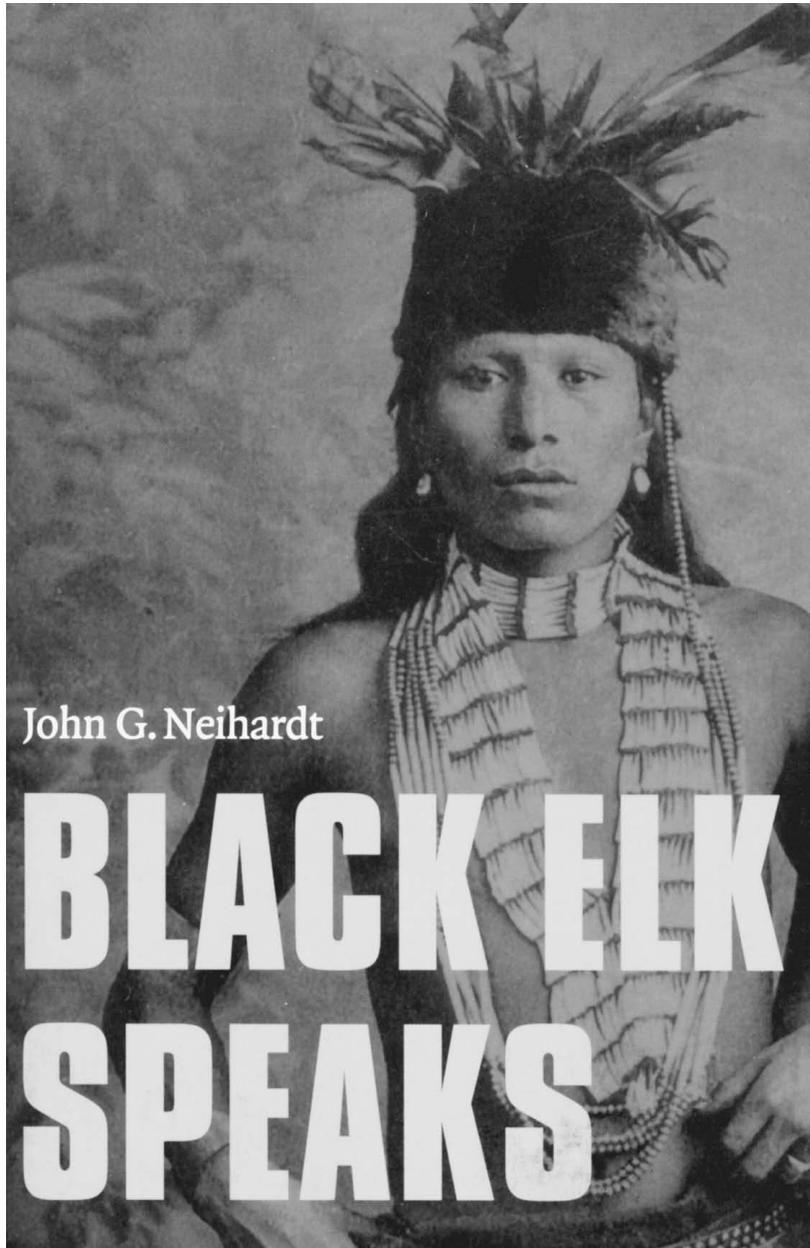
I looked about me once again, and suddenly the dancing horses without number changed into animals of every kind and into all the **fowls** that are, and these fled back to the four quarters of the world from whence the horses came, and vanished.

Then as we walked, there was a heaped up cloud ahead that changed into a tepee, and a rainbow was the open door of it; and through the door I saw six old men sitting in a row.

The two men with the spears now stood beside me, one on either hand, and the horses took their places in their quarters, looking inward, four by four. And the oldest of the Grandfathers spoke with a kind voice and said: “Come right in and do not fear.” And as he spoke, all the horses of the four quarters neighed to cheer me. So I went in and stood before the six, and they looked older than men can ever be—old like hills, like stars.

The oldest spoke again: “Your Grandfathers all over the world are having a council, and they have called you here to teach you.” His voice was very kind, but I shook all over with fear now, for I knew that these were not old men, but the Powers of the World. And the first was the Power of the West; the second, of the North; the third, of the East; the fourth, of the South; the fifth, of the Sky; the sixth, of the Earth. I knew this, and was afraid, until the first Grandfather spoke again: “Behold them yonder where the sun goes down, the thunder beings! You shall see, and have from them my power; and they shall take you to the high and lonely center of the earth that you may see: even to the place where the sun continually shines, they shall take you there to understand.”

Fowls: Birds, especially game birds.



In Black Elk Speaks, the Lakota holy man Black Elk tells of his vision in which he met with the spiritual grandfathers of his people.

REPRODUCED FROM BLACK ELK SPEAKS BY JOHN G. NEIHARDT. PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS. NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION/72-7016.

And as he spoke of understanding, I looked up and saw the rainbow leap with flames of many colors over me.

Now there was a wooden cup in his hand and it was full of water and in the water was the sky.

"Take this," he said. "It is the power to make live, and it is yours."

Now he had a bow in his hands. "Take this," he said. "It is the power to destroy, and it is yours."

Then he pointed to himself and said: "Look close at him who is your spirit now, for you are his body and his name is Eagle Wing Stretches."

And saying this, he got up very tall and started running toward where the sun goes down; and suddenly he was a black horse that stopped and turned and looked at me, and the horse was very poor and sick; his ribs stood out.

Then the second Grandfather, he of the North, arose with a herb of power in his hand, and said: "Take this and hurry." I took and held it toward the black horse yonder. He fattened and was happy and came prancing to his place again and was the first Grandfather sitting there.

The second Grandfather, he of the North, spoke again: "Take courage, younger brother," he said; "on earth a nation you shall make live, for yours shall be the power of the white giant's wing, the cleansing wing." Then he got up very tall and started running toward the north; and when he turned toward me, it was a white goose wheeling. I looked about me now, and the horses in the west were thunders and the horses of the north were geese. . . .

And now it was the third Grandfather who spoke, he of where the sun shines continually. "Take courage, younger brother," he said, "for across the earth they shall take you!" Then he pointed to where the daybreak star was shining, and beneath the star two men were flying. "From them you shall have power," he said, "from them who have awakened all the beings of the earth with roots and legs and wings." And as he said this, he held in his hand a peace pipe which had a spotted eagle outstretched upon the stem; and this eagle seemed alive, for it was poised there, fluttering, and its eyes were looking at me. "With this pipe," the Grandfather said, "you shall walk upon the earth, and whatever sickens there you shall make well." Then he pointed to a man who was bright red all over, the color of good and of plenty, and as he pointed, the red man lay down and rolled and changed into a bison that got up, and galloped toward the sorrel horses of the east, and they too turned to bison, fat and many.

And now the fourth Grandfather spoke, he of the place where you are always facing (the south), whence comes the power to grow. "Younger brother," he said, "with the powers of the four quarters you shall walk, a relative. Behold, the living center of a nation I shall give you, and with it many you shall save." And I saw that he was holding in his hand a bright red stick that was alive, and as I looked it sprouted at the top and sent forth branches, and on the branches many leaves came out and murmured and in the leaves the birds began to sing. And then for just a little while I

thought I saw beneath it in the shade the circled villages of people and every living thing with roots or legs or wings, and all were happy. "It shall stand in the center of the nation's circle," said the Grandfather, "a cane to walk with and a people's heart; and by your powers you shall make it blossom."

Then when he had been still a little while to hear the birds sing, he spoke again: "Behold the earth!" So I looked down and saw it lying yonder like a hoop of peoples, and in the center bloomed the holy stick that was a tree, and where it stood there crossed two roads, a red one and a black. "From where the giant lives (the north) to where you always face (the south) the red road goes, the road of good," the Grandfather said, "and on it shall your nation walk. The black road goes from where the thunder beings live (the west) to where the sun continually shines (the east), a fearful road, a road of troubles and of war. On this also you shall walk, and from it you shall have the power to destroy a people's foes. In four **ascents** you shall walk the earth with Power."

Ascents: Climbs or advances, rising upward.

I think he meant that I should see four generations, counting me, and now I am seeing the third.

Then he rose very tall and started running toward the south, and was an elk; and as he stood among the buckskins yonder, they too were elks.

Now the fifth Grandfather spoke, the oldest of them all, the Spirit of the Sky. "My boy," he said, "I have sent for you and you have come. My power you shall see!" He stretched his arms and turned into a spotted eagle hovering. "Behold," he said, "all the wings of the air shall come to you, and they and the winds and the stars shall be like relatives. You shall go across the earth with my power." Then the eagle soared above my head and fluttered there; and suddenly the sky was full of friendly wings all coming toward me.

Now I knew the sixth Grandfather was about to speak, he who was the Spirit of the Earth, and I saw that he was very old, but more as men are old. His hair was long and white, his face was all in wrinkles and his eyes were deep and dim. I stared at him, for it seemed I knew him somehow; and as I stared, he slowly changed, for he was growing backwards into youth, and when he had become a boy, I knew that he was myself with all the years that would be mine at last. When he was old again, he said: "My boy, have courage, for my power shall be yours, and you shall need it, for your nation on the earth will have great troubles. Come."

• • •

What happened next . . .

The remainder of the narrative outlines Black Elk's career as a healer and holy man. He discusses his first cure, and he shares additional visions he had of the spiritual world. He also talks about the events surrounding the

tragedy at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. At the end of his narrative, he takes the book's author back to the place where he had the vision detailed in "The Great Vision." There he comments on the destiny of the Sioux people, who live, he says, in a state of despair. He calls on Grandfather and says: "With tears running, O Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my Grandfather—with running tears I must say now that the tree has never bloomed. A pitiful old man, you see me here, and I have fallen away and have done nothing. Here at the center of the world, where you took me when I was young and taught me; here, old, I stand, and the tree is withered, Grandfather, my Grandfather!"

Did you know . . .

- The horse held an important place among the Sioux. Although the largest branch of the Sioux nation, the Lakota, originally came from the forests of Minnesota, they moved to the Great Plains in the seventeenth century. When they acquired horses, around 1750, they formed the basis of the horse culture of the Plains. Today many Sioux believe that the horse helps define them as a people, and horses are important symbols of the Sioux nation.
- One Native American religious practice banned by the U.S. government was the Ghost Dance, which was inspired by a vision of a Paiute Indian prophet named Wovoka. Wovoka was known among the Sioux as the Messiah. At a time when Sioux fortunes seemed at their lowest, Wovoka reported that through the Ghost Dance, Indian dead would be brought back to life, the buffalo herds would return, and the white man would leave Indian country. Black Elk attended Ghost Dances himself in 1890. The Ghost Dance was a ritual designed to reconnect the Sioux with their past. Unlike the normally fast-paced dances of other rituals, the Ghost Dance was a slow-moving, shuffling dance. It took place over four or five days and was accompanied by chanting and singing, with no drumming. Both men and women took part in the dance.
- While many objects are sacred in Sioux religion, the Sacred Pipe holds special meaning. It symbolizes the unity of the Sioux people with the earth of which the pipe is made. It is believed that when people pray with the Sacred Pipe, the spirits will come. Care of the Sacred Pipe, given to the Sioux by White Buffalo

Woman, is in the hands of a keeper; in 2005 the keeper was Arval Looking Horse.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain the position and role of each of the Six Grandfathers in Black Elk's vision.
- Sioux religious belief focuses on many elements of the natural world, including the seasons, the directions, and creatures such as the buffalo, horses, and birds. Explain why they might be important elements in a traditional religious community.
- Compare Sioux spirituality with the spirituality of any other religious community with which you may be familiar.

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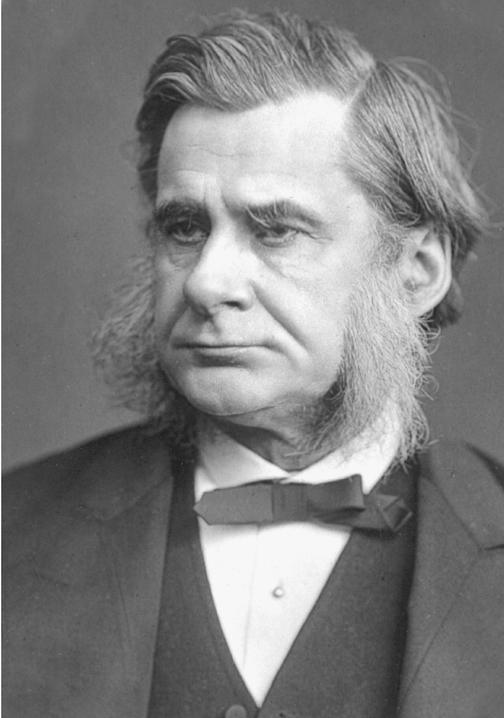
Collected Essays, vol. 5: Science and Christian Tradition

“Agnosticism and Christianity,” from *Collected Essays, vol. 5:*
Science and Christian Tradition, *available online from the Huxley File,*
<http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE5/Agn-X.html>
By Thomas Henry Huxley
Published in 1894 by D. Appleton and Company

“It is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty.”

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) was a biologist and one of the leading English intellectuals of the nineteenth century. A biologist is a scientist who studies plant and animal life in the environment. Huxley is perhaps best remembered in the twenty-first century for coining the terms *agnostic* and *agnosticism*. These terms have since been used to refer to uncertainty about the existence of gods, an afterlife, the soul, and similar religious concepts. For Huxley, however, the words had a more complex meaning. He outlined this meaning in his essay “Agnosticism and Christianity,” written in 1889. Put simply, Huxley was not prepared to accept the existence of a creator-god who made the world in a period of “days.”

Agnosticism, for Huxley, was an intellectual position. It implied skepticism, meaning a refusal to take anything on faith without logical examination of evidence. He began to show his skepticism even as a child, when he recorded in his diary doubts and uncertainties about such matters as the soul, morality, and the church. The Huxley File Web site explains that, as a young adult, Huxley quoted approvingly in his diary the German poet and playwright Johann Goethe: “An active skepticism is that which unceasingly strives to overcome itself and by



Thomas Henry Huxley coined the term “agnosticism,” which to him meant a skepticism towards accepting anything, such as the existence of God, without a logical examination of evidence. HIP/ART RESOURCE, NY.

well-directed research to attain to a kind of conditional certainty.” In other words, a skeptic is someone who tries to discover the truth through research. A skeptic also arrives at conditional certainty, meaning that his or her belief could change with new evidence.

As an adult, Huxley was an active participant in the debates that surrounded the appearance in 1859 of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. This book introduced readers to the theory of natural selection. This theory states that animals on Earth, including humankind, slowly changed, or evolved, over time through a random process and that those who were the most fit adapted and survived, while the weak died out. Darwin’s theory was controversial because it eliminated the need to believe in divine, or godlike, intervention to explain the emergence of different species of animals. Along with other nineteenth-century books about biology (the study of plant and animal life and their processes) and geology (the study of the

history of Earth and its processes, mainly through the evidence of rocks), it shook the foundations of religious faith. It cast into doubt the traditional Judeo-Christian view of creation as described in the biblical book of Genesis, the view that God created Earth and all things on it. The theory of natural selection challenged this by proposing that living creatures changed randomly over time, influenced only by their environment.

Because of Darwin’s works and the interpretations of scientists like Huxley, it seemed that nineteenth-century science was turning away from the concept of a creator-god or gods and seeing natural processes as the way in which the world and humankind came into being. The suggestion that humans may have evolved over time from apes into the beings they are today challenged the basic Judeo-Christian belief that God created humankind in His own image. Science seemed to be replacing the faith in creation.

At the height of Huxley’s career, from the 1860s through the 1880s, the findings of modern science and the teachings of religion seemed to be at war with each other. Religion insisted that there was a creator-god.

Science seemed to be denying that claim. Huxley was on the front lines of this war. As a strong supporter of Darwin he came to be called “Darwin’s bulldog.” In 1860 Huxley took part in a debate with the Anglican bishop Samuel Wilberforce at Oxford University. Wilberforce, along with many members of the clergy, opposed Darwin’s ideas. At one point he turned to Huxley and asked disapprovingly, “Is it on your grandfather’s or your grandmother’s side that you claim descent from a monkey?” Huxley gave an equally disapproving reply, scolding Wilberforce for interfering in scientific areas about which he knew little and distracting attention from the real issues of the debate.

In 1869 Huxley was invited to join a new group called the Metaphysical Society, created to discuss “metaphysical and theological matters in a scientific manner.” Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that examines the nature of reality, especially reality that cannot be perceived by the senses. At an early meeting of the group, each member was asked to state his religious or philosophical affiliation or membership. Huxley had none, so he replied “agnostic,” the opposite of gnostic (one who claims to understand divine mysteries), and the word was born.

Agnosticism, as Huxley defined it, was a form of intellectual honesty, a demand for evidence and rational thought, a refusal to accept ideas on faith. Toward the end of “Agnosticism and Christianity,” he summarized his position by saying that agnosticism “is not a creed ‘statement of belief’, but a method.” He went on to say that at the basis of agnosticism is a single principle. That principle says that in intellectual matters, a person has to follow reason as far as it will go, “without regard to any other consideration.” Another way of putting it is that a person should not say that conclusions about God are certain when they cannot be demonstrated. Huxley concluded, “That I take to be the agnostic faith, which if a man keep whole . . . , he shall not be ashamed to look the universe in the face, whatever the future may have in store for him.”

Huxley was not opposed to religion. As a member of London’s board of education, for example, he proposed that students be required to read the Bible, the holy book of Christianity, for its moral and ethical instruction, as well as for its literary value. He did not reject the miracles recorded in the Bible; he asked whether evidence showed that they could have and did happen. He also had little use for atheists (those who did not believe in God), and he rejected charges that he was a “materialist,” someone who believes only in the physical, material world and not in abstract concepts such as morality and ethics, or a code of principles.

Huxley's Letter to Darwin

Huxley was immediately impressed with the views that Charles Darwin expressed in *On the Origin of Species* and wrote the following letter to him on November 23, 1859:

I finished your book yesterday. . . .
No work on Natural History Science
I have met with has made so great
an impression on me & I do most
heartily thank you for the great
store of new views you have given
me. . . .

As for your doctrines I am pre-
pared to go to the stake if requisite
[required]. . . .

I trust you will not allow yourself
to be in any way disgusted or
annoyed by the considerable abuse
& misrepresentation which unless
I greatly mistake is in store for
you. . . . And as to the curs [mongrels]
which will bark and yelp—you must
recollect that some of your friends
at any rate are endowed with an
amount of combativeness which
(though you have often & justly
rebuked [scolded] it) may stand you
in good stead—

I am sharpening up my claws and
beak in readiness.

University of California Museum of
Paleontology, "Thomas Henry Huxley," [http://
www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/thuxley.html](http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/thuxley.html).

He did not oppose the study of theology as long
as it was conducted in a scientific manner.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from *Collected Essays*, vol. 5: *Science and Christian Tradition*

- Huxley coined the word *agnostic* as the opposite of *gnostic*, or one who claims to understand divine mysteries.
- The definition of "agnosticism" is stated by Huxley "that it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty." He does not say that he does not believe in God or religion. His point always was that the existence of God cannot be proved rationally.
- Huxley refers to a "metaphysical Nifelheim" when he talks about the realm of spiritual matters where, over history, one doctrine slays, or replaces, another. Nifelheim, often spelled Niflheim, refers to the outer region of cold and darkness in Norse mythology. It is the abode of Hel, the goddess of the dead. His allusion suggests that the realm of religion is a mysterious, frightening realm where belief systems come and go.

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Excerpt from *Collected Essays*, vol. 5: *Science and Christian Tradition*

"Agnosticism and Christianity"

The present discussion has arisen out of the use, which has become general in the last few years, of the terms "Agnostic" and "Agnosticism." The

people who call themselves "Agnostics" have been charged with doing so because they have not the courage to declare themselves "Infidels." It has been **insinuated** that they have adopted a new name in order to escape the unpleasantness which attaches to their proper **denomination**. To this wholly **erroneous imputation**, I have replied by showing that the term "Agnostic" did, as a matter of fact, arise in a manner which **negatives** it; and my statement has not been, and cannot be, **refuted**. Moreover, speaking for myself, and without **impugning** the right of any other person to use the term in another sense, I further say that Agnosticism is not properly described as a "negative" **creed**, nor indeed as a creed of any kind, except in so far as it expresses absolute faith in the **validity** of a principle, which is as much ethical as intellectual. This principle may be stated in various ways, but they all amount to this: that it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty. This is what Agnosticism **asserts**; and, in my opinion, it is all that is essential to Agnosticism. That which Agnostics deny and **repudiate**, as immoral, is the contrary doctrine, that there are propositions which men ought to believe, without logically satisfactory evidence; and that **reprobation** ought to attach to the **profession** of disbelief in such inadequately supported propositions. The **justification** of the Agnostic principle lies in the success which follows upon its application, whether in the field of natural, or in that of civil, history; and in the fact that, so far as these topics are concerned, no sane man thinks of denying its validity.

Still speaking for myself, I add, that though Agnosticism is not, and cannot be, a creed, except in so far as its general principle is concerned; yet that the application of that principle results in the denial of, or the **suspension** of judgment concerning, a number of propositions respecting which our contemporary **ecclesiastical** "agnostics" profess entire certainty. And, in so far as these ecclesiastical persons can be justified in their old-established custom (which many nowadays think **more honoured in the breach than the observance** of using **opprobrious** names to those who differ from them, I fully admit their right to call me and those who think with me "Infidels"; all I have ventured to urge is that they must not expect us to speak of ourselves by that title.

The extent of the region of the uncertain, the number of the problems the investigation of which ends in a verdict of not proven, will vary according to the knowledge and the intellectual habits of the individual Agnostic. I do not very much care to speak of anything as "unknowable." What I am sure about is that there are many topics about which I know nothing; and which, so far as I can see, are out of reach of my **faculties**. But whether these things are knowable by any one else is exactly one of those matters which is beyond my knowledge, though I may have a tolerably strong

Infidels: People with no religious beliefs.

Insinuated: Suggested.

Denomination: Identifying term by which someone is classified.

Erroneous imputation: Incorrect attribution or suggestion, often offensive or insulting.

Negatives: Shows to be false.

Refuted: Proved incorrect.

Impugning: Attacking.

Creed: System of beliefs or principles.

Validity: Soundness.

Asserts: Declares.

Repudiate: Reject.

Reprobation: Criticism.

Profession: A statement of opinion.

Justification: A defense, a statement in explanation.

Suspension: Postponement.

Ecclesiastical: Associated with a church.

More honoured in the breach than the observance: Widely ignored.

Opprobrious: Scornful, critical.

Faculties: Powers of perception or understanding.

Nebulous: Vague.

Theism: Belief in the existence of a god.

Nifelheim, or Niflheim: The home of the dead in Norse mythology.

Innumerable: Countless.

Mystifications: Confusions.

Tell: Become apparent.

Inevitable: Unavoidable.

Theology: The study of religion and religious truth.

Ecclesiasticism: Excessive devotion to church practices.

Idiosyncrasy: A quirk, a way of thinking or behaving that is particular to a person.

Impartial: Neutral, not having an opinion for or against something.

Arrest: Holding off, slowing down.

Emissaries: Representatives.

Attainment: Achievement.

Ascertainment: Discovering with certainty.

opinion as to the probabilities of the case. Relatively to myself, I am quite sure that the region of uncertainty—the **nebulous** country in which words play the part of realities—is far more extensive than I could wish. Materialism and Idealism; **Theism** and Atheism; the doctrine of the soul and its mortality or immortality appear in the history of philosophy like the shades of Scandinavian heroes, eternally slaying one another and eternally coming to life again in a metaphysical "**Nifelheim**." It is getting on for twenty-five centuries, at least, since mankind began seriously to give their minds to these topics. Generation after generation, philosophy has been doomed to roll the stone uphill; and, just as all the world swore it was at the top, down it has rolled to the bottom again. All this is written in **innumerable** books; and he who will toil through them will discover that the stone is just where it was when the work began. . . . More and more eyes have been cleansed of the films which prevented them from seeing it; until now the weight and number of those who refuse to be the prey of verbal **mystifications** has begun to **tell** in practical life.

It was **inevitable** that a conflict should arise between Agnosticism and **Theology**; or rather, I ought to say, between Agnosticism and **Ecclesiasticism**. For Theology, the science, is one thing; and Ecclesiasticism, the championship of a foregone conclusion as to the truth of a particular form of Theology, is another. With scientific Theology, Agnosticism has no quarrel. On the contrary, the Agnostic, knowing too well the influence of prejudice and **idiosyncrasy**, even on those who desire most earnestly to be **impartial**, can wish for nothing more urgently than that the scientific theologian should not only be at perfect liberty to thresh out the matter in his own fashion; but that he should, if he can, find flaws in the Agnostic position; and, even if demonstration is not to be had, that he should put, in their full force, the grounds of the conclusions he thinks probable. The scientific theologian admits the Agnostic principle, however widely his results may differ from those reached by the majority of Agnostics.

But, as between Agnosticism and Ecclesiasticism, or, as our neighbours across the Channel call it, Clericalism, there can be neither peace nor truce. The Cleric asserts that it is morally wrong not to believe certain propositions, whatever the results of a strict scientific investigation of the evidence of these propositions. He tells us "that religious error is, in itself, of an immoral nature." He declares that he has prejudged certain conclusions, and looks upon those who show cause for **arrest** of judgment as **emissaries** of Satan. It necessarily follows that, for him, the **attainment** of faith, not the **ascertainment** of truth, is the highest aim of mental life. And, on careful analysis of the nature of this faith, it will too often be found to be, not the mystic process of unity with the Divine,



This fossil of Archaeopteryx shows a half dinosaur, half bird, scientific evidence that would seem to support the theory of evolution. Agnostics desire evidence to support theories and beliefs, not faith without proof. © LOUIE PSIHOYOS/CORBIS.

understood by the religious **enthusiast**; but that which the candid simplicity of a Sunday scholar once defined it to be. "Faith," said this unconscious **plagiarist** of **Tertullian**, "is the power of saying you believe things which are incredible."

Now I, and many other Agnostics, believe that faith, in this sense, is an **abomination**; and though we do not **indulge** in the luxury of self-righteousness so far as to call those who are not of our way of thinking hard names, we do feel that the disagreement between ourselves and those who hold this doctrine is even more moral than intellectual. It is desirable there should be an end of any mistakes on this topic. If our clerical opponents were

Enthusiast: Strong supporter.

Plagiarist: A person who uses another's ideas as his or her own.

Tertullian: An early Christian church leader (c. 155–230).

Abomination: Something that is unbearable and without acceptance.

Indulge: Give oneself freely to, allow free rein.

Delusion: A mistaken belief.

Antipodal: Directly contrasting or conflicting.

Lay: Not belonging to the clergy.

Contrived: Labored or struggled.

Distinctive: Helping to distinguish, or tell apart, one thing from another.

Jurisprudence: A branch of philosophy that has to do with the law.

In the teeth of: Despite or in defiance of.

Despicable: Offensive, repulsive.

Implicitly: Understood without being stated outright.

Explicitly: Clearly expressed or stated.

Exposition: Explanation.

Doctrine: A set of guidelines or beliefs.

Henceforward: From now on.

Materialists: Those who value money and possessions or who believe that the physical world is the only one there is.

Idealists: Those who live by high standards or believe that the material world does not exist on its own, apart from the mind, or consciousness, of persons who live in the world.

clearly aware of the real state of the case, there would be an end of the curious **delusion**, which often appears between the lines of their writings, that those whom they are so fond of calling “Infidels” are people who not only ought to be, but in their hearts are, ashamed of themselves. It would be discourteous to do more than hint the **antipodal** opposition of this pleasant dream of theirs to facts.

The clerics and their **lay** allies commonly tell us, that if we refuse to admit that there is good ground for expressing definite convictions about certain topics, the bonds of human society will dissolve and mankind lapse into savagery. There are several answers to this assertion. One is that the bonds of human society were formed without the aid of their theology; and, in the opinion of not a few competent judges, have been weakened rather than strengthened by a good deal of it. Greek science, Greek art, the ethics of old Israel, the social organisation of old Rome, **contrived** to come into being, without the help of any one who believed in a single **distinctive** article of the simplest of the Christian creeds. The science, the art, the **jurisprudence**, the chief political and social theories, of the modern world have grown out of those of Greece and Rome—not by favour of, but **in the teeth of**, the fundamental teachings of early Christianity, to which science, art, and any serious occupation with the things of this world, were alike **despicable**.

Again, all that is best in the ethics of the modern world, in so far as it has not grown out of Greek thought, or Barbarian manhood, is the direct development of the ethics of old Israel. There is no code of legislation, ancient or modern, at once so just and so merciful, so tender to the weak and poor, as the Jewish law; and, if the Gospels are to be trusted, Jesus of Nazareth himself declared that he taught nothing but that which lay **implicitly**, or **explicitly**, in the religious and ethical system of his people. . . .

I trust that I have now made amends for any ambiguity, or want of fullness, in my previous **exposition** of that which I hold to be the essence of the Agnostic **doctrine**. **Henceforward**, I might hope to hear no more of the assertion that we are necessarily **Materialists**, **Idealists**, Atheists, Theists, or any other *ists*, if experience had led me to think that the proved falsity of a statement was any guarantee against its repetition. And those who appreciate the nature of our position will see, at once, that when Ecclesiasticism declares that we ought to believe this, that, and the other, and are very wicked if we don't, it is impossible for us to give any answer but this: We have not the slightest objection to believe anything you like, if you will give us good grounds for belief; but, if you cannot, we must respectfully refuse, even if that refusal should wreck morality and insure

our own damnation several times over. We are quite content to leave that to the decision of the future. The course of the past has impressed us with the firm **conviction** that no good ever comes of falsehood, and we feel **warranted** in refusing even to experiment in that direction.

Conviction: Firmly held belief.

Warranted: Justified.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Huxley was pleased that his invention of the term *agnostic* took hold and was used by others. The word appeared in print in a journal the same year he first used it (1869), and numerous writers used it in their books and essays.

In his 1879 autobiography, Darwin himself described himself as an agnostic. In the twentieth century one of the most prominent persons to carry on the agnostic tradition in England was the philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). He outlined his position in a 1927 pamphlet called *Why I Am Not a Christian*, a 1947 pamphlet called *Am I an Atheist or an Agnostic? A Plea for Tolerance in the Face of New Dogmas*, and a 1953 essay entitled “What Is an Agnostic?”

Agnosticism is now used to describe a series of related beliefs. While agnosticism still is used to describe a state between belief and disbelief, modern thinkers blur the distinctions that Huxley tried to make between agnosticism, atheism, and other forms of questioning dogmatic beliefs.

Did you know . . .

- Agnosticism was a logical consequence of the development of the scientific method, the set of principles and procedures scientists follow to increase knowledge, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One example of the newfound reliance on the methods of science was the philosophical movement called Positivism. Positivism was an effort to apply the methods of science not just to the study of physical matter but to social and historical problems as well.
- Huxley was a well-known biologist. He was the first to propose that birds evolved from dinosaurs and was England’s leading expert on reptile fossils.
- Huxley’s grandson was Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), the British author of *Brave New World*, a 1932 novel about the dehumanizing effects of scientific progress.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain the difference between agnosticism and atheism. Respond to the belief that agnostics are really atheists but do not want to admit it.
- How would Huxley respond to the idea that science and religion are always going to be in conflict with one another?
- Explain what Huxley meant when he wrote that “agnosticism is not a creed but a method.”

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Characteristics of the Divine

Perhaps no other questions have engaged the minds of people since the beginning of history more than those having to do with God. These questions include: How many gods exist? Is God a “person” or an abstract concept? What is the nature of God? What is the relationship between God and the world He (or She) created, including human beings? Most of the world’s scriptures and sacred texts try to provide answers to these and other questions about God.

The number of gods in existence

The Epic of Gilgamesh 61

The Odyssey 73

Sri Guru Granth Sahib 85

Wicca: A Guide for The Solitary Practitioner 97

“Paper on Hinduism” 109

One of the first questions concerns how many gods exist. In connection with this question, theologians (people who study God and religion) use two major terms to describe the world’s religions: monotheistic and polytheistic. Less frequently, they also use two other terms, duotheistic and henotheistic.

A monotheistic religion (from *mono-*, meaning “one”) is one that believes in a single, supreme God. The principal monotheistic religions include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. One of the chief beliefs of Islam, for example, is that there is a single God, called Allah, and this belief is reinforced on nearly every page of Islam’s sacred scripture, the Qur’an. Sikhism, too, is a monotheistic religion. In “Jup,” the first section of Sikhism’s sacred scripture, the **Sri Guru Granth Sahib**, the first words are “One Universal Creator God.”

In contrast, a polytheistic religion (from *poly-*, meaning “many”) believes in more than one god. The ancient Greeks and Romans, with their pantheons of gods and goddesses, are examples of cultures whose religion was polytheistic. A pantheon refers to the officially recognized gods of a people. “Athena Inspires the Prince,” an excerpt from the Greek poet Homer’s *The Odyssey*, makes clear that the ancient Greeks believed in numerous gods, each of which had control over some aspect of creation, such as the seas.

A duotheistic religion (from *duo*-, meaning “two”) is also polytheistic, because its members believe in more than one god. These religions, however, do not worship a large number of gods or even several gods. Rather, they worship a pair of gods, often a masculine god and a feminine god. As Scott Cunningham states in ***Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner***, Wicca, with its belief in a male god and a female goddess, is considered a duotheistic religion. This belief in two gods stems from ancient religions that, for example, worshipped the Sun and the Moon and saw both a feminine and a masculine principle at work in the natural world.

Finally, a henotheistic religion can be thought of as a cross between monotheism and polytheism. Such a religion worships one supreme God but does not deny that other gods exist. Sometimes believers worship these other gods as manifestations, or representations or expressions, of the supreme God. One example of a henotheistic religion is that of the ancient Egyptians. For the Egyptians, a god such as Amon was considered an attribute of the supreme god Ra; that is, he was thought to represent a trait or feature of Ra. Thus, Amon was often referred to as Amon-Ra.

Hinduism is also henotheistic. Hindus worship a single God, Brahma, who has no specific form, but they see other gods and goddess as forms or qualities of Brahma. Drawing on this belief, Hindus tend not to see their version of God as superior in any way to any other versions of God. For Hindus, all of the world’s gods are manifestations, or appearances, of the same divine being or spirit. Swami Vivekananda emphasizes this belief in his **“Paper on Hinduism.”** He writes that the “contradictions” among the gods of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and other religions are only “apparent,” meaning that they seem to be contradictions but are not really so under the surface. He says that the light of religious truth, including different ideas of the nature of God, “is the same light coming through glasses of different colors.” He goes on to say, “The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna: ‘I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls.’” In other words, while Hindus may see God in a certain way, the points of view of other religions are no less truthful or valid. All gods are manifestations of the same eternal and unchanging force.

Characteristics of god

A second major question studied by theologians concerns the characteristics of God. These features can apply either to one supreme God in

monotheistic religions or to multiple gods and goddesses in polytheistic religions. Among monotheistic religions, God is typically seen as pure, eternal, and the source of all creation. People can come to know Him only by listing His many characteristics: His power, virtue, greatness, beauty, and so on. Listing these traits is one of the chief purposes of Sikhism's "Jup," as well as of the Qur'an of Islam. Other traits often assigned to a single, supreme God include His being all powerful, all knowing, present everywhere, and all good. Many religions, including Christianity, place a great deal of emphasis on the belief that God is loving and cares very much about the welfare of the humans He created.

One major question religions face is whether God is a "person." People are male or female, and they identify themselves with names. Many cultures picture their God as a person. An example is Ahura Mazda, the name for God in Zoroastrianism, an ancient religion from what is now Iran. Ahura Mazda is identified as male. Christianity also identifies God as male. The religion of Wicca identifies both male and female gods. Examples include the male gods Apollo and Tammuz and the female goddesses Hecate and Ceriddwen.

The notion of God as a person often leads both monotheistic and polytheistic religions to assign human characteristics to God. In the Jewish sacred scripture, the Tanakh (referred to by Christians as the Old Testament), God is a humanlike being who often has to be appeased (soothed or calmed) because He grows angry with humans. He shows Himself to humans to provide them with laws to live by and to make contracts, or agreements, with them. Humans can sometimes even negotiate with Him to arrive at agreements. Similarly, the gods in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* are depicted as "persons" who grow angry with humans and send a great flood to destroy humankind. Finally, the gods of Homer's *The Odyssey* have distinct humanlike personalities and meddle freely in human affairs as though they were humans themselves. Thus, in "Athena Inspires the Prince," the chief god, Zeus, is portrayed much as a human king, with the ability to govern, reward good conduct and punish evil, dispense justice, and protect cities and homes, while Athena acts like a human counselor and friend to Telemachus.

Other religions, in contrast, see God as a force, without any specific form or humanlike characteristics. Although this point of view can be found worldwide, it is especially prominent among Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. These religions view God as an

ultimate, eternal reality that exists beyond the suffering and change of the physical world. God is not identified as a specific “person.” As the “Jup” notes, “By thinking, He cannot be reduced to thought.” Similarly, Swami Vivekananda highlights the eternal nature of God in Hinduism when he writes, “God is the ever-active providence [fate], by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos [disorder], made to run for a time, and again destroyed.” For Hindus, God is not a person but a creative principle, a force that is eternally at work in the universe.

God's relationship with humans

A third question that arises in connection with God concerns the nature of His relationship with creation and specifically with humans. Among monotheists a distinction is sometimes made between two types of belief, theism and deism. Theists believe that God is the ongoing sustainer of the universe He created. Thus, God remains involved with day-to-day human affairs. Deists, in contrast, believe that God withdrew from the world He created; the figure of speech often used to express this idea is that God is like a watchmaker (or clockmaker) who built the watch, wound it up, and then let it operate on its own. These differing views about God's involvement with creation are not necessarily associated with any particular religion. Muslims, the followers of Islam, would be considered theists, believing that God remains intimately involved with the daily affairs of creation and of humans. Judaism and Christianity lean toward the theistic view, but many Jews and especially Christians adopt a more deistic view. They believe that God created the world and set it in motion, but they do not believe that God involves Himself in the day-to-day affairs of His creation.

Polytheistic religions, too, often see the gods and goddesses as having an ongoing relationship with humans. Many polytheistic religions emerged from cultures that were not literate (that is, they did not read or write) and that did not understand science. They attributed natural forces to the work of gods and goddesses. In an arid country, for example, a rain god or rain goddess may have been credited with bringing rain as a sign of his or her favor, while drought was seen as a sign of his or her anger. In more fertile countries, gods and goddesses were thought to control the harvest of crops. The ancient Sumerians, who produced the Gilgamesh epic, were entirely dependent on the cycles of nature. They saw their gods as beings who could, for example, reward humankind with bountiful crops, but who

could also punish humankind with crop failure through flood, fire, or other disasters.

Some people believe that there is no God (or gods). They argue that God is an invention of the human imagination. Most of the world's people, however, disagree. They may differ about the number of gods, the nature of God, and the ways in which they describe him (or her). They may see God as an active participant in the world's affairs or as a passive observer of creation. They may see God as a person or as a creative force. Most people have a very human need to seek truth through spirituality. The ongoing debate over the nature of God reflects this need.

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Tablet XI of The Epic of Gilgamesh,
available online from the Academy for Ancient Texts at
<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab11.htm>

By Shin-eqi-unninni

Written around 2750 to 2500 BCE

Translated by Maureen Gallery Kovacs

Originally published in 1989 by Stanford University Press

"I watched the appearance of the weather—
the weather was frightful to behold!
I went into the boat and sealed the entry."

The Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written sometime around 2750 to 2500 BCE (before the Common Era), is the world's first known epic poem. An epic poem is typically a long story that records the adventurous deeds of heroic, often partly divine, persons. These deeds were important to the culture that produced the epic because they had historical, religious, or legendary significance. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is also one of the world's earliest surviving written texts. Its author, Shin-eqi-unninni, is the earliest known named author of a surviving text. The epic was composed and written down in ancient Mesopotamia, an area that lies mostly in modern Iraq. The area was called the Fertile Crescent because of its rich agricultural lands.

Mesopotamia was not really a country as we understand the word today. Instead, it was a large region made up of areas dominated by different peoples. One of those areas was Sumer, located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is now the southern part of Iraq. The people of Sumer, called Sumerians, developed one of the world's earliest civilizations, because of the fertile soil left behind by the flooding of the two rivers. By about 3000 BCE the region had about twelve independent cities,

each ruled by its own king, called a *lugal*. The Sumerians developed a code of law, had a fixed social structure, and traded with other parts of the known world, mostly to acquire lumber and stone in exchange for foodstuffs.

The major contribution of the Sumerians to civilization, though, was the development of writing. The earliest Sumerians used a form of writing called pictographs, or writing in which symbols were essentially pictures of the things they represented. Sumerian writing later developed into a form based on ideographs. An ideograph is a more symbolic or abstract representation than a pictograph. Still later, the Sumerians developed a form of writing based partially on an alphabet.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a good example of this kind of writing. It was recorded on twelve clay tablets using a form of writing modern historians call *cuneiform*, from a Latin word meaning “wedge-shaped.” The Sumerians were the first to develop this form of writing, which they made using a stylus (a pen-like instrument) made of reed or bone to impress the written characters into wet clay, which was then dried or baked to make a permanent record. Cuneiform writing was used by many ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia and the surrounding areas for several thousand years, much longer than our modern alphabet has been in existence.

The Gilgamesh epic was originally written in the Sumerian language, which bears no resemblance to any other known language in the world. The version that survives, however, was written later in the Akkadian language. Akkadian was a Semitic language (related to Hebrew and Arabic) spoken by the Babylonians. These people were natives of Babylon, a town to the north of Sumer on the Euphrates River.

The twelve clay tablets that contain the epic were discovered in the city of Nineveh (in modern Iraq) in the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal, who was king of Assyria from 669 to 633 BCE. The library was destroyed by Persian invaders in 612 BCE, and all of the tablets were damaged, some more than others. No complete text of the epic remains. In many instances where portions of the text were lost, scholars have been able to suggest missing words and phrases. These added words and phrases are shown in parentheses in Tablet XI, excerpted here. When a word is followed by a question mark set in parentheses, scholars are not sure of the word they have chosen for their translation. When a word is followed by an exclamation point set in parentheses, scholars are sure of the translation but unsure of

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Though written about in a legendary story in The Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh was a real-life king. His likeness is shown in this stone statue from the Palace of Sargon in Khorsabad, modern-day Iraq. THE ART ARCHIVE/ MUSEE DU LOUVE PARIS/ DAGLI ORTI (A).



the meaning of the passage. Other sections of the epic, however, remain forever lost.

Tablet I introduces Gilgamesh, the heroic king of Uruk in Babylonia, who lived around 2700 BCE. Many legends grew up around Gilgamesh, some of which were recorded in other poems. In Tablet XI, Gilgamesh is speaking to an immortal human named Utanapishtim, asking him why he cannot die. Utanapishtim reveals to the hero the secret of his immortality by telling his story.

Utanapishtim says that in the city of Shuruppak, on the banks of the Euphrates River, the gods held a meeting and decided to destroy humans

Finding Gilgamesh's Tomb

The Epic of Gilgamesh, like Homer's *Iliad*, may be based in part on historical events and characters. In 2003 German archaeologists working in the southern part of Iraq announced that they had uncovered traces of buildings like those the epic describes. The ruins were in the middle of the old bed of the Euphrates River, right where the epic places them. Jorg Fassbinder, a spokesman for the German team, told the BBC World Service that traces of the buildings were located using a technique that measures changes in tiny magnetic fields embedded in the soil. Although the German experts said that it is highly unlikely that the ancient buildings could ever be linked directly to Gilgamesh, the discovery is significant because it illustrates the link between literature and history in the region.

with a great flood. The gods agreed not to reveal their plan, but Ea, one of the gods who created humans, whispered the secret to the walls of Utanapishtim's house. Ea told the walls to build a great boat and to gather all living things into it, and Utanapishtim overheard. Utanapishtim built the boat, loaded it with silver, gold, and living things, and launched it. Soon a storm, with the thunder god Adad inside, broke out, lasting for seven days and seven nights. After the storm ended, Utanapishtim opened a window on the boat to discover that Earth was flooded and that all humans had been turned to stone.

The boat drifted until it came to rest on Mount Nimush, where it rested for seven days. Utanapishtim then offered a sacrifice to the gods, who smelled the odor of the sacrifice and gathered around him. The gods, particularly Enlil, the storm god, were enraged that a human had escaped the flood. Enlil accused Ea

of treachery, but Ea pleaded with him to show mercy on Utanapishtim and his family. Enlil relented and granted immortality to Utanapishtim.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*:

- Gilgamesh is believed to be a historical king of Uruk, not a fictional creation. He ruled Uruk sometime around 2700 BCE. The modern country Iraq is considered by some historians to get its name from Gilgamesh's kingdom of Uruk.
- Much of the history of the Sumerians was dictated, or determined, by geography. The land was very fertile, so the Sumerians were able to grow plenty of food crops. On the other hand, that fertility was due to the frequent flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates, which regularly renewed the soil but also caused great destruction. The fertile land also caused them to be invaded often by other people who wanted their wealth. Because of these difficulties, there was a strain of pessimism, or negativity and gloom, that ran through Sumerian thought.

- The Sumerians were a polytheistic culture, meaning that they believed in more than one god. They believed that the gods created the world and standards that people had to live by. In addition to the sky god Anu, they recognized the storm god Enlil, a normally kind god who made the land fertile and gave the Sumerians the plow. Enlil, however, was at times terrifying, forced to carry out the wishes of other gods when they were displeased with humans. Enlil was also known as the punisher. There were also many other gods that Sumerians recognized.

• • •

Excerpt from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Tablet XI: The Story of the Flood

Gilgamesh spoke to Utanapishtim, the Faraway:

"I have been looking at you,
but your appearance is not strange—you are like me!
You yourself are not different—you are like me!
My mind was **resolved** to fight with you,
(but instead?) my arm lies useless over you.
Tell me, how is it that you stand in the Assembly of the Gods,
and have found life!"

Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:

"I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,
a secret of the gods I will tell you!
Shuruppak, a city that you surely know,
situated on the banks of the Euphrates,
that city was very old, and there were gods inside it.
The hearts of the Great Gods moved them to **inflict** the Flood.
Their Father **Anu** **uttered** the oath (of secrecy),
Valiant **Enlil** was their Adviser,
Ninurta was their **Chamberlain**,
Ennugi was their Minister of Canals.
Ea, the Clever Prince(?), was under oath with them
so he repeated their talk to the reed house:
'Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!
O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu:
Tear down the house and build a boat!
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!
Make all living beings go up into the boat.
The boat which you are to build,
its dimensions must measure equal to each other:

Resolved: Made up one's mind to do, reached a decision.

Inflict: To cause something harmful.

Anu: Father of all the gods in Sumerian mythology.

Uttered: Spoke.

Enlil: The storm god of Sumer, the god who punishes humans who displease the gods.

Ninurta: The god of rain, war, thunderstorms, and floods.

Chamberlain: An official who manages a royal household.

Ennugi: The Sumerian god in charge of canals, bringing water to dry regions.

Ea: One of the gods who created humans and gave them souls.

Spurn: Reject or refuse.

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Apsu: The underwater palace of the god Ea.

Heed: Pay attention to, listen.

Populace: The people.

Reside: Live.

Abundance: A large quantity, plenty.

Profusion: An ample amount, a large quantity.

Myriad: Many.

Pitch: A black, oily substance used to seal and waterproof various objects.

Cubits: The number of measurements from the length of the bent elbow to the end of the middle finger of the hand, approximately 18 inches per cubit.

Punting poles: Long straight poles used to move a boat through the water by pushing.

Bitumen: A black asphalt substance used as cement or sealer.

Kiln: Oven.

Porters: People hired to carry burdens or baggage.

Casks: Barrels.

Consumed: Eaten or used up.

its length must correspond to its width.

Roof it over like the **Apsu.**'

I understood and spoke to my lord, Ea:

'My lord, thus is the command which you have uttered

I will **heed** and will do it.

But what shall I answer the city, the **populace**, and the Elders!'

Ea spoke, commanding me, his servant:

'You, well then, this is what you must say to them:

"It appears that Enlil is rejecting me

so I cannot **reside** in your city (?),

nor set foot on Enlil's earth.

I will go down to the Apsu to live with my lord, Ea,

and upon you he will rain down **abundance**,

a **profusion** of fowl, **myriad**(!) fishes.

He will bring to you a harvest of wealth,

in the morning he will let loaves of bread shower down, and in the evening a rain of wheat!'"

Just as dawn began to glow

the land assembled around me—

the carpenter carried his hatchet,

the reed worker carried his (flattening) stone,

... the men ...

The child carried the **pitch**,

the weak brought whatever else was needed.

On the fifth day I laid out her exterior.

It was a field in area,

its walls were each 10 times 12 **cubits** in height,

the sides of its top were of equal length, 10 times in cubits each.

I laid out its (interior) structure and drew a picture of it(?).

I provided it with six decks,

thus dividing it into seven (levels).

The inside of it I divided into nine (compartments).

I drove plugs (to keep out) water in its middle part.

I saw to the **punting poles** and laid in what was necessary.

Three times 3,600 (units) of raw **bitumen** I poured into the bitumen **kiln**,

three times 3,600 (units of) pitch ... into it,

there were three times 3,600 **porters** of **casks** who carried (vegetable) oil,

apart from the 3,600 (units of) oil which they **consumed**(!)

and two times 3,600 (units of) oil which the boatman stored away.

I butchered oxen for the meat(!),

and day upon day I slaughtered sheep.

I gave the workmen(?) ale, beer, oil, and wine, as if it were river water,

so they could make a party like the New Year's Festival.

... and I set my hand to the oiling(!).

The boat was finished by sunset.

The launching was very difficult.

They had to keep carrying a runway of poles front to back, until two-thirds of it had gone into the water(?).

Whatever I had I loaded on it:

whatever silver I had I loaded on it,

whatever gold I had I loaded on it.

All the living beings that I had I loaded on it,

I had all my **kith and kin** go up into the boat,

all the beasts and animals of the field and the craftsmen I had go up.

Shamash had set a stated time:

'In the morning I will let loaves of bread shower down, and in the evening a rain of wheat!

Go inside the boat, seal the entry!'

That stated time had arrived.

In the morning he let loaves of bread shower down, and in the evening a rain of wheat.

I watched the appearance of the weather—the weather was frightful to behold!

I went into the boat and sealed the entry.

For the **caulking** of the boat, to Puzuramurri, the boatman, I gave the palace together with its contents.

Just as dawn began to glow

there arose from the horizon a black cloud.

Adad rumbled inside of it,

before him went **Shullat and Hanish**,

heralds going over mountain and land.

Erragal pulled out the mooring poles, forth went Ninurta and made the **dikes** overflow.

The **Anunnaki** lifted up the torches, setting the land ablaze with their flare.

Stunned shock over Adad's deeds overtook the heavens, and turned to blackness all that had been light.

The... land shattered like a... pot.

All day long the South Wind blew... ,

blowing fast, **submerging** the mountain in water, overwhelming the people like an attack.

No one could see his fellow,

they could not recognize each other in the **torrent**.

The gods were frightened by the Flood,

and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu.

Kith and kin: Immediate family and other relatives.

Shamash: The god of the sun and of justice, in charge of determining day and night.

Caulking: Sealing up cracks to prevent leaking.

Adad: The god of thunder.

Shullat and Hanish: Lesser gods of storms and bad weather; they predicted bad weather and served the god Adad.

Heralds: Messengers, bearers of news.

Erragal: God of the underworld; god of war and plague.

Dikes: Bank of Earth used to control or keep back water.

Anunnaki: Gods of the underworld.

Submerging: Causing something to sink below the surface of water.

Torrent: A rush of liquid.

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Cowering: Moving back in fear.

Crouching: Bending down low, squatting.

Ishtar: Goddess of love and war.

Catastrophe: Disaster, tragedy.

Parched: Dry.

Terrain: A piece of land.

Vent: An opening for air.

Leagues: Measures of about three miles each.

Perch: Place for a bird to sit.

The gods were **cowering** like dogs, **crouching** by the outer wall.

Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth, the sweet-voiced Mistress of the Gods wailed: 'The olden days have alas turned to clay, because I said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods! How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods, ordering a **catastrophe** to destroy my people!! No sooner have I given birth to my dear people than they fill the sea like so many fish!' The gods—those of the Anunnaki—were weeping with her, the gods humbly sat weeping, sobbing with grief(?), their lips burning, **parched** with thirst.

Six days and seven nights came the wind and flood, the storm flattening the land. When the seventh day arrived, the storm was pounding, the flood was a war—struggling with itself like a woman writhing (in labor).

The sea calmed, fell still, the whirlwind (and) flood stopped up. I looked around all day long—quiet had set in and all the human beings had turned to clay! The **terrain** was as flat as a roof.

I opened a **vent** and fresh air (daylight!) fell upon the side of my nose.

I fell to my knees and sat weeping, tears streaming down the side of my nose.

I looked around for coastlines in the expanse of the sea, and at twelve **leagues** there emerged a region (of land).

On Mt. Nimush the boat lodged firm,

Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.

One day and a second Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.

A third day, a fourth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.

A fifth day, a sixth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.

When a seventh day arrived

I sent forth a dove and released it.

The dove went off, but came back to me;

no **perch** was visible so it circled back to me.

I sent forth a swallow and released it.

The swallow went off, but came back to me;

no perch was visible so it circled back to me.

I sent forth a raven and released it.

The raven went off, and saw the waters slither back.

It eats, it scratches, it bobs, but does not circle back to me.

Then I sent out everything in all directions and **sacrificed** (a sheep).

I offered incense in front of the mountain-**ziggurat**.

Seven and seven cult vessels I put in place, and (into the fire) underneath (or: into their bowls) I poured reeds, cedar, and myrtle.

The gods smelled the **savor**, the gods smelled the sweet savor, and collected like flies over a (sheep) sacrifice.

Just then **Beletili** arrived.

She lifted up the large flies (beads) which Anu had made for his enjoyment(!):

'You gods, as surely as I shall not forget this **lapis lazuli** around my neck,

may I be mindful of these days, and never forget them!

The gods may come to the incense offering, but Enlil may not come to the incense offering, because without considering he brought about the Flood and **consigned** my people to **annihilation**.'

Just then Enlil arrived.

He saw the boat and became furious, he was filled with rage at the **Igigi** gods:

'Where did a living being escape?

No man was to survive the annihilation!'

Ninurta spoke to Valiant Enlil, saying:

'Who else but Ea could devise such a thing?

It is Ea who knows every **machination**!'

Ea spoke to Valiant Enlil, saying:

'It is yours, O Valiant One, who is the **Sage** of the Gods.

How, how could you bring about a Flood without consideration

Charge the **violation** to the violator,

charge the offense to the offender,

but be **compassionate lest** (mankind) be cut off,

be patient lest they be killed.

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that a lion had appeared to diminish the people!

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that a wolf had appeared to diminish the people!

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that famine had occurred to slay the land!

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,

would that (**Pestilent**) **Erra** had appeared to ravage the land!

It was not I who revealed the secret of the Great Gods,

I (only) made a dream appear to **Atrahasis**, and (thus) he

heard the secret of the gods.

Sacrificed: Made a ritual offering to a god, especially of a killed animal.

Ziggurat: A Mesopotamian temple tower.

Savor: Aroma.

Beletili: A minor Sumerian deity, who is believed to have been a fertility goddess.

Lapis lazuli: A deep-blue semiprecious stone.

Consigned: Delivered or handed over.

Annihilation: Complete destruction.

Igigi: Spirits that appear as stars in the sky.

Machination: Scheme, plot, or crafty action.

Sage: Wise person.

Violation: Crime or a breaking of laws or rules.

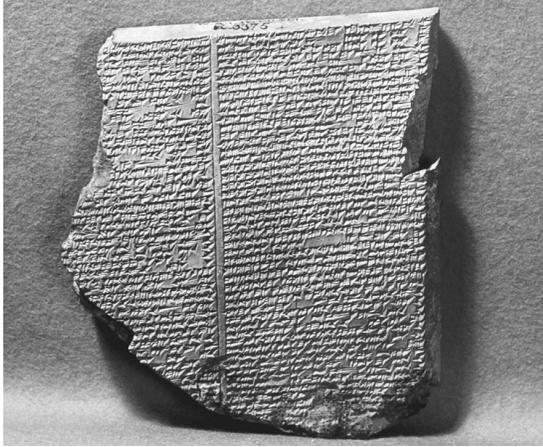
Compassionate: Showing sympathy for the suffering of others.

Lest: In order to prevent something from happening.

Pestilent: Damaging or deadly.

Erra: Form of Erragal as a thunder god.

Atrahasis: Hero of an Akkadian epic (c. 1700 BCE) that also tells the story of the Flood.



The Epic of Gilgamesh was inscribed on this tablet in the seventh century BCE. It relays the mythic story of the king Gilgamesh and his interaction with the gods of Mesopotamia.

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PERMISSION.

Deliberation: Careful thought or planning, discussion.

Now then! The **deliberation** should be about him!"

• • •

What happened next . . .

In the remaining portion of Tablet XI, Utanapishtim gives Gilgamesh a chance at immortality. He tells the hero that if he can stay awake for six days and seven nights, he, too, will be immortal. Gilgamesh agrees to try, but as soon as he sits down, he falls asleep. Utanapishtim is convinced that all humans are liars. If Gilgamesh falls asleep, Utanapishtim believes Gilgamesh will say he stayed awake. To prove that Gilgamesh will lie, Utanapishtim arranges a test. He has his wife bake a loaf of bread each day, which he places at Gilgamesh's feet. As Gilgamesh continues to sleep, the loaves of bread gather, untouched. When Utanapishtim awakens Gilgamesh, the hero insists that he only dozed off for a moment, but he is grieved when Utanapishtim points out the loaves of bread, which grew progressively stale with each passing day.

Utanapishtim's wife persuades him to have mercy on Gilgamesh, so he gives the hero another chance. He tells Gilgamesh of a plant that will restore his youth, but the plant is at the bottom of the ocean. Gilgamesh plucks the plant, but he is not certain that he trusts it, so he resolves to take it back to Uruk to test it on an old man. Along the way, however, a snake eats the plant. (This act suggests that snakes gained the ability to be reborn, which they seem to do when they shed their skin.) This leaves Gilgamesh grief-stricken because he has lost his chance at immortality.

Did you know . . .

- The ancient Sumerians believed that their fate depended entirely on the will of the gods. They saw their lives as a cycle, with the gods granting and then withdrawing their favor. This view is probably a reflection of nature's cycle of flooding followed by growth. When the land flooded, the Sumerians believed that they had angered the gods, who submerged the land to show their

displeasure. But when the crops grew, the people thought that they had won back the gods' favor.

- The last Sumerian dynasty fell about 2000 BCE. After a period of about one hundred years, a group called the Amorites gained control of the area encompassing Mesopotamia. Little is known about the religious beliefs of the Amorites, though it is thought that they adopted many of the religious beliefs of the Sumerians. The Amorites introduced the supreme god Marduk to the Sumerians. Like the Sumerians, the Amorites were not concerned with life after death; their focus was on this world.
- *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is not the only surviving epic from this region of the world. There is also the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, a creation story at the center of which is the creator-god Marduk. In this epic, humans are depicted as slaves of the gods. At one point Marduk says, "Let me create a primeval man./The work of the gods shall be imposed (on him), and so they shall be at leisure." Other Mesopotamian epics and poems speak of events similar to those in the Judeo-Christian Bible, including the temptation by the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain how weather, climate, and geography could influence and shape the view of the world held by ancient peoples.
- Compare the account of the flood in Tablet XI of the *Gilgamesh* epic with a flood story from another culture or religious tradition, focusing on similarities and differences. An example is the flood survived by Noah and his family in the biblical book of Genesis.
- Explain why the writer of the epic of *Gilgamesh* placed so much emphasis on the dimensions and methods of construction of the ark.

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The Odyssey

Book I: "Athena Inspires the Prince," from The Odyssey, from the Ancient History Sourcebook, available online at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/odysseyBL.html>

Written by Homer circa 800 BCE

Translated by Samuel Henry Butcher and Andrew Lang

"How vainly mortal men do blame the gods! For of us they say comes evil, whereas they even of themselves through the blindness of their own hearts, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained."

"**A**thena Inspires the Prince" is the first of twenty-four books in *The Odyssey*, an ancient epic poem of some twelve thousand lines thought to have been written by the Greek poet Homer. Epic poetry is lengthy poetry telling tales of heroic deeds. Virtually nothing is known about Homer and his life or about the circumstances surrounding the composition of the poem. It was probably developed orally over a period of years and may have been first written down many centuries later.

The poem survived on ancient scrolls of papyrus (a kind of paper made from the papyrus plant, primarily in Egypt) and then in handwritten manuscripts in books called codices. A codex is a collection of ancient texts in manuscript form. Codices are more than one codex. These manuscripts had been preserved in the library at Byzantium (present-day Constantinople in Turkey) by the Greeks. After Byzantium was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the library became more available to the Western world. At this time *The Odyssey*, along with many other ancient texts, became more widely known in the West. *The Odyssey* and its companion poem, *The Iliad*, are the oldest surviving works of

Greek literature. They are regarded as two of the most influential works in the foundation of Western literature.

Odysseus' long journey home *The Odyssey* can be read as the sequel to Homer's *Iliad*. The latter epic tells the adventurous story of the Trojan War, a war between Troy and ancient Greece. This war begins when Paris, the son of the king of Troy, wins the love of Helen, the wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta in Greece, and takes her with him back to Troy. *The Iliad* focuses on just a few weeks during the tenth and last year of that war. One of the major characters in *The Iliad* is Odysseus, a warrior-king and general from the Greek state of Ithaca.

At the beginning of "Athena Inspires the Prince," Homer calls upon the Muse of epic poetry (one of nine goddesses who inspire artistic creation) to guide him in telling the story of a man who has survived hardship and experienced the twists and turns of fate. That man is Odysseus, who has been away from his wife and his kingdom for many years. Odysseus fought at Troy for ten years before he began his long journey home. At the start of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus has spent seven years on the island of Ogygia. There, Odysseus, the only Greek who has not yet returned home from the war, is being held by Calypso, a nymph who has cast a spell over him because she wants Odysseus as her husband.

Odysseus had angered the sea god Poseidon (the brother of Zeus, the king of the gods) by blinding Polyphemus the Cyclops, Poseidon's son. Poseidon was responsible for making Odysseus's return home so difficult. At the same time Odysseus's wife, Penelope, is being courted at home in Ithaca by a large number of suitors, who feast and drink in Odysseus's home at his expense and who each hope to marry Penelope and become king. Penelope's situation remains uncertain because she does not have any reliable information about the fate of her husband.

Reputation, revenge, and power The first book of *The Odyssey* introduces a number of themes that run through the poem. One is the value of maintaining a good reputation, both with humans and with the gods. This theme illustrates that the people of Homer's time thought of their relationship with the gods in very human terms. Book I states that Odysseus is held in high regard by all the gods except Poseidon.

A second theme is the role of revenge in achieving justice. In ancient times, when societies did not have police, a court system, or prisons, individuals found justice for perceived wrongs themselves, and the gods, who had human characteristics, often helped them to do so. Telemachus, the son of Penelope and Odysseus, is hesitant to take action against the men who would seize the crown by marrying his mother. Athena, however, “inspires the prince” to act against them.

A final theme is power—how it is earned and how it is maintained. The youthful Telemachus has not yet gained the right to the throne of Ithaca. He is challenged by Antinous, one of the suitors, but he lacks support in establishing his claim to kingship. He is roused to make a stand, though, by Athena and begins to take steps to strengthen and secure his power. Again, for the people of Homer’s time, success in life could be achieved only with the aid of the gods, who were all too happy to become involved in human affairs.

Characteristics of the gods *The Odyssey* provides modern readers with a rich portrait of the characteristics of the gods and the roles they play in human affairs as they were conceived by the ancient Greeks. Greek religion was polytheistic, meaning that the people believed in more than one god. Chief among the Greek gods is Zeus, son of Cronus, the king of the Titans. On reaching adulthood, Zeus leads a revolt against the Titans and takes away the throne from Cronus with the help of his brothers Poseidon and Hades. From his position on Mount Olympus, Zeus observes the affairs of humans. He sees everything, governs all human actions, rewards good conduct and punishes evil, dispenses justice, and protects cities and homes. Nonetheless, Zeus recognizes that humans play a part in determining their own fates.

In Greek myth, numerous lesser gods and goddesses have their own spheres of influence and often quarrel among themselves. Legend has it that Athena had no mother. She sprang directly from the forehead of Zeus. She is a goddess of warfare, but, more importantly, she also represents practical wisdom, restraint, and reason. In *The Iliad*, she inspires the Greek heroes, and her name is equated with military skill, excellence in combat, victory, and glory, as opposed to mere lust for blood, represented by the god Ares. In this role, she becomes Odysseus’s guardian, and in her relationship with Telemachus she acts as the goddess of good counsel, practical insight, and cautious self-control.



*The Greek gods, depicted at their home on Mount Olympus, had many of the same passions and faults as humans. They often involved themselves in human affairs, as in the case of Odysseus, told in *The Odyssey*.* THE ART ARCHIVE/PALAZZO DEL TE MANTUA/DAGLI ORTI (A).

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from *The Odyssey*:

- As the daughter of the sky god Zeus, Athena is one of the twelve Olympians, the gods and goddesses who live on Mount Olympus. The other Olympians, besides Zeus and Athena, include Aphrodite, the goddess of love; Hermes, the messenger god; Poseidon, the god of the sea; and others.
- Athena presents herself to Telemachus in disguise. She enters Ithaca in the form of Mentès, one of Odysseus's old friends, and meets with Telemachus. She tells the prince that Odysseus will return but that in the meantime Telemachus has to stand up to the suitors who are

harassing his mother. Only in this way can he hope to inherit the kingdom from his father. Because Athena presents herself as a male friend of Telemachus's father rather than as a woman, Telemachus will be more likely to take her counsel.

- Telemachus's mother, Penelope, is surrounded by men from the kingdom who want to take Odysseus's place as king. Because she is a woman, Penelope cannot reign as the ruler of Ithaca herself. She has earned her position in life from her husband. The men believe that because Odysseus is gone, Penelope will marry one of them so that she can keep her position as queen.

• • •

Excerpt from *The Odyssey*

"Athena Inspires the Prince"

Tell me, **Muse**, of that man, so ready at need, who wandered far and wide, after he had **sacked** the sacred **citadel** of Troy, and many were the men whose towns he saw and whose mind he learnt, yea, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the deep, **striving** to win his own life and the return of his company. Nay, but even so he saved not his company, though he desired it **sore**. For through the blindness of their own hearts they perished, fools, who **devoured** the oxen of **Helios Hyperion**: but the god took from them their day of returning. Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, **whencesoever** thou hast heard thereof, declare thou even unto us.

Now all the rest, as many as fled from sheer destruction, were at home, and had escaped both war and sea, but Odysseus only, craving for his wife and for his homeward path, the lady **nymph** Calypso held, that fair goddess, in her hollow caves, longing to have him for her lord. But when now the year had come in the courses of the seasons, wherein the gods had **ordained** that he should return home to Ithaca, not even there was he quit of **labours**, not even among his own; but all the gods had pity on him save Poseidon, who raged continually against godlike Odysseus, till he came to his own country. **Howbeit** Poseidon had now departed for the distant Ethiopians, the Ethiopians that are **sundered** in **twain**, the **uttermost** of men, abiding some where Hyperion sinks and some where he rises. There he looked to receive his **hetacomb** of bulls and rams, there he made merry sitting at the feast, but the other gods were gathered in the halls of Olympian Zeus. Then among them the father of gods and men began to speak, for he **bethought** him in his heart of noble Aegisthus, whom the

Muse: A Greek goddess who oversees art, song, poetry, and science.

Sacked: Destroyed.

Citadel: Fortress, castle.

Striving: Trying with great effort.

Sore: Greatly.

Devoured: Consumed, ate.

Helios Hyperion: The Greek sun god.

Whencesoever: From whatever place.

Nymph: A woodland or water-dwelling goddess.

Ordained: Decided.

Labours: Burdens.

Howbeit: However.

Sundered: Broken.

Twain: Two.

Uttermost: Greatest.

Hetacomb: Sacrifice.

Bethought: Thought.

The Odyssey

Spake: Spoke.

Perish: Die.

Rent: Torn; broken.

Happless: Unlucky.

Affliction: Torment.

Seagirt: Surrounded by ocean or sea.

Naval: Center.

Habitation: Home.

Atlas: One of the Titans, or giant gods who ruled Earth until overthrown by Zeus.

Assunder: Apart.

Guileful: Deceptive.

Wooping: Convincing.

Yearning: Longing.

Wroth: Angry.

Girdler: Supporter.

Quenchless: Never satisfied.

Cyclops: One-eyed giant.

Unerring: Unfailing.

Rouse: Wake.

Might: Strength.

Achaeans: Greek armies.

Woosers: Those hoping to marry Odysseus's wife.

Thronging: Large.

Kine: Cattle.

Shambling gait: Slow, dragging walk.

Peraventure: By chance.

son of Agamemnon, farfamed Orestes, slew. Thinking upon him he **spake** out among the Immortals:

“Lo you now, how vainly mortal men do blame the gods! For of us they say comes evil, whereas they even of themselves through the blindness of their own hearts, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained. . . .

And the goddess, grey-eyed Athene [Athena], answered him, saying: “O father, our father Cronides, throned in the highest; that man assuredly lies in a death that is his due; so **perish** likewise all who work such deeds! But my heart is **rent** for wise Odysseus, that **happless** one, who far from his friends this long while suffereth **affliction** in a **seagirt** isle, where is the **naval** of the sea, as woodland isle, and therein a goddess hath her **habitation**, the daughter of the wizard **Atlas** who knows the depths of every sea, and himself upholds the tall pillars which keep earth and sky **assunder**. His daughter it is that holds the hapless man in sorrow: and ever with soft and **guileful** tales she is **wooping** him to forgetfulness of Ithaca. But Odysseus **yearning** to see if it were but the smoke leap upwards from his own land, hath a desire to die. As for thee, thine heart regardeth it not at all, Olympian! What! did not Odysseus by the ships of the Argives make thee free offering of sacrifice in the wide Trojan land? Wherefore wast thou then so **wroth** with him, O Zeus?”

And Zeus the cloud-gatherer answered her, and said, “My child, what word hath escaped the door of thy lips? Yea, how should I forget divine Odysseus, who in understanding is beyond mortals and beyond all men hath done sacrifice to the deathless gods, who keep the wide heaven? Nay, but it is Poseidon, the **girdler** of the earth, that hath been wroth continually with **quenchless** anger for the **Cyclops**' sake whom he blinded of his eye, even godlike Polyphemus whose power is mightiest amongst all the Cyclopes. . . .

Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athene, answered him, and said: “O father, our father Cronides, throned in the highest, if indeed this thing is now well pleasing to the blessed gods, that wise Odysseus should return to his own home, let us then speed Hermes the Messenger, the slayer of Argos, to the island of Ogygia. There with all speed let him declare to the lady of the braided tresses our **unerring** counsel, even the return of the patient Odysseus, that so he may come to his home. But as for me I will go to Ithaca that I may **rouse** his son yet the more, planting **might** in his heart, to call an assembly of the long-haired **Achaeans** and speak out to all the **woosers** who slaughter continually the sheep of his **thronging** flocks, and his **kine** with trailing feet and **shambling gait**. And I will guide him to Sparta and to sandy Pylos to seek tidings of his dear father's return, if **peradventure** he may hear thereof and that so he may be had in good report among men.”

She spake and bound beneath her feet her lovely golden sandals that **wax** not old, and bare her alike over the wet sea and over the limitless land, **swiftly** as the breath of the wind. And she seized her **doughty** spear, **shod** with sharp bronze, weighty and huge and strong, **wherewith** she **quells** the ranks of heroes with whomsoever she is wroth, the daughter of the mighty **sire**. Then from the heights of Olympus she came glancing down, and she stood in the land of Ithaca, at the entry of the gate of Odysseus, on the threshold of the courtyard, holding in her hand the spear of bronze, in the semblance of a stranger, Mentis the captain of the **Taphians**. And there she found the lordly wooers: now they were taking their pleasure at **draughts** in front of the doors, sitting on hides of oxen, which themselves had slain. And of the **henchmen** and the ready **squires**, some were mixing for them wine and water in bowls, and some again were washing the tables with porous sponges and were setting them forth, and others were carving flesh in plenty.

And godlike Telemachus was far the first to **descry** her, for he was sitting with a heavy heart among the wooers dreaming on his good father, **haply** he might come **somewhence**, and make a scattering of the wooers there throughout the palace, and himself get honour and bear rule among his own possessions. Thinking **thereupon**, as he sat among wooers, he saw Athene—and he went straight to the outer porch, for he thought it blame in his heart that a stranger should stand long at the gates: and halting **nigh** her he clasped her right hand and took from her the spear of bronze, and uttered his voice and spake unto her **winged words**: “Hail, stranger, with us thou shalt be kindly **entreated**, and thereafter, when thou hast tasted meat, thou shalt tell us that **whereof** thou hast need.” . . .

But Telemachus spake unto grey-eyed Athene, holding his head close to her that those others might not hear: “Dear stranger, wilt thou of a truth be wroth at the word I shall say? **Yonder** men **verily** care for such things as these, the **lyre** and song, lightly, as they that devour the livelihood of another without atonement, of that man whose white bones, it may be, lie wasting in the rain upon the mainland, or the **billow** rolls them in the **brine**. Were but these men to see him returned to Ithaca, they all would pray rather for greater speed of foot than for gain of gold and **rainment**. But now he hath perished, even so, an evil doom, and for us is no comfort, no, not though any of earthly men should say that he will come again. Gone is the day of his returning! . . .

“For all the noblest that are princes in the isles, in Dulichium and Same and wooded Zacynthus, and as many as lord it in rocky Ithaca, all these woo my mother and waste my house. But as for her she neither refuseth the hated bridal, nor hath the heart to make an end: so they devour and **minish** my house, and **ere** long will they make havoc likewise of myself.”

- Wax:** Were.
- Swiftly:** Swiftly; quickly.
- Doughty:** Fearless.
- Shod:** Made.
- Wherewith:** With which.
- Quells:** Calms.
- Sire:** Father.
- Taphians:** A division of Greeks.
- Draughts:** Drinks.
- Henchmen:** Grooms; people who take care of horses.
- Squires:** Young noble attendants.
- Descry:** Notice.
- Haply:** By good fortune.
- Somewhence:** From somewhere.
- Thereupon:** On that.
- Nigh:** Near.
- Winged words:** Beautiful language.
- Entreated:** Treated.
- Whereof:** Whatever.
- Yonder:** At a distance.
- Verily:** Truly.
- Lyre:** A musical instrument similar to a harp.
- Billow:** Waves.
- Brine:** Seawater.
- Rainment:** Fine clothes.
- Minish:** Diminish; use up all the supplies of.
- Ere:** Before.



This third century CE Roman mosaic shows Odysseus facing the Sirens, who tempt him to abandon his quest to return home after the Trojan War. © CHARLES & JOSETTE LENARS/CORBIS.

Then in heavy displeasure spake unto him Pallas Athene: "God help thee! thou art surely sore in need of Odysseus that is afar, to stretch forth his hands upon the shameless wooers. If he could but come now and stand at the entering in of the gate, with helmet and shield and lances twain, as mighty a man as when first I marked him in our house drinking and making merry what time he came up out of Ephyra from Ilus son of Mermerus! For even **thither** had Odysseus gone on his swift ship to seek a deadly drug, that he might have wherewithal to smear his bronze-shod arrows: but Ilus would in **nowise** give it to him, for he had in awe the ever-living gods. But my father gave it him, for he bare him wondrous love. O that Odysseus might in such strength **consort** with the wooers: so should they all have swift fate and bitter wedlock! **Howbeit** these things surely lie on the knees of the gods, whether he shall return or not, and take **vengeance** in his halls. But I charge thee to take **counsel** how thou mayest thrust forth the wooers from the hall. Come now, mark and take heed unto my words. **On the morrow** call the Achaean lords to the assembly,

Thither: Though.

Nowise: No way.

Consort: Associate.

Howbeit: How would it be if.

Vengeance: Revenge.

Counsel: Care.

On the morrow: Tomorrow.

and declare thy saying to all, and take the gods to witness. As for the wooers bid them scatter them each one to his own, and for thy mother, if her heart is moved to marriage, let her go back to the hall of that mighty man her father, and her kinsfolk will furnish a wedding feast, and array the gifts of wooing exceeding many, all that should go back with a daughter dearly beloved. And to thyself I will give a word of wise counsel, if **perchance thou will harken**. Fit out a ship, the best thou hast, with twenty oarsmen, and go to inquire concerning thy father that is long afar, if perchance any man shall tell thee **aught**, or if thou mayest hear the voice from Zeus, which chiefly brings tidings to men. Get thee first to Pylos and inquire of goodly Nestor, and from thence to Sparta to Menelaus of the fair hair, for he came home the last of the mail-coated Achaeans. If thou shalt hear news of the life and the returning of thy father, then verily thou mayest endure the wasting for yet a year. But if thou shalt hear that he is dead and gone, return then to thine own dear country and pile his **mound**, and over it pay burial rites, full many as is due, and give thy mother to a husband. But when thou hast done this and made an end, thereafter take counsel in thy mind and heart, how thou mayest slay the wooers in thy halls, whether by **guile** or openly; for thou shouldst not carry childish thoughts, being no longer **of years thereto**. Or hast thou not heard what **renown** the goodly Orestes **gat** him among all men in that he slew the slayer of his father, guileful Aegisthus, who killed his famous sire? . . ."

Then wise Telemachus answered her, saying: "Sir, verily thou speakest these things out of a friendly heart, as a father to his son, and never will I forget them. But now I pray thee **abide** here, though eager to be gone, to the end that after thou hast bathed and had all thy heart's desire, thou mayest **wend** to the ship joyful in spirit, with a costly gift and very goodly, to be an heirloom of my giving, such as dear friends give to friends." . . .

Now the wooers **clamoured** throughout the shadowy halls, and each one uttered a prayer to be her **bedfellow**. And wise Telemachus first spake among them:

"Wooers of my mother, men **despiteful** out of measure, let us feast now and make merry and let there be no **brawling**; for, lo, it is a good thing to **list** to a minstrel such as him, like to the gods in voice. But in the morning let us all go to the assembly and sit us down, that I may declare my saying outright, to wit that ye leave these halls: and busy yourselves with other feasts, eating your own substance, going in turn from house to house. But if ye **deem** this a likelier and a better thing, that one man's goods should perish without atonement, then waste ye as ye will; and I will call upon the everlasting gods, if haply Zeus may grant that acts of **recompense** be made: so should ye hereafter perish within the halls without atonement."

Perchance thou will

harken: By chance you will pay attention.

Aught: Of him.

Mound: Grave.

Guile: Deception.

Of years thereto: Of a childish age.

Renown: Famous.

Gat: Got.

abide: Stay.

Wend: Direct.

Clamoured or clamored: Made loud noises.

Bedfellow: One who shares the same bed.

Despiteful: Spiteful.

Brawling: Fighting.

List: Listen.

Deem: Consider.

Recompense: Compensation; payment.

The Odyssey

Marvelled: Were amazed.

So spake he, and all that heard him bit their lips and **marvelled** at Telemachus, in that he spake boldly.

Harangue: To make a ranting speech.

Then Antinous, son of Eupheithes, answered him: "Telemachus, in very truth the gods themselves instruct thee to be proud of speech and boldly to **harangue**. Never may Cronion [Zeus] make thee king in seagirt Ithaca, which thing is of inheritance thy right!"

Fain: Unwilling.

Then wise Telemachus answered him, and said: "Antinous, wilt thou indeed be wroth at the word that I shall say? Yea, at the hand of Zeus would I be **fain** to take even this thing upon me. Sayest thou that this is the worst hap that can **befal** a man? Nay, verily, it is no ill thing to be a king: the house of such an one quickly **waxeth** rich and himself is held in greater honour. Howsoever there are many other kings of the Achaeans in seagirt Ithaca, kings young and old; someone of them shall surely have this kingship since goodly Odysseus is dead. But as for me, I will be lord of our own house and **thralls**, that goodly Odysseus gat me with his spear." . . .

Befal: Happen to.

Waxeth: Becomes.

Thralls: Possessions.

But Telemachus, where his chamber was builded high up in the fair court, in a place with wide **prospect**, thither **betook** him to his bed, **pondering** many thoughts in his mind; and with him went trusty Eurycleia, and bare for him torches burning. She was the daughter of Ops, son of Peisenor, and Laertes bought her on a time with his wealth, while as yet she was in her first youth, and gave for her the worth of twenty oxen. And he honoured her even as he honoured his dear wife in the halls, but he never lay with her, for he shunned the wrath of his lady. She went with Telemachus and bare for him the burning torches: and of all the women of the household she loved him most, and she had nursed him when a little one. Then he opened the doors of the well-builded chamber and sat him on the bed and took off his soft **doublet**, and put it in the wise old woman's hands. So she folded the doublet and smoothed it, and hung it on a pin by the jointed **bedstead**, and went forth on her way from the room, and pulled to the door with the silver handle, and drew home the bar with the thong. There, all night through, wrapped in a fleece of wool, he meditated in his heart upon the journey that Athene had showed him.

Prospect: View.

Betook: Took.

Pondering: Thinking.

Doublet: Jacket.

Bedstead: Framework of a bed.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Books II through IV of *The Odyssey* depict the situation in Ithaca, where Penelope and Telemachus attempt to hold on to their authority in Odysseus's absence. In Book V, Zeus orders Calypso to release Odysseus, who sets out on a raft that is destroyed by his enemy, Poseidon. Odysseus washes ashore on the land of the Phaeacians, portrayed in Books VI

through VIII. Books IX through XII contain Odysseus's account of his adventures since leaving Troy. These adventures include his stay in the land of the Lotus-Eaters; his blinding of Polyphemus; the loss of eleven of his twelve ships to a race of cannibals, or eaters of human flesh; his arrival at the island of the enchantress Circe; his visit to the Land of Departed Spirits; his encounter with the Sirens, partly human creatures who lure seamen to their deaths at sea; and his arrival at Calypso's island. In Books XIII through XVI, the Phaeacians return Odysseus to Ithaca. After Athena disguises him as a beggar, he reveals his true identity to Telemachus, and the two men plot to rid the kingdom of the king's rivals. In the final books (XVII through XXIV), Odysseus passes a test Penelope sets up to choose one of her suitors. Odysseus kills the suitors with the help of his son and resumes his place as Penelope's husband and king of Ithaca.

Did you know . . .

- While *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are the earliest works of literature that portray the Greek gods and goddesses, other works give further detail. Most important are two works by Hesiod, a poet who lived at almost the same time (c. 800 BCE) as Homer: *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. In these books, Hesiod provides accounts of the origins of the universe, the succession of gods and goddesses, the ages of the world, and the sources of human misfortune.
- Readers of (or listeners to) *The Odyssey* who knew *The Iliad*, the earlier epic, would have already been familiar with Athena and her skill and practicality in the art of warfare. This skill is shown near the end of *The Iliad* when she helps the Greek Epeius build a huge wooden horse, referred to as the Trojan horse. The Greeks leave the horse outside the walls of Troy. The Trojans take the horse inside as an offering to Athena—not knowing that the horse has been hollowed out and that inside are Greek soldiers under the command of Odysseus. At night, the soldiers emerge from the horse and unlock the gates of the city, allowing the Greeks to enter, sack the city, and end the Trojan War. The term *Trojan horse* is still used today to refer to any similar act of trickery; computer experts use the term to refer to a way of sneaking a virus into a computer system.
- The historical setting for *The Odyssey* is about the twelfth century BCE. Archeologists call this period of time the Bronze Age, named after the type of metal that was widely used. The Greeks

believed that the Bronze Age was a time when their country was home to heroic people with superhuman characteristics and when gods moved freely about Earth. There are several mentions of bronze in the excerpted passage, for example, in reference to Athena, who is described as seizing “the rugged spear tipped with a bronze point.” Odysseus is said to have sailed past Ephyra, “hunting deadly poison to smear on his arrows’ bronze heads.” The epic tries to capture the glorious spirit of the age by using a high poetic style rather than everyday language.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain how Homer establishes the importance of the story he is about to tell.
- Summarize ways in which the gods and goddesses portrayed in *The Odyssey* behave and think. Compare these behaviors and ways of thought to those of deities in other religions.
- Explain the relationship between Athena and Odysseus and between Athena and Telemachus. Summarize the role Athena plays in the affairs of these two human beings.

For More Information

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Sri Guru Granth Sahib

*“Jup,” from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, available online from the Internet Sacred Text Archive at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/skh/granth/gr01.htm>
Compiled by Guru Gobind Singh in the eighteenth century*

“Endless are His Praises, endless are those who speak them.
Endless are His Actions, endless are His Gifts.
Endless is His Vision, endless is His Hearing.”

Sikhism emerged in the Punjab region of what is now India and Pakistan in the fifteenth century. The founder of Sikhism was Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1449–1538), who was born in an area of the Punjab that is now part of Pakistan. From an early age, he came to believe that external forms of worship were not as important as inner beliefs. He rejected many of the beliefs and practices of the Hindus who surrounded him, as well as that of Muslims. At one time Guru Nanak famously proclaimed, “There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.”

At the city of Sultanpur in India he had a revelation instructing him to preach about paths to enlightenment and to God. He opposed the caste system of Hindus (a hereditary system that defined and separated social classes) and any form of worship of idols, or substitutes for God. He also adopted the monotheism (belief in one supreme god) of Islam and placed a great deal of emphasis on the brotherhood of humankind.

The excerpt presents Guru Nanak’s concept of God, a concept that all Sikhs adopt. It is taken from the Sikh sacred scripture, called the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The section from which the excerpt is taken, titled “Jup,” is an epic poem written by Guru Nanak. An epic poem is a work of poetry that may be as long as a book. The fundamental beliefs of Sikhs are reflected in the excerpt and are relatively simple. Sikhs believe that the purpose of religion is to create a close, loving relationship with

God. One way to do this is through prayer, which repeatedly emphasizes the attributes, or characteristics, of God. The God of the Sikhs is a single God with no form that could be represented in, for example, a painting or sculpture. This is a contrast to the beliefs of Hinduism, in which God can take on many forms and be present in many things. The Sikh God fills the universe (“Endless are His Actions, endless are His Gifts”). He can be known only through meditation (“The faithful have intuitive awareness and intelligence”).

The “Jup” consists entirely of an ongoing list of the features and qualities of God. God is to be honored and worshipped because of his creative power, his gifts to humankind, his virtue, his greatness, his beauty, his watchfulness over people, and many other characteristics. He has many names, such as True One, Infinite Lord, Highest of the High, and Treasure of Excellence. People can create a loving relationship with God by listening to Him and by striving to be pleasing to Him. Repeatedly, the prayer says, “May I never forget Him.” The goal of always remembering God is central to the Sikh faith.

Guru Nanak was the first in a succession of ten gurus of Sikhism. A guru is a spiritual and religious teacher and counselor. The nine that followed him were regarded as reincarnations of Nanak. That is, they were considered to be new bodies into which Nanak was reborn. These gurus were the leaders of the Sikh faith until the early eighteenth century. The fifth guru, Sri Arjan Dev Ji (1563–1606), assembled the Sikh holy text, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, in 1603. The book consists of the hymns and writings of Sikhism’s early gurus as well as those of various Hindu and Muslim saints. In later years, the Guru Granth was updated to include the writings of some of the later gurus. In all it contains the work of six gurus: Nanak, Angad Dev, Amar Das, Ram Das, Arjan Dev, and Teg Bahadur.

Then, early in the eighteenth century, the last of the gurus, Gobind Singh Ji (1666–1708), compiled all of these writings into an updated version of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. He proclaimed the text to be the eleventh and final guru of Sikhism. The Guru Granth Sahib is still personified in the early twenty-first century as the final guru, the living embodiment of the previous gurus, almost like a person. It remains the sacred scripture and spiritual guide of Sikhism.

The Guru Granth is the focus of worship in a Sikh temple, called a *gurdwara*, which literally means “residence of the Guru” or “door that



Sikhs hold an image of Guru Nanak, Sikhism's founder. Guru Nanak discussed his concept of God in the "Jup," an epic poem within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. AFP/GETTY IMAGES.

leads to the Guru." Because Sikhs reject any form of idol worship (the worship of images that are not God) and believe that God has no physical form, there are no statues, pictures, incense, bells, or any other objects associated with religious ritual. Additionally, no copy of the Guru Granth is illustrated.

Any building that has a copy of the Guru Granth can be regarded as a Gurdwara. While a leader, called a Granthi, reads passages from the Guru Granth for the assembled worshippers, this person is not a priest. He is regarded simply as a reader and custodian of the Guru Granth, though he is expected to live an exemplary life. The Guru Granth is stored in a room by itself during the night. When Sikhs gather to worship, it is carried out in ceremonial fashion and placed on a raised platform or throne, where it is covered by a rich cloth when not being read. Sikhs regard the Guru Granth as an expression of God and a living embodiment of the gurus, so copies of it are treated respectfully.

The Gurdwara

The *gurdwara* is a Sikh temple. Each gurdwara has four doors that lead into it. They are called the Door of Livelihood, the Door of Peace, the Door of Grace, and the Door of Learning. The four doors have symbolic meaning. They suggest that anyone is welcome to enter from the four points of the compass. They also suggest that members of any of the four Hindu castes are welcome. A light is always kept burning in the gurdwara to show that the Guru Granth's visible light can be seen by anyone at any time. There are approximately two hundred gurdwaras in India and an equal number in the United States.

While Sikhism rejected certain elements of Hinduism, particularly what it saw as Hinduism's emphasis on rituals and outward forms of worship, Sikhs believe in several central Hindu concepts:

- *samsara*, or the endlessly repeated cycle of birth, life, and death;
- karma, or the concept that the sum of a person's good and bad actions determines how he or she lives a future life; and
- reincarnation, or rebirth following death.

In this respect Sikhism differs from many other religions in the world that teach that when a person dies, his or her soul goes either to heaven or hell forever. A person can become a Sikh by recognizing a single immortal God, by

believing in the ten gurus as well as the Guru Granth Sahib, and by accepting the teachings of the gurus.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

- The “Jup” differs from much of the rest of the Guru Granth in being more like an epic poem than a song, prayer, or hymn. The Guru Granth evolved from an earlier text called the Adi Granth. The Adi Granth consisted of poems, prayers, verses, and hymns that Nanak and later gurus wrote down.
- The excerpt repeatedly calls on Guru Nanak (“O Nanak”) for spiritual wisdom. Because a guru to Sikhs embodies divine wisdom, calling on Nanak is akin to calling on God.
- At the time the Guru Granth was being compiled, religious texts in India were written largely in Sanskrit. This was a written language that the people did not speak. In contrast, the Granth was written largely in Punjabi, the language of the people. When asked why this was so, the third guru, Amar Das (1479–1574), replied (according to Sandeep Singh Brar, author of “The Third Master Guru Amar Das (1479–1574)”): “Sanskrit is like a well, deep, inaccessible [out of reach] and confined to the elite [a select few], but the language of the people is like rain water—ever fresh, abundant and accessible to all.”



Excerpt from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Section 01—Jup—Part 001

One Universal Creator God. The Name Is Truth. Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred. Image Of The Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent. By Guru's Grace ~

Chant And Meditate:

True In The Primal Beginning. True Throughout The Ages.

True Here And Now. O Nanak, Forever And Ever True.

By thinking, He cannot be **reduced** to thought, even by thinking hundreds of thousands of times.

By remaining silent, inner silence is not **obtained**, even by remaining lovingly **absorbed** deep within.

The hunger of the hungry is not **appeased**, even by piling up loads of worldly goods.

Hundreds of thousands of clever tricks, but not even one of them will go along with you in the end.

So how can you become truthful? And how can the veil of **illusion** be torn away?

O Nanak, it is written that you shall obey the **Hukam** of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will.

By His Command, bodies are created; His Command cannot be described.

By His Command, souls come into being; by His Command, glory and greatness are obtained.

By His Command, some are high and some are low; by His Written Command, pain and pleasure are obtained.

Some, by His Command, are blessed and forgiven; others, by His Command, wander aimlessly forever.

Everyone is subject to His Command; no one is beyond His Command.

O Nanak, one who understands His Command, does not speak in ego.

Some sing of His Power—who has that Power?

Some sing of His Gifts, and know His Sign and **Insignia**.

Some sing of His Glorious Virtues, Greatness and Beauty.

Some sing of knowledge obtained of Him, through difficult philosophical studies.

Some sing that He fashions the body, and then again reduces it to dust.

Some sing that He takes life away, and then again restores it.

Some sing that He seems so very far away.

Reduced: Simplified or limited.

Obtained: Acquired.

Absorbed: Occupied, having one's attention held.

Appeased: Satisfied.

Illusion: A false idea.

Hukam: Divine will.

Insignia: Symbol of authority, like a badge.

Section 01—Jup—Part 002

Some sing that He watches over us, face to face, ever-present.
There is no shortage of those who preach and teach.
Millions upon millions offer millions of sermons and stories.
The Great Giver keeps on giving, while those who receive grow weary
of receiving.

Throughout the ages, consumers consume.

The Commander, by His Command, leads us to walk on the Path.

O Nanak, He blossoms forth, Carefree and Untroubled.

True is the Master, True is His Name—speak it with infinite love.

People beg and pray, “Give to us, give to us,” and the Great Giver gives
His Gifts.

So what offering can we place before Him, by which we might see the
Darbaar of His Court?

What words can we speak to **evoke** His Love?

In the Amrit Vaylaa, the **ambrosial** hours before dawn, chant the True
Name, and contemplate His Glorious Greatness.

By the karma of past actions, the robe of this physical body is obtained.
By His Grace, the Gate of Liberation is found.

O Nanak, know this well: the True One Himself is All.

He cannot be established, He cannot be created.

He Himself is **Immaculate** and Pure.

Those who serve Him are honored.

O Nanak, sing of the Lord, the Treasure of Excellence.

Sing, and listen, and let your mind be filled with love.

Your pain shall be sent far away, and peace shall come to your home.

The Guru’s Word is the Sound-current of the **Naad**; the Guru’s Word is
the Wisdom of the **Vedas**; the Guru’s Word is **all-pervading**.

The Guru is **Shiva**, the Guru is **Vishnu** and **Brahma**; the Guru is **Paarvati**
and **Lakhshmi**.

Even knowing God, I cannot describe Him; He cannot be described in
words.

The Guru has given me this one understanding:

there is only the One, the Giver of all souls. May I never forget Him!

If I am pleasing to Him, then that is my **pilgrimage** and cleansing bath.
Without pleasing Him, what good are ritual cleansings?

I gaze upon all the created beings: without the karma of good actions,
what are they given to receive?

Darbaar: The court of a king.

Evoke: To bring forth.

Ambrosial: Very pleasing.

Immaculate: Without fault.

Naad: The essence of all sounds.

Vedas: Hindu sacred texts.

All-pervading: Present everywhere.

Shiva: Hindu god of destruction and transformation; one of the trinity of gods that includes Brahma the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver.

Vishnu: Hindu god of preservation; the second member of the trinity that includes Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer.

Brahma: Hindu god of creation and also of knowledge; the third member of the trinity that includes Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer.

Paarvati: The consort, or wife, of Shiva.

Lakhshmi: The consort, or wife, of Vishnu.

Pilgrimage: Trip to a sacred place, taken for a religious reason.



A Sikh priest reads from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. The writings contained in it were compiled in the eighteenth century by Guru Gobind Singh. © CHRIS LISLE/CORBIS.

Within the mind are gems, jewels and rubies, if you listen to the Guru's Teachings, even once.

The Guru has given me this one understanding:

there is only the One, the Giver of all souls. May I never forget Him!

Even if you could live throughout the four ages, or even ten times more, and even if you were known throughout the nine continents and followed by all,

with a good name and reputation, with praise and fame throughout the world

still, if the Lord does not bless you with His Glance of Grace, then who cares? What is the use?

Among worms, you would be considered a lowly worm, and even **contemptible** sinners would hold you in contempt.

O Nanak, God blesses the unworthy with virtue, and **bestows** virtue on the virtuous.

Contemptible: Looked upon with disgust.

Bestows: Gives as a gift.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Siddhas: Human beings who have reached perfection.

Yogic: Having to do with yoga, the Hindu discipline aimed at gaining a state of perfect spiritual understanding.

Akaashic: In Hinduism, relating to one of the five great elements that make up the world.

Nether: Located below or in a lower position.

Indra: In the Hindu Vedas, a warrior god, ruler of the sky and weather.

Intuitively: Instinctively, without needing explanation.

Essence: The most important quality or feature.

Devotees: Dedicated followers.

Scribe: One who copies down documents or religious texts.

No one can even imagine anyone who can bestow virtue upon Him.

Listening—the **Siddhas**, the spiritual teachers, the heroic warriors, the **yogic** masters.

Listening—the earth, its support and the **Akaashic** ethers.

Listening—the oceans, the lands of the world and the **nether** regions of the underworld.

Listening—Death cannot even touch you.

O Nanak, the devotees are forever in bliss.

Listening—pain and sin are erased.

Listening—Shiva, Brahma and **Indra**.

Listening—even foul-mouthed people praise Him.

Listening—the technology of Yoga and the secrets of the body.

...

O Nanak, the devotees are forever in bliss.

Section 01—Jup—Part 003

Listening—pain and sin are erased.

Listening—truth, contentment and spiritual wisdom.

Listening—take your cleansing bath at the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage.

Listening—reading and reciting, honor is obtained.

Listening—**intuitively** grasp the **essence** of meditation.

O Nanak, the **devotees** are forever in bliss.

Listening—pain and sin are erased.

Listening—dive deep into the ocean of virtue.

Listening—the Shaykhs, religious scholars, spiritual teachers and emperors.

Listening—even the blind find the Path.

Listening—the Unreachable comes within your grasp.

O Nanak, the devotees are forever in bliss.

Listening—pain and sin are erased.

The state of the faithful cannot be described.

One who tries to describe this shall regret the attempt.

No paper, no pen, no **scribe**

can record the state of the faithful.

Such is the Name of the Immaculate Lord.

Only one who has faith comes to know such a state of mind.

The faithful have intuitive awareness and intelligence.

The faithful know about all worlds and realms.
 The faithful shall never be struck across the face.
 The faithful do not have to go with the Messenger of Death.
 Such is the Name of the Immaculate Lord.
 Only one who has faith comes to know such a state of mind.
 The path of the faithful shall never be blocked.
 The faithful shall depart with honor and fame.
 The faithful do not follow empty religious rituals.
 The faithful are firmly bound to the **Dharma**.
 Such is the Name of the Immaculate Lord.
 Only one who has faith comes to know such a state of mind.
 The faithful find the Door of Liberation.
 The faithful uplift and **redeem** their family and relations.
 The faithful are saved, and carried across with the Sikhs of the Guru.
 The faithful, O Nanak, do not wander around begging.
 Such is the Name of the Immaculate Lord.
 Only one who has faith comes to know such a state of mind.
 The chosen ones, the self-elect, are accepted and approved.
 The chosen ones are honored in the Court of the Lord.
 The chosen ones look beautiful in the courts of kings.
 The chosen ones meditate single-mindedly on the Guru.
 No matter how much anyone tries to explain and describe them,
 the actions of the Creator cannot be counted.
 The mythical bull is Dharma, the son of **compassion**;
 this is what patiently holds the earth in its place.
 One who understands this becomes truthful.
 What a great load there is on the bull!
 So many worlds beyond this world—so very many!
 What power holds them, and supports their weight?
 The names and the colors of the assorted species of beings
 were all **inscribed** by the Ever-flowing Pen of God.
 Who knows how to write this account?
 Just imagine what a huge scroll it would take!
 What power! What fascinating beauty!
 And what gifts! Who can know their extent?
 You created the vast expanse of the Universe with One Word!
 Hundreds of thousands of rivers began to flow.

Dharma: Divine law as a source of happiness and contentment.

Redeem: Restore the reputation of or pay for the sins of.

Compassion: Sympathy for the suffering of others.

Inscribed: Written down.

Potency: Strength.

How can Your Creative **Potency** be described?

I cannot even once be a sacrifice to You.

Whatever pleases You is the only good done,

You, Eternal and Formless One!

Countless meditations, countless loves.

Austere: Strict.

Countless worship services, countless **austere** disciplines.

Countless scriptures, and ritual recitations of the Vedas.

Countless Yogis, whose minds remain detached from the world.



What happened next . . .

The Sikhs have a political as well as a religious history. After the death of the tenth guru in 1708, leadership of the Sikhs fell to his follower, Banda Singh Bahadur (1670–1716). His goal was to create a Sikh homeland in the Punjab. At the time, though, the Persian army was repeatedly invading India, carrying back captured riches and slaves. On their expeditions, they had to pass through the Punjab region, where they encountered ferocious resistance from the Sikhs. Using the tactics of guerrilla warfare, Sikh warriors harassed the Persians, reclaiming the booty and freeing the slaves. When the Persians pursued them, the Sikhs would suddenly turn and assault them, usually killing most of their pursuers. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Sikhs were largely in control of the Punjab region.

Through the early 1600s, the Sikhs lived in relative peace with Muslims in the region. That changed, though, under the Muslim emperor Jahan-gir, who opposed Sikhism. He was determined to convert its followers, including Guru Arjan Dev, to Islam. In the following decades, Sikhs took up arms and conducted military training to defend their faith. Violent battles between Sikh and Muslim armies erupted. The Sikhs were determined to defend the principle of religious toleration, not just of Sikhs but of Hindus as well.

Did you know . . .

- Strict Sikhs continue to exhibit the five emblems of Sikhism, sometimes called the “five K’s.” The first emblem is *Kesh*, or uncut hair, which is seen as a gift from God. Male Sikhs can typically be recognized by the turban that is wound tightly around the head to

contain the hair. The second emblem is *Kungha*, or a wooden comb to keep the hair neat. The third is *Kasba*, or an undergarment, like shorts, that was worn by Sikh soldiers and suggests chastity and cleanliness. The fourth, *Kara*, is a steel bracelet that symbolizes a connection with God, and the last, *Kirpan*, is a saber carried in readiness to defend the weak or uphold the right.

- Sikhism's baptism and naming ritual began in 1699, when the first five Sikhs were baptized with *amrit*, a mixture of water and sugar that they drank from the same bowl. The five Sikhs were all members of different castes, and until that time it would have been unheard of for members of different castes to drink from the same bowl. With the use of *amrit*, this ceremony makes clear that anyone can be a Sikh, regardless of his or her background, family, social class, or other factor. As part of the ritual, each man's last name is replaced with the name Singh, meaning "lion." When women are baptized, their last names are replaced with Kaur, meaning "princess."

Consider the following . . .

- Throughout the poem, God is frequently referred to just as "He" or "Him." Give a possible explanation for why much of the text avoids mentioning God by name.
- Summarize the role that God plays in people's lives, as that role is developed in the "Jup."
- The "Jup" is regarded as a morning prayer by Sikhs. Explain why the poem seems suitable for this purpose, focusing especially on the repeated line "May I never forget Him."

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Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner

"The Deities," from *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*

By *Scott Cunningham*

Published in 1988 by *Llewellyn Publications*

"The sight of a perfect blossom in a field of bare earth can instill feelings rivaling those of the most powerful formal rite. Living in nature makes every moment a ritual."

Scott Cunningham is a leading authority on Wicca, a modern religious movement that falls under the broader heading of neo-paganism (*neo* meaning "new"). Neo-paganism encompasses a number of modern groups that find religious truth in ancient practices and beliefs. Some neo-pagans, for example, identify themselves specifically as followers of Asatru, a god from ancient Norse (Scandinavian) mythology. Others call themselves Druids, whose religion is based on ancient Celtic practices. (The Celts were an early ethnic group found primarily in western Europe and the British Isles.) Other groups include shamans (priests or priestesses who use magic rituals to cure the sick or foretell the future), members of such movements as Goddess Spirituality or Sacred Ecology, and Wicca. Many of these terms tend to overlap in meaning because neo-paganism has no formal theology (a system of beliefs and teachings) or organization.

Wicca is a form of modern witchcraft, but the word *witchcraft* causes considerable confusion. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, witchcraft usually refers to those who have made a religious error of belief or practice. However, it more popularly refers to worship of Satan, or the devil. Witchcraft has often been mistakenly associated with bizarre rituals that may involve blood, animal sacrifices, unconventional sexual practices, and the like. Throughout the history of Christianity, many women and men have faced the wrath of the Christian church



The Salem Witch Trials, carried out in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, punished men and women suspected of witchcraft, which at the time was mistakenly thought to be connected with “black arts” and the devil. THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

for supposed Satan worship and witchcraft. In 1692, for example, nineteen people, mostly women, were executed after the infamous witch trials in the town of Salem, Massachusetts. The church and the community believed that these people had been practicing black arts as witches. The accused, however, were innocent victims of unfortunate events.

Modern practitioners of witchcraft strongly deny that they worship evil or engage in strange practices. They maintain that witchcraft, as practiced by Wiccans and other groups, is an Earth-centered religion that sees the divine in the natural world, including, for example, the cycle of the seasons and the phases of the Moon. Most such groups have a strict code of behavior based on not doing harm to others.

While various neo-pagan groups, including Wiccans, follow different traditions and practices, they do have characteristics in common. Many are either solitary practitioners (reflected in the title of Scott

Cunningham's book) or practice in very small groups, variously referred to as covens, circles, groves, kindreds, garths, hearths, and other terms. These groups have little if any official ruling structure; that is, no ruling body has authority over members. Most believers prefer to practice their rituals outdoors when they can, which is consistent with their emphasis on nature. Many practice in secret, largely because many people associate neo-paganism with Satan worship and may discriminate against them, avoiding them or treating them unfairly in other ways.

Another characteristic that neo-pagan religions share is that they are generally reconstructed from ancient Western pre-Christian religions that have all but disappeared. In the case of Wicca, several theories have been offered about its origins, but a well-regarded theory is that Wicca evolved from ancient Celtic worship of the goddess of fertility and the god of the hunt. As Celtic society spread across northern Europe and the British Isles, the Celts carried Wiccan practices with them. The religion largely died out as a result of persecution (treating people unfairly, and often with violence, because of extreme differences) by the Romans, the Saxons, and the Norman French. Later, the Christian Church tried to forcefully eliminate Wicca during "the Burning Times," when accused witches were handed over to local authorities who saw to their deaths by hanging, drowning, or, though less common, burning at the stake. This took place roughly between the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

Neo-pagan groups, including Wicca, tend to have similar teachings. They follow a belief system that is either duotheistic (believing in two deities, typically a god and a goddess) or polytheistic (believing in many deities). Neo-pagans feel close to the cycles of nature. Holy days tend to fall on the first day of each of the four seasons, that is the summer and winter solstices (respectively, the longest and shortest days of the year) and the spring and autumnal equinoxes (the first day of spring and autumn).

The emergence of Wicca as a modern religious movement can be traced to the 1950s in England and the efforts of a British civil servant named Gerald Gardner, who wrote extensively on witchcraft. Later, in 1974, a number of Wiccans gathered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where they drafted a statement containing the principles of Wiccan belief. The following list summarizes some of the most important principles, along with ways they are reflected in Cunningham's book.

- Wiccans practice rites attuned to, or in step with, the “natural rhythm of life forces,” Cunningham notes, referring to rituals that follow “the course of the Sun through its astronomical year . . . as well as the monthly waxing and waning of the Moon.” A waxing moon means the moon is appearing larger, and is one where the side of the moon facing east is dark. A waning moon is one where the side of the moon facing west is dark. This gives the appearance that the moon is getting smaller.
- Wiccans encourage and support responsibility toward the environment. Cunningham points out that “many of us are involved in ecology—saving the Earth from utter destruction by our own hands.”
- Wiccans “acknowledge a depth of power far greater than that apparent to the average person,” as stated at the 1974 meeting. They find power and divine awe in seemingly ordinary aspects of nature, such as flowers and trees.
- The creative power of the universe is both masculine and feminine and contained within each person: “Wicca,” writes Cunningham, “reveres [respects and honors] these twin deities [called the God and Goddess] because of its links with nature.”
- Wiccans seek the interaction of the outer and inner (psychological) worlds and, as Cunningham writes, “can contact and communicate with [the God and Goddess] because a part of us is in them and they are within us.”
- Wiccans do not have an organized structure of authority to oversee their religious beliefs. Throughout his book, Cunningham makes clear that every practitioner can be his or her own priest or priestess, performing rituals without the assistance of a class of specialists, a class that other religions would describe as priests (in Christianity) or rabbis (in Judaism) or imams (in Islam).
- Wisdom, religion, and “magick” (a spelling sometimes used in religious contexts to distinguish it from tricks and entertainment) are united in a way of living, or a life philosophy. As Cunningham notes elsewhere in the book, “magic plays a special role in Wicca. It allows us to improve our lives and return energy to our ravaged [damaged] planet.”
- Wicca opposes Christianity and other religions only to the extent that they deny spiritual freedom to others.

- Meaning in the universe comes from fulfilling and affirming life: “Wiccans emphasize the bright aspects of the deities because this gives us purpose to grow and evolve to the highest realm of existence.”
- Wiccans do not worship Satan, the devil, or evil. Cunningham makes clear throughout his book that worship of the God and Goddess is worship of the creative, life-affirming powers of the universe, those powers that sustain and support the universe.

Things to remember while reading *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*:

- Wicca is regarded as a form of paganism. The modern word *pagan* has negative associations, suggesting that a person is backward and ignorant. The word comes from a Latin word, *paganus*, meaning “country dweller.” The word was used by the ancient Romans after the empire converted to Christianity. People in rural areas tended to hold on to ancient religious beliefs rather than to adopt Christianity. People in cities who did become Christians thought of people outside of the cities as backward.
- Scholars debate the origins of Wicca. While most practitioners and religious scholars trace Wicca to the 1950s and the books of Gerald Gardner, others disagree about the nature of his role. They believe that Gardner adapted his claims about Wicca from various other authors, religious historians, and even a prominent witch named Dorothy Clutterbuck, who was well known in England at the time.
- Many neo-pagans, including Wiccans, have adopted the pentagram as a symbol. This symbol consists of a circle with a five-pointed star inside, with the tips of the points touching the circle. It is widely believed that the pentagram is a satanic symbol, but it

Do Witches Carry Brooms?

A common image of witches, and one that is reflected every year by children in Halloween costumes, is that they ride on broomsticks. While this is a stereotype, it is one based on an element of truth. Wiccans commonly use brooms as sacred tools, typically starting rituals by sweeping a sacred place where an altar is set up. This sweeping is not just for cleanliness. As part of the ritual, it symbolizes the act of purifying, or making holy, the sacred space for worship.

In fact, witches in many cultural traditions were believed to have been associated with brooms. In Mexico before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the fifteenth century, the witch deity Tlazelteotl was often pictured naked, riding on a broom. The ancient Chinese worshipped a broom goddess they called on to bring good weather. In Europe, witches were believed to ride in the air on brooms, which some at the time believed “proved” that they were allied with the dark powers of Satan.

is not. The circle represents the magic circle used for rituals, and the five points of the star represent the five elements of earth, air, water, fire, and spirit.

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Excerpt from the *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*

“The Deities”

Reverence: Respect, devotion for.

All religions are structures built upon **reverence** of Deity. Wicca is no exception. The Wicca acknowledge a supreme divine power, unknowable, ultimate, from which the entire universe sprang.

Comprehension: Understanding.

The concept of this power, far beyond our **comprehension**, has nearly been lost in Wicca because of our difficulty in relating to it. However, Wiccans link with this force through their deities. In accordance with the principles of nature, the supreme power was **personified** into two basic beings: the Goddess and the God.

Personified: Represented as a being, given a concrete form.

Archetypal: Ideal.

Every deity that has received worship upon this planet exists with the **archetypal** God and Goddess. The complex **pantheons** of deities which arose in many parts of the world are simply *aspects* of the two. Every Goddess is resident within the concept of the Goddess; every God in the God.

Pantheons: Official groups.

Embodying: Representing.

Wicca reveres these twin deities because of its links with nature. Since most (but certainly not all) nature is divided into gender, the deities **embodying** it are similarly **conceived**.

Conceived: Formed an idea of.

In the past, when the Goddess and God were as real as the Moon and Sun, rites of worship and adoration were unstructured—spontaneous, joyous union with the divine. Later, rituals followed the course of the Sun through its astronomical year (and thusly the seasons) as well as the monthly waxing and waning of the Moon.

Instill: Impart, produce.

Today similar rites are observed by the Wicca, and their regular performance creates a truly magical closeness with these deities and the powers behind them.

Rivaling: Competing with.

Fortunately, we needn't wait for ritual occasions to be reminded of the Gods' presence. The sight of a perfect blossom in a field of bare earth can **instill** feelings **rivaling** those of the most powerful formal **rite**. Living in nature makes every moment a ritual. The Wiccans are comfortable in communicating with animals, plants and trees. They feel energies within stones and sand, and cause fossils to speak of their **primeval** beginnings. For some Wiccans, watching the Sun or Moon rise and set each day is a ritual unto itself, for these are the heavenly symbols of the God and Goddess.

Rite: An established ceremony, particularly in a religion.

Primeval: Original, ancient.

Because the Wicca see Deity **inherent** in nature, many of us are involved in ecology—saving the Earth from utter destruction by our own hands. The Goddess and God still exist, as they have always existed, and to honor them we honor and preserve our precious planet.

In Wiccan thought, the Deities didn't exist before our spiritual ancestor's acknowledgement of them. However, the *energies* behind them did; they created us. Early worshippers recognized these forces as the Goddess and God, personifying them in an attempt to understand them.

The Old Ones didn't die when the ancient Pagan religions fell to **upstart** Christianity in Europe. Most of the rites vanished, but they weren't the only effective ones. Wicca is alive and well and the Deities respond to our calls and **invocations**.

When **envisioning** the Goddess and God, many of the Wicca see Them as well-known deities from ancient religions. Diana, Pan, Isis, Hermes, Hina, Tammuz, Hecate, Ishtar, Cerridwen, Thoth, Tara, Aradia, Artemis, Pele, Apollo, Kanaloa, Bridget, Helios, Bran, Lugh, Hera, Cybele, Inanna, Maui, Ea, Athena, Lono, Marduk—the list is virtually endless. Many of these deities, with their corresponding histories, rites and mythic information, **furnish** the concept of deity for Wiccans.

Some feel comfortable associating such names and forms with the Goddess and God, feeling that they can't possibly revere nameless divine beings. Others find a lack of names and costumes a comforting lack of limitations.

As stated earlier, the Wicca as outlined in this book is "new," although built upon established rituals and myths, firmly rooted within the earliest religious feelings which nature aroused within our species. In these rituals I've used the words "the God" and "the Goddess" rather than specific names such as Diana and Pan. [. . .]

They have been given so many names they have been called the Nameless Ones. In appearance they look exactly as we wish them to, for they're all the Deities that ever were. The Goddess and God are all-powerful because they are the creators of all **manifest** and unmanifest existence. We can contact and communicate with them because a part of us is in them and they are within us.

The Goddess and God are equal; neither is higher or more deserving of respect. Though some Wiccans focus their rituals toward the Goddess and seem to forget the God entirely, this is a reaction to centuries of stifling **patriarchal** religion, and the loss of acknowledgement of the feminine aspect of Divinity. Religion based entirely on feminine energy, however, is as unbalanced and unnatural as one totally masculine in focus. The ideal is a perfect balance of the two. The Goddess and God are equal, complementary.

Inherent: Part of the inner nature or essence of something.

Upstart: Newly powerful.

Invocations: Acts of prayer or calling upon a spirit or god.

Envisioning: Forming a picture of.

Furnish: Supply.

Manifest: Clear to see, obvious to the senses.

Patriarchal: Characteristic of rule by men, not women.

Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner

Wiccans purify a wand in salt water during a ceremony. Neo-pagan religions such as Wicca are often very focused on nature and try to live in harmony with it. © REBECCA MEENTEE/CORBIS SYGMA.



Crone: An old woman, often one who is ugly.

Dormant: In a state of rest or inactivity, usually when growth and development have stopped.

Oblivion: The state of nothingness.

Incarnations: Lifetimes, the times spent in a particular human body.

Tempress: A woman who is considered extremely appealing.

The Goddess The Goddess is the universal mother. She is the source of fertility, endless wisdom and loving caresses. As the Wicca know Her, She is often of three aspects: the Maiden, the Mother and the **Crone**, symbolized in the waxing, full and waning of the Moon. She is at once the unplowed field, the full harvest and the **dormant**, frost-covered Earth. She gives birth to abundance. But as life is Her gift, She lends it with the promise of death. This is not darkness and **oblivion**, but rest from the toils of physical existence. It is human existence between **incarnations**.

Since the Goddess is nature, all nature, She is both the **Tempress** and the Crone; the tornado and the fresh spring rain; the cradle and the grave.

But though She is possessed of both natures, the Wicca revere Her as the giver of fertility, love and abundance, though they acknowledge Her darker side as well. We see Her in the Moon, the soundless, ever-moving sea, and in the green growth of the first spring. She is the embodiment of fertility and love. [...]

The God The God has been revered for **eons**. He is neither the stern, all-powerful deity of Christianity and Judaism, nor is He simply the **consort** of the Goddess. God or Goddess, they are equal, one.

We see the God in the Sun, brilliantly shining overhead during the day, rising and setting in the endless cycle which governs our lives. Without the Sun we could not exist; therefore it has been revered as the source of all life, the warmth that bursts the dormant seeds into life and hastens the greening of the Earth after the cold snows of winter.

The God is also tender of the wild animals. As the Horned God He is sometimes seen wearing horns on His head, symbolizing His connection with these beasts. In earlier times, hunting was one of the activities thought to be ruled by the God, while the domestication of animals was seen to be Goddess-oriented.

The God's domains include forests untouched by human hands, burning deserts and towering mountains. The stars, since they are but distant suns, are sometimes thought to be under His domain.

The yearly cycle of greening, maturation and harvest has long been associated with the Sun, hence the solar festivals of Europe [...] which are still observed in Wicca.

The God is the fully ripened harvest, **intoxicating** wine pressed from grapes, golden grain waving in a lone field, shimmering apples hanging from **verdant** boughs on October afternoons.

With the Goddess He also celebrates and rules sex. The Wicca don't avoid sex or speak of it in hushed words. It's a part of nature and is accepted as such. Since it brings pleasure, shifts our awareness away from the everyday world and **perpetuates** our species, it is thought to be sacred. The God **lustily imbues** us with the urge that ensures our species' biological future.

Symbols often used to depict or to worship the God include the sword, horns, spear, candle, gold, brass, diamond, the **sickle**, arrow, magical wand, **trident**, knife and others. Creatures sacred to Him include the bull, dog, snake, fish, stag, dragon, wolf, boar, eagle, falcon, shark, lizard and many others.

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What happened next . . .

In *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, Cunningham goes on to explain both the theory and the practice of Wicca. He explains the roles of numerous sacred objects used in Wiccan worship, including the broom, the wand, the cauldron, the magic knife, the crystal sphere, and others. He draws on

Eons: Long periods of time, ones that are too long to measure.

Consort: Husband, companion.

Intoxicating: Capable of making drunk.

Verdant: Lush or flourishing with vegetation.

Perpetuates: Continues.

Lustily: With energy and enthusiasm.

Imbues: Fills.

Sickle: A tool with a semicircular blade on a handle, used for cutting tall grass.

Trident: A spear with three prongs.

the Book of Shadows, a handbook of Wiccan rituals that discusses music, dance, construction of altars, and many other symbolic practices and items. The Book of Shadows has no particular author or publisher. It has been handed down, usually in handwritten form (though versions are available widely on the Internet), by generations of Wiccans.

Did you know . . .

- Wiccans estimate their numbers to be about 750,000 in the United States, which would make Wicca the fifth-largest religion in the country. For many years, Wiccans faced persecution, physical attacks, and discrimination. This could affect their ability to get and hold jobs and run businesses. For this reason, many tended to keep their beliefs private. Wiccans acknowledge that in the twenty-first century non-Wiccans have become more tolerant because of growing public awareness that Wiccans are not worshipers of Satan or of evil.
- Wiccans believe that the ideal number of persons in a coven is thirteen. When the number grows larger than thirteen, the coven splits, or “hives,” into two or more covens. The covens remain associated as a larger unit called a grove.
- Wiccan wedding ceremonies are referred to most commonly as “handfastings.” Some Wiccans adhere to an ancient Celtic practice of a “trial marriage” for a year and a day.

Consider the following . . .

- Some people, including government officials and the court system, have not regarded Wicca as a “religion” but more as a philosophy or a way of life. Respond to this point of view.
- Most mainstream religions that recognize a deity, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, think of the deity as masculine. Explain how and why Wicca recognizes a female as well as a male deity.
- Define the word “witchcraft” as a Wiccan might use it. Explain how the Wiccan use of the term differs from the popular use of the term.

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“Paper on Hinduism”

*“Paper on Hinduism,” available online from the Universal Wisdom
at <http://www.theuniversalwisdom.org/hinduism/paper-on-hinduism-vivekananda/>
Speech delivered by Swami Vivekananda
Given at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 19, 1893*

“I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary...power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.”

Swami Vivekananda delivered the “Paper on Hinduism,” at the World Parliament of Religions on September 19, 1893. His speech became an important document in the history of modern religious tolerance. In this speech, and others that Vivekananda delivered to the parliament that September, he introduced Hinduism to the Western world.

For many centuries, knowledge of Hinduism had been confined largely to people in Southeast Asia and was mostly unknown to people in the West. After September 1893, however, the spiritual message of Hinduism gained attention in the Western world. Over the next century many westerners began to explore that message. More important, the “Paper on Hinduism” strengthened modern recognition that religious truths come in a variety of forms. While different cultures may have differing views of the nature and characteristics of God, each of the world’s religions reflects the culture and history of the people who practice the religion. All provide spiritual nourishment to people throughout the world.

As part of his message of religious tolerance, Vivekananda discusses in his speech the nature of God. He notes that throughout the world, different peoples have varying concepts of God. Christians worship God, Muslims worship Allah, Hindus worship Brahma, and so on. Vivekananda, though, says that each of these gods, and many others, are all expressions

of the same fundamental truth: that God is eternal and unchanging and the creative force and power throughout the universe. Differing ideas of the nature and being of God are simply the result of different cultural needs. God is multifaceted, meaning that He has many characteristics. Just as Hindus worship numerous gods that are facets, or aspects, of Brahma, so the world community can worship numerous gods that are aspects of a single, unchanging supreme deity. Each religion, then, has its own “light of truth.” The differences among them represent “glasses of different colors” through which that light of truth passes.

The paper presents a number of views that were new to most westerners at the time. Vivekananda says, for example, that the universe was not created but that it is eternal; it has always existed. He explained reincarnation (the idea that people die and are born again into the physical world in different bodies and life circumstances) and why people are unable to remember their past lives. He states that the goal of human life is to realize the divinity that lies within and to express that divinity through concern for the welfare of others. Perhaps most important, he rejects the concept, prominent in Christianity, that all people are sinners.

Vivekananda’s chief goal, however, was to encourage religious tolerance. In his address, he quotes from the Bhagavad Gita, a prominent Hindu scripture: “As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies [preferences], various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.” In other words, despite differences in religions, they all lead to the same God. Vivekananda’s address was a call for open-mindedness and acceptance and an end to religious extremism and prejudice. Religious extremism is when violence is carried out in the name of a religion. Prejudice is when individuals, or specific groups of people, are singled out for unfair treatment due to the characteristics of that particular person or group.

Swami Vivekananda was one of Hinduism’s great modern teachers. He was born into an educated, well-to-do family in Calcutta, India, on January 12, 1863. He grew up in a home that encouraged learning. From an early age he had a great capacity for absorbing and remembering what he read, including the entire contents of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. As a young man, Vivekananda attended the University of Calcutta. There, he acquired a broad-based education in science, philosophy, and religion and learned to speak several languages, including

English. He was also an accomplished musician and singer. During his college days Vivekananda began to discover that many of the principles and beliefs of Western science and philosophy were similar to beliefs found in Hindu sacred scriptures written thousands of years earlier. In time, he came to see little conflict between the teachings of Hinduism and the findings of modern science.

A turning point in Vivekananda’s life came in 1881, when he began to study under Sri Ramakrishna, another great nineteenth-century Hindu teacher. At this point, Vivekananda was still somewhat of a religious skeptic; that is, he was not prepared to accept Ramakrishna as a spiritual guru, or spiritual leader, or to believe that the guru was truly able to directly experience the divine. The divine refers to realizations and understandings of God and the teachings of God. Yet by his second meeting with Ramakrishna, Vivekananda began to see the world in a new way.

Over the next five years, Vivekananda studied under Ramakrishna. During these years he explored the basics of Hindu thought. Among them were:

- Brahma;
- the nature of the soul;
- meditation, the practice of focusing on one thought or image to quiet the mind and gain greater understanding of the divine;
- yoga, a physical and spiritual practice aimed at focusing the mind to achieve greater understanding of the divine;
- karma, a person’s good or bad actions throughout life, which determine the nature of his or her next life; and
- reincarnation

Vivekananda also studied the Hindu sacred scriptures, particularly the Vedas and the Upanishads. When Ramakrishna died in 1886, Vivekananda inherited his role as a spiritual master. For two years he went on a pilgrimage throughout India, journeying to sacred places.



Brahma is the one supreme god of Hinduism. The many gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion are merely different representations of this one God. © LINDSAY HEBBERD/CORBIS.

During this time he became exposed to the poverty and hunger that troubled many of his countrymen. From these experiences he became determined not only to help improve the condition of Indians but also to preach the message of the divine unity of humankind. He carried out these intentions until his death on July 4, 1902.

Vivekananda made his first trip to the United States in 1893. When he arrived in Chicago, he did not even know the dates when the World Parliament of Religions was to be held, nor did he have any credentials that entitled him to speak. Nonetheless, as a highly respected guru, he was able to address the seven thousand people in attendance on three occasions, bringing the audience to its feet in applause. The most important occasion was September 19, when he presented the “Paper on Hinduism.”

Things to remember while reading the “Paper on Hinduism”:

- Vivekananda earned the title *swami*, which comes from a word in Hindi (the language of northern India) meaning “owner” or “lord.” A swami is a spiritual teacher and philosopher. Typically, a swami is the head of a school of thought or the head of a social or educational institution.
- Swami Vivekananda’s significance is that he, more than any other person of his time, introduced Hinduism to the Western world. In the century that followed, more and more westerners began to study Hinduism. Although many came to regard themselves as Hindus (one can be a Hindu simply by accepting the teachings of Hindu scripture, especially the Vedas), others were interested in Hinduism more as a life philosophy or as a way of achieving inner peace.
- The 1893 World Parliament of Religions was the first-ever meeting of this worldwide body. Its goal was to bring together people from different religions to encourage relationships with one another, peace, and justice. It was held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a world’s fair that celebrated modern scientific and technological innovations. It also identified Chicago as a major world city. This gathering of religious leaders provided a spiritual dimension for the hundreds of thousands of people who visited the exposition.

A Primer on Hindu Sacred Scripture

Hindus recognize a number of documents as scripture, or holy writings. The chief documents are the Vedas (from a word meaning “vision,” “knowledge,” or “wisdom”), which were written sometime between 1500 to 1200 BCE. There are four Vedas: the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda, and the Atharva Veda. Each Veda consists of four elements: *Samhitas*, or hymns; *Brahmanas*, or rituals, encompassing religious duties of all Hindus; *Aranyakas*, or religious principles, usually studied by Hindu monks; and the Upanishads.

While the Upanishads are part of the Vedas, they generally are treated as if they were separate from them. Hindus typically do not read the other portions of the Vedas, primarily because they are complex. They are more likely to focus their study on the Upanishads. There are 108 surviving Upanishads; among them, 13 are regarded as the most important, in that they contain the essential teachings of Hinduism. Because they come at the end of the Vedas,

they are referred to as the Vedanta, or “end of the Vedas.”

Although numerous other texts are sacred to Hindus, one that is central is the Bhagavad Gita. Many Hindus, and westerners as well, find the Bhagavad Gita to be one of the most beautiful Hindu scriptures. It is part of Book VI of an epic poem called the Mahabharata, which means “Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty” and was probably written in the first or second century CE. It is written as a dialogue between a warrior prince, Arjuna, and his companion and chariot driver, Krishna, who is an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. The dialogue occurs on the battlefield: Krishna tells the prince that he is required to perform his duty and to maintain his faith in God, despite his self-doubts and questions about the nature of the universe. The Bhagavad Gita goes on to examine the nature of God and to explore the ways in which human beings can come to know Him.



Excerpt from the “Paper on Hinduism”

The Hindus have received their religion through **revelation**, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound **ludicrous** to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits [that they] were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.

The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honor them as perfected beings. I am glad to tell this audience that some of the very greatest of them were women.

Revelation: Communication through divine means.

Ludicrous: Ridiculous.

“Paper on Hinduism”

Manifested: Obvious, realized.

Potential: Existing in possibility but not in reality.

Kinetic: Characterized by motion or action.

Mutable: Capable of changing in form or substance.

Simile: A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two different things.

Providence: Divine guidance.

Aptitude: Natural ability.

Configuration: The way in which parts are arranged or fitted together.

Peculiar: Unique, distinct.

Affinity: Natural attraction or feeling of belonging together.

Immortal: Undying, lasting forever.

Infinite: Unlimited, without boundaries.

Chasm: Gap.

Here it may be said that these laws as laws may be without end, but they must have had a beginning. The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this **manifested** energy? Some say it was in a **potential** form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes **kinetic**, which would make Him **mutable**. Everything mutable is a compound and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd—Therefore, there never was a time when there was no creation.

If I may be allowed to use a **simile**, creation and creator are two lines, without beginning and without end, zoning parallel to each other. God is the ever-active **providence**, by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos, made to run for a time, and again destroyed. . . .

Are not all the tendencies of the mind and the body accounted for by inherited **aptitude**? Here are two parallel lines of existence—one of the mind, the other of matter. If matter and its transformations answer for all that we have, there is no necessity for supposing the existence of a soul. . . .

We cannot deny that bodies acquire certain tendencies from heredity, but those tendencies only mean the physical **configuration** through which a **peculiar** mind alone can act in a peculiar way. There are other tendencies peculiar to a soul caused by his past actions. And a soul with a certain tendency would, by the laws of **affinity**, take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency. This is in accord with science, for science wants to explain everything by habit, and habit is got through repetitions. So repetitions are necessary to explain the natural habits of a new born soul. And since they were not obtained in this present life, they must have come down from past lives. . . .

So then the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce—him the fire cannot burn—him the water cannot melt—him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere but whose center is located in the body, and that death means the change of the center from holy to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter. . . .

Well, then, the human soul is eternal and **immortal**, perfect and **infinite**, and death means only a change of center from one body to another. The present is determined by our past actions, and the future by the present. The soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death. But here is another question: Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning **chasm** the next, rolling to and from at the mercy of good and bad

actions—a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, **uncompromising** current of cause and effect—a little moth placed under the wheel of **causation**, which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow’s tears or the orphan’s cry? The heart sinks at the idea, yet this is the law of nature. Is there no hope? Is there no escape?—was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair. It reached the throne of mercy, and words of hope and consolation came down. . . . We are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, divinities on earth. . . .

Thus it is that the Vedas **proclaim**, not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One, “by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain and death stalks upon the earth.”

And what is His nature?

He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. “Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend, Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe; help me bear the little burden of this life.” Thus sang the Rishis of the Veda. And how to worship Him? Through love He is to be worshiped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life.” . . .

The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the **bondage** of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is, therefore, *Mukti—freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery*—And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God. . . . Purity is the condition of His mercy. How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, . . . even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. . . . So the best proof a Hindu **sage** gives about the soul, about God, is: “I have seen the soul; I have seen God.” And that is the only condition of perfection. The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or **dogma**, but in realizing—not in believing, but in being and becoming. . . .

Descend we now from the **aspirations** of philosophy to the religion of the ignorant. At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no **polytheism** in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including **omnipresence**, to the images. It is not polytheism. . . .

“The rose, called by any other name, would smell as sweet.” Names are not explanations. . . .

Uncompromising: Showing no willingness to find a middle ground or negotiate.

Causation: The process of causing an effect.

Proclaim: Announce.

Bondage: Slavery.

Sage: Holy man.

Dogma: Code of belief.

Aspirations: Ambitions, goals.

Polytheism: Belief in more than one god.

Omnipresence: Presence everywhere, throughout all of creation.

“Paper on Hinduism”

Superstition: Belief not founded on reality, often a belief in the magical power of objects or the magical effects of certain actions.

Bigotry: Prejudice, narrow-mindedness.

Brethren: Members of the same community or family.

Constitution: Makeup, combined parts.

Mosque: Place of worship in the religion of Islam.

Idol: A physical object that is worshipped as if it were a god.

Assent: Voicing of agreement.

Doctrines: Bodies of ideas taught as truths in religion.

Fetishism: Worship of an object thought to have magical powers.

Absolutism: Belief in a being who is without limits and beyond human control.

Compulsory: Required.

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but **bigotry** is worse. Why does a Christian go to church? Why is the cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My **brethren**, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing—By the law of association the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. . . .

As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our mental **constitution**, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or of the sea, so we naturally connect our idea of holiness with the image of a church, a **mosque**, or a cross. The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms. But with this difference that while some people devote their whole lives to their **idol** of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual **assent** to certain **doctrines** and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindu is centered in realization. Man is to become divine by realizing the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood; but on and on he must progress. . . .

To the Hindu, man is not traveling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions from the lowest **fetishism** to the highest **absolutism**, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength till it reaches the Glorious Sun.

Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognized it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas and tries to force society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols—so many pegs to hang spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for everyone, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it **compulsory** in Hinduism. . . .

To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a traveling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out



Hindu followers of Krishna parade through the street during a religious festival. God spoke through Krishna and said, “I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls.” © MARKO GEORGIEV/STAR LEDGER/CORBIS.

of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many **contradictions**? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.

It is the same light coming through glasses of different colors—And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna: “I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.” And what has been the result? I challenge the world to find, throughout the whole system of Sanskrit philosophy, any such expression as that the Hindu alone will be saved and not others. Says Vyasa, “we find perfect men even beyond the pale of our **caste** and creed.” One thing more. How, then, can the Hindu, whose whole fabric of thought centers in God, believe in Buddhism which is **agnostic**, or in Jainism which is **atheistic**?

Contradictions: Opposition between two ideas.

Caste: A hereditary class into which Hindu society was divided and which governs such things as one’s profession.

Agnostic: Believing that God is unknown and probably unknowable.

Atheistic: Believing that there is no god.

The Buddhists or the Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion, to evolve a God out of man. They have not seen the Father, but they have seen the Son. And he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also.

This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The Hindu may have failed to carry out all his plans, but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its **catholicity** will embrace in infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being from the lowest **grovelling savage**, not far removed from the **brute**, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its **polity**, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centered in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature. . . .

May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea! . . .

• • •

What happened next . . .

During the 1880s and 1890s, Swami Vivekananda actively tried to improve the material lives of Indians. One way he achieved this aim was through the Ramakrishna mission in India, which, among other accomplishments, provided care for Indians during an outbreak of the plague and was credited with saving many lives. During the twentieth century, the work of the mission continued worldwide. Under the name Vivekananda Vedanta Society, it maintains 135 missions throughout the world, 12 of them in the United States. In Chicago, a branch of the society was founded in 1930, with the twin goals of helping people find the God within and of serving others.

Hinduism in the early twenty-first century is the third largest religion in the world. People in the West, the nations of the Americas and

Catholicity: Universality, the quality of including everyone.

Grovelling, or groveling: Crawling or lying on the ground as a mark of meekness or obedience.

Savage: An uncivilized person.

Brute: A lower animal, a beast.

Polity: Society, institution.

Europe, became interested in Hinduism after Swami Vivekananda’s presentation. More than 900,000 people in the United States are Hindu. There are more than 400,000 Hindus in the United Kingdom. The largest concentration of Hindu followers remains in South Asia.

The World Parliament of Religions changed its name to the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions. It continues to pursue harmony between religions and encourages religious communities to become involved with the world. The Parliament has met in various locations around the world, including Cape Town, South Africa, in 1999, and Barcelona, Spain, in 2004. Nearly eight thousand religious leaders attended the 2004 meeting.

Did you know . . .

- Hindus worship many gods and goddesses. Many Hindus worship a particular god or goddess or a group of them based on personal identification with that deity. This means that they have a strong feeling of connection with a particular god. Hindus, however, believe in a supreme god, called Brahma. Brahma is the creator-god and is thought of as being in harmony with the universe. All other gods are considered to be forms or aspects of Brahma. Other major deities in Hinduism are Vishnu (or Krishna), the preserver-god, and Shiva (or Siva), the destroyer-god.
- Hindus conduct their personal lives according to a variety of principles, but two of the most important are *dharma* and *karma*. Dharma means something like “righteousness.” Because of dharma, for example, most Hindus are vegetarians, believing that all creatures belong to God and that killing them would violate, or go against, dharma. The other principle, karma, is based on the Hindu belief in an eternal cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation. Karma determines how a person will live his or her next life. In this life a person who stores up good karma will lead a future life on a higher plane, while one who builds up bad karma will be reincarnated on a lower plane.
- Yoga is an ancient form of Hindu meditation. Although in modern Western life yoga is practiced as a form of exercise or as a relaxation technique, yoga for Hindus has a higher purpose, which is to become one with the universal god.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain why, according to Swami Vivekananda, the universe was not created.
- Explain the basis for the Hindu rejection of the belief that all humans are sinners.
- Summarize Hinduism’s explanation for the major differences in the world’s religions.

For More Information

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Religion as a Guide to Living

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Belief in religion has a central role in many people's lives. The existence of a god who may approve or disapprove of their actions may motivate people in their decisions. Belief in God can give people comfort that life has meaning and purpose. Religious figures, both historical and contemporary, can inspire people to find the courage to handle their difficulties and overcome hardship. People may wish to live lives modeled after the teachings of their religion so that they can achieve the rewards that religion offers. For some, that reward is the promise of heaven. For others, it is the possibility of ending the cycle of existence and their achieving Salvation. Each religion makes clear that the way to achieve its promises is to follow its teachings. This requires more than attending worship services at a temple or church. A religion's teachings as they apply to everyday life may have the greatest impact on one's behavior and attitudes.

All religions provide for their followers a moral code, or guideline, that establishes what behavior is acceptable and what is not. They may approach the issue differently, but they all have a common theme of respect for life and upright (honest and respectable) living. Confucianism is a religion built not around a god, but around proper behavior. **The Analects of Confucius** instruct Confucian followers to have filial piety, or respect for parents, as well as respect for other elders. Among its central teachings is that a person is responsible for his or her own behavior and should act humbly and with moderation.

Like Confucianism, Jainism advises respect for other people and also for all living beings. The Akaranga Sutra in the **Gaina Sutras**, states that one should honor and respect all life by following the five Great Vows. These vows include not harming any living thing, not lying or stealing, and not becoming too involved with worldly, or material, concerns. The Akaranga Sutra relays the causes of sin so that Jains can avoid it and live a moral (honorable and decent) life.

Moral living is also central to Daoism, where following “the way” leads to an honorable life and spiritual understanding. Daoism’s main religious text, the **Dao De Jing**, emphasizes that all things, living and non-living, are connected, and that a moral person should live in harmony with them. One of the best ways to do this is to not be too materialistic or aggressive. To be materialistic is to desire objects, such as cars, money, and success, in hopes of having a fulfilling life. A person is aggressive when he or she responds angrily or tries to force things to happen a certain way. This is not harmonious behavior. By following the Dao De Jing’s advice on living a good life, a person will gain greater spiritual understanding and become closer to the spiritual center of Daoism, the *Dao*.

One of Buddhism’s major and most referenced sacred texts is the **The Dhammapada**. This text consists solely of sayings from the Buddha instructing followers on how to live their lives. As with the previously mentioned religions, proper behavior is very important in Buddhism. A Buddhist who lives according to the words of the Buddha will follow the Eightfold Path to enlightenment and achieve *nirvana*, or the end of suffering. Such a life includes respect for living beings, non-attachment (as in Daoism and Jainism, not being attached to material objects), honesty, and moderation in all things.

Zoroastrianism’s **Avesta**, which contains the Gathas, offers its followers instructions that are quite similar to those of Buddhists, Daoists, and others. The central message of the Gathas is “good thoughts, good words, good deeds.” Zoroastrians believe that each person is capable of understanding the differences between good and evil and should strive to do no harm. To live a good life, one must exercise truth, order, tolerance, and discipline. Violence, such as anger, is discouraged as being very harmful.

The founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, believed that following a standard of behavior was not enough. In his Sermon of the Mount from the **Bible**, Jesus explained that acting honestly and refraining from judging others were important. Equally important, however, were showing love, compassion (sympathy and kindness), and forgiveness to others. According to Jesus, these emotional and spiritual expressions bring one closer to God in a way that simply behaving properly cannot achieve.

The Bahá’í religion also states that there is more to being close to God than living a moral life. The *Kalimat-i-Maknunih*, or **The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh**, tells Bahá’ís to be humble and love all of creation,

but it also urges them to show their devotion to God by serving others. An example of this type of service is work supporting peace efforts or the elimination of poverty. Efforts to achieve positive results such as peace, education for those who have none, and job training for those who are unskilled are called social justice. This is a central element of the Bahá'í faith.

Social justice is the driving force behind Emma Goldman's atheism. Atheism is the belief that there is no god. In her essay "**The Philosophy of Atheism,**" Goldman states that humankind can only rely on itself. She wrote that the existence of a kind and concerned God was impossible given the injustice and suffering in the world. She urged people to take responsibility and action through social justice to make the changes that would improve the world.

Whether a person chooses to believe the message of atheism or of a different belief system, each offers a message that one must take responsibility for one's life. Respect, honesty, and compassion are key elements in all faiths. Concern with acquiring possessions or winning a certain status are not fulfilling. People seeking guidance in their daily lives can consult with one of these moral codes or those from another religion. The fact that most of these codes have existed for hundreds of years and continue to be followed shows that there is value and inspiration in their messages.

The Analects of Confucius

*Books 1 and 2 of the The Analects of Confucius,
available online from Exploring Ancient World Cultures Anthology
at <http://leawc.evansville.edu/anthology/analects.htm>*

Attributed to Confucius or his followers

Completed around 475 BCE

Translator unknown

"The Master said, 'A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies'."

The Lun Yu, also known as the Analects, is one of the most influential books that survives from the ancient Chinese world. An analect is any collection of assorted writings. It has been said that all later Chinese philosophy (thought or study on the arts and sciences) is in some way rooted in the Analects. This slim, twenty-chapter book is thought to have been written by Confucius (551–479 BCE), a philosopher, educator, politician, and public servant. In the centuries following his death, Confucius came to be regarded as an almost mythic figure, a “sage-king” whose name remains readily identifiable with practical wisdom, or wisdom that can be applied to life.

The Analects record Confucius’s teachings as dialogues, or conversations, with students. In Books 1 and 2, the “Master” is Confucius, and other names refer to students who ask him questions. In these dialogues, he presented his thoughts not as new but as wisdom that had

been handed down over the course of hundreds of years. The core of his belief was that while people live their lives subject to the rules and commandments both of heaven and of the cycle of natural forces, they are also responsible for their own behavior, particularly their treatment of others. This concept, which he called *ren*, meaning “loving others” or “compassion,” remains central to Confucian belief. Confucius believed that the best way to love others was to maintain humility and to avoid being clever or trying to gain favor with others. He also supported what in the West is called the Golden Rule, an ethical principle that can be found in some form in the scriptures of at least eight world religions. As Confucius put it, “perfect virtue” meant “not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself” (Book 12). An important part of compassion, or sympathy and understanding of others, is devotion to one’s brothers and sisters and parents.

For generations Chinese diplomats and other government officials turned to Confucius for guidance on behavior, as reflected in these passages from Book 10:

Confucius, in his village, looked simple and sincere, and as if he were not able to speak.

When he was in the prince’s ancestral temple, or in the court, he spoke minutely [thoroughly] on every point, but cautiously.

When he was waiting at court, in speaking with the great officers of the lower grade, he spoke freely, but in a straightforward manner; in speaking with those of the higher grade, he did so blandly “mildly,” but precisely.

When the ruler was present, his manner displayed respectful uneasiness; it was grave, but self-possessed.

In other words, Confucius urged his followers to be humble and moderate in their behavior. This is the kind of simple, almost homespun wisdom that runs throughout the *Analects*. Repeatedly, Confucius emphasizes such virtues as being upright and courteous, kind and proper, faithful and sincere.

The historical Confucius Little is known about Confucius’s life. Historians regard much that is known about him as legend rather than fact. The chief source of information about his life comes from a second-century BCE biography by a court historian, Sima Qian (145–c. 85 BCE), the author of *Records of the Grand Historian*. Sima Qian’s book claims that Confucius was a descendant of royal ancestors. He was born in the town of Lu, near



Students dressed in ancient clothing stand before a statue of Confucius, the founder of Confucianism. His teachings are recorded in the Lun Yu, or the Analects. CHINA PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES.

the present-day city of Qufu in China's southeastern Shandong province, in answer to prayers his parents had offered at the nearby sacred hill of Ni.

His original family name was Kong (K'ung), and the name Confucius is a Latinized (written using the Latin alphabet) version of "Kong Fuzi" (K'ung Fu-tzu), a name that means "the Master Kong." "Confucius" was the name used by early Catholic missionaries, priests who tried to convert the Chinese people to Christianity, in China. Nothing is known about Confucius's education, but part of the legend is that he studied the religion of Daoism (Taoism) and music. In his early years he took jobs that he considered undignified, such as caring for livestock. By the time he reached middle age he had gathered around himself a number of disciples, or followers, to whom he taught his philosophy. This philosophy grew into the religion of Confucianism. The major beliefs of Confucianism are contained in the Analects.

When he was about fifty years old, Confucius entered public service. He was appointed Minister of Public Works and Minister of Crime by the duke of Lu. He was forced into exile when he offended members of the court, and he spent the following years traveling about China, facing danger and hardship. He returned to Lu in 484 BCE and spent his remaining years collecting classic works of literature and putting together the court chronicle, or record, of Lu. During these years, he earned a reputation for good manners and courtesy. It was for this reason that people began to follow the teachings of the Analects as a guide for everyday living.

Confucianism as a guide for politics One theme that runs through the Analects, and specifically the excerpts from Books 1 and 2, has to do with government and the characteristics best suited to leaders. For example, Confucius refers to agreements within and between governments. He points out that agreements should be based on what is right. Leaders should show respect to others and follow through with what they say they are going to do. Diplomats and leaders would consult Confucius's words and model their actions after his advice. Even into the twenty-first century, leaders in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea quote Confucius to support their policies. They believe that the Confucian values of loyalty, thrift, and hard work contribute to the economic success of their countries.

Confucius believed that the political institutions of his time had collapsed. China was in a state of turmoil because of the claims to power of competing warlords. Rulers often did not live up to their responsibilities, and their assistants frequently were given their jobs not because of merit but because they had flattered their superiors or otherwise won favor. Confucius's view was that good government was the result of self-discipline by leaders. He also urged that leaders govern by keeping in mind the principle of *de*, or virtue. In Book 2, he wrote: "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it." Similarly, he wrote in Book 2 that rulers should be kind and firm in their decisions, that they should strive to keep goodness in their work and their lives. Many of these principles also applied to everyday people. They, too, in their dealings with others and with their government, have to show similar virtues.

The Literary Style of The Analects

The effect of many of the sayings in the Analects relies on a type of figure of speech called *chiasmus* (kee-AZ-muhs). This refers to a reversal of parallel, or corresponding, elements in a sentence or saying. A good example is found in Book 2: "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous [dangerous]." The chiasmus is the reversal of the words "learning without thought" to form "thought without learning." Another good example, also from Book 2, is advice for leaders: "Advance the upright and set aside the crooked [dishonest, corrupt], then the people will submit. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, then the people will not submit."

A major reason that Confucius used this and other figures of speech was to make the sayings in the Analects more memorable. If the Analects were to serve as a guide to everyday living, people had to remember them so that they could apply them in their dealings with others. Rather than writing in an abstract, philosophical style that people would find hard to understand, Confucius wrote in a way that enabled people to remember his teachings. In this respect, the Analects are similar to the Ten Commandments, which are also written in a language and style that can be easily remembered. Leaders, such as politicians and business executives, often quote from Confucius for the same reason: these

figures of speech provide practical wisdom in pithy phrases, or phrases that are brief and full of meaning. Perhaps the best example of this style of phrasing in modern times comes from U.S. president John F. Kennedy's 1960 inaugural speech: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

Translating ancient Chinese texts into modern English (or any other language) is difficult. Chinese characters may not have close English equivalents, ancient Chinese has no punctuation marks, and the language is often open to wide interpretation by translators. For example, the sentence about learning from Book 2 has been translated in many different ways, among them, "Study without thought is vain [useless]; thought without study is dangerous"; "Study without thinking, and you are blind; think without studying, and you are in danger"; and "He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger." These difficulties with translation in their own way add to the appeal of the Analects. If the Analects are to serve as a guide for living, they have to apply in many different situations. Because their language is general and can take on different meanings, their wisdom is not forever fixed but is subject to interpretation as the circumstances of everyday life change.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from The Analects of Confucius:

- Confucius was born into a social class of people called *shi*. The *shi* were people, like Confucius's parents, who could say that they had royal ancestors. They themselves, though, had little wealth and usually held low-level military and government jobs. Confucius's social class would likely have contributed to his frame of mind in composing the Analects, for its teachings provided Confucius

and others of his status with a way to succeed among more powerful people.

- A Chinese education such as that which Confucius received as a child focused on the Six Arts: military skills, arithmetic, the appreciation of music, calligraphy (artistic writing), learning to play a musical instrument, and *li*, or etiquette and rituals. Being a gentleman required a youngster to master the complex principles of *li*. One of the primary purposes of the Analects, then, was to serve as a text that would provide Confucius's followers with a more detailed understanding of etiquette and proper behavior.
- The Analects were written in part as a response to the political turmoil and corrupt governments of the day. In fact, the turmoil was so great that the Chinese refer to the period from about the fifth century through 221 BCE as the Warring States Period. This was a time when Chinese warlords were gaining power by taking over neighboring regions. The Analects attempted to provide an antidote, or remedy, to these problems by defining the qualities of kind and just leadership.

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Excerpt from The Analects of Confucius

Perseverance:

Determination.

Discomposure: Uneasiness.

Filial: Relating to a child's feelings for his or her parents.

Fraternal: Showing friendship or brotherly feeling.

Radical: Essential or far-reaching in scope.

Piety: Devotion, loyalty.

Insinuating: Gaining favor through effort, often sly and underhanded.

Transacting: Doing, carrying out.

Book 1

The Master said, "Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant **perseverance** and application?

"Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?

"Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no **discomposure** though men may take no note of him?"

The philosopher Yu said, "They are few who, being **filial** and **fraternal**, are fond of offending against their superiors. There have been none, who, not liking to offend against their superiors, have been fond of stirring up confusion.

"The superior man bends his attention to what is **radical**. That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up. Filial **piety** and fraternal submission,—are they not the root of all benevolent actions?"

The Master said, "Fine words and an **insinuating** appearance are seldom associated with true virtue."

The philosopher Tsang said, "I daily examine myself on three points:—whether, in **transacting** business for others, I may have been not



The Analects of Confucius

People parade through the street during the Confucius Culture Festival in Yunnan province, China, as they honor Confucianism's founder. Confucius valued education and proper behavior. CHINA
PHOTOS/ GETTY IMAGES.

faithful;—whether, in **intercourse** with friends, I may have been not sincere;—whether I may have not mastered and practiced the instructions of my teacher.”

The Master said, “To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; **economy** in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons.”

The Master said, “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.”

Tsze-hsia said, “If a man withdraws his mind from the love of beauty, and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his **utmost** strength; if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere:—although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has.

The Master said, “If the scholar be not grave, he will not call forth any **veneration**, and his learning will not be solid.

“Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles.

Intercourse: Communication or interaction.

Economy: Thrift or saving, careful use of finances or resources.

Utmost: Greatest.

Veneration: Respect, admiration.

“Have no friends not equal to yourself.

“When you have faults, do not fear to abandon them.”

The philosopher Tsang said, “Let there be a careful attention to perform the funeral rites to parents, and let them be followed when long gone with the ceremonies of sacrifice;—then the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence.”

Tsze-ch'in asked Tsze-kung saying, “When our master comes to any country, he does not fail to learn all about its government. Does he ask his information? or is it given to him?”

Benign: Kind and caring.

Temperate: Mild-mannered, calm, self-controlled.

Complaisant: Unworried.

Bent: Direction.

Propriety: Good manners, decency.

Manifests: Shows.

Intimate: Friendly, close.

Gratify: Satisfy.

Appliances: Things that make tasks easier.

Ease: Comfort.

Rectified: Corrected, put right.

Pronounce: Say.

Apprehend: Understand.

Tsze-kung said, “Our master is **benign**, upright, courteous, **temperate**, and **complaisant** and thus he gets his information. The master’s mode of asking information,—is it not different from that of other men?”

The Master said, “While a man’s father is alive, look at the **bent** of his will; when his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial.”

The philosopher Yu said, “In practicing the rules of **propriety**, a natural ease is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them.

“Yet it is not to be observed in all cases. If one, knowing how such ease should be prized, **manifests** it, without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise is not to be done.”

The philosopher Yu said, “When agreements are made according to what is right, what is spoken can be made good. When respect is shown according to what is proper, one keeps far from shame and disgrace. When the parties upon whom a man leans are proper persons to be **intimate** with, he can make them his guides and masters.”

The Master said, “He who aims to be a man of complete virtue in his food does not seek to **gratify** his appetite, nor in his dwelling place does he seek the **appliances** of **ease**; he is earnest in what he is doing, and careful in his speech; he frequents the company of men of principle that he may be **rectified**:—such a person may be said indeed to love to learn.”

Tsze-kung said, “What do you **pronounce** concerning the poor man who yet does not flatter, and the rich man who is not proud?” The Master replied, “They will do; but they are not equal to him, who, though poor, is yet cheerful, and to him, who, though rich, loves the rules of propriety.”

Tsze-kung replied, “It is said in the Book of Poetry, ‘As you cut and then file, as you carve and then polish.’—The meaning is the same, I **apprehend**, as that which you have just expressed.”

The Master said, "With one like Ts'ze, I can begin to talk about the **odes**. I told him one point, and he knew its proper sequence."

The Master said, "I will not be **afflicted** at men's not knowing me; I will be afflicted that I do not know men."

Book 2

The Master said, "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it."

The Master said, "In the Book of Poetry are three hundred pieces, but the design of them all may be embraced in one sentence 'Having no **depraved** thoughts.'"

The Master said, "If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame.

"If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good."

The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning.

"At thirty, I stood firm.

"At forty, I had no doubts.

"At fifty, I knew the **decrees of Heaven**.

"At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth.

"At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without **transgressing** what was right."

Mang I asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "It is not being disobedient."

Soon after, as Fan Ch'ih was driving him, the Master told him, saying, "Mang-sun asked me what filial piety was, and I answered him,—'not being disobedient.'"

Fan Ch'ih said, "What did you mean?" The Master replied, "That parents, when alive, be served according to **propriety**; that, when dead, they should be buried according to propriety; and that they should be sacrificed to according to propriety."

Mang Wu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "Parents are anxious lest their children should be sick."

Tsze-yu asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "The filial piety nowadays means the support of one's parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support;—without **reverence**, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?"

Tsze-hsia asked what filial piety was. The Master said, "The difficulty is with the **countenance**. If, when their elders have any troublesome

Odes: Lyric poems marked by high feeling.

Afflicted: Upset, distressed.

Depraved: Evil, wicked.

Decrees of Heaven: Destinies.

Transgressing: Violating; going against.

Propriety: Good behavior, correctness.

Reverence: Respect.

Countenance: Look, appearance.

affairs, the young take the toil of them, and if, when the young have wine and food, they set them before their elders, is THIS to be considered filial piety?"

The Master said, "I have talked with Hui for a whole day, and he has not made any objection to anything I said;—as if he were stupid. He has retired, and I have examined his conduct when away from me, and found him able to illustrate my teachings. Hui!—He is not stupid."

The Master said, "See what a man does.

"Mark his motives.

"Examine in what things he rests.

"How can a man conceal his character? How can a man conceal his character?"

The Master said, "If a man keeps **cherishing** his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others."

The Master said, "The accomplished scholar is not a utensil."

Tsze-kung asked what **constituted** the superior man. The Master said, "He acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions."

The Master said, "The superior man is **catholic** and not **partisan**. The mean man is partisan and not catholic."

The Master said, "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is **perilous**."

The Master said, "The study of strange **doctrines** is **injurious** indeed!"

The Master said, "Yu, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it;—this is knowledge."

Tsze-chang was learning with a view to official **emolument**.

The Master said, "Hear much and put aside the points of which you stand in doubt, while you speak cautiously at the same time of the others:—then you will **afford** few occasions for blame. See much and put aside the things which seem perilous, while you are cautious at the same time in carrying the others into practice: then you will have few occasions for **repentance**. When one gives few occasions for blame in his words, and few occasions for repentance in his conduct, he is in the way to get emolument."

The Duke Ai asked, saying, "What should be done in order to secure the submission of the people?" Confucius replied, "Advance the upright and set aside the crooked, then the people will submit. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, then the people will not submit."

Chi K'ang asked how to cause the people to reverence their ruler, to be faithful to him, and to go on to **nerve** themselves to virtue. The Master said,

Cherishing: Valuing, appreciating.

Constituted: Made up, represented.

Catholic: All-embracing, wide-reaching.

Partisan: Biased, taking sides.

Perilous: Dangerous.

Doctrines: Policies, practices.

Injurious: Harmful.

Emolument: Compensation, in the form of payment, benefits, or privileges, for services or employment.

Afford: Provide.

Repentance: Guilt or regret.

Nerve: Encourage.

The Analects of Confucius

“Let him **preside over** them with gravity;—then they will reverence him. Let him be final and kind to all;—then they will be faithful to him. Let him advance the good and teach the **incompetent**;—then they will eagerly seek to be virtuous.”

Some one addressed Confucius, saying, “Sir, why are you not engaged in the government?”

The Master said, “What does the Shu-ching say of filial piety?—‘You are final, you **discharge** your brotherly duties. These qualities are displayed in government.’ This then also constitutes the exercise of government. Why must there be THAT—making one be in the government?”

The Master said, “I do not know how a man without truthfulness is to get on. How can a large carriage be made to go without the crossbar for yoking the oxen to, or a small carriage without the arrangement for yoking the horses?” . . .

The Master said, “For a man to sacrifice to a spirit which does not belong to him is flattery.

“To see what is right and not to do it is **want** of courage.”

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What happened next . . .

Confucianism came about partly as a response to self-seeking, corrupt rulers, so in the early centuries it was not very popular among the ruling classes. In 213 BCE the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty issued a decree ordering all Confucian books to be destroyed, under pain of death. Many Confucian scholars refused to obey the ruling, and they were buried alive. In 191 BCE, however, the Han Dynasty lifted the ban on Confucianism, and many of the ancient Confucian texts were again published and read.

Did you know . . .

- Many Asian countries celebrate the date of Confucius’s birth on September 28, though it is not certain that he was born on this date. In Taiwan the holiday is called Teachers’ Day, because Confucius was one of the first great teachers.
- Confucianism and Daoism, which took root at roughly the same time in ancient China, were regarded at the time as sharply differing forms of religion. Daoism was “otherworldly” and urged its followers to withdraw from earthly concerns. In contrast, Confucianism was “this worldly,” providing advice about how to behave in the physical world.

Preside over: Supervise, be in charge of.

Incompetent: People who lack ability or skills.

Discharge: Carry out, fulfill.

Want: Lack.

- The Analects are not the only Confucian texts. In addition, there are two more groups of texts that are important to Confucianism. One group is called the Five Classics, and the other is called the Four Books. Most of these works were written before Confucius was born, but they gained authority because he approved of them. The Five Classics include the Record of Rites, the Classic of Odes, the Classic of Documents, the Book of Changes, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. The Four Books include Doctrine of the Mean and Great Learning. In the eleventh century Books 1 and 2 of the Analects were incorporated into the Four Books.

Consider the following . . .

- Based on your reading of Books 1 and 2 of the Analects, explain why some people would not regard Confucianism as a religion but rather as a life philosophy. Explain on what basis others might disagree with that view.
- Explain how some of the events of Confucius's life may have contributed to the development of his philosophical-religious views.
- Summarize Confucius's view of "filial piety" and say why this virtue was so important to him.

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Gaina Sutras

*“Knowledge of the Weapon,” from “Akaranga Sutra” in the Gaina Sutras,
available online from the Internet Sacred Text Archive at*

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/jailakaranga.htm>

Compiled around the fifth century CE

Translated by Hermann Jacobi

Published in Sacred Books of the East (Clarendon Press, 1884)

“He who has the true knowledge about all things, will
commit no sinful act, nor cause others to do so.”

“**K**nowledge of the Weapon” consists of seven lessons that make up the first of twenty-four books, or chapters, contained in the Akaranga Sutra, which is found in the Gaina Sutras. It is a *sutra*, or a collection of religious teachings. This sutra is a holy text of Jainism. Jainism is an ancient religion practiced primarily in India, and it shares many beliefs with Hinduism. The Akaranga Sutra is one of twelve central Jain religious texts, collectively referred to as the Twelve Limbs. Like many Jain holy texts, it developed over a long period of time and was passed down orally until it was recorded in Sanskrit roughly a thousand years after it was first composed.

The Akaranga Sutra, including “Knowledge of the Weapon,” was created by one of the central figures in the history of Jainism, Mahavira. During his lifetime, Mahavira made and lived by five vows, called the Great Vows. These vows, or promises, still form the central belief system of Jainism, and all Jain ascetics (monks) continue to fulfill them. Ordinary people fulfill these vows to the extent that the circumstances of their lives allow. The Great Vows are as follows:

Ahimsa: not killing or injuring humans or any other living thing;

Satyā: speaking only the truth;

Asteya: not stealing or being greedy;

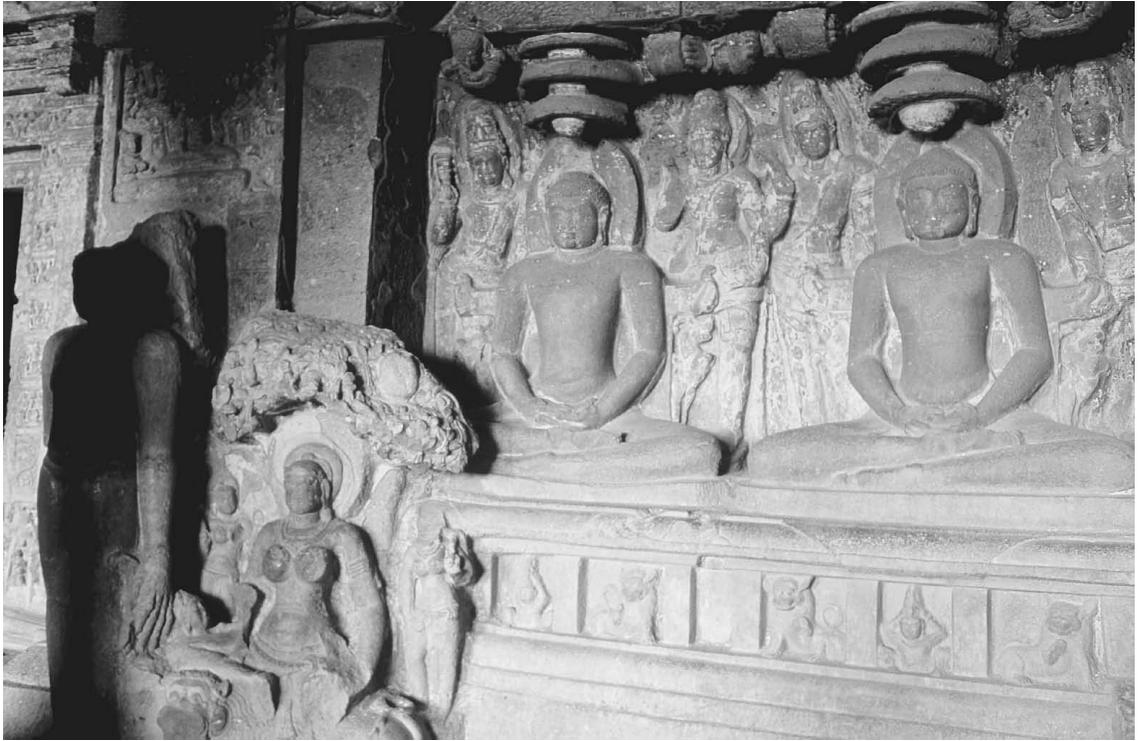
Brahmacharya: chastity (for a monk, this means remaining celibate, or not married and refraining from sexual relations; for laypeople, it means remaining faithful to one's spouse);

Asparigrah: not being overly concerned with the cares of the world.

These practices grew out of Jain viewpoints about the nature of life in the universe. Jains do not believe in a creator-god (a god who created the world and living beings); instead, they consider the universe to be eternal and unchanging. Jains see the world as composed of six categories, and two of these are *jiva*, or soul, and non-*jiva*, or non-soul. Non-*jiva* is further divided into matter, space, time, and motion, and nonmotion. *Jiva*, reveals itself in six forms: earth-bodied, fire-bodied, air-bodied, water-bodied, stationary (unmoving, for example, plants and trees, and moving (including humans, insects, animals, gods, and "hell-beings"). These six forms are discussed in the excerpts from the Akaranga Sutra in the context of not doing harm to living creatures.

Jains use the concept of *karma* to explain the differences among living things. Karma is the built-up effect of a person's good or bad actions on his or her future lives. The basic notion is that all forms of *jiva* attract karma. Some of this karma does no harm; it determines such things as a person's gender and length of life. Other types of karma, however, are harmful. They lead to a loss of faith, knowledge, and energy. A person who lives a life of self-discipline is able to ward off and wear away these damaging forms of karma and eventually, perhaps, reach a state of omniscience (all-knowingness or universal understanding) and liberation, or freedom. At death, such a person moves to the roof of the universe and lives there in a state of pure knowledge, bliss, and energy. This state, however, can be achieved only through the fire of self-denial.

This is the teaching of the Akaranga Sutra. In "Knowledge of the Weapon," the speaker, who is passing along the teachings of Mahavira, outlines the way in which people can lead a moral, sin-free life of denial. He explains the presence of life, like insects, small animals and plants, in fire, wind, water, earth, and so on. For example, small life-forms can be found swimming in water, so one has to be careful not to destroy those life-forms when using water. In this way Mahavira expresses the fundamental Jain doctrine, or set of guidelines, that opposes injuring or harming living creatures. Knowing the causes of sin gives people "knowledge of the weapon" being used to keep them from a virtuous life, and knowledge is power to help them avoid sin.



Sculptures of Jain tirthankaras adorn the wall of a cave in Ellora, India. Jains believe in 24 tirthankaras, or respected teachers, with Mahavira being the final one. © LINDSAY HEBBERD/CORBIS.

The dates of Mahavira's life are uncertain, but evidence shows that he lived at the same time as the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. This means that he was probably born in about 490 BCE and died in about 410 BCE, though many sources give dates in the sixth century BCE. Mahavira, whose name means "Great Hero," was born Nataputta Vardhamana and grew up surrounded by luxury as the son of a local king. After his parents died when he was about thirty years old, however, he left his home, gave up all of his possessions, and eventually became one of the great teachers of Jainism. As a teacher, he provided his students and followers with guidelines for living a holy life. Jain tradition regards Mahavira as the last of twenty-four respected teachers called *Jina*, a word meaning "conqueror" and referring to conquering one's inner enemies, such as greed, dishonesty, pride, and anger. The word *tirthankara* means "makers of the ford" and is also used to refer to these teachers. The term signifies the construction of ways to cross the

Jainism and Vegetarianism

Some people think of Jainism as almost identical with strict vegetarianism. Vegetarians do not eat meat. Strict vegetarians also will not consume animal-based products, such as milk and eggs. The two are thought of in relation to each other because of the Jain concept of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, and many vegetarians' wish not to harm living beings, even for food. While this view oversimplifies the religion, the emphasis on vegetarianism in Jain life has led to the development of what is called a "Jain menu," which defines suitable dishes to be served both in the home and at restaurants.

Some Jains are more strict than others when it comes to their diet. Many, for example, refuse to eat root vegetables (vegetables that grow in the earth, such as onions, garlic, potatoes, and carrots) because they are likely to hide other life-forms. Others fast (refrain from eating) extensively during the monsoon season, which is the growing season; they are likely to avoid roots during this time, so that they do not risk injuring living things that are growing. Jains typically avoid eating after dark because of the possibility of accidentally harming a living being that cannot be seen.

Nonetheless, Jains still enjoy many meals common in everyday life, such as burgers. Instead of beef, however, the chief ingredients in a Jain burger are bananas, peas, and chilies, pressure-cooked with tomato sauce, vinegar, sugar, and oil and served with tomatoes, cucumbers, and spicy condiments.

"ocean" of rebirth. The Akaranga Sutra includes Mahavira's teachings, which were recorded by a group of his followers.

Mahavira was an ascetic, meaning that he gave up worldly activities and interests and lived a life of self-denial, poverty, and contemplation, or deep thought, in a monastery. A monastery is the residence of a group of people who have taken religious vows. At first, his only possession was a single robe, but eventually he gave up even that and went naked. For years he wandered throughout India, never staying in one village for more than a day at a time and refusing to shelter himself from either cold or heat. When he walked or sat, he was careful never to cause hurt to any life-form. For this reason, he would remain in one place for long periods of time during the rainy season, when the paths he walked would have been covered with life-forms he did not want to injure. Because of this refusal to do harm, Mahavira was a strict vegetarian, meaning he did not eat meat or any food that came from an animal. He was so strict that he even strained his drinking water to ensure that no creature was living in it. In these ways, Mahavira was setting an example for his followers about how to live.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Gaina Sutras:

- A defining doctrine of Jainism is *ahimsa*, not killing or harming other living creatures. In the modern world, Jains pledge to follow this doctrine by means of paci-

fism, or opposition to violence (especially the refusal to fight in a war); vegetarianism; and concern with not harming or polluting the environment.

- According to Jain belief, "sin" and "acting sinfully" means in large part to do any kind of harm to other living creatures, not just

humans but even the smallest living things. This type of sin can occur through any type of daily activity, or what the excerpt calls “through his doing acts relating to earth.” People who “pretend to be houseless” commit sin by pretending to adhere to Jain practices but are insincere in their beliefs.

- The text uses the term *Bauddha* to refer to those who object to the teachings of Jainism. The word *Bauddha* comes from the word *buddha*, referring to the founder of Buddhism. In Jain contexts, it refers to intellectuals, to thinkers who examine and question Jain doctrines.

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Excerpt from the Gaiṇa Sūtras

“Knowledge of the Weapon”

Second Lesson The (living) world is **afflicted**, miserable, difficult to instruct, and without **discrimination**. In this world full of pain, suffering by their different acts, see the **benighted** ones cause great pain. See! there are beings individually **embodied** (in earth; not one all-soul). See! there are men who control themselves, whilst others only pretend to be houseless (i.e. monks, such as the **Bauddhas**, whose conduct differs not from that of householders), because one destroys this (earth-body) by bad and **injurious** doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of earth, through his doing acts relating to earth. About this the **Revered One** has taught the truth: for the sake of the splendour, honour, and glory of this life, for the sake of birth, death, and final **liberation**, for the removal of pain, man acts sinfully towards earth, or causes others to act so, or allows others to act so. This **deprives** him of happiness and perfect wisdom. About this he is informed when he has understood or heard, either from the Revered One or from the monks, the faith to be **coveted**. There are some who, of a truth, know this (i.e. injuring) to be the **bondage**, the **delusion**, the death, the hell. For this a man is longing when he destroys this (earth-body) by bad, injurious doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of earth, through his doing acts relating to earth. Thus I say. . . .

Third Lesson . . . See! there are men who control themselves; others pretend only to be houseless; for one destroys this (water-body) by bad, injurious doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of water, through his doing acts relating to water. About this the Revered One

Afflicted: Troubled.

Discrimination: Common sense, judgment.

Benighted: Living in a state without knowledge or morals, unenlightened.

Embodied: Alive, having physical form.

Bauddhas: Buddhists.

Injurious: Harmful.

Revered: Respected, honored.

Liberation: Release, freedom.

Deprives: Takes away, leaves without.

Coveted: Desired.

Bondage: Slavery.

Delusion: False impression.

has taught the truth: for the sake of the splendour, honour, and glory of this life, for the sake of birth, death, and final liberation, for the removal of pain, man acts sinfully towards water, or causes others to act so, or allows others to act so. This deprives him of happiness and perfect wisdom. About this he is informed when he has understood and heard from the Revered One, or from the monks, the faith to be coveted. There are some who, of a truth, know this (i.e. injuring) to be the bondage, the delusion, the death, the hell. For this a man is longing when he destroys this (water-body) by bad and injurious doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of water, through his doing acts relating to water. Thus I say.

There are beings living in water, many lives; of a truth, to the monks water has been declared to be living matter. See! considering the injuries (done to water-bodies), those acts (which are injuries, but must be done before the use of water, e.g. straining) have been **distinctly declared**. Moreover he (who uses water which is not strained) takes away what has not been given (i.e. the bodies of water-lives). (A Buddha will **object**: "We have permission, we have permission to drink it, or (to take it) for toilet purposes." Thus they destroy by various injuries (the water-bodies). But in this their doctrine is of no authority.

He who injures these (water-bodies) does not **comprehend** and **renounce** the sinful acts; he who does not injure these, comprehends and renounces the sinful acts. Knowing them, a wise man should not act sinfully towards water, nor cause others to act so, nor allow others to act so. He who knows these causes of sin relating to water, is called a reward-knowing sage. Thus I say.

Fourth Lesson (Thus I say): A man should not, of his own **accord**, **deny** the world (of fire-bodies), nor should he deny the self. He who denies the world (of fire-bodies), denies the self; and he who denies the self, denies the world (of fire-bodies). He who knows that (viz. [namely] fire) through which injury is done to the long-living bodies (i.e. plants), knows also that which does no injury (i.e. control); and he who knows that which does no injury, knows also that through which no injury is done to the long-living bodies. This has been seen by the heroes (of faith) who conquered ignorance; for they control themselves, always **exert** themselves, always mind their duty. He who is **unmindful** of duty, and desiring of the qualities (i.e. of the pleasure and profit which may be **derived** from the elements) is called the **torment** (of living beings). Knowing this, a wise man (**resolves**): "Now (I shall do) no more what I used to do . . . before." See! there are men who control themselves; others pretend only to be houseless; for one destroys this (fire-body) by bad and injurious doings, and many other

Distinctly Clearly.

Declared: Stated.

Object: Disagree.

Comprehend: Understand.

Renounce: Give up, reject.

Accord: Free will.

Deny: Refuse to let have.

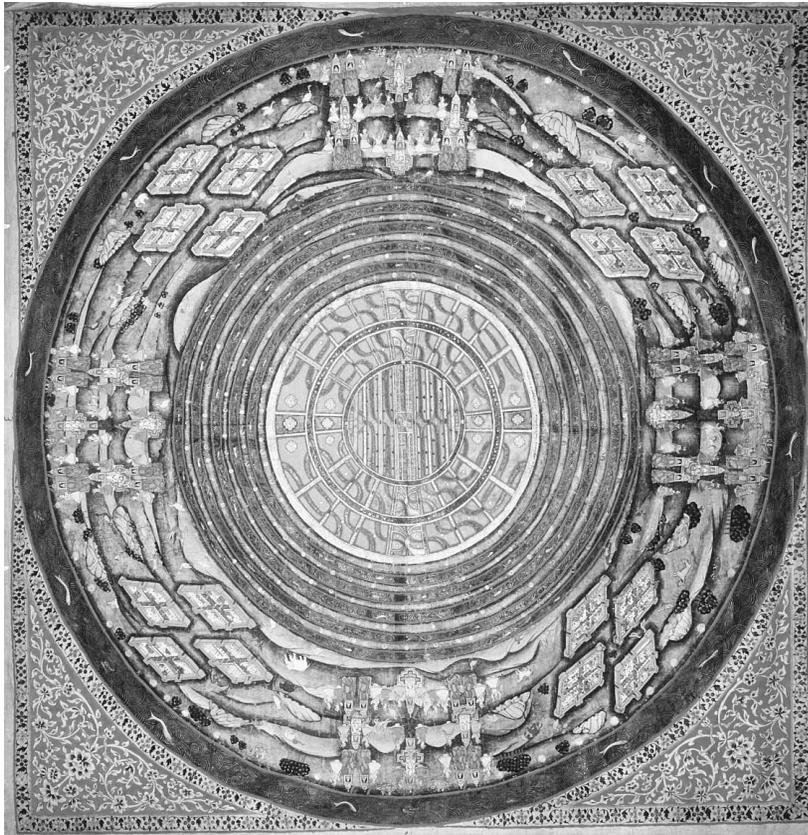
Exert: Make an effort.

Unmindful: Careless or unaware.

Derived: Obtained, gotten.

Torment: Suffering.

Resolves: Makes a firm decision.



A Jain diagram of the universe, which Jains believe to be eternal and unchanging. The universe is divided into six categories. These are discussed in the Akaranga Sutra, a part of the Gaina Sutras. THE ART ARCHIVE/BRITISH LIBRARY.

beings, besides, which he hurts by means of fire, through his doing acts relating to fire. About this the Revered One has taught the truth: for the sake of the splendour, honour, and glory of this life, for the sake of birth, death, and final liberation, for the removal of pain, man acts sinfully towards fire, or causes others to act so, or allows others to act so. This deprives him of happiness and perfect wisdom. About this he is informed when he has understood, or heard from the Revered One or from the monks, the faith to be coveted. There are some who, of a truth, know this (i.e. injuring) to be the bondage, the delusion, the death, the hell. For this a man is longing, when he destroys this (fire-body) by bad and injurious doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of fire, through his doing acts relating to fire. Thus I say.

There are beings living in the earth, living in grass, living on leaves, living in wood, living in cowdung, living in dust-heaps, jumping beings which coming near (fire) fall into it. Some, certainly, touched by fire, shrivel up; those which shrivel up there, lose their sense there; those which lose their sense there, die there.

He who injures these (fire-bodies) does not comprehend and renounce the sinful acts; he who does not injure these, comprehends and renounces the sinful acts. Knowing them, a wise man should not act sinfully towards fire, nor cause others to act so, nor allow others to act so. He who knows the causes of sin relating to fire, is called a reward knowing sage. Thus I say.

Fifth Lesson I shall not do (acts relating to plants) after having entered the order [having become a Jainist], having recognised (the truth about these acts), and having conceived that which is free from danger (i.e. control). . . .

See! there are men who control themselves; others pretend only to be houseless, for one destroys this (body of a plant) by bad and injurious doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of plants, through his doing acts relating to plants. About this the Revered One has taught the truth: for the sake of the splendour, honour, and glory of this life, for the sake of birth, death, and final liberation, for the removal of pain, man acts sinfully towards plants, or causes others to act so, or allows others to act so. This deprives him of happiness and perfect wisdom. About this he is informed when he has understood, or heard from the Revered One, or from the monks, the faith to be coveted. There are some who, of a truth, know this (i.e. injuring) to be the bondage, the delusion, the death, the hell. For this a man is longing when he destroys this (body of a plant) by bad and injurious doings, and many other beings, besides, which he hurts by means of plants, through his doing acts relating to plants. Thus I say.

As the nature of this (i.e. men) is to be born and to grow old, so is the nature of that (i.e. plants) to be born and to grow old; as this has reason, so that has reason; as this falls sick when cut, so that falls sick when cut; as this needs food, so that needs food; as this will **decay**, so that will decay; as this is not eternal, so that is not eternal; as this **takes increment**, so that takes increment; as this is changing, so that is changing. He who injures these (plants) does not comprehend and renounce the sinful acts; he who does not injure these, comprehends and renounces the sinful acts. Knowing them, a wise man should not act sinfully towards plants, nor cause others to act so, nor allow others to act so. He who knows these causes of sin relating to plants, is called a reward-knowing sage. Thus I say. . . .

Seventh Lesson . . . There are jumping beings which, coming near wind, fall into it. Some, certainly, touched by wind, shrivel up; those which shrivel up there, lose their sense there; those which lose their sense there, die there.

He who injures these (wind-bodies) does not comprehend and renounce the sinful acts; he who does not injure these, comprehends and

Decay: Rot.

Takes increment: Proceeds one step at a time.

renounces the sinful acts. Knowing them, a wise man should not act sinfully towards wind, nor cause others to act so, nor allow others to act so. He who knows these causes of sin relating to wind, is called a reward-knowing sage. Thus I say.

Be aware that about this (wind-body) too those are involved in sin who **delight** not in the right conduct, and, though doing acts, talk about religious discipline, who **conducting** themselves according to their own will, pursuing **sensual** pleasures, and **engaging** in acts, are **addicted** to worldliness. He who has the true knowledge about all things, will commit no sinful act, nor cause others to do so, &c [etc.]. Knowing them, a wise man should not act sinfully towards the aggregate of six (kinds of) lives, nor cause others to act so, nor allow others to act so. He who knows these causes of sin relating to the aggregate of the six (kinds of) lives, is called a reward-knowing sage. Thus I say.

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What happened next . . .

The “Knowledge of the Weapon” is a portion of a description of the life of an ascetic. The five Great Vows taken by Mahāvira are also taken by modern-day ascetics, such as monks and nuns. For most Jains, however, renunciation, or self-denial, is not the major focus of their lives. Nonetheless, they follow what are called the Small Vows, which they find a way to incorporate into their daily lives.

These vows include avoiding a job or profession that is likely to involve violence to other life-forms (for example, agriculture), being honest in business dealings, not stealing, not showing off material possessions, and donating excess wealth to charity. Jains also try to live by three Subsidiary Vows (additional vows), which are to avoid unnecessary movement, excessive enjoyment, and self-indulgent brooding, or feeling sorry for one’s self.

Did you know . . .

- Jains do not worship a god, nor do they believe that the world was formed by a creator-god. Jainism, in this sense, is as much a philosophy of life as it is a religion. Its core belief is that people can achieve knowledge and understanding about their role in the world, as well as freedom from rebirth, by leading a life of renunciation and withdrawal from sensory experiences. Sensory experiences are those that a person comprehends through sight, sound, taste, and touch.

Delight: Find pleasure or enjoyment.

Conducting: Behaving, acting.

Sensual: Relating to the five senses.

Engaging: Taking part, involving oneself.

Addicted: Dependent on, regularly occupied with.

- The number of Jains in the world can only be estimated, but most experts think that about 3.3 to 3.6 million people follow the religion. Nearly all of them live in India. Approximately 100,000 Jains live abroad in other countries.
- Some scholars believe that Jainism gave rise to Buddhism. They point out, for example, that just as the Jains identify twenty-four Jina, Buddhism speaks of twenty-four Buddhas before Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE), the founder of Buddhism, who is referred to as the Buddha. They see a connection between Jainism and Buddhism based on the possibility that the Jina and the Buddhas are the same. They believe that the Buddhist doctrine of the Middle Way, a philosophy of moderation, may have been a reaction against the strict and active self-denial of the Jains.
- Jains hold many beliefs in common with Hindus. In fact, Jainism can be regarded as a sect, or subgroup, of Hinduism. However, the two religions are different enough that Jains think of theirs as a separate religion, one that is culturally distinct from Hinduism. Good examples of beliefs that the two religions hold in common are karma, or the belief that a person's deeds determine the nature of his or her future; reincarnation, or rebirth in another body and time; and *moksha*, or the belief that a person can escape from the eternal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and achieve salvation.
- For Jains, karma is not an abstract idea. Rather, they view karma as an actual physical substance, like dust, that weighs down a person's soul.

Consider the following . . .

- Describe the one principle above others that defines Jainism.
- Define ahimsa and explain its importance for Jains.
- If someone were to state that “Jains do not believe in God,” explain how a Jain might respond.

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Dao De Jing

*Selections from Tao Te Ching, available online from Chinese Cultural Studies at
<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/taote-v3.html>*

Compiled around the third century BCE

Translated by Stephen Mitchell

Published in 1988 by Harper Collins

“The Tao is like a well:
used but never used up.
It is like the eternal void:
filled with infinite possibilities.”

The Dao De Jing (also known as Tao Te Ching) is a religious text of Daoism (Taoism, pronounced DOW-ism). The text is short, made up of 81 brief chapters. Its shortness, however, does not reflect its importance in the history of Chinese philosophy. Philosophy is a branch of study that looks for a general understanding of values and reality. Traditionally, the Dao De Jing was thought to have been written by the Chinese sage, or wise man, Laozi (also spelled Lao-tzu; 604–531 BCE). Laozi, a name that means “Old Master,” is believed to have been a record keeper and librarian in the court of the Zhou Dynasty (also called the Chou Dynasty, c. 1100–256 BCE). The details of the authorship of the Dao De Jing, however, are still questioned. Little is known, for example, about the life of Laozi, primarily because no records about him survive from that time. The earliest mentions of him date to about 400 BCE, and it was not until about 100 BCE that a biography of him was written. Some scholars believe that the author of the Dao De Jing may, in fact, have been several men who composed the book over the years.

The title of the Dao De Jing can be translated in many ways, but it is usually given as something like “The Book of the Way and Its Virtue.”

Chinese written words are referred to as “characters.” The first character in the Dao De Jing, *dao*, means “the way ahead” or “the way.” *De* means “righteousness” or “virtue.” Virtue here refers to both the values of proper, honest living and to power, as in the healing virtue, or power, of medicine. The third character, *jing*, is often translated as “doctrine,” which is a set of guidelines.

The center of the Dao The views expressed in the Dao De Jing are similar to views that have been voiced in other religions and philosophies, both Eastern and Western. The core of the book is the *dao*, or the way, suggesting a path to virtue (*de*). Virtue is the condition of being morally good. The path also leads one toward a state of spiritual understanding. What distinguishes Daoism from most other world religions is its emphasis on nothingness or detachment. It promotes acceptance and openness to achieve harmony with all things. To do this, one should be detached, not involved in worldly matters or desiring material goods and instead focused on improving virtue and improving one’s understanding of the Dao. One should also practice nonaction, known as *wu wei*. A person can do this by being detached and not responding to things in an aggressive manner. *Wu wei* was seen as a balance to the social turmoil that troubled China at a time when local rulers were competing for power and influence in the various regions of the country.

Daoism emphasizes a belief that all things, living and not living, are connected. The tradition says that the differences between physical objects are an illusion, or false impression, and that the universe exists independently of this illusion. All creation is part of the *dao*, and this will never change. Because the *dao* is infinite, or never-ending, and all of creation; it is beyond our understanding.

In this respect, Daoism as reflected in the Dao De Jing is different from many other religions, particularly Western religions. Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, for example, do not believe that the physical world is an illusion. They believe that it is real and that it was created by the will of God. Additionally, these and other religions, including Bahá’í, with its emphasis on social justice and service, have different guides for living. Rather than teaching detachment, they teach involvement with the world in an effort to make it a better place. They believe that in carrying out the commandments, or instructions, of God in their daily lives, they are fulfilling God’s will and helping God to perfect His creation.



A man visits a Daoist temple on Mount Qingcheng, near Guanxian, China. Daoists believe that by following the natural order, which is eternal, social stability can be obtained. © JOHN T. YOUNG/CORBIS.

Other themes of the Dao Other themes run through the Dao De Jing. One is an emphasis on the value of the feminine principle, with its qualities of fluidness and softness, like water (as opposed to the male principle of solidity, represented by the mountain). In this way, the Dao De Jing challenges its readers to reject such “male” traits as action, force, command, and ruling in favor of such “female” traits as dependence, intuition (the ability to know instinctively, without having to discover something) and recognizing the mysterious and obscure, or unclear, aspects of creation.

Another theme has to do with return. On the face of it, this has been simply interpreted to mean something like a return to nature, or to a simpler, more natural state of existence before the beginning of civilization. In Daoism, though, the concept is more complex. Returning to an earlier time of existence is really a kind of stripping away, or shrinking, of one’s existence and retreating into the core of one’s being. The goal is to lessen ego, or the emphasis on the self and its concerns, which is glorified by

action in the world, and instead seeking enlightenment and salvation (saving from sin).

The Dao De Jing develops a number of other themes as well:

that force gives rise to force;

that beauty, power, and wealth bring about envy, shame, and crime;

that exerting effort creates resistance;

that the simpler a person's needs are, the more they will be fulfilled;

and

that achievement comes from acting in harmony with the universe, especially the female principle of flexibility.

Each of these themes is reflected in the excerpts given here, and each provides followers of Daoism with a set of principles that they apply in their daily lives. Still, these principles are not always entirely clear. For example, the Dao De Jing says, "When people see some things as good, other things become bad." This sentence tells readers that they cannot know evil unless they know the good. The question is how a person might apply this principle in everyday life. One possibility among many is that good and evil are both part of the same scale used to measure the value of things. People cannot know either good or evil, or any opposite, without thinking deeply about both. In doing so, they are likely to better understand them and follow the good, whatever that may be in a particular circumstance.

Although little is known about the circumstances surrounding how the Dao De Jing was written, the text itself has survived with few of the kinds of changes and additions that were often made by scribes (people who copy manuscripts or documents by hand) who passed down ancient texts. The earliest form of the Dao De Jing that exists, as far as is known in the early twenty-first century, was written on stone tablets that date to about 300 BCE. In 1973 silk scrolls were discovered with two versions of the text, one dating to about 200 BCE. The oldest known version was discovered in 1993 and is believed to be from roughly the same time period as the other two, only slightly earlier. It, too, was written down, but on strips of bamboo.

One challenge that runs throughout the entire Dao De Jing is that of how to translate it. There are many translations, at least one hundred in English, and all differ from one another in ways that are both large and small. The problem is made worse by a number of factors. One is that the Chinese characters make indirect references to other Chinese

texts that were widely read at the time but that are lost in modern times. A second is the absence of punctuation marks in ancient Chinese texts, making division of the lines into phrases and sentences a matter of the translator's own choice. The most important factor, though, is that the language of the text, both in the original and in translation, tends to be abstract, meaning that it refers not to objects but to ideas, feelings, or qualities. As a result, the text is open to different ways of reading and understanding. This abstractness has turned out to be an advantage. Both Daoism and the Dao De Jing have survived for centuries, providing people with a guide for living. Interpretations of the Dao De Jing can change and adapt as people's circumstances and the nature of the world change. In this way, the book can continue to serve as a guide for living over the course of long periods of time without seeming outdated.

The Dao De Jing is written in two sections and is probably a combination of two different texts. The Dao section includes chapters 1 through 37; the De section consists of chapters 38 through 81. Many of the chapters are quite short, as few as a handful of lines. The language of the book is simple, consisting of only about five thousand different Chinese characters. There are tens of thousands of Chinese characters, but only a few thousand are commonly used. This simplicity has made the Dao De Jing a book with wide appeal. Over the centuries it has been a source of inspiration to artists, military leaders, poets, corporate executives, and even gardeners, because of its practical wisdom. It is an important text in China not only to Daoists but to Chinese Buddhists as well, for many of the ideas in Daoism are similar to those found in Buddhism. Both, for example, believe in some form of reincarnation, or the belief that people are reborn into a new existence. Some early scholars have seen Daoism and Chinese Buddhism as similar religions, though most modern scholars see them as distinct.

Translation from Chinese

A major challenge for the English-speaking world is changing Chinese characters into English using the Latin alphabet. Two systems are used. Under the older one, called the Wade-Giles system, the title of the work would be written "Tao Te Ching," its author's name would be written "Lao Tzu," and the religion would be written "Taoism." The more modern system, called Pinyin, produces "Dao De Jing" (or Daodejing), "Laozi," and "Daoism," respectively. These differences are largely caused by the differences in the sound systems of the English and Chinese, which make it difficult for translators to find exact English equivalents for Chinese pronunciations. A great many Western translations of the book continue to use the form Tao Te Ching, because that was the form commonly used during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contemporary standards of translation, however, are more often adopting the Pinyin system, which is the system used by the People's Republic of China.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Dao De Jing:

- Dao De Jing brings together the basic and most important points of ancient Chinese wisdom. It was designed to promote a stable social order at a time of great political and social unrest, primarily because warlords were competing with one another. These warlords were military rulers who controlled the people in their local region by force. They often battled with neighboring warlords for power and influence. The basic message of the book is that the natural order, the boundlessness of the universe, is more stable and enduring than any political order. Human learning, in contrast to rest and meditation, is an uncertain path to salvation and enlightenment.
- Dao is sometimes seen as a feminine principle, a mother that is the source of all things. This distinction between masculine and feminine is often seen as a stereotype in modern times, but at the time the Dao De Jing was written, masculinity was associated with action, purpose, drive, aggressiveness, and the like. Femininity, in contrast, was associated with feelings, emotion, thought, and especially being passive and nonaggressive. Daoism valued feminine principles over masculine ones.

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Excerpts from the Dao De Jing

- 1 The tao [dao] that can be told
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.

The unnamable is the eternally real.
Naming is the origin
of all particular things.

Free from desire, you realize the mystery.
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Manifestations: Outward examples or appearances.

Yet mystery and **manifestations**
arise from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.
The gateway to all understanding.

- 2 When people see some things as beautiful,
other things become ugly.
When people see some things as good,
other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.
Difficult and easy support each other.
Long and short define each other.
High and low depend on each other.
Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the Master
acts without doing anything
and teaches without saying anything.
Things arise and she lets them come;
things disappear and she lets them go.
She has but doesn't possess,
acts but doesn't expect.
When her work is done, she forgets it.
That is why it lasts forever.

- 4 The Tao is like a well:
used but never used up.
It is like the eternal **void**:
filled with infinite possibilities.

Void: Empty space.

It is hidden but always present.
I don't know who gave birth to it.
It is older than God.

- 5 The Tao doesn't take sides;
it gives birth to both good and evil.
The Master doesn't take sides;
she welcomes both saints and sinners.

The Tao is like a **bellows**:
it is empty yet infinitely capable.
The more you use it, the more it produces;
the more you talk of it, the less you understand.

Bellows: A device that
draws in air and blows it
back out.

Hold on to the center.

- 7 The Tao is infinite, eternal.
Why is it eternal?
It was never born;
thus it can never die.
Why is it infinite?
It has no desires for itself;
thus it is present for all beings.



A Daoist priest prays during a ceremony. Daoists strive to live in harmony with all things, living and not living, which they believe are connected to one another. © REUTERS/CORBIS.

Subtle: Difficult to understand.

Conception: Forming of an idea.

The Master stays behind;
that is why she is ahead.
She is detached from all things;
that is why she is one with them.
Because she has let go of herself,
she is perfectly fulfilled.

- 12** Colors blind the eye.
Sounds deafen the ear.
Flavors numb the taste.
Thoughts weaken the mind.
Desires wither the heart.

The Master observes the world
but trusts his inner vision.
He allows things to come and go.
His heart is open as the sky.

- 14** Look, and it can't be seen.
Listen, and it can't be heard.
Reach, and it can't be grasped.

Above, it isn't bright.
Below, it isn't dark.
Seamless, unnamable,

it returns to the realm of nothing.
Form that includes all forms,
image without an image,
subtle, beyond all **conception**.

Approach it and there is no beginning;
follow it and there is no end.
You can't know it, but you can be it,
at ease in your own life.
Just realize where you come from:
this is the essence of wisdom.

- 16** Empty your mind of all thoughts.
Let your heart be at peace.
Watch the turmoil of beings,
but contemplate their return.

Each separate being in the universe
returns to the common source.
Returning to the source is serenity.

If you don't realize the source,
you stumble in confusion and sorrow.
When you realize where you come from,

you naturally become tolerant,
disinterested, amused,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.

Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life brings you,
and when death comes, you are ready.

Immersed: Wrapped up,
absorbed.

- 17** When the Master governs, the people
are hardly aware that he exists.
Next best is a leader who is loved.
Next, one who is feared.
The worst is one who is despised.

If you don't trust the people,
you make them untrustworthy.

The Master doesn't talk, he acts.
When his work is done,
the people say, "Amazing:
we did it, all by ourselves!"

- 25** There was something formless and perfect
before the universe was born.
It is serene. Empty.
Solitary. Unchanging.
Infinite. Eternally present.
It is the mother of the universe.
For lack of a better name,
I call it the Tao.

It flows through all things,
inside and outside, and returns
to the origin of all things.

The Tao is great.
The universe is great.
Earth is great.
Man is great.
These are the four great powers.

Man follows the earth.
Earth follows the universe.
The universe follows the Tao.
The Tao follows only itself.

- 28** Know the male,
yet keep to the female:
receive the world in your arms.

If you receive the world,
the Tao will never leave you
and you will be like a little child.

Know the white,
yet keep to the black:
be a pattern for the world.
If you are a pattern for the world,
the Tao will be strong inside you
and there will be nothing you can't do.

Know the personal,
yet keep to the impersonal:
accept the world as it is.
If you accept the world,
the Tao will be **luminous** inside you
and you will return to your primal self.

Luminous: Bright, radiant,
glowing.

The world is formed from the void,
like utensils from a block of wood.
The Master knows the utensils,
yet keeps to the block:
thus she can use all things.

- 33** Knowing others is intelligence;
knowing yourself is true wisdom.
Mastering others is strength;
mastering yourself is true power.

If you realize that you have enough,
you are truly rich.
If you stay in the center
and embrace death with your whole heart,
you will endure forever.

- 34** The great Tao flows everywhere.
All things are born from it,
yet it doesn't create them.
It pours itself into its work,
yet it makes no claim.
It nourishes infinite worlds,
yet it doesn't hold on to them.
Since it is merged with all things
and hidden in their hearts,
it can be called humble.
Since all things vanish into it
and it alone endures,
it can be called great.

It isn't aware of its greatness;
thus it is truly great.

- 38** The Master doesn't try to be powerful;
thus he is truly powerful.
The ordinary man keeps reaching for power;
thus he never has enough.

The Master does nothing,
yet he leaves nothing undone.
The ordinary man is always doing things,
yet many more are left to be done.

The kind man does something,
yet something remains undone.
The just man does something,
and leaves many things to be done.
The moral man does something,
and when no one responds
he rolls up his sleeves and uses force.

When the Tao is lost, there is goodness.
When goodness is lost, there is morality.
When morality is lost, there is ritual.
Ritual is the husk of true faith,
the beginning of chaos.

Therefore the Master concerns himself
with the depths and not the surface,
with the fruit and not the flower.
He has no will of his own.
He dwells in reality,
and lets all illusions go.

- 51** Every being in the universe
is an expression of the Tao.
It springs into existence,
unconscious, perfect, free,
takes on a physical body,
lets circumstances complete it.
That is why every being
spontaneously honors the Tao.

The Tao gives birth to all beings,
nourishes them, maintains them,
cares for them, comforts them, protects them,
takes them back to itself,
creating without possessing,

acting without expecting,
guiding without interfering.
That is why love of the Tao
is in the very nature of things.

- 60** Governing a large country
is like frying a small fish.
You spoil it with too much poking.

Center your country in the Tao
and evil will have no power.
Not that it isn't there,
but you'll be able to step out of its way.

Give evil nothing to oppose
and it will disappear by itself.

- 78** Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
nothing can surpass it.

The soft overcomes the hard;
the gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
but few can put it into practice.

Therefore the Master remains
serene in the midst of sorrow.
Evil cannot enter his heart.
Because he has given up helping,
he is people's greatest help.

True words seem paradoxical.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Daoism began originally as a combination of philosophy and psychology (the study of the human mind and behavior) and was seen as an alternative to Confucianism. It became a religion in 440 BCE, when it was adopted as the state religion of China. Along with Confucianism and Buddhism, it remained for centuries as one of the three major religious traditions of China. When the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty ended in 1911, support for Daoism began to decline. In the decades that followed much of

the Daoist heritage was destroyed. The situation worsened after the communist takeover of China in 1949, when religious freedom was severely restricted. Communists are people who follow the political theory of a classless society where all people are equal, property is owned in common, and work is done for the benefit of the entire group. Communists believe that religion is not good for society. In the early twenty-first century about 20 million people practice Daoism, most of them living in Taiwan.

Did you know . . .

- Unlike religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, Daoism does not believe in a single God. Daoists do not worship God; their goal is to find harmony with the dao. The dao represents the sum of all that is right and harmonious. When people complicate their lives with selfishness, ambition, and the desire for fame, they lose harmony, fail to become enlightened, and are unhappy.
- Daoism has had a growing impact on the Western world. Many Westerners, for example, are turning to acupuncture (the treatment of certain disorders by inserting needles into the skin to release blocked energy) to cure disease, relieve pain, and even deal with such problems as alcoholism and smoking. Acupuncture developed from the Daoist belief that physical distress is the result of an imbalance in *qi* (*chi*), which literally means “air” or “breath” and represents a person’s life force or energy. Similarly, *taijichuan*, also known as *tai chi*, is a form of exercise increasingly practiced in the West. It is based on rhythmic movements that bring about relaxation, lower blood pressure, and improve digestion and circulation.
- Daoists do not pray as Westerners probably understand the term. Westerners typically, but not always, address prayers to a single God, often to ask for forgiveness, a solution to a problem, or God’s blessing. In contrast, Daoist prayer is more like meditation and reflection. Daoists see the universe as eternal and infinite, and they believe that meditation rather than prayer is the answer to life’s problems.
- The People’s Republic of China, or the Chinese mainland, prevented the spread of Daoism, particularly during the early decades of the nation’s founding in the late 1940s and 1950s. The communist

leadership that took power in 1949 believed that Daoism was passive, or lacking in will, and fatalistic, meaning that they have the belief that people are powerless against destiny. These views were at odds with the communist ideal of reconstructing society through labor. Some observers believed that by the end of the twentieth century, as the communist leadership in China was relaxing its grip on the people, it was becoming somewhat more tolerant of Daoism and the other religions practiced within the country's borders.

Consider the following . . .

- Respond to the point of view that Daoism does not believe in God.
- Using Daoism and the Dao De Jing as examples, explain why certain types of religious beliefs might arise as a response to social disorder and other historical circumstances. In ancient China during the period when the Dao De Jing was composed, many competing warlords were trying to build kingdoms. They tried to build economic and military power. To that end, they needed large numbers of literate teachers and civil servants. As a result, many new ideas and philosophies arose, leading historians to refer to the era as the Warring States period or the Hundred Schools of Thought period. Compare these types of events in ancient China with similar events in other cultures. For example, consider how Islam arose as a way of uniting the Arab peoples at a time when they were divided into competing clans and tribes.
- Choose one image from the Dao De Jing, such as the image of the bellows, and discuss what the image reveals about Daoist beliefs.

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<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadenal/dhammal/dham-hp.htm#Contents>

Compiled around the first century BCE

Translated by Harischandra Kaviratna

Published in 1980 by the Theosophical University Press

“One should be watchful over his speech, well-restrained in mind, and commit no unwholesome deed with his body.”

The Dhammapada is a Buddhist text that is believed to record the actual words of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama, better known as the Buddha, lived between 563 and 483 BCE. His words were passed along orally until they were written down in about the first century BCE. The word *dhmma* means “the teachings of Buddhism.” The title of the Dhammapada is often translated as “Words of the Doctrine.” It consists of 423 aphorisms. These are short statements that contain a truth, principle, or sentiment, usually in memorable language. The verses are numbered sequentially and are divided into twenty-six *vaggas*, or sections, with such titles as “On Vigilance,” “The Mind,” “The Fool,” and “The Wise.” For more than two thousand years, Buddhists have used the Dhammapada and other sacred Buddhist texts as a reference to provide guidance in their lives.

The Buddha laid out the essence of the Dhammapada as a guide for living in one of his earliest sermons, which he delivered in a deer refuge in the town of Isipatana, India. For this reason, the sermon is often called the “Deer Park Sermon,” but Buddhists also sometimes call it the “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Doctrine” sermon. In this sermon, the Buddha outlined what he called the Four Noble Truths. These truths became the cornerstones of Buddhist teaching.

The Four Noble Truths The first of the Four Noble Truths is *dubka*. This refers to the Buddhist belief that life consists of pain and sorrow and that people are trapped in a cycle of birth, old age, death, and rebirth. This cycle is called *samsara*. This is a life that has no permanence and no lasting essence, or core nature. The second of the Four Noble Truths refers to *avidya*, or “ignorance,” and *trishan*, or the cravings of the senses. These words refer to the belief that people cannot escape the bonds of *samsara* if they remain ignorant of the nature of reality and if they crave the sensual (bodily) pleasures of earthly existence. At the time of death, *avidya* and *trishan* bind a person to the material world and rebirth into earth existence. The third of the Four Noble Truths is *nirvana*, a word that means “blowing out.” It refers to the path to enlightenment (a state of pure spiritual understanding) the Buddha urged his believers to follow. He taught that only by breaking the chain of ignorance and worldly passions could a person be released from rebirth and from the physical world. This release is called *nirvana*. A person who has achieved *nirvana* can mystically escape the impermanent world and find a form of bliss that cannot be described.

The first three of the Four Noble Truths make clear that ignorance and earthly passions trap people in a life of suffering, pain, and death but that there is a way out of this cycle. The Buddha outlined this way out in the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, which he called the Eightfold Path. By following the Eightfold Path, a person can reach *nirvana* and enlightenment. The Eightfold Path might be considered similar to the Ten Commandments in the Western Judeo-Christian tradition because it consists of a series of specific guides for living.

The first two parts of the Eightfold Path, called Right Understanding and Right Thought, help a person achieve wisdom. (Sometimes different translations of the words are found; for example, Right Understanding is also translated as “Right View” and Right Thought is also translated as “Right Intention.”) Both involve learning and thinking about the teachings of Buddhism and becoming motivated to apply them to everyday life. The next three parts of the Eightfold Path include Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. These promote ethical, or moral, conduct in dealing with other people. A person who follows them avoids such things as lying, gossiping, cruelty, stealing, and overeating. Right Livelihood requires followers to earn their living in ways that do not harm the world. The final three parts of the Eightfold Path, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, all encourage mental development. They require followers to avoid mental laziness, to meditate, and to seek enlightenment.

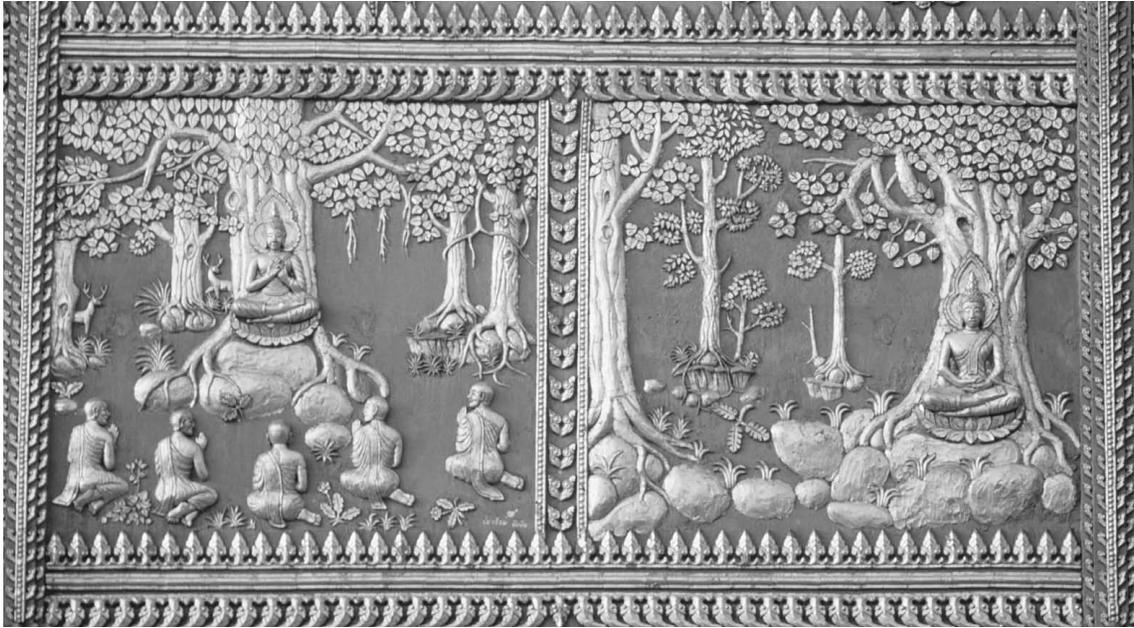
Taken together, the various elements of the Eightfold Path promote mental and physical discipline and release from earthly passions.

A key theme that runs through the Dhammapada, suggested in the excerpts included here, is the idea that the human mind is not somehow a by-product of the physical universe. Rather, according to the Buddha, mind comes before all that exists. The destruction of the body is not the end of existence; instead, the external world is a creation of the mind. But the Buddha also points out that the mind is unstable and flighty, or inconsistent. It is also fickle, meaning changeable and indecisive; sometimes it thrashes around like a fish taken out of the water. It is unstable and apt to wander. It is fearful and sometimes tempted to follow evil, represented in the excerpts here as Mara, who tried to tempt the Buddha away from the Eightfold Path. Because of these weaknesses, a person has to develop a well-guarded mind in order to follow the Eightfold Path. For this reason, Buddhists turn to the verses of the Dhammapada to provide them with truths they can apply to their daily lives.

Growth of Buddhism A major difficulty faced by modern students of Buddhism is that because it is an ancient religion, it is impossible to trace its history and development accurately through a universally accepted group of texts. While, for example, Christianity is based on the Bible and Islam is based on the Qur'an, Buddhism has produced an almost overwhelming number of texts that can be considered sacred writings. Many of these texts have not survived into the twenty-first century. Many are no longer in their original form, but exist only in translation. Others form the core scriptures (the sacred writings of a religion) of various sects of Buddhism. A sect is a smaller group within a larger religious body, which has beliefs that differ from the main body.

One of the major traditional sects of Buddhism is referred to as Theravada, a term that means “doctrine of the elders.” A doctrine is a set of rules or principles. In the early twenty-first century, Theravada is the dominant form of Buddhism practiced in such countries as Cambodia, Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, and Thailand. It is also practiced in Bangladesh, parts of China, and in Vietnam, and it has experienced a revival in southern India. Through missionary activity, in which believers seek to spread the religion to nonbelievers, Theravada has also spread throughout the world.

The only early Buddhist scriptural texts that exist in full in the early twenty-first century are those of Theravada Buddhists. These texts make



The Buddha is shown seated under a bodhi, or fig, tree as he gives a sermon to his followers (left) and engages in meditation. Many of the Buddha's sayings are recorded in the Dhammapada and consulted by Buddhists for guidance in their daily lives. © MICHAEL FREEMAN/CORBIS.

up what is called the Tipitaka, a term that translates as “Threefold Basket,” with the word *basket* meaning a collection of texts. The second of the Threefold Baskets, called the Suttapitaka, or “Basket of the Discourses,” contains the Khuddakanikaya, or “Group of Small Texts.” The Dhammapada appears as the second text in the Group of Small Texts. Put simply, while most other religions have only one holy text or a small number of texts considered sacred, Buddhists have many, and all can provide Buddhists with principles to follow in their lives.

According to Buddhist tradition, a council of Buddhist elders met three weeks after the death of the Buddha. Their purpose was to remember the truths that the Buddha had taught and to implant these truths in the minds of the Buddha’s followers. Because the Buddha’s teachings had never been written down, the elders organized them and brought them together so that they could be more easily recited orally. Only later were they written down. To this day millions of Buddhists recite verses from the Dhammapada daily, regarding them, in effect, as prayers that keep them focused on the teachings of the Buddha and to guide them in their daily activities.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Dhammapada:

- The Dhammapada is believed to contain statements the Buddha actually made in sermons that he delivered to a wide range of people, from kings and queens to cowherds. *Dhamma* means “the teachings of Buddhism.” The Dhammapada was written to help people follow the teachings of Buddhism.
- The text refers to “Mara (the Evil One).” Mara is the lord of five desires. He and other demons threatened the Buddha with windstorms and darkness as he sat in meditation under a *bodhi*, or fig, tree. They were unsuccessful in their efforts to make him fearful and abandon his search for enlightenment. People must battle the temptations and fears presented by Mara on a daily basis. The Buddha’s words in the Dhammapada provide guidance on how to do this.
- Having fought and beaten Mara, a person should protect what he has learned through the dhamma, or dharma, but do so without attachment. One of the central practices of Buddhism is nonattachment, or not desiring to have or keep something, because everything is changing and cannot be held onto.
- The excerpt refers to “the Eightfold Path” and “the Four Noble Truths.” The Four Noble Truths are the foundations of Buddhism: that life is suffering; that desire causes suffering; that suffering can end; and that the end of suffering can be achieved by following the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path describes the proper behavior, or basic guidelines for living, that Buddhists should practice in order to end suffering.

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Excerpt from the Dhammapada

The Mind—CANTO III

33. The **discerning** man straightens his mind, which is **fickle** and unsteady, difficult to guard and restrain as the skilled **fletcher** straightens the shaft (of the arrow).
34. As the fish, taken out of its watery home and thrown on land, thrashes around, so does the mind tremble, while freeing itself from the **dominion** of Mara (the Evil One).

Discerning: Showing good judgment.

Fickle: Likely to change.

Fletcher: Arrow maker.

Dominion: Control, authority.

The Dhammapada

Flighty: Changing constantly.

Incomprehensible: Beyond understanding.

Subtle: Complex, capable of understanding small differences.

Aspirant: Someone who wants to achieve something.

Incorporeal: Without a body.

Dhamma: The teachings of Buddhism.

Ruffled: Disturbed.

Defiled: Damaged, polluted.

Devoid: Missing, lacking in.

Dichotomy: Division into two widely different things.

Vigilant: Watchful, cautious, on one's guard.

Corporeal: Physical.

Citadel: Fortress, castle.

Attachment: A feeling of closeness, an emotional tie or bond.

Ere: Before.

Unheeded: Not given attention.

Kindred: Relative, family member.

Detachment: Lack of interest or involvement.

Foremost: Most important.

Insight: Ability to understand clearly.

Bewilders: Puzzles, confuses.

Fetters: Chains.

35. The mind is unstable and **flighty**. It wanders wherever it desires. Therefore it is good to control the mind. A disciplined mind brings happiness.

36. The mind is **incomprehensible** and exceedingly **subtle**. It wanders wherever it desires. Therefore, let the wise **aspirant** watch over the mind. A well-guarded mind brings happiness.

37. Those who control the mind which wanders afar, solitary, **incorporeal**, and which resides in the inner cavern (of the heart), will liberate themselves from the shackles of Mara.

38. He whose mind is not steady, who is ignorant of the true **Dhamma**, whose tranquility is **ruffled**, the wisdom of such a man does not come to fullness.

39. Fear has he none, whose mind is not **defiled** by passion, whose heart is **devoid** of hatred, who has surpassed (the **dichotomy** of) good and evil and who is **vigilant**.

40. Knowing the **corporeal** body to be fragile as an earthen jar, and fortifying the mind like a **citadel**, let the wise man fight Mara with the sword of wisdom. He should now protect what he has won, without **attachment**.

41. Alas! **ere** long, this corporeal body will lie flat upon the earth, **unheeded**, devoid of consciousness, like a useless log of wood.

42. An ill-directed mind does greater harm to the self than a hater does to another hater or an enemy to another enemy.

43. Neither father nor mother, nor any other **kindred**, can confer greater benefit than does the well-directed mind.

The Path—CANTO XX

273. Of paths the Eightfold is the best; of truths the Four Noble Truths are the best; of all states **Detachment** is the best; of men the Seeing One (Buddha) is the **foremost**.

274. This is the path; there is no other path that leads to purity of **insight**. Follow this path, for this path **bewilders** the Evil One (Mara).

275. Having entered upon the path you will come to an end of your suffering. Having myself recognized this, I proclaimed this path which removes all thorns.

276. You yourself must make the effort. The Tathagatas (Buddhas) can only point the way. Those who have entered the path and become meditative are freed from the **fetters** of Mara.

277. “**Transient** are all **composite** things”; he who **perceives** the truth of this gets disgusted with this world of suffering. This is the path to purity.
278. “Sorrowful are all composite things”; he who perceives the truth of this gets disgusted with this world of suffering. This is the path to purity.
279. “All forms of existence are unreal” (*an-atta*); he who perceives the truth of this gets disgusted with this world of suffering. This is the path to purity.
280. He who does not get up when it is time to do so; who, although youthful and strong, is yet given to **indolence** is weak in **resolution** and thought—such an idle and lazy person does not find the path to wisdom.
281. One should be watchful over his speech, well-restrained in mind, and commit no **unwholesome** deed with his body. Let him **purify** this threefold avenue of action (karma), and he will tread the path made known by the **sages**.
282. **Verily**, from devotion (*yoga*) arises wisdom, from nondevotion springs the loss of wisdom. Having become aware of this twofold path that leads to progress and decline, let him place himself in such a way that his wisdom increases.
283. Cut down the whole forest (of desires), not just a tree. From the forest arises fear. Cut down the forest and its brushwood, O monks, and be **emancipated**.
284. As long as the brushwood of a man’s **lust** towards women is not completely destroyed, even to the last seedling, so long is his mind fettered as a **suckling** calf is bound to its mother.
285. Cut off the love of self as one would pluck an **autumnal** white lotus. Proceed then upon that (Eightfold) path of peace—the **nirvana** as **expounded** by Sugata (Buddha).
286. “Here shall I dwell in the rainy season; here shall I dwell in winter and summer.” Thus the fool **muses**, but never **reflects** on the dangers that might befall him.
287. As a great flood carries off a sleeping village, so death seizes and carries off a man who is distracted and overly attached to his children and cattle.
288. Sons are no protection, neither father nor **kinsfolk**; when one is **assailed** by death, there is no protection among one’s kin.
289. Having perceived this significant fact, let the wise and self-restrained man quickly clear the path that leads to nirvana.

Transient: Lasting for a short time.

Composite: Made of different parts.

Perceives: Understands.

Indolence: Laziness.

Resolution: Firmness of purpose.

Unwholesome: Harmful, unhealthy.

Purify: Make clean, remove unclean parts.

Sages: Wise men.

Verily: In truth, surely.

Emancipated: Freed.

Lust: Desire, longing.

Suckling: A baby animal that still feeds on its mother’s milk.

Autumnal: Having to do with autumn, or fall.

Nirvana: The end of suffering.

Expounded: Explained.

Muses: Thinks.

Reflects: Thinks carefully.

Kinsfolk: Family members.

Assailed: Attacked or overwhelmed.



A stone tablet engraved with part of the Tipitaka, a sacred Buddhist text, stands in Mandalay, Burma. The Dhammapada is one of the many texts within the Tipitaka. © CHRISTINE KOLISCH/CROBIS.

• • •

What happened next . . .

About a century after the first council of elders, or about a century after the death of the Buddha, another council was held to confirm the teaching of Buddhist doctrine. During this council, a major split emerged in Buddhism between two schools of thought. One school of thought, the Southern School, practiced a traditional form of Buddhism that emphasized finding personal enlightenment. Theravada is a part of this school of thought. The other major school of thought, the Northern School, was referred to by the term Mahayana. The goal of this school was collective, or group, enlightenment, meaning that its focus was less on the individual and more on helping everyone achieve enlightenment.

Did you know . . .

- The Dhammapada, which was written in an Indian language called Pāli, was the first Pāli text ever translated into a Western language. It was translated and edited by the Danish scholar Viggo Fausböll (1821–1908) in 1855.
- Very early Buddhist texts, such as the Dhammapada, were not written down for a variety of reasons. One practical reason was the lack of convenient writing materials. But the emphasis on oral transmission, or retelling Buddhist texts and stories from person to person, came from deeper causes. Early Buddhist wise men believed that the way to achieve enlightenment and contact with a divine reality was through self-deprivation (going without or denying oneself something) and intuition (the state of being aware of or knowing something without having evidence). It was believed that contemplation, or the study of spiritual matters calmly and over a long period of time, of wisdom that was heard rather than read was a purer path to enlightenment and that writing actually took away from the value and wisdom of the words. Further, while

historical events were typically written down, it was believed that spiritual and philosophical truths were best understood through oral poetry, which was more easily remembered.

- There is no “Indian” language. A principal language in India is Hindi, but this is a literary and official language used primarily in the north. It is estimated that India is home to about 428 languages. Of them, 415 are still spoken, while the rest are no longer used. Pāli is just one of these languages that no longer exists. The language spoken in one region in India generally cannot be understood by Indians living in another region, who do not speak it every day. Pāli was never a language spoken by a community of people. Rather, it was more like the Latin used by Christianity, an official language used in texts such as the Dhammapada.
- It is probable that the verses of the Dhammapada were altered over time. Verses were borrowed by other Buddhist texts, and it is likely that scribes (someone who copies documents or manuscripts by hand) and monks added material to the Dhammapada. The language of the verses, however, indicates that at least some of them date back to the early years of Buddhism.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain how the verses from the Dhammapada use down-to-earth images to express their truths and why this type of language was used.
- Summarize the view of the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds contained in the Dhammapada.
- Discuss ways in which the Eightfold Path is similar to guides for everyday life in another religion you are familiar with. Examples might be the Ten Commandments of Judaism and Christianity or the Pillars of Islam.

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The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh

Excerpt from Part I of The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh

Available online from the Bahá'í Reference Library

at <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/HW/>

By Bahá'u'lláh

Written around 1857

Published in 1985 by Bahá'í Publishing Trust

“There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me.”

The Bahá'í faith is one of the world's youngest religions, dating only to about the mid-nineteenth century. Its founder was Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), Arabic for “the glory of God.” Bahá'u'lláh wrote a number of texts that are important to members of the faith. One of these texts is called *Kalimat-i-Maknunih*, or *The Hidden Words*. The text consists of seventy-one Arabic and eighty-two Persian sayings. The stated purpose of *The Hidden Words* is to take the most important elements from the teachings of all religions to find their inner essence, or true meaning. Members of the faith are urged to read the sayings every day and to apply their wisdom in their daily lives.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote *The Hidden Words* in the mid- to late 1800s. The word “hidden” in the title refers to the Bahá'í belief that people could not have a true understanding of the knowledge within the book before Bahá'u'lláh revealed it. It details the spiritual path a person can follow and provides moral guidelines for living. Following this path and behavior, a person can become closer to God.

The Bahá'í understanding of God

In all his writings, Bahá'u'lláh explained and discussed three connected “unities.” The first is the oneness of God, making the Bahá'í faith a

monotheistic religion, in the tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This means that the religion recognized only one god instead of many gods. The second unity is the oneness of God's many prophets and messengers. These are the people who deliver God's words and intentions to others. This means that Bahá'í teaches that religion is not fixed forever by a single prophet but grows and develops over time with the revelations of each of God's historical messengers. A revelation is an enlightening or astonishing discovery or disclosure of something. The third unity is the oneness of humanity, with emphasis on globalism (worldwide concerns), equality, and social justice. Social justice is the idea that all people should have the same rights, securities, opportunities, and benefits. To work towards social justice, such as in educational programs or economic development programs, is to engage in activity that will help bring about this goal.

This excerpt from The Hidden Words places emphasis on the oneness of God. The words are written as commands from God to His people. The picture of God that emerges from these verses is that of a divinity who is interested in justice. He urges people to remain humble, to develop their abilities and talents, and not to vaunt themselves over the poor. This means that they should not brag about their wealth. God emphasizes his love for his creation, a love that humans should share. Based on this love, humans should pursue such goals as eliminating prejudice (preconceived judgment), promoting world peace, and ridding the world of poverty. Because God is one with all of His creation, bringing about these ends is a way of worshipping God. In fact, members of the faith place little emphasis on outward forms of worship, such as rituals. They believe that serving others is the best way to show devotion to God.

Bahá'u'lláh led an exciting and eventful life. He was born as Mirza Husayn-Ali (1817–1892) in Tehran, Persia (present-day Iran). In his early years, he was a follower of the Bab, which was a sect, or branch, of Shi'a Islam that believed that a messiah would soon appear. A messiah is an inspiring leader who claims to have a message from God and can show people the way to salvation, or deliverance from sin or evil. The Bab expressed this belief with references to “He whom God shall make manifest” (visible).

The Bab's leader, Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, had declared himself the leader of the movement only in 1844. Bahá'u'lláh saw himself as this expected messiah. He believed that he would lay the spiritual foundations for a worldwide religion based on harmony and peace. He announced this publicly in 1866, which can be regarded as the year that the religion was founded.



The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Akko, Israel, is a sacred site honoring the Bahá'í founder and his vision of peace and unity for humanity.

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The Islamic government in Persia regarded both the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh as threats to its authority, so Bahá'u'lláh was exiled, or sent away, first to Baghdad in the Ottoman Empire (present-day Iraq), then to Constantinople in Turkey, and finally to Adrianople (modern Edirne, Turkey). Later he was arrested and held at the prison colony in Akka, in present-day Israel. In his final years, Bahá'u'lláh was allowed to live at home, although officially he remained a prisoner of the city. He died in 1892, and members of the Bahá'í faith turn in the direction of his gravesite, the Mansion of Bahji at Akka, in prayer each day.

The sources of Bahá'í wisdom

Throughout his life, Bahá'u'lláh produced a large number of writings. His primary works on religion include the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book, containing the laws and rules of the faith) and the *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (The Book of Certitude). Bahá'u'lláh believed that God can only be understood through direct knowledge. Thinking or reasoning will not give one an understanding of God. He wrote about these and other spiritual matters in the *Haft-Vádí*, or “Seven Valleys,” and *The Hidden Words*, excerpted here.

Perhaps the best summary of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings comes from Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), who was the successor to Bahá'u'lláh's son, Abdu'l-Baha. Shoghi Effendi was the first Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. In this role, he translated Bahá'u'lláh's works and greatly

expanded the size of the Bahá'í community. In his book *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi writes about some of the essential elements that stand out from what Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed, including world peace, education for everyone, and the oneness of humanity. He also called for such things as the creation of a world body to resolve disputes between nations. He said that the most important goal for the faith was “justice as the ruling principle in human society.”

Elsewhere, Shoghi Effendi comments on the inclusiveness, or all-embracing nature, of Bahá'í and its tolerance and acceptance of other faiths. Bahá'í followers believe that all religions come from the same sacred source. They believe that the basic principles of all faiths are in harmony with one another and that their goals and purposes are the same. In this respect, the Bahá'í faith differs from some other religions, which historically have held that theirs is the only true faith. While many religions in modern life have become more accepting of other religious views, Bahá'í is unique in making this acceptance a central element of its beliefs.

One characteristic of Bahá'í is its emphasis on social action, which many members regard as a form of worship. For example, the last lines of the following excerpt encourage Bahá'ís to help others as an expression of their faith in God: “Deny not My servant should he ask anything from thee, for his face is My face; be then abashed before Me.” Members actively promote social and economic development projects in their communities and around the world. It is not uncommon to see road signs indicating that the local Bahá'í community has “adopted” a stretch of highway to keep it free of litter. Because they encourage the idea of world government, they support the United Nations (U.N.) and have engaged in many development projects through U.N. agencies. The United Nations is an international organization where countries can go to negotiate an end to conflicts and work together on issues that affect them. This concern for social justice is clear in *The Hidden Words*, a text that repeatedly emphasizes the divine nature of justice, love, peace, kindness to others, and humbleness before God.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*:

- As with many other religious texts, the verses in the *Hidden Words* are numbered. This is so that readers can easily locate and identify particular passages. The number of the verses can be distinguished

between those written in Arabic and those in Persian with a reference such as Arabic no. 7.

- The excerpt repeats phrases such as “O SON OF MAN” and “O SON OF BEING.” “Son” here refers to mankind. The Hidden Words repeatedly calls on mankind to express love and to provide guidance.
- Bahá'í believes in the oneness of God and the oneness of religion, meaning that although religions may seem to differ, they all worship the same God and are, in fact, unified through that worship. Verse 13 says, “Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee.” This is similar to a statement made in the Christian Bible’s book of John, 14:20, which says, “The Father is the Son, and the Son is in you.” Both mean that God’s spirit is reflected in each person.

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Excerpt from The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh

Part I.— From the Arabic

Preamble *HE IS THE GLORY OF GLORIES*

*This is that which hath descended from the **realm** of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner **essence thereof** and clothed it in the garment of **brevery**, as a **token** of grace unto the **righteous**, that they may stand faithful unto the **Covenant** of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue.*

- 1: O SON OF SPIRIT! My first **counsel** is this: Possess a pure, kindly and **radiant** heart, that thine may be a **sovereignty** ancient, **imperishable** and everlasting.
- 2: O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away **therefrom** if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may **confide** in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. **Ponder** this in thy heart; how it **behooveth** thee to be. **Verily** justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.
- 3: O SON OF MAN! **Veiled** in My **immemorial** being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I

Realm: Kingdom.

Essence: Spirit or heart.

Thereof: Of it.

Brevity: The quality of being brief or short.

Token: A sign or hint.

Righteous: Moral, good, honest.

Covenant: A promise or contract.

Counsel: Advice, guidance.

Radiant: Happy, joyful.

Sovereignty: Rulership, seat of power or government.

Imperishable: Undying.

Therefrom: From that.

Confide: Tell a secret to or give something into someone’s care.

Ponder: Think over.

Behooveth: Is right or necessary.

Verily: In truth, indeed.

Veiled: Hidden, disguised.

Immemorial: Very old, going back in time beyond memory.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh

Engraved: Carved or imprinted, left a lasting impression.

Hence: For this reason.

Wherefore: Why.

In no wise: In no way.

Therein: Into that place or condition.

Tarry: Delay, linger, hang back.

Destined: Intended.

Dominion: Territory over which someone rules.

Renouncing: Giving up.

Stronghold: Fortress, a place that can be defended.

Perish: Die.

Utterance: A statement, something spoken.

Abide: Live.

Radiance: Bright light; joy.

Bountifully: Richly, generously.

Favor: Goodwill, kindness.

Binding: Required, necessary.

Wherewith: By what means.

Abase: Lower oneself in rank or status, shame, dishonor.

Enlightenment: Spiritual understanding.

Self-subsisting: Living by one's own means, without others' help.

created thee, have **engraved** on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

4: O SON OF MAN! I loved thy creation, **hence** I created thee. **Wherefore**, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

5: O SON OF BEING! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can **in no wise** reach thee. Know this, O servant.

6: O SON OF BEING! Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter **therein** and **tarry** not. This is that which hath been **destined** for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted **dominion**.

7: O SON OF MAN! If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.

8: O SON OF SPIRIT! There is no peace for thee save by **renouncing** thyself and turning unto Me; for it behooveth thee to glory in My name, not in thine own; to put thy trust in Me and not in thyself, since I desire to be loved alone and above all that is.

9: O SON OF BEING! My love is My **stronghold**; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and **perish**.

10: O SON OF **UTTERANCE**! Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest **abide** in safety. My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me near unto thee.

11: O SON OF BEING! Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy **radiance** and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have **bountifully** shed My **favor** upon thee.

12: O SON OF BEING! With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is **binding**. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof.

13: O SON OF SPIRIT! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, **wherewith** dost thou **abase** thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou **enlightenment** from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and **self-subsisting**.

14: O SON OF MAN! Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light

and My light shall never be extinguished; why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be **outworn**. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory.

- 15: O SON OF UTTERANCE! Turn thy face unto Mine and **renounce** all **save** Me; for My sovereignty endureth and My dominion perisheth not. If thou seekest another than Me, yea, if thou searchest the universe for evermore, thy quest will be in vain.
- 16: O SON OF LIGHT! Forget all save Me and **commune** with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it.
- 17: O SON OF MAN! Be thou content with Me and seek no other helper. For none but Me can ever **suffice** thee.
- 18: O SON OF SPIRIT! Ask not of Me that which We desire not for thee, then be content with what We have **ordained** for thy sake, for this is that which profiteth thee, if **therewith** thou dost content thyself.
- 19: O SON OF THE WONDROUS VISION! I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou **forsaken** Me and sought a beloved other than Me?
- 20: O SON OF SPIRIT! My claim on thee is great, it cannot be forgotten. My grace to thee is **plenteous**, it cannot be veiled. My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be **obscured**.
- 21: O SON OF MAN! Upon the tree of **effulgent** glory I have hung for thee the **choicest** fruits, wherefore hast thou turned away and contented thyself with that which is less good? Return then unto that which is better for thee in the realm on high.
- 22: O SON OF SPIRIT! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast **abased** thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.
- 23: O SON OF THE SUPREME! To the eternal I call thee, yet thou dost seek that which perisheth. What hath made thee turn away from Our desire and seek thine own?
- 24: O SON OF MAN! **Transgress** not thy limits, nor claim that which **beseemeth** thee not. **Prostrate** thyself before the **countenance** of thy God, the Lord of might and power.
- 25: O SON OF SPIRIT! **Vaunt** not thyself over the poor, for I lead him on his way and behold thee in thy evil **plight** and **confound** thee for evermore.
- 26: O SON OF BEING! How couldest thou forget thine own faults and busy thyself with the faults of others? **Whoso** doeth this is accursed of Me.

Outworn: Worn out.

Renounce: Give up, reject.

Save: Except.

Commune: Communicate with, feel connected to

Suffice: Be enough.

Ordained: Commanded, established by law or decree.

Therewith: With that.

Forsaken: Deserted, abandoned.

Plenteous: Plentiful, present in great quantity.

Obscured: Made dark or dim or difficult to understand.

Effulgent: Radiating or spreading out brightly.

Choicest: Best.

Abased: Lowered, humiliated.

Transgress: Go beyond.

Beseemeth: Suits or is proper.

Prostrate: Bow or lie face down.

Countenance: Face.

Vaunt: Boast, brag.

Plight: Trouble, difficulty.

Confound: Confuse or make matters worse.

Whoso: Whoever.



An interior view of the Shrine of the Bab. The Bahá'í faith grew out of the Babi religion, which was itself an offshoot of Islam. The shrine houses the remains of the Bab, founder of the Babi movement, and of Abdu'l-Baha, son of Bahá'u'lláh. © TOMI JUNGER/ALAMY.

Bear witness: Testify to.

Biddeth: Orders.

Just: Honest, moral.

Iniquity: Evil, wickedness.

Ascribe: Assign.

Abashed: Ashamed.

27: O SON OF MAN! Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed wouldst thou be, and to this I **bear witness**.

28: O SON OF SPIRIT! Know thou of a truth: He that **biddeth** men be **just** and himself committeth **iniquity** is not of Me, even though he bear My name.

29: O SON OF BEING! **Ascribe** not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

30: O SON OF MAN! Deny not My servant should he ask anything from thee, for his face is My face; be then **abashed** before Me.

• • •

What happened next . . .

When Bahá'u'lláh died in 1892, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha. In his will, Bahá'u'lláh named his son the Center of the Covenant, Head of the Faith, and the sole interpreter of his writings. Like his father, Abdu'l-Baha spent a great deal of time in prison for his beliefs, though he was released in 1908. Afterward, he spent the rest of his life traveling, speaking, and corresponding with Bahá'í communities throughout the world, until his death in 1921. In his will, Abdu'l-Baha included an outline of the Bahá'í organization. He established the post of guardianship of the faith and of the Universal House of Justice. He appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the first Guardian. After Effendi's death in 1957, no clear candidate for the guardianship emerged. In the early twenty-first century, the faith is led by the nine-member board of the Universal House of Justice, headquartered in Haifa, Israel.

Did you know . . .

- The Hidden Words is based on a Shi'a Muslim tradition that comes from the Book of Fatima. Fatima was the daughter of

Muhammad, the founder of Islam. According to tradition, when Muhammad died, the archangel Gabriel appeared to Fatima to comfort her and reveal to her prophecies (predictions of the future) that she recorded in a book. The book did not survive, but Bahá'í followers believe that the prophecies will be revealed again at a later date. Bahá'ís believe that The Hidden Words may be a fulfillment of this tradition.

- Bahá'ís continue to face persecution (discrimination or mistreatment) in the Muslim world, particularly in Iran. From 1978 to 1998, at least two hundred Bahá'ís were put to death in Iran, and many more were imprisoned. Bahá'ís are not allowed to hold government jobs or attend universities, and their sacred sites have been repeatedly desecrated (violated or damaged) or destroyed.
- Some scholars see strong similarities between The Hidden Words and scriptural passages, or passages from sacred writings, in other religious traditions, including the Psalms in the Hebrew Bible, the Beatitudes in the Christian New Testament, and the *hadiths* in Islam, or the sayings and teachings of Islam's founder, Muhammad.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain the image of God that comes out of the excerpts from The Hidden Words.
- Explain why the word hidden is used in the title. In what sense are the words of this text hidden?
- The Bahá'í faith continues to grow in popularity, not just in the Middle East but around the world among people of widely different heritages, or traditions. Explain why the Bahá'í view of God might make the religion popular in the modern world.

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Avesta, as reproduced in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*

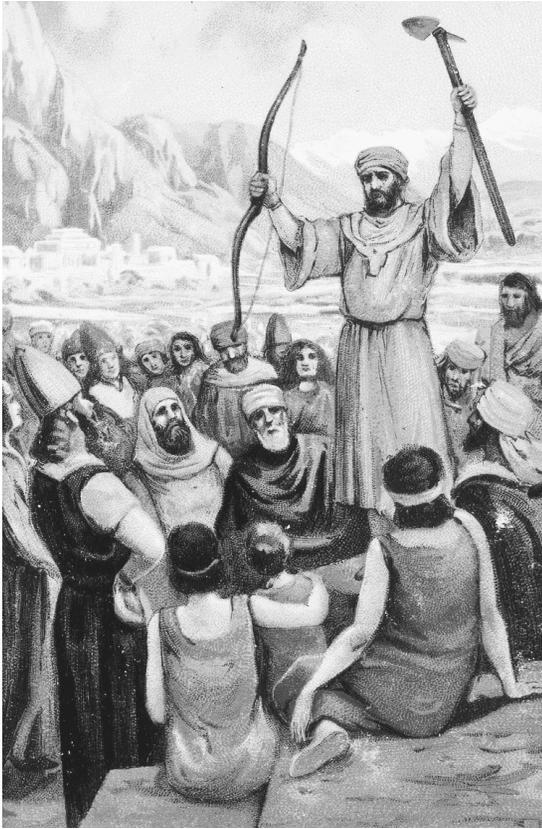
*In The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra,
available online from the Internet Sacred Text Archive at
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/zor/sbe31/yasnae.htm>
Compiled between 1700 BCE and 400 CE
Translated by Irach J. S. Taraporewala
Published in 1951 by D. S. Taraporevala Sons*

“Violence must be put down! against cruelty make a stand,
ye who would make sure of the reward of Good Thought through
Right. . . .”

The collection of Zoroastrianism’s sacred texts is called the Avesta. It is sometimes referred to as the Zend-Avesta, but this term is inaccurate and is the result of a historical mistake in translation. *Avesta* is thought to come from an Iranian word that means “shelter” or “support.” *Zend* refers to interpretations of the text. The Avesta contains twenty-one volumes of various documents that were written over a long period of time, ranging from 1700 BCE to 400 CE.

One of the documents within the Avesta is the Yasna, which means reverence or veneration. The Yasna describes rituals and other observances within the religion. The oldest part of the Avesta appears in the Yasna. This section is called the Gathas, or the Hymns of Zarathushtra. It is comprised of hymns, or songs, said to contain the original words of the religion’s founder, Zarathushtra (also called Zoroaster). For this reason the Gathas are considered to be the core of the Avesta. These religious songs total about 6,000 words and 241 verses arranged in 17 chapters.

The Gathas are thought to have been composed by Zarathushtra around 1200 BCE. They are arranged into five different groups based



Zarathushtra speaks to followers about the religion he founded, Zoroastrianism. His writings, which are the religion's holy texts, were written for Ahura Mazda, not to provide specific instruction to the religion's followers. THE ART ARCHIVE.

on their meter, or rhythm or pattern in verse. These are: Ahunavaiti Gatha; Ustavaiti Gatha; Spenta Mainyu Gatha; Vohu Khshathra Gatha; and Vahisto Ishti Gatha. The Gathas can be difficult to understand because the songs are not accompanied by any commentary that explains their meaning. The songs have been used as a meditative tool, meaning that Zoroastrians meditate on the words to try to gain greater understanding. Zarathushtra did not write the Gathas to teach new followers about the religion. He wrote that Gathas in praise of the Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord).

The message of the Gathas Zarathushtra wrote in the Gathas that there is one god, Ahura Mazda, and that everyone is able to receive God's message. Zarathushtra also provided details on how people should behave. These included acquiring knowledge, being righteous (honest and respectable), and protecting nature. The Amesha Spentas, or Bounteous Immortals (also called Holy Immortals), help guide Zoroastrians in life.

The Amesha Spentas provide a channel of communication between humans and Ahura Mazda. They are thought by some to be actual beings and by others to be merely concepts, or ideas, to aid people. There are six immortal concepts that make up the Amesha Spentas:

- Vohu Manah, good mind and purpose;
- Asha Vahishta, truth and justice;
- Spenta Ameraiti, devotion, serenity, and kindness;
- Khashathra Vairya, power and just (fair) rule;
- Hauravat, wholeness and health; and
- Ameretat, long life and immortality.

Based on the teachings of Zarathushtra, Zoroastrians follow the will of the Amesha Spentas. They dedicate themselves to a "threefold path," which is stated simply in the Zoroastrian motto, "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds." This goal is expressed by the term *asba*. Asha is a form of righteousness that comes from the natural order of things and

includes truth, order, discipline, and progress. Zoroastrianism is a religion that is free of fixed teachings (required lessons to learn) and commandments (orders). Zarathushtra, who believed in the power of human reason, taught that each person was capable of knowing the difference between good and evil and of following the good. A person who has Vohu Manah, or good mind and purpose, will follow the path of righteousness in agreement with the law of asha.

Because the words of the Gathas are believed to come directly from Zarathushtra, members of the faith read and follow them as a guide in their daily lives. The passages of the Gathas excerpted here all have a single theme, usually translated as violence or fury. Violence, which includes not only anger but also destructive force (as in the fury of a storm), is seen as something that is damaging to the civilized world. One who does not have a good mind (Vohu Manah) acts in fury and with violence and harms others. Rulers can act in fury, bringing violence and unhappiness upon their people. As Zarathushtra says, “Violence must be put down! against cruelty make a stand, ye who would make sure of the reward of Good Thought through Right, to whose company the holy man belongs.”

A person who can control his or her anger and violent behavior is a supporter of humankind. Those who find it hard to control their anger have to change their ways to acquire a good mind. If they do not, their fury will turn back on them and they will be harmed. If they do change their ways, they can eliminate violence from the mind, which will lead to good words and good deeds. This examination of the dangers of anger and violence reflects the tolerance, peacefulness, and emphasis on good works and service to others that characterize Zoroastrianism even in modern life. A person who can avoid fury is rational, logical, successful, happy, and peaceful.

History of the Gathas Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions still in existence and may be the oldest surviving monotheistic religion. This means that, like Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, its followers believe in a single god. Zarathushtra lived in Persia (modern-day Iran). Scholars are not entirely certain when he lived, but most think that it was between 1500 and 1000 BCE, probably around 1200 BCE. These dates are uncertain because throughout the religion’s history, many of its texts were destroyed, first by the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great in 330 BCE and then by Arab and Mongol invaders beginning in 650 CE. Some of the earliest Zoroastrian texts were about such topics as medicine, law, science, and

Zoroastrianism: The First Ecological Religion?

At the time that Zoroastrianism was founded in northwestern Persia, the people believed in a polytheistic religion, which is a religion that recognizes many gods. Zarathushtra, perhaps for the first time in human history, taught his followers that there was only one God, Ahura Mazda. This god was omniscient (knowing everything), omnipresent (present everywhere), and omnipotent (all-powerful). Zarathushtra believed that Ahura Mazda was unchanging, unknowable, and the source of all that was good in the world.

Based on this belief, Zarathushtra taught that everything that Ahura Mazda had created was pure and good and deserved to be treated with respect, including the natural environment. For this reason, Zoroastrians avoid any activities that pollutes the air, land, or water, earning Zoroastrianism the title, among some people, of the world's first ecological religion. Ecological refers to the workings of nature and its many environments. By receiving this title, Zoroastrianism is called an environmentally aware and caring religion. This is one of the central ways that Zoroastrianism serves as a guide for daily life. Zoroastrians tend to take jobs that allow them to avoid harming the earth. The Gathas place heavy emphasis on industry and hard work. Further, Zoroastrians believe that all creatures are sacred. To follow these beliefs Zoroastrians shun any type of violence, discrimination (behaving unfairly to people because of their perceived differences), and persecution (discrimination that results in violence), and they show great respect for people of other religious traditions. Zoroastrians also promote equality of men and women.

history. While most of these texts did not survive, it is believed that much of their content was translated into Arabic and absorbed into Islam. Because of this destruction, many of the Zoroastrian texts that do survive are fragments, or incomplete pieces.

Much of the Avesta, and therefore the Gathas, are written in a language called Avestan, sometimes referred to as Gathic Avestan. This is one of the oldest Indo-European languages and is similar in some ways to Sanskrit, the language of ancient India. Indo-European languages are a series of related languages, including English, Spanish, German, Greek, and many others that descend from a common ancestral language probably spoken in what is now Russia about four thousand years ago. The Avesta had to be reconstructed from scattered texts, some of them in Greek translations. In the early twenty-first century many Zoroastrians continue to recite the Avesta in the Avestan language, although most do not understand the words. The original Avestan is often recited first, and then the text is repeated in the local language.

Zoroastrianism had a great deal of influence on Judaism and Christianity, giving rise to such concepts as the soul, heaven and hell, the savior (one who will show people the way to heaven), resurrection (rising from the dead), final judgment, and others. For example, Zoroastrians believe that the soul, or *urvan*, is given three days to meditate after death. If good thoughts outweigh the bad, the soul is admitted to heaven; if the bad outweighs the good, the soul is sent to hell. Another important concept in Zoroastrianism is that the world passes through three phases. The first is creation. The second, the present world, is one in which good and evil are mixed but people's good actions and thoughts are

helping lead the world to a heavenly ideal. In the final state, good and evil will be separated, all will be pure and good, and even the souls that have been sent to hell will be freed.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Avesta in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*:

- The excerpt begins with Yasna 29 and refers to the Ox-Creator. At the time of Zarathushtra, cattle were very important to survival. Every part of the cattle could be used for food, clothing, or other purposes. People were very dependent on cattle, and the animals, in turn, were also dependent on the people for their well-being. The Ox-Creator, representing the most valued creature of the time, asks Ahura Mazda for protection from the surrounding violence.
- The Daevas are demon spirits who follow Angra Mainya, or Ahriman, the Devil. They have “rushed together to Violence.” Zarathushtra taught that there was both a good and a bad and that people could choose the good. The Daevas did not choose correctly.
- To fight against the Daevas, one needs to exercise Asha, which includes truth, order, and discipline. Zarathushtra is telling his followers that by this behavior, they can choose good and avoid joining the Daevas in hell.

• • •

Excerpt from the Avesta in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*

Ahunavaiti Gatha

Yasna 29

1. Unto you **wailed** the Ox-soul, “For whom did ye fashion me? Who created me? Violence and **rapine** (and) savagery **hath oppressed** me, and outrage and might. I have no other herdsman than you; prepare for me then the blessings of pasture.”
2. Then the Ox-Creator asked of the Right: “**Hast** thou a judge for the Ox, that ye may be able to appoint him **zealous tendance** as well as **fodder**? Whom do ye will to be his lord, who may drive off violence together with the followers of the Lie?” . . .

Wailed: Cried.

Rapine: Plunder, the use of force to take property, especially in time of war.

Hath: Has.

Oppressed: To dominate harshly or by force.

Hast: Have.

Zealous: Enthusiastic.

Tendance: The act of taking care or being in charge.

Fodder: An animal's food.

Avesta, as reproduced in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*

The Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda is depicted on the façade of the Old Majlis Building in Tebran, Iran.

Zarathushtra wrote the Gathas in praise of Ahura Mazda. © ROGER WOOD/
CORBIS.



Twain: Two.

Aright: Correctly.

Infatuation: An intense and usually brief obsession for an idea or person.

Enfeeble: Weaken.

Dominion: Control, authority.

Karapan and the Usij: Classes of priests.

Kavi: A king of ancient Iraq.

Yasna 30

6. Between these **twain** the Daevas also chose not **aright**, for **infatuation** came upon them as they took counsel together, so that they chose the Worst Thought. Then they rushed together to Violence, that they might **enfeeble** the world of men. . . .

Ushtavaiti Gatha

Yasna 44

20. Have the Daevas ever exercised good **dominion**? And I ask of those who see how for the Daevas' sake the **Karapan and the Usij** give cattle to violence, and how the **Kavi** made them continually to mourn, instead of taking care that they make the pastures prosper through Right. . . .

Spentamainyush Gatha

Yasna 48

7. Violence must be put down! against cruelty make a stand, ye who would make sure of the reward of Good Thought through Right, to whose company the holy man belongs. His dwelling place shall be in thy House, O Ahura. . . .

12. These shall be the deliverers of the provinces, who **exert** themselves, O Good Thought in their action, O **Asha**, to fulfill their duty, face to face with thy command, O Mazda. For these are the appointed **smiters** of Violence.

Exert: Make an effort.

Asha: Holiness, order, truth, righteousness.

Smiters: Those who strike hard.

Prevail: Win out, prove to have greater influence.

Yasna 49

4. They who make the increase of violence and cruelty with their tongues, the foes of cattle-nurture among its friends; whose ill deeds **prevail**, not their good deeds: these (shall be) in the house of the Daevas, (the place for) the Self of the Liar.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Initially, Zarathushtra had only a single follower to his religion, a cousin. The local Iranian leaders felt threatened by Zarathustra's religious ideas and their emphasis on peace and right conduct and the rejection of overly complex rituals. Even the local people resisted his ideas because Zarathushtra reduced the Daevas from demon gods to mere workers on behalf of Angra Mainyu.

After twelve years of trying to persuade the people to accept his ideas, Zarathushtra left Persia. He found refuge in Bactria, an ancient Greek kingdom in ancient Afghanistan and Tajikistan. There, King Vish-taspa and his queen, Hutosa, heard Zarathushtra debate local religious leaders and decided to adopt his ideas. They made Zoroastrianism the official religion of the kingdom.

Did you know . . .

- The most prominent symbol of Zoroastrianism is the *Faravabar*, sometimes spelled *Farobar*. The name comes from an Avestan word *fravarane*, meaning "I choose," suggesting the idea that a person freely chooses to follow the religion. The *Faravabar* depicts a bird with its wings spread and a human figure appearing to sit atop it.
- Because of their emphasis on "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds," Zoroastrians make significant contributions to charity and have a reputation for honesty and tolerance for other religious beliefs.
- A strong similarity between Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is that a savior, in Zoroastrianism a descendant of Zarathushtra called Saoshyant, will be born of a virgin (a woman

who has never had sex). He will raise the dead and evaluate everyone's life in the final judgment.

Consider the following . . .

- Summarize the resemblances you see between Zoroastrianism's belief in "Good thoughts, good speech, good deeds" and the ethical codes of other religious traditions you may be familiar with.
- Explain specifically how violence runs counter to the Zoroastrian faith.
- Explain what a Zoroastrian would mean by "good mind" and how a good mind is part of the religion's belief system.

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“The Philosophy of Atheism”

“*The Philosophy of Atheism*,” available online from Spunk Library at <http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/goldman/sp001502.html>

By Emma Goldman

Published in 1916 in *Mother Earth*

“It is the earth, not heaven, which man must rescue if he is truly to be saved.”

Emma Goldman (1869–1940) is remembered as one of the most outspoken American atheists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An atheist is someone who does not believe in God. She rejected belief in such religious ideas as heaven, hell, sin, and other principles, and she outlined her views in a 1916 essay called “The Philosophy of Atheism.” Goldman was also a prominent anarchist. Anarchism is a political theory that considers government to be unnecessary and even harmful. Anarchists call for a society based on voluntary cooperation and free association of individuals and groups.

Goldman was a controversial figure whose beliefs were not very popular in the United States of the early twentieth century. She was in favor of equality of the sexes, sexual freedom, birth control, and labor organization into unions, as well as many other issues that were considered radical at that time. “The Philosophy of Atheism” described another of Goldman’s controversial beliefs: that God did not exist. A philosophy is an idea or theory that gives greater understanding to how the world works. Goldman’s philosophy first appeared in the journal *Mother Earth*, which she founded. She later gave speeches on this philosophy.

In addition to stating in her essay that God did not exist, Goldman believed that religion could not provide people with a guide for living. Religion, she said, was designed to make man dependent and without

Weak Versus Strong Atheism

Sometimes the terms “weak atheist” and “strong atheist” are used to refer to different types of atheists. Weak atheists do not find the evidence for the existence of gods persuasive. While theists say that deities, or gods, do exist, weak atheists do not necessarily disagree. Some simply hold no opinion on the matter. Others more actively have doubts that gods exist. They consider it likely that gods do not exist because no one can prove that they do. In this respect, weak atheism is similar to agnosticism, or the view that gods might or might not exist but no one can know for certain.

In contrast to weak atheism is strong atheism. Strong atheism describes the position Emma Goldman takes in her essay, “The Philosophy of Atheism.” Strong atheists positively deny that deities exist. Goldman states that it is only by rejecting the idea of God altogether that mankind can break away from the crutch of religion and achieve true freedom. Strong atheists tend to believe in rationalism, the philosophy that truth can be reached through human reason and factual analysis rather than through religious faith or the teachings of a church.

Strong atheists are critical of any belief system that demands from people faith or simple acceptance instead of relying on reasoning and critical thinking. Atheists of this type, including Goldman, argue that religion and belief in God are not just irrational, or unreasonable, but also destructive and harmful because of the influence of religious institutions over people’s lives. Atheists believe that only by freeing themselves from religious beliefs can people likewise free themselves from superstition and realize their true potential.

free will (self-determination). Therefore, any guidelines from religion on how to live life also had this same aim. Goldman also discussed what philosophers call the “problem of evil.” This says that a powerful, kind, and loving god would have arranged the world in a way that reflects his (or her) goodness, and would not have allowed evil to exist. Belief in such a god, Goldman said, ignores the existence of evil and suffering in the world. It is in part by this reasoning that Goldman concluded that a loving god does not exist.

Goldman believed that only humans could create a world in which people live lives of freedom and peace rather than lives of suffering, war, and mistreatment. Guides for living have to come from universal principles of social justice rather than from religion and its sacred writings. Social justice is the belief that all people should receive the same rights, from opportunities in education and economy, to equality in treatment. Goldman states that the solution to the problems that torment mankind is with man himself, not through reliance on a divine being. “No, not the gods, but MAN must rise in his mighty wrath. He . . . himself, must undertake to usher in justice upon the earth.” In other words, only humans, with their own passion for justice and humanity, can solve the problems of injustice in the world.

Emma Goldman was born in Russia but in her teens immigrated to the United States. She was drawn to anarchist beliefs by the events surrounding the Haymarket Square bombing in Chicago, Illinois, in 1886. During a workers’ rally a bomb was tossed into the crowd, killing a number of policemen and wounding many more, including bystanders. Many people, including Goldman,

believed that the four men who were later hanged for the crime had been convicted because of their political views rather than by the evidence.

In the decades that followed, Goldman dedicated herself to revolutionary ideals, equality of the sexes, and the rights of workers. She was imprisoned for distributing literature about birth control at a time when it was illegal to do so. In 1892 she came under suspicion because the police believed she had taken part in an attempt to assassinate the wealthy industrialist Henry Clay Finch. An industrialist is someone who owns or operates a manufacturing business. She was later a vocal opponent of U.S. entry into World War I (1914–18; a war in which Great Britain, France, the United States and their allies defeated Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their allies). After she was convicted of openly opposing the military draft, she was sentenced to prison, stripped of her U.S. citizenship, and deported to the Soviet Union.

Consistent with her social beliefs and her distrust of institutions, which she believed robbed people of their freedom, Goldman was a firm atheist. Her views were by no means new. Atheism, from the Greek word *atheos*, meaning “without gods,” can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. For many centuries, people who opposed the official religion of the country in which they lived faced charges of atheism and were often executed for their beliefs. It was not until the dawn of the Age of Reason in Europe (roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) that philosophers in such countries as France, Germany, Russia, and England began to take openly atheistic positions. These views were still often considered criminal by the state. One of the most prominent Age of Reason atheists was Francis Bacon (1561–1626), a British philosopher who wrote: “Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety [devotion], to laws, to reputation; all of which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, even if religion vanished; but religious superstition dismounts [takes down] all these and erects an absolute monarchy in the minds of men.” This is a viewpoint very similar to Goldman’s, who argues that people have to provide their own guides for living, not take them from religious beliefs.

Things to remember while reading “The Philosophy of Atheism”:

- Atheism is a philosophy, a set of ideas about understanding the universe and the ways to live appropriately. Philosophies can

“The Philosophy of Atheism”



Emma Goldman believed that people needed to rely on themselves to improve their lives rather than putting their faith in a God. Only humans, she said, could create the changes they sought.

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address the workings of nature, the meaning of life, and religion, as well as other topics in the arts and sciences. Atheism’s philosophy is that there is no God and humankind must rely only on itself to improve human life and solve the world’s problems.

- Goldman’s argument in favor of atheism looks to science as the source of reason, rather than to faith. As man’s knowledge of science and the natural world has increased over time, the concept of God, she says, has become more unclear. It is precisely such advances in knowledge that cause many people to doubt or deny the existence of God.
- The essay talks strongly about people giving power to themselves instead of appealing to a divine being with positive and negative qualities found in the world. By assigning powers such as punishment and reward for bad and

good behavior to a god, people lose their free will and surrender control over their lives. Goldman believes that people themselves have the power to take charge of their lives and even to help address the problems and reduce the suffering in the world.

- Religious revivals, which Goldman attacks, are large gatherings of people who come to hear compelling speakers, such as Billy Sunday (1862–1935), preach about religion. In the early twentieth century such revivals were common and resulted in many people becoming newly religious. Revivalism was responsible for a large growth in U.S. religious participation.

• • •

Excerpt from “The Philosophy of Atheism”

Exposition: Explanation.

To give an adequate **exposition** of the Philosophy of Atheism, it would be necessary to go into the historical changes of the belief in a Deity, from its earliest beginning to the present day. But that is not within the scope of the present paper. However, it is not out of place to mention, in passing, that the concept God, Supernatural Power, Spirit, Deity, or in whatever

other term the essence of Theism may have found expression, has become more indefinite and **obscure** in the course of time and progress. In other words, the God idea is growing more impersonal and **nebulous** in proportion as the human mind is learning to understand natural phenomena and in the degree that science progressively **correlates** human and social events.

God, today, no longer represents the same forces as in the beginning of His existence; neither does He direct human destiny with the same Iron hand as of **yore**. Rather does the God idea express a sort of spiritualistic **stimulus** to satisfy the **fads** and **fancies** of every shade of human weakness. In the course of human development the God idea has been forced to adapt itself to every phase of human affairs, which is perfectly **consistent** with the origin of the idea itself.

The conception of gods originated in fear and curiosity. Primitive man, unable to understand the phenomena of nature and **harassed** by them, saw in every terrifying **manifestation** some **sinister** force **expressly** directed against him; and as ignorance and fear are the parents of all **superstition**, the troubled fancy of primitive man wove the God idea.

Very **aptly**, the world-renowned atheist and anarchist, Michael Bakunin, says in his great work *God and the State*: “All religions, with their gods, their **demi-gods**, and their prophets, their **messiahs** and their saints, were created by the prejudiced fancy of men who had not **attained** the full development and full possession of their **faculties**. . . . The history of religions, of the birth, grandeur, and the decline of the gods who had succeeded one another in human belief, is nothing, therefore, but the development of the collective intelligence and conscience of mankind. As fast as they discovered, in the course of their historically-progressive advance, either in themselves or in external nature, a quality, or even any great **defect** whatever, they **attributed** it to their gods, after having exaggerated and enlarged it beyond measure, after the manner of children, by an act of their religious fancy. . . . The idea of God implies the **abdication** of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive **negation** of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice.”

Thus the God idea . . . has dominated humanity and will continue to do so until man will raise his head to the sunlit day, unafraid and with an awakened will to himself. In proportion as man learns to realize himself and mold his own destiny theism becomes **superfluous**. How far man will be able to find his relation to his fellows will depend entirely upon how much he can outgrow his dependence upon God. . . .

It is the earth, not heaven, which man must rescue if he is truly to be saved. . . .

Obscure: Difficult to understand.

Nebulous: Unclear.

Correlates: Makes a relationship between.

Yore: Olden days.

Stimulus: Something that encourages an activity or interest.

Fads: Fashions or trends that are popular for a short period of time.

Fancies: Whims or sudden likings.

Consistent: In agreement.

Harassed: Bothered, disturbed.

Manifestation: Appearance.

Sinister: Threatening.

Expressly: Deliberately.

Superstition: False idea.

Aptly: Appropriately.

Demi-gods: Beings who are part human and part god.

Messiahs: Those who rescue or save from harm.

Attained: Achieved.

Faculties: Mental abilities.

Defect: Flaw.

Attributed: Credited.

Abdication: Giving up.

Negation: Denial.

Superfluous: Unnecessary.

“The Philosophy of Atheism”

Billy Sunday: A well-known American baseball player turned evangelist, or an enthusiastic preacher of Christianity.

Squalor: Dirtiness.

Jahve or Jehovah: A name for the god of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Wrath: Anger.

Deceived: Tricked.

Emissaries:
Representatives.

Usher: Lead.

Oracles: Predictions of the future.

Mean: Lowly.

Degradation: Poverty, terrible life conditions.

Paradox: Contradiction.

Speculation: Guesswork.

Demonstrable: Provable.

Immolation: Killing as a sacrifice, usually by burning.

Ascertain: Learn.

Futile: Useless.

Omnipotence: All-powerfulness.

It is characteristic of theistic “tolerance” that no one really cares what the people believe in, just so they believe or pretend to believe. To accomplish this end, the crudest . . . methods are being used. Religious . . . revivals with **Billy Sunday** as their champion—methods which must outrage every refined sense, and which in their effect upon the ignorant and curious often tend to create a mild state of insanity. . . . All these frantic efforts find approval and support from the earthly powers. . . .

Consciously or unconsciously, most theists see in gods and devils, heaven and hell; reward and punishment, a whip to lash the people into obedience, meekness and contentment. . . .

Have not all theists painted their Deity as the god of love and goodness? Yet after thousands of years of such preachments the gods remain deaf to the agony of the human race. Confucius cares not for the poverty, **squalor** and misery of people of China. Buddha remains undisturbed in his philosophical indifference to the famine and starvation of outraged Hindoos; **Jahve** continues deaf to the bitter cry of Israel; while Jesus refuses to rise from the dead against his Christians who are butchering each other.

The burden of all song and praise “unto the Highest” has been that God stands for justice and mercy. Yet injustice among men is ever on the increase; the outrages committed against the masses in this country alone would seem enough to overflow the very heavens. But where are the gods to make an end to all these horrors, these wrongs, this inhumanity to man? No, not the gods, but MAN must rise in his mighty **wrath**. He, **deceived** by all the deities, betrayed by their **emissaries**, he, himself, must undertake to **usher** in justice upon the earth. . . .

The philosophy of Atheism represents a concept of life without any metaphysical Beyond or Divine Regulator. It is the concept of an actual, real world with its liberating, expanding and beautifying possibilities, as against an unreal world, which, with its spirits, **oracles**, and **mean** contentment has kept humanity in helpless **degradation**.

It may seem a wild **paradox**, and yet it is pathetically true, that this real, visible world and our life should have been so long under the influence of metaphysical **speculation**, rather than of physical **demonstrable** forces. Under the lash of the theistic idea, this earth has served no other purpose than as a temporary station to test man’s capacity for **immolation** to the will of God. But the moment man attempted to **ascertain** the nature of that will, he was told that it was utterly **futile** for “finite human intelligence” to get beyond the all-powerful infinite will. Under the terrific weight of this **omnipotence**, man has been bowed into the dust—a will-less creature, broken and sweating in the dark. The triumph of the philosophy of Atheism is to free man from the nightmare of gods. . . . Again and again the light of

"The Philosophy of Atheism"

Goldman's approach towards religion was first revealed in her journal Mother Earth. Her controversial opinions were not always received well by the public. LABADIE COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LIBRARY.

MOTHER EARTH
BULLETIN

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gift of Agnes Douglas
Freedom of Criticism and Opinion
EMMA GOLDMAN

Under the "Trading With the Enemy Act," the Postmaster General has become the absolute dictator over the press. Not only is it impossible now for any publication with character to be circulated through the mails, but every other channel, such as express, freight, newstands, and even distribution has been stopped. As MOTHER EARTH will not comply with these regulations and will not appear in an emasculated form, it prefers to take a long needed rest until the world has regained its sanity.

The MOTHER EARTH BULLETIN has been decided upon largely as a means of keeping in touch with our friends and subscribers, and for the purpose of keeping them posted about our movements and activities.

FORBIDDEN

DEDICATION

This is the wee Babe of Mother Earth. It was conceived during the greatest human crisis—born into a tragic, disintegrating world. To give it life, Mother Earth had to choose death, yet out of Death must come Life again. The Babe is frail of body, but it comes with a heritage of strength, determination and idealism to be worthy of her who gave it birth.

To bring a child into the world these days is almost an unpardonable luxury. But the child of Mother Earth comes to you for a share of the beautiful love and devotion you gave its mother. Assured of that, it will make a brave effort to Live and to Do.—E. G.

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reason has dispelled the theistic nightmare, but poverty, misery and fear have recreated the phantoms. . . . Atheism, on the other hand, in its philosophic aspect refuses allegiance not merely to a definite concept of God, but it refuses all servitude to the God idea, and opposes the theistic principle as such. Gods in their individual function are not half as **pernicious** as the principle of theism which represents the belief in a supernatural, or even omnipotent, power to rule the earth and man upon it. It is the **absolutism**

Pernicious: Harmful.

Absolutism: Unquestionable.

“The Philosophy of Atheism”

Emancipation: Freeing.

Fetters: Restraints.

Consciousness: Awareness.

Fidelity: Faithfulness, devotion.

Vile: Evil.

Imbued: Filled.

Hypocrisy: Insincerity, a false claim to having high principles.

Exponents: Supporters.

Conditioned: Made strong or readied.

Precepts: Guidelines.

Vitality: Strength.

Disintegrating: Decaying.

Suffices: Is enough.

Sterility: Unproductiveness.

Affirmation: Positive statement in support.

Yea: Positive statement in support.

of theism, its pernicious influence upon humanity, its paralyzing effect upon thought and action, which Atheism is fighting with all its power.

The philosophy of Atheism has its root in the earth, in this life; its aim is the **emancipation** of the human race from all Godheads, be they Judaic, Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhistic, Brahministic, or what not. Mankind has been punished long and heavily for having created its gods; nothing but pain and persecution have been man's lot since gods began. There is but one way out of this blunder: Man must break his **fetters** which have chained him to the gates of heaven and hell, so that he can begin to fashion out of his reawakened and illumined **consciousness** a new world upon earth. . . .

Atheism is already helping to free man from his dependence upon punishment and reward as the heavenly bargain-counter for the poor in spirit.

Do not all theists insist that there can be no morality, no justice, honesty or **fidelity** without the belief in a Divine Power? Based upon fear and hope, such morality has always been a **vile** product, **imbued** partly with self-righteousness, partly with **hypocrisy**. As to truth, justice, and fidelity, who have been their brave **exponents** and daring proclaimers? Nearly always the godless ones: the Atheists; they lived, fought, and died for them. They knew that justice, truth, and fidelity are not **conditioned** in heaven, but that they are related to and interwoven with the tremendous changes going on in the social and material life of the human race. . . .

Thoughtful people are beginning to realize that moral **precepts**, imposed upon humanity through religious terror, have become stereotyped and have therefore lost all **vitality**. A glance at life today, at its **disintegrating** character, its conflicting interests with their hatreds, crimes, and greed, **suffices** to prove the **sterility** of theistic morality. . . .

Atheism in its negation of gods is at the same time the strongest **affirmation** of man, and through man, the eternal **yea** to life, purpose, and beauty.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Goldman's views did not fall on deaf ears. In 1925 the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism was formed to attack all religious beliefs by distributing atheistic literature. Then, in 1929, a successor organization was formed, the League of Militant Atheists. This organization, which claimed to have 5.5 million members, worked

actively to weaken the influence of religion. It established centers where lectures on atheism could be presented and tried to place atheists as university professors. In the later twentieth century American Atheists, Inc. (1963) and Atheists United (1982) were formed to protect the civil rights of atheists and promote the constitutional doctrine of separation of church and state, that religion and the government should operate separately from one another.

Did you know . . .

- J. Edgar Hoover (1895–1972), the first director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), called Emma Goldman “the most dangerous woman in America.”
- In 1901 Goldman was arrested and charged for having planned the attempt by Leon Czolgosz (1873–1901) to assassinate President William McKinley (1843–1901; served 1896–1901) on September 6 of that year. She was held in jail but later released because of lack of evidence.
- Although Emma Goldman was convicted of crimes and served three separate prison terms, many people regard her as a heroine, especially because of her opposition to war, her defense of the rights of workers, and her belief in the equality of the sexes. Institutions such as schools and family-planning clinics are named after her.
- Scientists are more likely to be atheists than are people in other professions. In 1996 a survey found that about 60 percent of scientists expressed disbelief or doubt about the existence of God. In contrast, in a 2001 survey of Americans, less than 0.5 percent identified themselves as atheists.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain why, in Goldman’s view, religion cannot provide people with a useful guide to living.
- Compare how atheists examine the “problem of evil” with the way this problem is examined in a religious tradition you may be familiar with.
- Goldman refers to organized religion as “the most powerful and lucrative [profitable] industry in the world.” Explain what she means by this statement, and express agreement or disagreement.

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Compiled between 1400 BCE and 90 CE

“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

The Bible is the sacred text of Christianity. It is composed of two major parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the Jewish sacred scripture, but “Old Testament” is a Christian term, and Jews refer to their scripture as the Tanakh. It is also often called the Hebrew Bible. While Christians believe in the authority of the Old Testament, the core of Christianity is found in the New Testament, which features accounts of the life and teachings of the religion’s founder, Jesus Christ (c. 6 BCE–c. 33 CE). These accounts are broken up into “books” named after important early figures in Christianity and contain chapters. The biblical book of Matthew contains what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 through 7. The Sermon on the Mount records the actual teachings of Jesus Christ. A shorter version of the sermon also can be found in the sixth chapter of the book of Luke.

Jesus’s political and spiritual roles

The word *Christ* comes from a Greek word meaning something like “the chosen one.” The Jewish people of the time of Christ (around the first century CE) looked forward to the arrival of a messiah, a savior who would be the last of God’s prophets. The coming of this messiah was foretold in the Jewish scripture. Most people believed that the long-awaited messiah would establish a kingdom on Earth. They believed

that he would free the Jewish people from the Roman Empire, which ruled the region during the time that Christ lived. They saw their expected messiah as an earthly ruler who would lead the Jewish people and make them strong again. Christians regard Christ as the expected messiah. Christ, however, taught a very different message in the Sermon on the Mount than the one the Jews were waiting for. He made clear to his followers that he was on Earth to establish God's heavenly kingdom, not an earthly kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount was a guide to earthly living for his Christian followers. Those who followed Christ's teachings could earn a place in the heavenly kingdom.

The basic message that Christ taught was that to enter the kingdom of heaven a person had to do more than simply follow the letter of the law or practice traditional rituals. Christ taught that a person's inward spirit, outlook, and attitude, towards both God and other people, were more important. As he said in verse 17 of chapter 5 in the book of Matthew, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Through his preaching, Christ was creating a new guide for living for his followers, one based not on legal traditions but on the state of a person's heart.

The Sermon on the Mount contains some of the verses of the New Testament that are most often quoted by Christians. One example is the third verse of chapter 5: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In this verse, Christ is saying that people should be humble ("poor in spirit"). Only those with an attitude of humility in their hearts can reach heaven. He calls on his followers to be peacemakers and to endure persecution from those who are not ready to accept Christ's message. Persecution is mistreatment, often involving violence. He sets a high standard for his followers, telling them to be meek and merciful. He urges them to be simple and trusting and to avoid outward shows of holiness. He concludes chapter 5 by saying, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Separating Christianity from Judaism In chapter 5 of the book of Matthew, Christ offers some examples of how his standards differ from those of the Jewish law. In verses 21 through 24, he says that it is not enough simply to follow the law not to kill, which is one of the laws contained in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. In Christ's view, reconciliation, meaning compromising and reaching an understanding with

others, and forgiveness are more important. He considers the example of someone who goes to the temple (a Jewish house of worship) with an offering but does so while he feels anger against a fellow human being. He tells such a person to “go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Christ’s emphasis is always on love and forgiveness.

The Sermon on the Mount is rich with statements Christ made that express the essence, or the core and the heart, of Christianity. Chapter 6, verses 9 through 13, contain the well-known “Lord’s Prayer,” a prayer to the Father in Heaven that is part of most Christian services. This prayer is a simple expression of belief in God and a request for help in becoming a forgiving person. Another often-quoted verse is the first verse of chapter 7, “Judge not that ye not be judged.” For Christ, the statement meant that one should look to the state of his or her own heart rather than worrying about the behavior of others. He also urges that people should treat others as they would wish to be treated themselves.

Things to remember while reading the excerpt from the Bible:

- Although Christ was the founder of Christianity, it must be remembered that he was born as a Jew, lived as a Jew, and was educated in the traditions and laws of Judaism contained in the Jewish scripture. During his sermon, he makes reference to the “scribes and Pharisees.” These are the names of sects, or subgroups, of early Judaism, but, more important, they serve as representatives of a strict obedience to tradition, law, and ritual, as outlined in the Old Testament.
- The numbers in the excerpt follow the usual method for identifying passages from the Bible. For example, Matthew 5:3 refers to the third verse of the fifth chapter of Matthew. A verse generally, but not always, corresponds to a sentence.
- Christ makes reference to the ancient Mesopotamian law of Hammurabi, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” as behavior that is not acceptable. The Sermon on the Mount urges Christians to act with kindness, charity, and forgiveness towards all, even if those others cause harm. Christ did not just urge his followers to behave this way. He himself acted in accordance with his words, as the story of his life told through the New Testament reveals.

The Ten Commandments

Christians regard the Sermon on the Mount as, in a sense, a New Testament version of the Ten Commandments. These commandments, the basic requirements of Judaism and Christianity, are found in chapter 20 of Exodus, the second book of the Jewish scripture. They were given to the prophet Moses as part of God's "covenant," or agreement, with the Israelites, the Jewish people.

The Ten Commandments became the basis for all Jewish law. They provided Jews with a guide to ethical, or moral, living. The first four commandments, verses 2 through 11, deal with people's relationship with God. The remaining six commandments, verses 12 through 17, have to do with people's relationships with others, covering such matters as family relationships; regard for human life and honesty; and standards for sex, property, speech, and thought.

20:2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. [slavery]

20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven [carved] image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity [sin] of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

20:6 And shewing [showing] mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

20:8 Remember the sabbath day [day of worship], to keep it holy.

20:9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

20:10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed [made holy] it.

20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

20:13 Thou shalt not kill.

20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery [sex with someone other than one's wife or husband].

20:15 Thou shalt not steal.

20:16 Thou shalt not bear false witness [lie] against thy neighbour.

20:17 Thou shalt not covet [desire] thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

"The Second Book of Moses: Called Exodus" (chapter 20). Available online from the Internet Sacred Text archive at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/kjv/exo020.htm>.



Excerpt from the Bible

The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

Chapter 5

5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

5:2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

5:4 Blessed are they that that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5:5 Blessed are the **meek** for they shall inherit the earth.

5:6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after **righteousness** for they shall be filled.

5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall **revile** you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his **savour, wherewith** shall it be salted? it is **thenceforth** good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be **trodden** under foot of men.

5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

5:18 For **verily** I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one **jot** or one **tittle** shall in no **wise** pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Meek: Humble.

Righteousness: Decency, honesty.

Revile: Insult, abuse.

Savour or savor: Flavor, taste.

Wherewith: With what.

Thenceforth: From that time on.

Trodden: Stepped on.

Verily: Truly.

Jot: Bit, speck.

Tittle: A small part.

Wise: Way.

Ought: Anything.

Adversary: Enemy, opponent.

In the way: In company.

Thence: From there.

Uttermost: Greatest amount.

Farthing: A former British coin, worth about a quarter of a penny.

Lust: Long for, desire.

Forswear: Be guilty of lying or giving false evidence or of breaking an oath.

5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

5:21 Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: . . .

5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath **ought** against thee;

5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

5:25 Agree with thine **adversary** quickly, whiles thou art **in the way** with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

5:26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out **thence**, till thou hast paid the **uttermost farthing**.

5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to **lust** after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. . . .

5:33 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not **forswear** thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

5:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

5:35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. . . .

5:38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth

5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

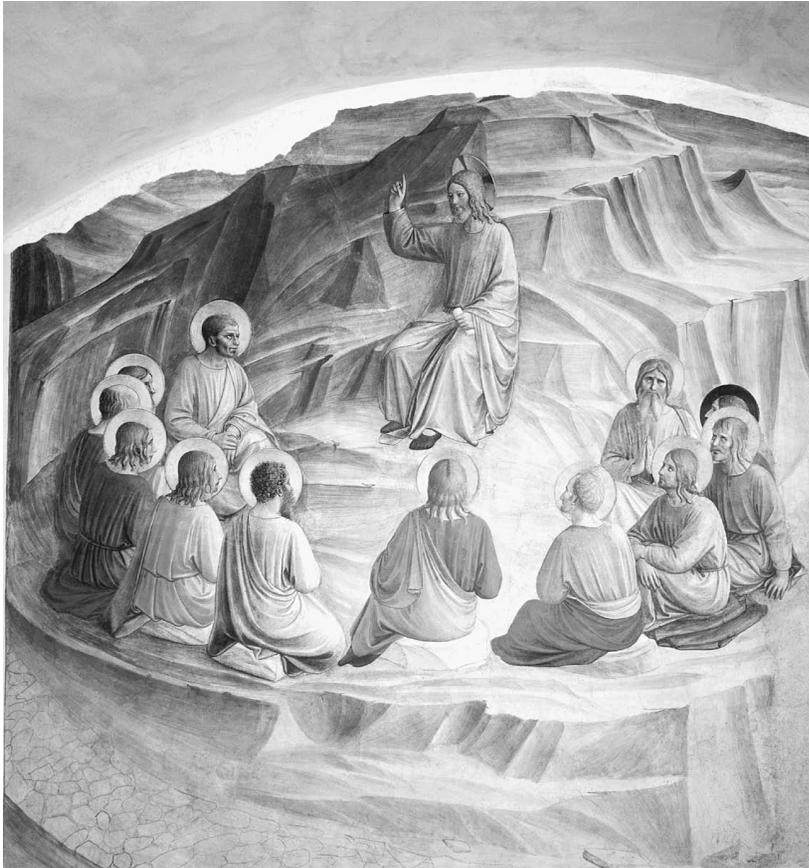
5:40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. . . .

5:42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. . . .



Jesus shares his Sermon on the Mount with his apostles. In the sermon, he reveals that people should show compassion, understanding, and forgiveness towards one another.

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5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Chapter 6

6:1 Take heed that ye do not your **alms** before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. . . .

6:3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

6:4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

6:5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the **hypocrites** are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. . . .

6:6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. . . .

Alms: Money or other contributions made to aid the poor.

Hypocrites: People who claim to have high principles and beliefs but do not.

Bible

Trespases: Sins, wrongdoings.

Corrupt: To spoil or contaminate.

Mammon: Riches as an evil influence or an object of worship.

Raiment: Clothing.

Arrayed: Clothed.

Metete: Give out or deal out.

Mote: A small fragment of wood.

6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

6:10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

6:11 Give us this day our daily bread.

6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

6:14 For if ye forgive men their **trespases**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespases, neither will your Father forgive your trespases. . . .

6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth **corrupt**, and where thieves break through and steal:

6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . .

6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and **mammon**.

6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than **raiment**? . . .

6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not **arrayed** like one of these.

6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? . . .

6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

6:34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Chapter 7

7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

7:2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye **metete**, it shall be measured to you again.

7:3 And why beholdest thou the **mote** that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

7:4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

7:5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. . . .

7:7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: . . .

7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. . . .

7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. . . .

7:28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his **doctrine**:

7:29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

• • •

What happened next . . .

Each of the four Gospels, including Matthew, records numerous events and teachings from the life of Christ. Chapters 8 through 20 of Matthew go on to detail additional teachings of Christ and note the miracles that he performed, particularly miracles of healing. Chapter 21 tells of Christ's triumphant arrival in the city of Jerusalem. Chapters 22 through 27 describe the events surrounding his arrest, trial, and crucifixion (death by hanging on a cross). The book concludes with Chapter 28, Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Did you know . . .

- Little is known about the life of Matthew. In fact, the Gospel does not identify him as the author of the book. About all that is known is that he had been a tax collector for the Roman Empire before he became a disciple of Jesus Christ. This made him a social outcast. He wrote the book sometimes between the years 50 and 100, and the main source of his information was Peter, another of the apostles. An apostle is a close follower of Christ.
- The Bible exists in numerous translations. The excerpt given here is taken from the King James Version of the Bible. This was a translation made especially for King James I of England early in the seventeenth century. It is thought of as the most "literary"

Doctrine: A set of guidelines.

translation of the Bible, meaning that the language is suited more to literature than to everyday speech.

- Christians often refer to verses 3 through 11 of Chapter 5 as the Beatitudes. The word *beatitude* comes from a Latin word that essentially means “happy.” The word has come to refer specifically to the “Blessed are” statements that Christ made at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. By following these precepts, or guidelines, a person can become happy by entering the kingdom of God.

Consider the following . . .

- Explain Christ’s overall purpose in giving the Sermon on the Mount.
- Summarize how Christ’s interpretation of law differed from that of the larger Jewish community.
- An often quoted passage from the Sermon on the Mount is “who-soever shall smite [hit] thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Explain the meaning of this teaching.

For More Information

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