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| **HINDUISM** |

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| **Background:**Hinduism is a **polytheistic**religion that was formed from a variety of different religious practices.  **The Basics:****Established**: Elements of the Hindu religion can be traced back to the Shiva, the Destroyer.ancient Indus River Valley civilization (approximately **3000 BCE**) in modern-day Pakistan.**Founder:** It has been theorized that Hinduism is a result of cultural diffusion that occurred between *Aryan* invaders and the native peoples of India sometime around 1500 BCE.**Geographic Origin**: Developed on the Indian subcontinent.**Currently Practiced**: Most common in India.**Significant Writings**: ***Vedas*** **Places of Worship**: While Hindu temples do exist, Hinduism is usually practiced in the home  where there is usually a shrine dedicated to a favored deity. **Significant Religious People**: Hindu priests carry out traditional religious practices in temples.**Teachings and Beliefs:**Hindus believe in **reincarnation**, which is influenced by **karma** (actions in this life resulting from the consequences of a previous life’s actions.), and **dharma** (fulfilling one's duty in life). Because all forms of animal life possess souls, Hindus believe in **ahimsa**, or that all life is sacred and should not be harmed. In fact, one animal which Hindus consider to be extremely sacred is the cow. The peaceful and contented existence of cows is considered virtuous by Hindus and would represent a rewarding reincarnation for a soul. For this reason, most Hindus are vegetarians so Rivers represent reincarnation to Hindus.that they do not harm other living beings. The belief in reincarnation, karma, and dharma also provides the religious justification for the existence of the rigid social structure known as the **Caste System**. **ReincarnationReincarnation** is a central teaching of Hinduism. Rivers are sometimes thought to symbolize reincarnation because they constantly flow, yet follow the same course. Perhaps the most sacred river is the **Ganges**, which is used for spiritual cleansing, funeral rites, and other Hindu rituals.  |

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**Caste System**The **Caste System** is a rigid class structure based on Hinduism which is found in India. It is believed that if one leads a good life, following good **karma** and **dharma**, then they will be rewarded by being reincarnated as a person belonging to the next highest level in the Caste System. However, if one is wicked during their life, they will be demoted, and possibly even removed from the Caste System altogether. Outcasts, or Untouchables, are members of Hindu society thought to have been removed from the Caste System, with no hope of returning to it, due to their misdeeds in previous lives. Work that is deemed unclean for all other Hindus is reserved for these Outcasts.

After winning its independence from Great Britain in 1947, India adopted a national constitution which stated that "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden." Since that time many Caste reforms have been enacted to diminish discriminatory practices in India. Today, the Caste System still exists in practice, despite the many laws designed to legally abolish it.

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| **JUDAISM** **Background**:Judaism is the oldest known **monotheistic** **religion** still practiced in the world today. Its fundamental teachings have been influential and are the basis for more recently developed religions such as Christianity and Islam. **The Basics:****Founder**: ***Abraham*** is generally recognized as the founder of Judaism due to his *covenant*, or promise with God. God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, the Hebrews, if they worshipped only him and followed his laws. However, Moses is also considered a founder due to his role in the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, and his delivery of the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai sometime around 2000BCE.**Geographic Origin**: Developed in the Middle East in and around the area that is currently Israel.**Currently Practiced**: Worldwide, but the greatest majority of Jews reside in Israel, the United States, and the former Soviet Union.**Significant Writings**: ***Torah*** **Moses and the Ten Commandments** **Places of Worship**: Jews worship in temples called synagogues. **Significant Religious People**: Rabbis are Jewish scholars charged with conducting religious  services, ensuring that Jewish laws are observed, and serving as a spiritual guide for the  community.**Teachings and Beliefs**Judaism teaches that there is one God who is the creator of all things. A major drought forced the Hebrews to flee to the Nile River of the Egyptian Empire. The Jews were enslaved until Moses led the Hebrews back into the desert and back towards their native homeland. The flight or “exit” of the Jews from Egypt was called the Exodus. After the Hebrew exodus from Egypt, many Hebrews began to lose their faith in God. During this time, Moses went atop Mount Sinai and returned with two stone tablets containing laws that all Hebrews needed to follow. These laws, recorded in *Exodus* 20:3-17, became known as the **Ten Commandments** and include: 1. **You shall have no other gods before Me**.
2. **You shall not make yourself any graven image**. . .
3. **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain**. . .
4. **Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy**.
5. **Honor your father and mother**. . .
6. **You shall not commit murder**.
7. **You shall not commit adultery**.
8. **You shall not steal**.
9. **You shall not witness falsely against your neighbor**.
10. **You shall not covet your neighbor's house**, your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, **or anything that is your neighbor's**.

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| **Important to note**: - Jews do NOT believe in the divinity of Jesus. They acknowledge Jesus’ existence and value as a great  teacher; however, they do not believe he was God in a human form like Christians. - Originally there were 12 Hebrew tribes, but after years of war and captivity the only tribe that  remained was that of Judah---therefore the Hebrews became known as Jews  |

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**ZOROASTRIANISM** **Background:**The religion was founded in Persia -- modern-day Iran. It may have been the world's first monotheistic faith. It was once the religion of the Persian empire, but has since been reduced in numbers to fewer than 200,000 today. Most religious historians believe the Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs concerning God and Satan, the soul, heaven and hell, the final judgment, etc. were all derived from Zoroastrianism. **The Basics**  **Established:** some time before the 6th century BCE (possibly older than Judaism)**http://www.mystfx.ca/academic/religious-studies/zoroastrianism.jpgFounder**: **Zarathushtra**(commonly known in West as Zoroaster from the Greeks)**Geographic Origin**: Developed in the Middle East in and around the area that is currently Israel.**Currently Practiced**: Mainly India. Zoroastrianism’s popularity significantly declined after the Islamic invasions of Middle East in the 600’s. A small number of Iranians secretly practice, as well as a community of Persians who escaped to India during the Islamic invasions. There are only about 200,000 Zoroastrians left.**Significant Writings**:The *Avesta,* the Zoroastrian holy book, is a collection of texts sacrificial hymns and prayers to God**Places of Worship**: fire temple **Significant Religious People**: fire temple priests**Teachings and Beliefs:****1. Belief in Supreme and Universal God**. Ahura Mazda is the supreme God who symbolizes truth, radiance, purity, order, justice, courage, strength and patience. He is the creator as well as sustainer. He also protects the good from the evil and maintains order by keeping the chaotic evil at bay.**2. Belief in the duality of existence**. Zoroastrians believe that the world is battle ground between good and evil forces. Although the good will ultimately triumph and the evil forces would be destroyed, Zoroastrians believe that every human has a role and responsibility in enhancing and marinating the sanctity and purity of our existence by staying away from evil, avoiding all possible contact and communication with it and by enhancing the good amidst us through religious practices and observances and adherence to the teachings of Zoroaster. **3. Belief in the basic goodness of the humanity**. Zoroastrians believe that human beings are born good, not as sinners as many Christian denominations do Human beings are born pure and have a choice either to follow the teachings of God and remain righteous or follow the ways of the evil and be damned. Depending upon their choices and their actions, God decides their fate in the spiritual realm. God offers knowledge of righteous conduct and provides instructions for the forgiveness of sin; however, he does not make a promise to take upon Himself the sins of his worshippers. (like Jesus in Christianity)**4. Belief in the tradition of prophets**. Followers of Ahura Mazda believe the birth of Zoroaster started the beginning the current cycle of creation, which would last for 3000 years. *During this period a prophet would appear on earth at the end of each millennium to preserve the teachings and guide the humanity. This idea of a messiah, or savior, sent by God to guide humanity away from evil is believed to have been borrowed by the Jews and later, Christians. Christians believe Jesus was this messiah sent by God to preserve his teachings and guide humanity.* The third prophet, will be a future son of Zoroaster, who would herald the Judgment Day and the eventual destruction of evil powers in the material world.**5. Belief in afterlife**. According to Zoroastrian beliefs death is as a result of the spirit leaving the body. The sanctity and purity of the body is lost once the spirit leaves it. Having left the body the soul would remain on earth for a three days and nights, hovering near the body. Then it would depart to the spiritual realm, where an angel would assess its actions and decide whether it should go to the heaven or hell for a temporary residence till the Last Judgment Day. **6. Belief in the Judgment day**. Zoroastrians believe God will destroy the evil forces in a final conflagration and herald the Judgment Day . On that day, those who prove to be pious and obedient to his instructions would be suitably rewarded with an eternal life in heaven and the rest will be condemned to an eternal suffering in a purgatory. |

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| **BUDDHISM** |

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| **Background**:Buddhism developed in India, and is based on many of the core concepts of Hinduism..  **The Basics:Siddhartha Gautama  Founder**: ***Siddhartha Gautama****,* or Buddha, which means "enlightened one." Founded in the 6th  century BCE [500’s]. **Geographic Origin**: Developed in India. **Currently Practiced**: Most common in Japan, Southeast Asia, and China. **Significant Writings**: ***Tripitka***, or *Three Baskets of Wisdom*. **Places of Worship**: Buddhism may be practiced individually, but temples and monasteries do exist. **Significant Religious People**: The **Dalai Lama** is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan sect of  Buddhism, and is considered to be the reincarnation of the bodhisattva, or "Buddha-to-be." Buddhist  monks can be identified by their traditional orange robes.**Teachings and Beliefs:**Siddhartha was born into the Brahmin caste, and by all account led a luxurious lifestyle. However, he was troubled by the human misery that he saw around him every day. He sought to achieve internal peace or happiness. Upon reflection, he deduced that desire was the root cause of all suffering. This idea has been recorded as the **Four Noble Truths**. **Four Noble Truths**Siddhartha's  philosophy of the nature of human **suffering** and its relation to **desire** is articulated by these four statements:1. Life is full of pain and **suffering**.
2. Human **desire** causes this **suffering**.
3. By putting an end to **desire**, humans can end **suffering**.
4. Humans can end **desire** by following the **Eightfold Path**.

Wheel of Life**Eightfold Path**The **Wheel of Life** is one of the most important symbols of Buddhism, as it represents the endless cycle of life through **reincarnation** and because each of its eight spokes represents one of the teachings of theEightfold Path**.** 1. Know that suffering is caused by desire.
2. **http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/41700/41717/FC_Infinity_41717_lg.gif**Be selfless and love all life.
3. Do not lie, or speak without cause.
4. Do not kill, steal, or commit other unrighteous acts.
5. Do not do things which promote evil.
6. Take effort to promote righteousness.
7. Be aware of your physical actions, state of mind, and emotions.
8. Learn to meditate.

**Reincarnation**Buddhists believe in an endless cycle of reincarnation, or samsara, which is similar to beliefs of Hinduism. However, Buddhists do not believe that deities are responsible for the phenomenon. In addition, the Caste System is rejected by Buddhists who believe instead that one is reincarnated until they can achieve **nirvana**, best described as spiritual enlightenment. The concept of reincarnation can best be illustrated using an infinity symbol:

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| **Important to note**: - Buddhism is more of a philosophy than a religion. It is more interested in how to improve your  current condition and well being in this life, not with issues of creation and the existence of a god or  gods.  - With that being said, Buddha, is not worshipped as a God, but is revered a great teacher from whom  you would seek advice. |

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| **CONFUCIANISM** |

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| **Background**:Confucius lived in China during the Chou Dynasty, when there was mass disorder and confusion and degrading moral standards. Confucius was appalled by what appeared to be the fracturing of Chinese society. He believed that the only cure was to stress a sense of social order and mutual respect, a **philosophy** that later became known as Confucianism.   **The Basics: Founder**-Kong Fu Zi, which was translated as Confucius by Europeans. His teachings were later  refined and spread by **Mencius**. **Geographic Origin**-Developed in China around **500 BCE**.. **Currently Practiced**-Elements of this **philosophy**are still practiced in China, Japan, and Southeast  Asia.**Significant Writings**-***The Analects***. **Teachings and Beliefs:**Confucianism teaches that there is a natural social order to society which can best be explained through the **Five Relationships**: 1. Ruler to ruled.
2. Father to son.
3. ConfuciusOlder brother to younger brother.
4. Husband to wife.
5. Friend to friend.

In these relationships, the second role is considered subordinate to the first. It was taught that if everyone knew their place in society, then order would prevail. Confucianism reinforced and adjusted the traditional idea of the Mandate of Heaven developed under the Zhou Dynasty. Confucius said, and the Chinese came to believe, that Heaven didn't recognize the right to power of an unworthy ruler. Thus, if there are rebellions and natural disasters in the land, it is because the Emperor is not fulfilling his proper duties. There are several concepts which needed to be practiced in order to achieve an ordered society: **Jen**-Human kindness should be shown towards one another.**Li**-Proper etiquette should always be used, and one should strive to achieve perfect virtue.**Filial Piety**-One should respect their elders. **Confucian and the Four Classes**Confucius also incorporated the notion of the four classes: the scholar, the peasants, the artisans (a.k.a. craftsmen), and the lowest of the low, the merchant. Notice two things, the place of the peasant and the absence of warriors. Confucianism had no need of war, because if everyone is following their proper role then there should be no war. If there is war, then Confucianism is out the window anyway. China never glorified the warrior as much as Japan and Europe did. Also, the class order put peasants second since they provided the food that everyone else needed to live. Artisans at least make useful things, but merchants were viewed as parasites whose only purpose was to live (and get rich) off the sweat of others' labor.**Civil Service Exams**Emperors began to prefer Confucian scholars as court advisors. Confucius had taught that gentlemen should practice “respect, generosity, truthfulness, diligence, and kindness.” Because these were exactly the qualities he wanted in government officials, the emperor set up a school where hopeful job applicants from all over China could come to study Confucius’ works. After their studies, job applicants took formal examinations in history, law, literature, and Confucianism—called the ***civil service exams***. To get a government job you had to pass the exams, which allowed the government to be staffed with the best and brightest Chinese. In theory anyone could take the exams. In practice few peasants could afford to educate their sons. In spite of this flaw, the civil service exam worked so efficiently that it continued in China until 1912. |

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| **CHRISTIANITY****Background**Christianity is currently the most popular religion in the world based on the number of worshippers found throughout the world. While this **monotheistic** **religion** developed from Judaism, there are several key differences in its teachings. **The BasicsFounder**-Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples who helped spread his teachings.http://regentsprep.org/regents/global/themes/beliefsystems/graphics/bd07701_.gif**Geographic Origin**-Developed in Judea (now Israel), located in the Middle East bordering the Mediterranean Sea sometime around the year **30 CE.****Currently Practiced**-Christianity is the dominant religion in North America, South America, Europe, and Russia.**Significant Writings**-The *Holy Bible*, consisting of both the ***Old Testament*** and the ***New Testament*.** The *New Testament* consists of the 4 Gospels, or stories of Jesus’ life, written by some of his followers.**Places of Worship**-Christians practice their faith in temples usually referred to as churches.**Significant Religious People**-Priests and ministers are Christian holy men and women who are charged with conducting religious services, ensuring that Jewish laws are observed, and serving as a spiritual guide for the community. In addition, deacons, nuns, and monks are people who have dedicated their lives to Christian service.Teachings and BeliefsBecause Christianity evolved from Judaism, there are certain concepts that these two religions share. For example, both Jews and Christians subscribe to the **Ten Commandments** found in the Book of *Exodus*. In addition, prophecies of Jewish prophets contained in several books of the Old Testament stated that God would send a **savior**, or **messiah**, to the people of Israel. While Judaism clearly states that this event has not yet occurred, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the **Son of God**, sent to redeem the world of sin. This has led the Christian faith to proclaim that there is a **Holy Trinity**, formed by the Creator (Father), Redeemer (Son), and Sustainer (Holy Spirit). Christians believe that these three entities are all part of a single higher power. Christians are expected to attend church services regularly, usually on Sundays and holy days such as Christmas and Easter. On these occasions Christians take part in **sacraments**, which are religious practices such as baptism, and receiving the Eucharist.  |

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| **ISLAM** |

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| **Background**Islam, which when translated from Arabic, means "to submit to the will of Allah," is the Mosqueyoungest of the world's major religions. Worshippers of this **monotheistic** **religion** are known as Muslims, which means "one who submits to the will of Allah."  Islam is currently the second most practiced religion in the world, and experts predict that it will overtake **Christianity** as the most popular religion in the world sometime during the 21st century. The Basics**Founder**-Islam was founded by the prophet Mohammed.**Geographic Origin**-Developed on the Arabian Peninsula in the year **622 CE**, and quickly spread to other regions.**Currently Practiced**- Islam is most dominant throughout the Middle East, including Southwest Asia and North Africa.**Significant Writings**-The teachings of Islam are collected in the ***Qur'an****.***Places of Worship**-Muslims may gather to worship in temples called Mosques (see picture above).**Significant Religious People**-The Caliph, or successor to the Prophet Mohammed; Imam, leader of prayers; and the Muezzin, or one who issues a call to prayer, causing the faithful to gather at the local Mosque.**Teachings and Beliefs**Mohammed received the word of God, or Allah, through the angel Gabriel while living in the city of Mecca. Townspeople soon became fearful of the Mohammed's preaching and he began to receive threats. As a result, he fled to the nearby city of Medina, where people began to believe in his message. The flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Median was instrumental to the founding of the religion of Islam, and is known as the **Hegira**. Thus, in 622 CE Islam was founded and this date became the starting point for the Islamic calendar. Mohammed and his followers later returned to Mecca and declared a **jihad**, or holy war, after which he captured the city. Under Mohammed's leadership, the basic teachings of Islam were established, which are known as the **Five Pillars of Islam**. Every Muslim is expected to follow these rules in order to lead an ethical life: 1. **Confession of Faith:** The belief that "there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet."
2. **Prayer:** Muslims must pray five times per day, facing towards Mecca.
3. **Charity:** Muslims must give alms to the poor, and support the local Mosque by donating a portion of their income.
4. **Fasting:** During the **Ramadan**, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, all Muslims must fast during daylight hours, except the very young or sick.
5. **Pilgrimage:** If possible financially, each Muslim must make a **hajj**, or holy pilgrimage, to the city of Mecca.
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