

Hinduism

Brahman

According to the monistic/panentheistic theologies of Hinduism, Brahman (the greater Self or God) is in the highest sense One and nondifferentiated from the world and its beings (hence 'nondualist'). In connoting Brahman's absolutely unparalleled nature, it is also called *Parambrahman*, where the Sanskrit prefix *param-* denotes "ultimate". Brahman is also sometimes seen as synonymous with the concept of *Paramatma* (Supreme Spirit).

Beyond time and space, both immanent and transcendent, *Brahman* is often described succinctly as *sacchidananda*, meaning 'Truth-Consciousness-Bliss', not only possessing the qualities but also being their very essence. Advaita philosophy declares that ultimately Brahman (the impersonal God) is beyond mere intellectual description and can be understood only through direct spiritual experience, where the 'knower' and the 'known' are subsumed into the act of 'knowing'. The goal is to "wake up" and realize that one's atman, or soul, is really identical to Brahman, the uber-soul.

On the other hand, monotheistic (typically Dvaita Vedanta) and related devotional (bhakti) schools, understand Brahman as a Supreme Being who possesses personality. In these conceptions, Brahman is associated with Vishnu, Shiva or Shakti depending on the sect. Brahman is seen as fundamentally separate from its reliant souls (humanity) so, in achieving liberation, individual beings experience God as an independent being, a living personality, and retain their individual identities.

Atman

Most Hindus believe that the spirit or soul, the true "self" of every person, called the *ātman*, is eternal; as is Brahman, which may be seen as either the greater Self or as God, depending on the outlook. According to the Advaita (non-dualist) schools of philosophy, the individual self and greater Self are not fundamentally distinct. They argue that the core spirit, or "Self", of every individual person is identical with the greater Spirit. Referring to 'brahman' unequivocally as God may reveal problems of semantics, where certain traditions understand God to be a motivating agency with personality and others that it is without personality and form, beyond any sort of definition and thus non-equivalent to the 'God' as understood by dualist schools of Hinduism or Abrahamic understandings of God. According to the Upanishads, whoever gains insight into the depths of his own nature and becomes fully aware of the *ātman* as the innermost core of his own Self will realize his identity with Brahman and will thereby reach Moksha. According to the Dvaita (dualist) school, (often associated with Vaishnavism), the *ātman* is not identical with Brahman, which is seen as being God with personality (though not limited); instead, the *ātman* is dependent on God. Moksha depends on the cultivation of love for God and on God's grace.

The Basis of the Caste and Class System

When you study the Hindu religion, you'll discover that it recognizes four distinct stages in a person's life. Basically, these stages translate to student, householder, retirement and ascetism. Indian society in general was divided into four classes, which are referred to as **Varnas**. These four classes consist of **Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras**. Starting at the top and working towards the bottom of the classes, the Brahmins consist of priests and teachers. Next in line are the Kshatriyas, which consist of kings, nobles and warriors. The Vaishyas are further down the class system, consisting of businessmen, merchants and farmers. The Shudras, which consist of laborers and servants, are at the bottom of the class hierarchy. Over time, these classes evolved into today's rigid caste system. Although there have been numerous reform movements throughout the 19th century and continuing into the early 20th century, the caste and class systems are still quite central to India's society. Although the more liberal nature of today's modern Hinduism has tempered this caste and class system somewhat, it's still an extremely important factor in the average India citizen's life. These factors tend to become even more important in areas such as politics, social norms, and marriage.

The first three varnas are known as the twice-born, all of whom undergo a ceremony in their youth admitting them into high status. The varna caste division excluded the Untouchables, who were and are below the Shudras in any ranking, despised because they engaged in occupations that were considered unclean and polluting. Untouchable castes became a category as *avarnas*, without varna, probably sometime after the fourth century CE. The untouchables (*śūdrās*) are mentioned in the Upanishads and early Buddhist literature, as a "fifth caste" resulting from the polluting contact of Shudra males and Brahmana females.

The Importance of Hierarchy

In India, the overall concept of hierarchy is seen in every kind of relationship. This strict hierarchy system is considered to be absolutely vital to the overall maintenance of social order. For example, teachers are referred to as gurus, and are viewed in schools as the ultimate source of knowledge. In the family, the father is considered to be the family's leader. In the world of business, the boss is viewed as being ultimately responsible. Even in the case of family and friends, hierarchy and social order are extremely important. You'll even find that hierarchy plays a role in the case of total strangers.



Hinduism

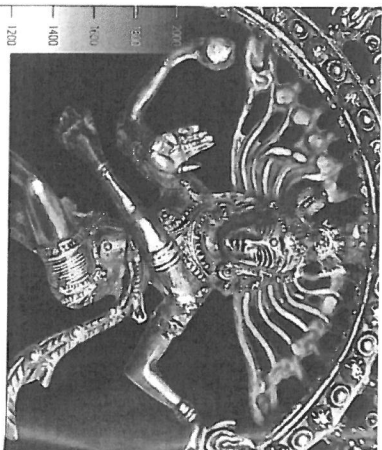
The name **Hinduism** was invented by us Europeans for Indian religion. In reality it does not denote a single Indian religion but a whole cluster of religions, a confederation of religions.

Indians themselves usually call their religion **eternal order**.

In Sanskrit, the old classical language of India, this is *Sanatana dharmo* – a term which was very often used by Mahatma Gandhi. This central concept of **dharmo** determines everything: it means order, the law, obligation.

Order here is not a legal order but an all-embracing cosmic order which governs all life. All men and women, regardless of the caste or class to which they belong, are to observe it.

Here we are reminded of something like the **fundamental ethic** that can already be found among the Aboriginal people in Australia, a fundamental order which is there from the start, right from the beginning.



Shiva

A Hindu's FOUR CLASSIC AIMS IN LIFE

Striving for what is pleasant and the delight of the senses (*Kama*).
Striving for what is useful and attaining prosperity (*artha*).
Working for justice and virtue (*dharmo*).
Striving for liberation and redemption (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation.

The seven modern

- SOCIAL SINS of humankind**
 - Politics without principles
 - Business without morality
 - Wealth without work
 - Education without character
 - Science without humanity
 - Enjoyment without conscience
 - Religion without sacrifice
- (according to Mahatma Gandhi)

Virtues of the YOGA WAY

- Non violence, doing no harm (*a-hinso*)
 - Truthfulness (*satya*)
 - Not stealing (*a-steya*)
 - Chastity, purity of life (*brahmacharya*)
 - Lack of desire (*a-parigraha*)
- (according to Patanjali)



Mahatma Gandhi

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Vivekananda

Truth, self-control, asceticism, generosity, non-violence, constancy in virtue – these are the means of success, and not caste or family.

(from the *Mahabharata*)

One should not take what belongs to others, that is an eternal duty.

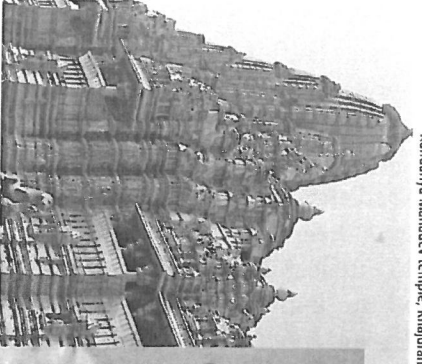
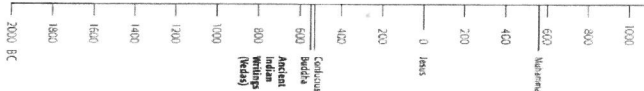
(from the *Mahabharata*)

- ▶ The union of hearts and minds and freedom from hate: I will bring you.
 - ▶ Love one another as the cow loves the calf that she has borne.
 - ▶ Let son be loyal to father and of one mind with his mother.
 - ▶ Let not a brother hate a brother, nor a sister hate a sister; unanimous, united in aims speak your words in friendliness.
- (*Atharva Veda* 3:30)
- ▶ One should speak the truth and speak it pleasantly.
 - ▶ One should not speak the truth in an unpleasant manner nor should one speak untruth because it is pleasing; this is the eternal law.
- (*Memo Smita* 4:138)

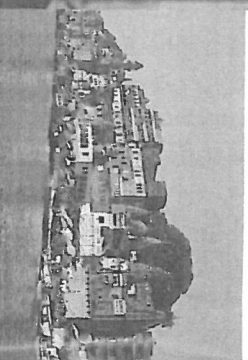
Most Hindus believe in one God, an Absolute, but depending on the path they choose they associate themselves with a quite particular divine-revealer figure, like Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Krishna or Ram. Hindus are convinced that the human soul is eternal, that it is identical with the primal ground of the world and according to the law of karma undergoes several earthly existences. Karma means that all actions have causes from earlier life and effects on later existences.

The four **Vedas** are regarded as classical sacred scriptures of the Hindus, but the Bhagavad-Gita, a book from the Mahabharata epic, is also extremely popular.

There are more than 800 million Hindus world-wide; most of them live in India.



Kandariya Mahadev temple, Khajuraho



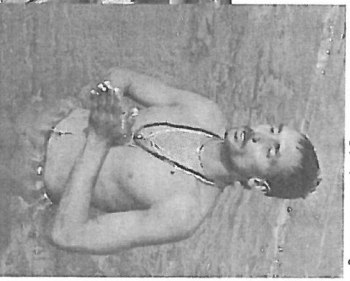
Varanasi, the city of Shiva



A Vishnavite priest



Temple frieze with tantric scenes



Morning prayer in the Ganges

BUDDHISM

- What is the main message of Buddhism?
- What was the prophecy about Siddhartha Gautama about?
- What was S.G.'s childhood like?
- Why did S.G. turn to spiritual life?
- Did strict asceticism bring him solace from suffering?
- How would you explain Nirvana?
- What does the Buddha stand for?
- How should we live to reach Nirvana?
- Could you name the Four Noble Truths?
- Did the Buddha set any pattern his followers should embrace?
- Can you "train" wisdom according to Buddhist teaching?
- Is there anything like a "church" in Buddhism?
- Who is Ashoka?

Now watch: Eastern Philosophy - The Buddha <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiBs32zN7I>

The Story of the Buddha's Enlightenment

The name 'Buddha' means 'the _____ one'. Buddhists follow the teachings of the Buddha, but do not believe him to be a god. The Buddha was born _____ Gotama in around 580BC in the village of Lumbini in _____. He was a prince born into a rich family. When he was young he had an _____ life as he was protected from the harsh _____ of sickness, suffering and death. The years passed. Siddhattha married and had a child, but found he was worried by many issues. He went outside the royal enclosure where he lived and went to _____ areas. For the first time he saw _____, sickness and _____. He also saw a holy man. He made the decision to leave his wife, his baby son and his privileged life and began to search the world to find a higher truth or _____. Siddhattha searched for a truth which would release him from the cycle of dying and _____ after death. He studied with wise teachers, practised _____ and lived a life of extreme self-denial and discipline, but still he did not find the answers he needed. The search took him six years, but Siddhattha found enlightenment whilst meditating under a _____ tree. Following this he became known as the Buddha and dedicated his life to spreading his message. The Buddha came to understand that the answer lay in the '_____': living a life which is not luxurious or deprived. Buddhists believe they can escape the cycle of life and death and reach Nirvana by following the Middle Way through the _____ Noble Truths and the _____ Path.

poor	easy	Middle Way	Nirvana	Siddhattha	realities	rebirth
Eightfold	old age	enlightened	Bodhi	Four	Nepal	death
meditation						

The Four Noble Truths

According to the scriptures, the Buddha taught that in life there exists sorrow / suffering which is caused by desire and it can be cured (ceased) by following the Noble Eightfold Path. This teaching is called the "Four Noble Truths".

- 1. Suffering:** Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.
- 2. The cause of suffering:** The desire which leads to renewed existence (rebirth) (the cycle of samsara)
- 3. The cessation of suffering:** The cessation of desire.
- 4. The way leading to the cessation of suffering:** The Noble Eightfold Path;

Middle Way

The primary guiding principle of Buddhist practice is the Middle Way which was discovered by the Buddha prior to his enlightenment (bodhi). The *Middle Way* or *Middle Path* is often described as the practice of non-extremism; a path of moderation away from the extremes of self-indulgence and opposing self-mortification. It also refers to taking a middle ground between certain metaphysical views, e.g. that things ultimately either exist or do not exist.



TAOISM

základní / konečný / nejzazší, víra, starobylý, obvykle, přesný

Taoism is an _____ tradition of philosophy and religious _____ that is deeply rooted in Chinese customs and worldview. Taoism is also referred to as Daoism, which is a more _____ way of representing in English the sound of the Chinese word. Taoism is about the Tao. This is _____ translated as *the Way*. But it's hard to say exactly what this means. The Tao is the _____ creative principle of the universe. All things are unified and connected in the Tao.

- Taoism originated in China 2000 years ago
- It is a religion of unity and opposites; Yin and Yang. The principle of Yin Yang sees the world as filled with complementary forces - action and non-action, light and dark, hot and cold, and so on
- The Tao is not God and is not worshipped. Taoism includes many deities, that are worshipped in Taoist temples, they are part of the universe and depend, like everything, on the Tao
- Taoism promotes:
 - achieving harmony or union with nature
 - the pursuit of spiritual immortality
 - being 'virtuous' (but not ostentatiously so)
 - self-development
- Taoist practices include:
 - meditation
 - feng shui
 - fortune telling
 - reading and chanting of scriptures

Before the Communist revolution fifty years ago, Taoism was one of the strongest religions in China. After a campaign to destroy non-Communist religion, however, the numbers significantly reduced, and it has become difficult to assess the statistical popularity of Taoism in the world.

Do Taoists believe in Gods? Do they prey? What is the future of Taoism in China?

Watch: EASTERN PHILOSOPHY – Confucius + EASTERN PHILOSOPHY – Lao Tzu

Relating to the Tao

Many Taoist ideas come from other Chinese schools of thought. It's not always easy to draw accurate distinctions between ideas that are fundamentally Taoist and those that Taoism took in from elsewhere, especially Buddhism. The Tao cannot be described in words. Human language can only give hints that may help the mind to form an idea. The most important thing about the Tao is how it works in the world, and how human beings relate to it. Philosophical speculation about what the Tao actually is, is less important than living in sensitive response to the Tao.

The most useful words to stimulate an idea of the Tao are found in the Tao Te Ching and Chuang Tzu:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao;

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;

The Named is the mother of all things.

.....
There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,
Which existed before Heaven and Earth.
Soundless and formless it depends on nothing and does not change.
It operates everywhere and is free from danger.

It may be considered the mother of the universe.

I do not know its name; I call it Tao.

.....

All things in the world come from being.

And being comes from non-being. (form comes from formlessness)?

Tao Te Ching

The Way is to man as rivers and lakes are to fish,
the natural condition of life.

Chuang Tzu

The Tao is not a thing

The Tao is not a thing or a substance in the conventional sense. It cannot be perceived but it can be observed in the things of the world. Although it gives rise to all being, it does not itself have being. Although it's conventional to refer to The Tao, some writers think that the "the" should be dropped because it isn't in the original Chinese term. They feel that using 'the' gives Westerners the idea that the Tao is a metaphysical reality, by which they mean a thing (in the widest sense) or an absolute being like a god. But even the name Tao can lead Westerners to think of Tao in the same way that they think of objects. That sort of thinking is misleading: Thinking of the Tao as some sort of object produces an understanding of the Tao that is less than the reality. It might be more helpful to regard Tao as a system of guidance. And if one does this one can translate 'achieving union with the Tao' into 'developing oneself so as to live in complete conformity with the teachings of the Tao' which is easier to understand, and closer to the truth.

Glimpsed only through its effects

A good way of avoiding the Tao-as-object error is to see the various concepts of the Tao as doing no more than describing those effects of the Tao that human beings are aware of. They do not describe its reality.

The Tao is not God

The Tao is not God and is not worshipped. Taoism does include many deities, but although these are worshipped in Taoist temples, they are part of the universe and depend, like everything, on the Tao.

The Tao includes several concepts in one word:

- the source of creation
- the ultimate
- the inexpressible and indefinable
- the unnameable
- the natural universe as a whole
- the way of nature as a whole

Taoist pantheon

Westerners who study Taoism are sometimes surprised to discover that Taoists venerate gods, as there doesn't seem to be a place for deities in Taoist thinking.

Taoism does not have a God in the way that the Abrahamic religions do. There is no omnipotent being beyond the cosmos, who created and controls the universe. In Taoism the universe springs from the Tao, and the Tao impersonally guides things on their way.

But the Tao itself is not God, nor is it a god, nor is it worshipped by Taoists.

This may seem surprising as Taoists do use 'God-talk' to refer to the Tao:

The Venerable Lord, the Tao, was at rest in open mystery, beyond silent desolation, in mysterious emptiness... Say it/he is there and do not see a shape; say it/he is not there, yet all beings follow him for life.

Taishang laojun kaitian jing

And they conventionally revere Lao Tsu both as the first god of Taoism and as the personification of the Tao.

Nonetheless, Taoism has many gods, most of them borrowed from other cultures. These deities are within this universe and are themselves subject to the Tao. Many of the deities are gods of a particular role, rather than a personal divine being and have titles rather than names.

Books often describe the Taoist pantheon as a heavenly bureaucracy that mimics the secular administrations of Imperial China. Some writers think that this is the wrong way round and that the secular administrations took their cue from the structure of the heavens. Since the Imperial administrations and the religious culture of the time were closely intertwined this would not be surprising.

Taoist ethics - theory and practice

Theory

The common view of Daoism is that it encourages people to live with detachment and calm, resting in non-action and smiling at the vicissitudes of the world.

Contrary to this common view, Daoists through the ages have developed various forms of community and proposed numerous sets of behavioral guidelines and texts on ethical considerations. Beyond the ancient philosophers, who are well-known for the moral dimension of their teachings, religious Daoist rules cover both ethics, i.e., the personal values of the individual, and morality, i.e., the communal norms and social values of the organisation. They range from basic moral rules against killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct through suggestions for altruistic thinking and models of social interaction to behavioral details on how to bow, eat, and wash, as well as to the unfolding of universal ethics that teach people to think like the Dao itself.

About eighty texts in the Daoist canon and its supplements describe such guidelines and present the ethical and communal principles of the Daoist religion. They document just to what degree Daoist realization is based on how one lives one's life in interaction with the community-family, religious group, monastery, state, and cosmos. Ethics and morality, as well as the creation of community, emerge as central in the Daoist religion.

Livia Kohn, Cosmos and Community

Taoist ethics are concerned less with doing good acts than becoming a good person who lives in harmony with all things and people.

Taoist ethics are inseparable from Taoist spirituality - both contain the same ideas.

If a Taoist wants to live well they should take all their decisions in the context of the Tao, trying to see what will fit best with the natural order of things.

Taoists thus always do what is required by events and their context, but they only do what is required, no more.

But what is required may be a lot less than modern Westerners think:

From the perspective of classical Taoism, Western humanism makes the mistake of assuming that the ability to intervene in life's events translates into a moral duty to do so.

The constant and unmistakable teaching of the Tao Te Ching is that humans are indeed capable of intervening in life's events, but the evidence of life, which humans constantly ignore, is that such intervention is destructive to all involved, and that we therefore have a moral duty to refrain from taking such actions.

Russell Kirkland, Responsible non-action in a natural world

So, in theory at least, Taoists tend not to initiate action - but wait for events to make action necessary - and avoid letting their own desires and compulsions push them into doing things.

Practice

In practice Taoism recommends the same sorts of moral behaviour to its followers as other religions. It disapproves of killing, stealing, lying and promiscuity, and promotes altruistic, helpful and kindly behaviour. Taoists believe such good behaviour is an essential part not only of self-improvement but of improving the world as a whole.

Cultivate the Tao within oneself; and one's virtue will be perfected.

Cultivate it within the household, and one's virtue will be abundant.

Cultivate it within the neighbourhood, and one's virtue will be enduring.

Cultivate it within the nation, and one's virtue will be overflowing.

Cultivate it within the entire world, and one's virtue will be universal.



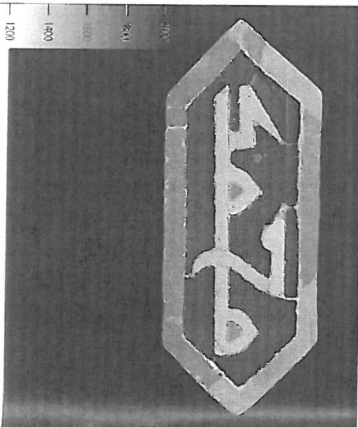
Islam

There is no doubt that, through the prophet Muhammad the Arabs were raised to the level of an ethical high religion, grounded in belief in the one God and in a basic ethic of humanity, with clear imperatives for more humanity and more justice. From its origins onwards, Islam was a religion not so much of the law as of an ethic. And there is also something like the Ten Commandments, the basis of a common ethic of humanity.

Muslims see Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, the messenger of God who brought God's final revelation to humankind. However, Muslims attach the greatest importance to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad does not stand at the centre of Islam, as Jesus Christ stands at the centre of Christianity.

For Muslims, the Word of God did not become a man but a book. And it is the Qur'an, the original version of which lies with God himself, that forms the centre of Islam.

So Islam is a religion of the book par excellence. The Qur'an completes the Torah of the Jews and the Gospel of the Christians. For Muslims it is unsurpassable, perfect, absolutely reliable. So it is also solemnly recited and above all learnt by heart by the experts. Yet Muslim theologians, too, have discussed the question whether as the word of God the Qur'an is not also a human word, the word of the Prophet Muhammad.



Muhammad

The QUR'AN
In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate,
Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, Master of the Day of Reckoning.
Thee alone do we worship; and to Thee alone do we turn for help.
Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
not of those who have incurred Thy wrath.
(Qur'an, Surah 1)

The Muslim code of duties
In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,
Set not up with God another god, or you will sit condemned and forsaken.
Thy Lord has decreed you shall not serve any but Him,
and be good to parents,
And give the kinsman his right, and the needy, and the traveller,
And slay not your children for fear of poverty; Nor take life, which God has made sacred.
And approach not fornication,
And do not touch the property of the orphan.

And be true to every promise,
And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance.
And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.
And walk not the earth with insolence.
(Qur'an, Surah 17:22-38)

And if they incline to peace, you should also incline to it and place your trust in God.
(Qur'an, Surah 8:61)
And avoid the abomination of idols, and avoid the speaking of falsehood.
(Qur'an, Surah 22:30)

Do you see him who calls the Reckoning a lie?
He is the one who casts the orphan away,
who fails to urge the feeding of one in need.
So woe to those that pray and are heedless of their prayers, to those who make display and refuse charity.
(Qur'an, Surah 107:1-7)

O believers, be you secure of justice, witness for God. Let not detestation for a people move you to deviate from justice.
(Qur'an, Surah 5:8)



Muhammad Iqbal



Muhammad Abduh



Gamaladdin al-Afghani

Islam means submission to the will of God. It is the message of the Prophet Muhammad, which was gradually revealed to him in the seventh century by an angel and was later written down in the Qur'an by Muhammad's companions and followers.

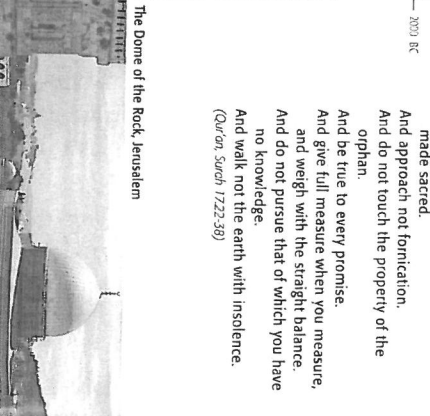
- The five pillars of Islam are:
- ▶ belief in God and Muhammad as his messenger;
 - ▶ daily ritual prayer;
 - ▶ obligatory contribution for the poor;
 - ▶ Ramadan, the annual month of fasting;
 - ▶ to go on pilgrimage to Mecca if possible once in a lifetime.

There are around 1.2 billion Muslims; the most important movements are the Sunni and the Shi'ites.
Most Muslims today live in South-East Asia and India, Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Turkey.

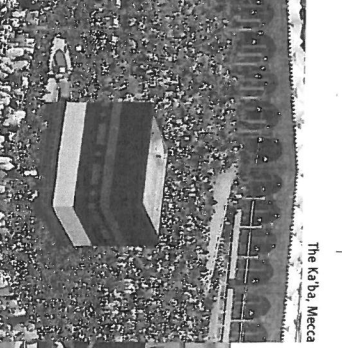


Geyran

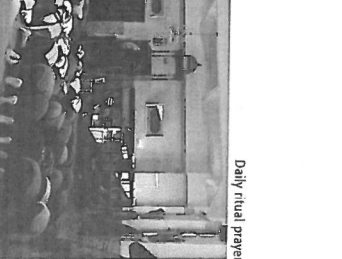
Believers recite the Qur'an



The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem



The Kaaba, Mecca



Daily ritual prayer

ISLAM

1. What springs to mind when you hear the word 'Islam'?
2. What is the difference between Islam and other world religions?
3. Why do you think Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world?
4. What are the Five Pillars of Islam?
5. Why do the two main branches of Islam, Sunni and Shia, often fight each other?
6. What do you know about Islamic holidays such as Ramadan and the Eid celebrations?

"Islam" means "Peace through the submission to God"; "Muslim" means "anyone or anything that submits itself to the will of God"; "Allah" is an Arabic word that means "God". Muslims also believe that "Allah" is the personal name of God. Allah is not the God of Muslims only. He is the God of all people and all creation. Just because people refer to God using different terms does not mean that they are different gods. Spanish people refer to God as "Dios" and French people refer to God as "Dieu", yet they are all the same God. Interestingly, most Arab Jews and Arab Christians refer to God as "Allah". And the word Allah in Arabic appears on the walls of many Arab churches.

The Islamic concept of God is that He is loving, merciful, and compassionate. But Islam also teaches that He is just and swift in punishment. Nevertheless, Allah once said to Prophet Muhammad, "My mercy prevails over my wrath." Islam teaches a balance between fear and hope, protecting one from both complacency and despair.

The Holy Qur'an was not authored by Muhammad. It was authored by God, revealed to Muhammad, and written into physical form by his companions. The Holy Qur'an has no flaws or contradictions. The original Arabic scriptures have never been changed or tampered with.

Muslims do not believe in the concept of "vicarious atonement" but rather believe in the law of personal responsibility. Islam teaches that each person is responsible for his or her own actions. On the Day of Judgment Muslims believe that every person will be resurrected and will have to answer to God for their every word, thought, and deed. Consequently, a practicing Muslim is always striving to be righteous.

Terrorism, unjustified violence and the killing of innocent people are absolutely forbidden in Islam. Islam is a way of life that is meant to bring peace to a society, whether its people are Muslim or not. The extreme actions of those who claim to be Muslim may be, among other things, a result of their ignorance or uncontrolled anger. Tyrant rulers and those who commit acts of terrorism in the name of Islam are simply not following Islam. These people are individuals with their own views and political agendas. Fanatical Muslims are no more representative of the true Islamic teachings than Timothy McVeigh or David Koresh are of Christianity. Extremism and fanaticism is a problem that is common to all religious groups. Anyone who thinks that all Muslims are terrorists should remember that the famous boxer Muhammad Ali, perhaps the most celebrated person of our era, is a practicing Muslim. The word "jihad" does not mean "holy war". Instead, it means the inner struggle that one endures in trying to submit their will to the will of God. Some Muslims may say they are going for "jihad" when fighting in a war to defend themselves or their fellow Muslims, but they only say this because they are conceding that it will be a tremendous struggle. But there are many other forms of jihad which are more relevant to the everyday life of a Muslim such as the struggles against laziness, arrogance, stinginess, or the struggle against a tyrant ruler or against the temptation of Satan, or against one's own ego, etc.

Women are not oppressed in Islam. Any Muslim man that oppresses a woman is not following Islam. Among the many teachings of Prophet Muhammad that protected the rights and dignity of women is his saying, "...the best among you are those who treat their wives well." (Tirmidhi) Islam grants women numerous rights in the home and in society. Among them are the right to earn money, to financial support, to an education, to an inheritance, to being treated kindly, to vote, to a dowry, to keep their maiden name, to worship in a mosque, etc., etc. Muslim women wear the head-covering (hijab) in fulfillment of God's decree to dress modestly. From a practical standpoint, it serves to identify one as attempting to follow God in daily life and, therefore, protects women from unwanted advances from men. This type of modest dress has been worn by righteous women throughout history. Prominent examples are traditional Catholic Nuns, Mother Teresa and the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus.