

WORLD RELIGIONS COMPARED

I have not included those secular teachers whose belief system did not include the supernatural (a divine being, a collective consciousness, or some promise of life after death). Philosopher Karl Marx and observer Charles Darwin would be two such persons.

ZOROASTRIANISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Zoroaster Tradition places its beginnings to about 650 B.C. somewhere in Persia. In a vision, a large personage - Vohu Manah or “good thought” took Zoroaster into the presence of the wise lord Ahura-Mazda, who instructed him in the one true religion.</p> <p>The Reese Chronological Bible places the captivity of the prophet Daniel to Babylon about 580 BC. The Babylonians (Arabs) were defeated by the Persians (539 BC). It is probable that the religion of Darius the Mede was Zoroastrianism. The magi who later brought gifts to the newborn “king of the Jews” may have studied the writings of Daniel, accepted as a “wise man” of “the good.”</p>	<p>Ahura-Mazda - The supreme deity, creator of the world. Deity impersonal.</p> <p>Not all-powerful, but coequal with his opposite, Angra mainya-The evil creator, archenemy of Ahura-Mazda.</p> <p>War between good and evil. Good will win out. Reward for the righteous. Punishment for the wicked.</p> <p>Fire worship. Priests called Magi.</p>

JUDAISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Moses (about 1540 BC). He is believed to have written the Torah - the first 5 books of the Old Testament which contain the LAW. [Many believe Moses used information from older records for portions of his history, concerning events and people who lived before his time.] Other Old Testament books tell of people who kept or did not keep Torah and the consequences. Moses identified Abraham (about 1900 BC), and his descendants thru Isaac, and Jacob as especially “chosen” of God. God promised to give to Abraham the land which then belonged to the descendants of Canaan, grandson of Noah.</p> <p>Judaism is so named for Jews (descendants of Judah, one of Jacobs 12 sons). They were essentially the only tribe left after the others were destroyed by the Assyrians, and the Babylonians.</p>	<p>Yahweh = The Supreme Being, The creator of all. God revealed Himself and His Law (Torah) thru Moses.</p> <p>If you keep the commands of the Torah, then you will be God’s people, and then He will bless you. He will punish you if you do not keep Torah.</p> <p>Messiah (a human descendant of King David) will come to lead God’s people back to obedience of Torah.</p> <p>Messiah will be used of God to deliver the faithful from oppression.</p> <p>Salvation: Life with God’s people in “the land” promised to Abraham and his chosen descendants..</p>

CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p><u>Jesus of Nazareth</u> Also call the Christ, meaning Messiah or “anointed one.” (Born about 4BC)</p> <p>Followers of Jesus wrote the “New Testament” portion of the Christian Bible.</p> <p>The Old Testament was regarded by His followers as the foundation of their faith. Christ was the “Promised One” whose coming was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.</p>	<p>Jesus claimed: I came forth from God. I am going back to God (<i>John 16:28</i>). I shared glory with God before the world existed (<i>John 17:5; John 6:62</i>). No one will receive eternal life except through me (<i>John 10:9; John 11:25</i>). “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (<i>John 14:6</i>). “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (<i>Matthew 28:18</i>). I am God’s Son, the promised Messiah (Christ) (<i>Mark 14:61-62; John 10:36; John 3:16</i>).</p> <p>The world with everyone on it is doomed. My death is the only way to save the earth and those people who will follow me (<i>John 3:16</i>).</p> <p>I will die by crucifixion - and I will be raised from the dead on the 3rd day (<i>Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19</i>). “I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (<i>Matthew 28:20</i>). Man’s nature is selfish - but can be changed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which I will send to you from the Father.</p> <p>Salvation: Defined as resurrection at the end of this age, to eternal life with the divine Father and Son, in the earth made new or renewed).</p>

PERSONAL COMMENT: In my search for truth, years ago, I studied for some time, the dominant religions of our world today. I concluded that IF Jesus Christ had NOT in fact, been raised from the dead on the third day, as He predicted, THEN I would choose Baha’i. It teaches education of and equality for women. It’s aims are worthy and desirable. Divorce is allowed, after a one year waiting period. It is basically accepting of all faiths - seeing all religions as seeking after the same universal truth. It even encourages a scientific approach and rejects those beliefs which cannot be harmonized with science. The key word here is “IF.”

In my own search for truth, I began to examine the “evidence” for the resurrection. Was there enough evidence to support belief in the event? For IF Jesus Christ did indeed come back from the dead, then His claims must be true, and I must follow Him as the only way to God the Father. I did love the idea of a loving Father God, who cares about me personally, rather than an unknowable arbitrary being, or a collective consciousness. So I admit - I wanted to find support for the resurrection. On the other hand, I was applauded by the idea that a Father God could “punish” His own children in a place of torture for eternity. Today I believe that this last teaching is NOT supported by the Bible. Those who say that Jesus of Nazareth was simply a good and wise teacher, or an ascended master, must ignore his own claims. Any man who claims that he IS himself the only way to God, must be mentally unstable, or cruelly manipulative, OR exactly what he claims to be.

ISLAM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Muhammad Believed by his followers to be the greatest of God’s prophets. In the 7th century AD, he received revelations from “God,” who identified Himself as Allah - given through the angel Gabriel (also believed to be the holy spirit). These revelations were gathered and recorded as the Quran (also called Koran). Muslims also revere the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels of Jesus, but teach that human writers, such as Luke, John, and Paul changed and corrupted them. The Christian Scriptures should be avoided (Hadith 9:614).</p> <p>Abraham was blessed of God as in the Old Testament of the Bible, but took his firstborn son Ishmael up the mountain in obedience to God, not Isaac. Essentially Islam corrects the Old Testament and the New Testament as believed by Jews and Christians.</p> <p>Women are seen as ultimate distractions & seductresses. Muhammad taught that women are less intelligent than men. Men are to take four wives (if they can afford them). Women are to serve their husbands, are to be covered except in the presence of their husbands or male relatives to whom they could not be married. They are to remain uneducated, and are to remain in the home for the most part. Beating of wives was permitted - not to be followed by sex on the same day.</p>	<p><u>In common with Christianity:</u> God is one, holy, truthful, rules, reveals His will, judges, is merciful, and forgives. Satan is a spirit created by God, who is now fallen.</p> <p><u>Differs from Christianity:</u> Differs from Christianity in HOW God, rules, reveals, judges, loves, and forgives. Allah does as He pleases. Man does <u>not have free will</u>. Allah is all controlling. Allah created both good and evil. Allah can and does change His mind. Allah causes and decides each man’s fate. Allah created some to send them to hell (Sura 32:13). Allah has no affection or feeling for any creature. Allah is NOT a divine father. All are slaves of Allah. Allah is completely separate from us. He is above us, but is NOT “with us,” or “in us.” Allah does NOT make covenants with men.</p> <p>There was no “fall.” Man was created weak but basically good. Man does not need salvation (Sura 4:28).</p> <p>Allah will prosper those who obey Him. People can, by their own efforts, free themselves from the power of sin (defined as disbelief or disobedience of Allah’s commands).</p> <p>“Paradise” (a place of sensual pleasures for men only) is gained through profession of belief in Allah and Muhammad His prophet, thru ritual prayer, fasting, alms giving, pilgrimage, and waging holy war. The lost (including all Christians and Jews) will go to a burning “hell,” but may only suffer until Allah frees them.</p> <p>Jesus was created from the dust. His ministry was inferior to Moses, or other earlier prophets, and was only to announce the messenger who would follow him, who is Muhammad - the last and greatest prophet of Allah (Sura 61:6). Jesus will return to earth to restore Islam to perfection and will wipe out Judaism and Christianity (Hadith 3:425). Jesus will NOT rule forever.</p> <p>Anyone who believes that God incarnated as a man, commits the worst form of blasphemy imaginable, is cursed by Allah, and will suffer “a grievous penalty” in this life and in the next. Jesus was NOT God’s son, and was NOT crucified. Someone else died in his place (Sura 4:157). On the great judgment day, Jesus will not intercede for human beings. Muhammad will intercede.</p>

SIKHISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Nanak (born near Punjab, India about 1469 AD)</p> <p>A fairly recent religion. Nanak taught that Islam and Hinduism both contained errors. The Grant Sahib contains his and others sacred writings. Appointed a successor, Lamina who changed his name to Angas (bodyguard), and declared Nana equal with God. Later adherents transferred obedience from the guru successor of Nana to the book of sacred writings called - "The Lords Book."</p>	<p>From Hinduism: <u>Retained</u> 1) salvation = polytheistic merging with mystical world soul 2) doctrine of Karma 3) Transmigration of souls <u>Repudiated:</u> 1) Hindu polytheism 2) Hindu scriptures 3) pilgrimages, ritualism, hermit asceticism 4) degradation of women 5) infanticide 6) vegetarianism</p> <p>From Islam: <u>Retained</u> 1) belief in a Supreme Being with absolute rule, sovereignty, arbitrariness 2) salvation through submission to the will of the Supreme Being, 3) worship thru repeating prescribed prayers and repetition of the name of deity, 4) devotion to the founder as God's prophet, extreme reverence for sacred scripture, 5) a powerful church-state 6) vehement denunciation of idolatry. 7) importance of central shrine at Mecca and Amritsar,</p> <p><u>Difference:</u> 1) Sikhism's founder not so ruthless or violent as Islam's. 2) Sikhism's deity not so ruthless or violent as Islam's. 3) Sikhism's sacred scriptures ascribed to many teachers, (at least 37) not to one, as in Islam.</p>

HINDUISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>The ancient <i>rishis</i> Pure and calm individuals who communicated eternal truth to their disciples who wrote it down. These <u>writings are called <i>vedas</i></u>.</p> <p>The name Hindu derived from the Persian “hindu” or “sindu” (meaning river) - the name arose from the Indus River, and those living near the river. Scriptures written over a period of 2,000 years [1400 BC to 500 AD].</p> <p>Many, many different sects, each focusing on one of the paths to Nirvana. Worship of different incarnations (in different forms) of deity, different “enlightened ones.”</p> <p>For the most part accepting of other religions, seeing them as alike, seeking truth, in different ways. Salvation (reaching Nirvana) is through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The way of knowledge - knowing one is actually a part of ultimate Brahman 2. The way of devotion - love and obedience to a particular deity 3. The way of works - following ceremonial ritual 	<p><i>Brahman</i> = The Three-in-One-God (impersonal) <i>Brahma</i>, Creator <i>Vishnu</i>, Preserver <i>Shiva</i>, Destroyer</p> <p>Submission to Fate No such thing as “sin” against God - just acts of ignorance. Man is simply a manifestation of Brahman - without individual self or worth The earth and everything that exists is simply part of Brahma. Everything is Brahma and Brahma is everything. The Caste System as determined by the Laws of Manu. Law of <i>Karma</i> (from good comes good, from evil comes evil) Reincarnation - through virtuous living a soul may rise to a higher state. <i>Nirvana</i>-the final stage - is mystical reabsorption into the Infinite. Nirvana frees the soul from the cycle of reincarnation</p> <p><i>Yogas</i>-disciplines to control body and emotions <i>Darma</i>- The Law of Moral Order - which each soul must find and follow to reach <i>Nirvana</i></p>

BUDDHISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Siddhartha Gautama (about 500 BC) later called the Buddha - Enlightened One</p> <p>(Approx. 5th century BC) Buddha began life as a prince, but left to seek enlightenment. Found enlightenment in deep meditation under a fig tree.</p> <p>Grew out of dissatisfaction with Hinduism and the caste system.</p> <p>Buddha is not recorded to have claimed divinity but was later worshiped by followers of his teachings. This was against his early teachings.</p>	<p>Denies the inspiration of the Vedas (Hindu scriptures) There is no supreme being. The universe simply evolved. Rejected physical deprivation. “Middle Path” to enlightenment “Four Noble Truths” and “Eightfold Path”</p> <p>Evil is emotion, and desire or unsatisfied desires resulting from ignorance. Salvation is through eradication/ suppression of all desire - through enlightenment. Nirvana is <u>peace with no desires</u> (achieved primarily thru meditation). Nirvana ends the cycle of rebirth.</p>

JAINISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Mahavira - meaning “great man” (born 599 BC in north-eastern India). Tradition relates Mahavira was the second son of a rajah living in luxury. Married with one daughter. At the age of 30 he decide to live a life of self-denial in search of enlightenment. Wandered for 12 years destitute, in rags, or naked. He experienced enlightenment while in deep meditation. He then took on disciples, preaching his new-found beliefs.</p> <p>Though he never claimed this, he became the object of worship by later followers - who came to regard him as having descended from heaven without sin and with all knowledge.</p>	<p>Began as a heretical movement within Hinduism. Differed from Hinduism:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individual souls remain distinct in Nirvana, instead of being absorbed into the collective Brahman. 2. No caste system 3. No worship of different manifestations of Brahman 4. Opposed to the concept of a supreme being. 5. No animal sacrifices, no harm to living things. <p>Evil defined as the encumbrance of body. Nirvana is freedom of the soul from physical or worldly attachments. Salvation defined as reaching Nirvana - reached only through rigid self-denial.</p>

CONFUCIANISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Confucius (lived about 550BC). Contemporary with Buddha (although they probably never met).</p> <p>A teacher who rose to prominence in China. Born at a time of warring tribes, and general viciousness.</p> <p>Much later - deified by followers of his teachings, but no record of his desire for this.</p>	<p>Optimistic Humanism: Man is basically good. Veneration of ancestors and their wisdom. Spirits of ancestors remain present with the family (if provided for). Spirits of angry ancestors - may cause trouble. Veneration of living elders, especially father by his son.</p> <p>Taught basic kindness to others. Life experience forces man to evil.</p> <p>Golden rule: Do not do to another, what you would not want done to you.</p> <p>Heaven real but undefined. Salvation through self-efforts</p>

SHINTOISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>No founder identified. Origin buried in pre-history.</p> <p>Abolished as the national religion of Japan, after defeat of WWII.</p>	<p>The Japanese people are Sons of the Gods, and Japan is the country of the Gods. Divine descent gives Japanese people superiority over others in courage and intelligence. Female deity gave “birth” to the islands of Japan. Kami - sacred power found in animate and inanimate objects.</p>

BAHA'ISM

INTRODUCED BY	MAIN TEACHINGS
<p>Bahau'llah (in the late 1860s). A Persian visionary called “the Bab” predicted a “messiah” who would fulfill all religions. This promised one turned out to be Hussayn-Ali, who assumed the name Baha'u'llah (“The Glory of God” in Arabic).</p> <p>This did not please the resident Shi'ite Muslims, and he fled to Baghdad, then to Constantinople and finally to Ottoman Palestine, where he died in 1892. Leadership was ceded to his son, then grandson and finally the “Univeral House of Justice.” Today, they are based on Mt. Carmel, near Haifa, Israel.</p> <p>Claiming to be the “promised one of all religions” they preach global socio-religious reform.</p>	<p>Monotheistic - God is an essence completely transcendent and unknowable. Centers on belief in <u>a series of “manifestations of God.”</u> These individuals reflect and manifest attributes of God and progressively reveal the divine purpose for humankind. Manifestations include: Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Gautama Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Bab, and (for the present age) Bahau'llah. Further divine messengers will periodically appear.</p> <p>Spiritual progress requires: <u>obedience to the commands of the God manifestations</u> and well-motivated good deeds.</p> <p>A <u>unity of all the peoples and religions of the earth is the destined hallmark of this age</u>. Governments and peoples must work to secure world peace, a world auxiliary language, a world government, the abolition of all forms of racial, national, and religious prejudice, the ending of all forms of economic and chattel slavery, <u>the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty</u>, and the equality of the sexes. Religion and true science must harmonize.</p> <p>Marriage is monogamous, and conditional upon consent of both the bride and groom and their parents. <u>Forbidden are</u> all extramarital sexual relations, homosexual relationships, backbiting, gambling, begging, use of alcohol or narcotics, and involvement in partisan politics or sedition. Honest work, education of both sexes, cleanliness, and cooperation are emphasized.</p>

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