

## JUDAISM

**Origins** Canaan (Palestine / Israel, Judah)  
c. 1500-1000 BC; (Abraham) Moses, Solomon,  
David, prophets, and judges

**Sacred Texts** Torah (*Mishna* and *Talmud*),  
Hebrew Bible

**Organization** autonomous local synagogues  
led by rabbi

**Beliefs** Judaism was the first organized religion  
to teach monotheism; God had special  
covenant with the ancient Israelites to bring

God's message to humanity by their example;  
seeks a just and peaceful world order;  
prohibition of images

**Practices** strict discipline through daily prayer,  
family relationships, ethical behavior (*Ten  
Commandments*), ritual practices, dietary  
laws, individual prayer, and public  
observances (Passover, Rosh Hashana, Yom  
Kippur)

**Divisions** wide variations of individual  
adherence to dietary and Sabbath behavior

## ISLAM

**Origins** Arabia (570-632 AD), Prophet  
Muhammad

**Sacred Texts** *Qur'an* (English: Koran); *Shari'a*  
("the way") – the laws and regulations for  
Muslim life and conduct

**Organization** community structure (once an  
empire headed by a caliph, now some entire  
countries are Islamic states – Iran,  
Afghanistan, Pakistan); in others local  
communities in separate mosques

**Beliefs** monotheist (commitment in faith,  
obedience, and trust to the one and only  
God – Allah); "Five Pillars": *shahada*  
(profession of faith in God); *salat* (ritual  
prayer, performed five times a day facing  
Mecca); *zakat* (alms giving); *sawm* (fasting);  
*hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca); sometimes *jihad*  
(literally, "striving in the way of God" – varies  
from sacred war to striving to fulfill the ethical  
principles of the *Qur'an*)

**Practices** The *Shari'a* is the creed and worship  
of the community (*umma*), as well as a code  
of ethics, a culture, a system of laws, an under-  
standing of the function of the state; main fes-  
tivals: *Id al-Fitr* (breaking of the fast at the end  
of Ramadan) and *Id al-Adha* (sacrifice)

**Divisions** Sunnis (majority) follow Rightly  
Guided Caliphs (a kind of "mandate of  
heaven" authority) and Shi'ite (minority)  
contend leadership flows from descendants  
of Ali (Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law)

## CHRISTIANITY

**Origins** Palestine, 1st century BC, founder  
Jesus of Nazareth

**Sacred Texts** Christian Bible (Old and New  
Testaments)

**Organization** Roman and Orthodox  
churches have hierarchal rule by chief  
bishop (Pope or Patriarch), archbishops,  
bishops, pastors; in Protestant sects,  
congregations tend to be more autonomous

**Beliefs** monotheist; Jesus was and is the  
Messiah or Christ promised by God in the  
prophecies of the Old Testament; freed  
believers from sin and offered resurrection  
and salvation in an afterlife; Trinity (one God  
in essence is viewed as 3 personifications:  
Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son), and  
Sustainer (Holy Spirit))

**Practices** Two principal rites (sacraments):  
Baptism, initiated converts; and the Eucharist,  
a sacred meal with prayers, chants, and  
scripture readings (Mass)

**Divisions** Western European (Latin Church)  
branch and a Byzantine (or Orthodox  
Church) branch. The Western church was in  
turn divided by the 16th century Reformation  
into the Roman Catholic Church and a large  
number of smaller Protestant churches :  
Lutheran, Calvinist (Reformed), Anglican, and  
sectarian

## HINDUISM

**Origins** Indus Valley c. 1500-500 BC - based on Aryan invaders practices

**Sacred Texts** *Veda* (including *Upanishads*) and epics (*Bhagavad Gita*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*)

**Organization** Individual temple rituals assisted by members of Brahmin class (priests)

**Beliefs** polytheistic; commitment to an ideal way of life (*dharma*) and notion of action, especially religious or ritual action (*karma*) to purify human acts during rebirths of the soul so as to leave the material world (*moksha*) and become part of the eternal universal spirit of life (Brahman Nerguna)

**Practices** self-denial, fasting to purify the soul, individual rituals (initiations, marriages, funerals) assisted by members of Brahmin class (priests)

**Divisions** variety of sects devoted to Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti

## BUDDHISM

**Origins** India (c. 566-486 BC), founded by noble Siddarta Gautama ("Buddha" - the Enlightened One)

**Sacred Texts** *Tripitaka* - narrative scriptural text Buddha's teaching (*sutras*)

**Organization** independent sanghas - monastic orders

**Beliefs** Four Noble Truths: (*duhkha*) all beings suffer in a cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) in which their actions (*Karma*) keep them wandering; suffering itself has a cause (*prattity asamut pada*); suffering and rebirth can cease (*nirvana*)

**Practices** Eightfold Path - combines ethical practices and disciplinary training in meditation to achieve enlightened wisdom (*panna*).

**Divisions** numerous sects based on schools of meditation such as Theravada (South & S. E. Asia) and Mahayana (China, Korea, Japan)

## CHINESE PHILOSOPHIES: CONFUCIANISM

**Origins** Ancient China, teacher / political advisor Confucius or Kongzi (c. 551-479 BC)

**Sacred Texts** *Analects* - guide to ethical principles of correct behavior, moral judgment, and social order

**Organization** The Confucian school functioned as a recruiting ground for government positions, which were filled by those scoring highest on examinations in the Confucian classics

**Beliefs** Social order stems from benevolence (kindly acts, generosity), traditional rituals, filial piety (child's respect for parents), loyalty, respect for superiors and for the aged, social interaction is shaped by convention; correct behavior follows a natural pattern (li)

**Practices** maintain domestic order, preserve tradition, and maintain a constant standard of living for the taxpaying peasants

**Divisions** (none)

## CHINESE PHILOSOPHIES: DAOISM (TAOISM)

**Origins** China, Laozi (Lao-tzu c. 6th century BC) and Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu, c. 369-286 BC)

**Sacred Texts** the *Daode Jing*, and the *Zuangzi*

**Organization** independent monastic orders

**Beliefs** Seek tranquil life by excluding desire, impulse, and aggression; act in harmony with nature and accept life's inevitable changes; create action (*wei*) by shaping desires (*yu*); yin and yang - balance and harmony in life

**Practices** monasticism and the ritual of community renewal, and study revealed scriptures; Taoist writings reflect some Buddhist influences

**Divisions** numerous sects (faith healing through the confession of sin; spiritualism; visionary communication with divinities)