

World Religions

World Religions

*FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT
JACKSONVILLE*



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Florida State College at Jacksonville	

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World Religions

FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT JACKSONVILLE

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PART I
MODULE I:
INTRODUCTION TO
RELIGION

I. Introduction

World Religions – Introduction to Religion

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to religion as an academic discipline. The module Learning Unit will familiarize students with the difficulties of defining religion as an academic category, explore academic theories for understanding individual religious impetus, and provide a definitional criteria for the term ‘World Religion.’ From there, the student will analyze the views of four religious scholars to argue for which they regard as being most convincing on the Discussion Board for this module. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments. ⁽¹⁾

Understanding Era Designations

Historians divide time in two eras. The era before year one is identified as BCE (Before the Common Era) or previously BC (Before Christ). The era after year one is identified as CE (Common Era) or previously AD (Anno Domini – Latin for the ‘In the Year of Our Lord’). While the Christianized delineations of history sufficed in previous decades, scholars now prefer the more generic BCE and CE as they take into account that different religions have different starting points in history. Jewish tradition, for example, has seen the beginning of Creation as their first year. Muslims, on the other hand,

identify Muhammad flight from Mecca as their first year (622 CE in the common calendar). Thus BCE and CE allow historians to speak about events in the past through a secular rather than religious lens.

Even so, the designations BCE/BC and CE/AD work the same. In the era of BCE/BC, time counts down backwards. Once you reach year one, however, time begins to march forward in the AD/CE era. Thus, Augustus comes to power in Rome in the year 27 BCE. He dies, however, in 14 CE. So, in essence, he ruled for 41 years. In terms of Jesus, many scholars now place his birth earlier than turn of the first millennia, sometime around 4 BCE.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Explain the factors that make defining religion a difficult task.
- Distinguish the views of religious scholars within the functionalist school of thought.
- Differentiate the substantive approach to religion from the functionalist approach.
- Distinguish between the various ‘isms’ that characterize religious belief (i.e. animism, monotheism, polytheism, etc.).
- Recognize what differentiates a world religion from an everyday religion.⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 1

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 1 Discussion
- Complete Module 1 Quiz

Discussion: Greetings and Introductions

Please introduce yourself to the class. In your response please include, your name, your major, and your general career goals. Once you have submitted your post, please read through your classmates' posts and respond to at least two. Be honest but keep in mind your own privacy. Responses should expand upon a thought and be meaningful.

2. The Nature and Functions of Religion

The Nature of Religion

Religion has been traditionally defined as a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Such definitions, while helpful for encapsulating religion quickly, do not capture the complexity and diversity of religious experiences around the world.⁽¹⁰⁾

In aiming to properly define religions, scholars have traditionally fallen into one of two schools: The Functionalist school and The Substantive school. The Functionalist school aims to define religion based on how religion functions for believers.

One can better understand this by thinking about the existential questions that religion aims to answer:

- Why am I here?
- What is my purpose?
- Where am I going?

In contrast to this school of thought, the Substantive camp argues that religion is best defined by the elements or “substances” that comprise it. Here, one might think about symbols, rituals, beliefs, etc.

In more recent years, scholars have come to see religion as a complex organism, which cannot be reduced to its functionality or its substances. Therefore, the best definitions often comprise a mixture of the two, noting that religion includes both tangible and intangible elements. With that said, we will explore briefly the

functions and substances that comprise religion to better capture the elements that define religion. ⁽¹⁾

The Functions of Religion

If one aims for a definition of how religion functions, one is likely to argue that the uniqueness of religion has to do with its ability to answer the “Big Questions” of human existence. Those questions include:

- Where did I come from?
- Where am I going?
- What is my purpose in life?
- Is there a cause for suffering?

Provide an Explanation for Human Origins

One of the common questions that religion has historically aimed to address is that of human origins. Most religions have creation stories to provide an explanation of human beginnings, or mythological accounts that provide a religious explanation for the creation of the universe and human beginnings. In the western World Religions, for instance, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all share a version of the Garden of Eden tale. A tale in which the expulsion of the first couple from paradise leads to the peopling of the world. Indian religions too have their own explanation for human origins. The Vedic creation myth, for example, explains that at the beginning of time the caste system was formed from the body of slain deity. Those born within the caste are simply fulfilling that which was established long ago.

As it relates to beginnings of the individual self, East and West

take different approaches to this question. Traditionally speaking, the West believes that the formation of the Self begins at conception or birth. When speaking about a soul or the spiritual self, the western tradition has by and large instructed that the soul does not possess a pre-history, but its beginnings start at ensoulment within the body. With the East, and Hinduism more specifically, there is a belief that one's soul migrates from one body to the next through a process of reincarnation. As such, it is not so much the body that defines the Self, as it is the soul that inhabits the body.

Provide an Explanation for Human Endings

East and West will take different paths when dealing with the question of endings, but most religions deal with this question in some way.

In all the major Indian religions, for example, there is a belief that life is not a one-and-done cycle, but that human beings have the possibility of being reincarnated again. Based on the amount of karma one accrues or loses in this life determines where one is slotted in the next life.

The religions of East Asia take a different approach to this question of afterlife.

- Daoism, for example, teaches that through mastery of one's chi, the believer can reverse the aging process and become an immortal infant.
- Confucianism and Shinto hold on to the belief that ancestral spirits continue to exist with the family, and therefore are deserved of continued veneration.
- In the West, Christianity and Islam are quite similar in their afterlife beliefs, teaching that life is a one-and-done endeavor, with places of rewards and punishments awaiting those who pass into the next life.

Provide an Explanation Human Purpose

Another question that religions seek to answer revolve around that of purpose. Religions across the world will have different ways of addressing this question, but ultimately, they all do in some way. Often times, interestingly enough, they articulate human purpose through some form of numbered system.

- In Confucianism, for example, the purpose of human kind is to treat others compassionately and recognize one's role within the larger society according to the *Five Great Relationships* . This, Confucius argued, would ensure that society would remain a stable, and free of chaos.
- In Buddhism, the purpose of human existence is to eliminate personal desire through the *Four Noble Truths* . The objective here being that the elimination of desire will lead one to the elimination of personal suffering.
- In the West, Judaism teaches that one purpose is to observe the laws of God as laid out in the ^{Ten Commandments} .
- For Muslims, one's objective is to abide by the regulations of the *Five Pillars* , demonstrating one's faith in public acts on a daily basis.

Provide an Explanation for Human Suffering

Again, most religions demonstrate a basic concern for the problem of human suffering. This is sometimes articulated as a matter of **theodicy** , or the problem of how to deal with “**evil**.” Almost across the board, evil is often articulated as the cause of self-interest or individual desire. This is why many, if not all, religions stress the importance of self-discipline and self-control so that to extinguish those evils.

Where religions differ is in terms of where evil derives. Western religions, for example, articulate evil along the lines of sin.

- For Christians, historically at least, the belief has been that human beings have inherited sin from Adam and Eve and therefore must rely on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to find relief from one's sin.
- In both Judaism and Islam, the belief is that human beings are born good but can become sinful through their wrongdoing. Both of these religions have holy days throughout the ritual year, which allow for the believer to purify him or herself of the sin that has accumulated over the year.
- In the East, Shinto holds a similar view of sin as that of Judaism and Islam, seeing impurity as an inevitable part of the human condition that must be managed lest it corrupt our innately good selves.

Conclusion

By addressing these questions, religion has historically legitimated its role within human culture by providing answers to the other unexplainable questions that surround human existence. With the development of science in the modern era, however, religion no longer is the sole proprietor of answers to these questions. Science, for example, can point to evolution as a reasonable response to the question of human origins. As such, this is one of the main reasons why religious definitions must comprise more than simply functionality. This is why a good definition must also account for the substances of religion, or the definable elements of religion. ⁽¹⁾

3. The Substances of Religion

The Substances of Religion

Whenever we speak of the substance of religion, we are speaking of the elements of religion that are either visible, tangible, or quantifiable. Thus, a visible example of a religious substance is a religious symbol. A tangible example of a religious substance is a sacred place. A quantifiable example of a religious substance would be a deity or deities within a religion. Let's explore some example of religious substances and then consider why these alone are incapable of providing a good definition of religion. ⁽¹⁾

Symbols

Religious symbolism is the use by a religion of symbols including archetypes, acts, artwork, events, or natural phenomena. Religions view religious texts, rituals, and works of art as symbols of compelling ideas or ideals. Symbols help create a resonant mythos expressing the moral values of the society or the teachings of the religion, foster solidarity among adherents, and bring adherents closer to their object of worship.

The symbolism of the early Church was characterized as being understood by initiates only. After the legalization of Christianity in the 4th-century, more recognizable symbols were put in use. Christianity has borrowed from the common stock of significant symbols known to most periods and to all regions of the world. ⁽¹¹⁾

Sacred Arts

One significant area of study in the humanities is that of art and art history. The art of a given culture or time period can speak volumes about the beliefs, religious or otherwise, of the people in that culture. Therefore, the intersection of art and religion is fertile ground for study. Art can evoke or enhance a religious experience. The reason for this is the emotional relationship between our senses, the world around us, and our beliefs. We may learn cognitively, but we engage with the world sensually. Our senses interact with, affect, and inform, our perceptions of the world around us. Art and religion then, are products of the sensually perceived world.

Music

Music is perhaps the more prevalent artistic form for religious expression. The great songs of the faith carry meaning, which spoken words or visual symbols cannot; Gregorian chants, George Frideric Handel's (1685–1759) "MESSIAH," and Johann Sebastian Bach's (1685–1750) various chorales and organ pieces represent the traditional high holy church music. However, many more examples abound beyond what is considered specifically church music. Bluesy gospel hymns, Polynesian choirs singing songs like "GOD YU TEKEM LAEF BLONG MI," the chanting and humming of Buddhist monks, even the Muslim call to prayer, can all be considered sacred forms of music. Each of these styles is capable of transporting, and transfixing, the listener to the presence of the divine.

Architecture

The architecture of a place of worship reflects the theology of the people. Iconography rich cathedrals for Orthodox Christians, solitary monasteries for Buddhist monks, and shrines to house the kami of the Shinto, each reflect the theology and praxis of the religion they represent.

Some of the most obvious examples of architecture reflecting theology in the western world are grand cathedrals. To identify a church as a cathedral depended on size, location, importance, and the awe factor. The word **cathedral** comes from the root Greek word *kathedra*, which means "a seat." The cathedral housed the seat of the bishop, archbishop, or pope. One of the grandest cathedrals in Christendom is *The Papal Basilica of Saint Peter* in the Vatican City, center of the Roman Catholic faith.

Writing

Writing is likely the most portable of the artistic expressions. Literature not only connects its reader to their beliefs through the use of imagination but also works as a means of transmitting those beliefs for others. We can look at an ancient text from the Middle East and understand the emotion, original intent, and ideas of the writer. Most religions throughout the world rely on written sacred texts for the transmission of their beliefs and praxis. ⁽¹⁾

Rituals

A ritual is a set of actions performed mainly for their symbolic value. It may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including by a religious community. The term usually refers to actions which are

stylized, and usually excludes actions which are arbitrarily chosen by the performers. The purposes of rituals are varied. Rituals can fulfill:

- Religious obligations or ideals
- Satisfy spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners
- Strengthen social bonds
- Provide social and moral education
- Demonstrate respect or submission
- Allow one to state one's affiliation
- Serve as a rite of passage
- Obtain social acceptance or approval for some event — or rituals are sometimes performed just for the pleasure of the ritual itself.

Beliefs

Religious belief is a strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control human destiny. Such a state may relate to the existence, characteristics, and worship of a deity or deities; divine intervention in the universe and human life; or values and practices centered on the teachings of a spiritual leader. In contrast to other belief systems, religious beliefs are usually codified. ⁽¹¹⁾

Religious Practitioners

There are several types of religious practitioners or people who specialize in religious behaviors.

These are individuals who specialize in the use of spiritual power to influence others. A **shaman** is an individual who has access to supernatural power that can then be used for the benefit of specific

clients. Found in indigenous cultures, shamans may be part-time specialists, but is usually the only person in the group that can access the supernatural. They have specialized knowledge that is deemed too dangerous for everyone to know because they do not have the training to handle the knowledge. Oftentimes, shamans train their replacement in the ways of contacting and utilizing the supernatural. Shamans are often innovative in their practices, using trance states to contact the supernatural.

Priests are another type of religious practitioner who is trained to perform rituals for benefit of a group. Priests differ from shamans in a couple of important ways. For priests, rituals are key—innovation and creativity are generally not prized or encouraged. Priests are found in most organized religions, e.g., Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism, although they have a different name such as monks, ministers, or rabbis.

Sorcerers and witches, unlike shamans and priests who have high status in their cultures, usually have low status because their abilities are seen in a negative manner. Both sorcerers and witches have the ability to connect with the supernatural for ill purposes.

- Sorcerers often take on a role similar to law enforcement in the United States; they are used by people to punish someone who has violated socially proscribed rules.
- Witches are believed to have an innate connection to the supernatural, one that they often cannot control. Because witches may inadvertently hurt people because they cannot control their power, if discovered, they are often ostracized or forced to leave their group. It is important to differentiate witches in some cultures from Wiccans. While Christianity makes no distinction between Wiccans and witches as described above, Wicca has clear mandates against using magic to harm others. The Wiccan rede states, “*An’ it harm none, do what ye will.*”⁽¹²⁾

The Experiential

Rudolf Otto, a German thinker, attempted to theorize a single term that could explain the structure of all religious experience independent of cultural background. In his book, *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY*, he identified this and called it the “**numinous**” experience. For an experience to be numinous, in Otto’s opinion, it needed to involve two things.

- First, it had to include the *mysterium tremendum*, which is the tendency to invoke fear and trembling.
- Secondly, it had to include the *mysterium fascinas*, which is the tendency to attract, fascinate or compel.

According to Otto, a numinous experience also has a personal quality to it, because individuals typically feel that they are opening some unique communication chain with the divine. ⁽¹³⁾

Conclusion

Many definitions of religion that one finds will rely strictly on the substances to encapsulate religion. The problem here is that, if one simply defines religion based on its substances, one ultimately defines it as an institution that is not unlike other institutions, such as sport or politics. Indeed, just like religions, sport and politics include symbols, sacred places, rituals, beliefs, and even feelings of awe — the *mysterium tremendum*. This is why, when thinking about religious definitions, one should articulate it not only based on what one sees, but also based on how it functions. Doing one without the other does not fully encapsulate what sets religion apart as an object of study.

What this all means, of course, is that not only can religion be properly defined. It can also be studied, as well as a unique human

institution. With that said, let's transition now to thinking about why people are religious. Here is where the scientific study of religion has proven invaluable over the past two centuries. ⁽¹⁾

4. Why Are People Religious?

Why Are People Religious?

Within the academic study of religion, one might argue that people are religious for one of four reasons.

- The **anthropological school** argues that religion functions as an early form of science, answering questions that human reason cannot yet explain.
- The **psychological school** argues that people gravitate towards religion because it provides a sense of comfort and security.
- The **sociological school** argues that religion provides a sense of social cohesiveness and solidarity.
- The **economic school** proposes that religion functions as a means of controlling the under classes to the benefits of those in the higher social strata.

Most scholars today argue that one cannot reduce religion to one form of functionality. It is more likely that religion attracts adherents because it fulfills many of these functions in the lives of believers.

Anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor and James Frazer looked at religion from an evolutionary approach. In examining societies that they regarded as less complex, they argued that as civilizations advance, it is inevitable that their system of belief advances as well. The more complex a particular society is, the more complex the religious system. All societies demonstrate some form of religious belief, as religions function scientifically, in that they provide mythological explanations for the existential questions surrounding human origins, purpose, and afterlife. Tylor and Frazer both agreed, however, that as civilizations advanced from religious reasoning to

scientific reasoning, religion would eventually die out, as science could offer more rational explanation to those existential questions.⁽¹⁾

Religion and Security

With the development of the school of psychology in the early twentieth century, psychologists became interested in why people gravitated towards religion. Sigmund Freud explained that religion provided a source of security for individual by answering existential questions as why we die and suffer. He also suggested that religion provides a mechanism of personal comfort, helping people cope with uncertainty. So, for instance, the Trobriand Islanders are excellent mariners, yet perform elaborate rituals before setting sail. On 9/11 and in the days following, tens of thousands of US citizens went to church, temple, or mosque to pray and find comfort and answers to the devastation of the terrorist attack.⁽¹⁶⁾

Religion and Social Cohesion

Regarded as the founder of sociology, Emile Durkheim, argued that the attractiveness of religion is its promise of social solidarity to like-minded persons. Religion was more than simply an institution for Durkheim. Rather, he regarded it as an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. We perceive as individuals a force greater than ourselves and give that perception a supernatural face. We then express ourselves religiously in groups, which for Durkheim makes the symbolic power greater. Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all of our individual consciousness, which then creates a reality of its own.⁽¹⁸⁾

Religion and Social Control

Marx viewed religion as a tool of social control used by the bourgeoisie to keep the proletariat content with an unequal status quo.

The social-conflict approach is rooted in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. According to Marx, in a capitalist society, religion plays a critical role in maintaining an unequal status quo, in which certain groups of people have radically more resources and power than other groups of people. Marx argued that the bourgeoisie used religion as a tool to keep the less powerful proletariat pacified. Marx argued that religion was able to do this by promising rewards in the after-life, instead of in this life. It was in this sense that Marx asserted the following:

“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people... The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness” (p.72).

In this passage, Marx is calling for the proletariat to discard religion and its deceit about other-worldly events. Only then would this class of people be able to rise up against the bourgeoisie and gain control of the means of production, and only then would they achieve real rewards, in this life. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Conclusion

Each of these four approaches to religion (anthropological, psychological, sociological, and economic) offer compelling explanations for determining why human beings gravitate to religion and religious beliefs. As a criticism, one can point out that

an argument can be made for each of these being a relevant reason why people are religious. In short, religious belief is very complex. One cannot simply reduce religious belief to anthropological, psychological, sociological, or economic reasons. In truth, people gravitate to religion for a multiplicity of reasons. To diminish religious belief to one or even two explanations fails to appreciate the distinct reasons that each individual has for adopting a religious identity. ⁽¹⁾

5. Types of Religious Experiences

Types of Religious Experiences

In terms of religious experiences, these too are just as diverse as the reasons for why people become religious. While most of the World Religions today will be theistic in practice, a handful — such as Shinto and Daoism — still bear visible signs of their animist roots. And magic, one could argue, provides the basis for all religious belief if one wanted. With that said, let's explore these three types of religious expression, keeping an open mind that they each provide avenues for connecting with the sacred. ⁽¹⁾

Magic

In many cases, it becomes difficult or impossible to draw any meaningful line between beliefs and practices that are magical versus those that are religious. In general, the term religion is reserved for an organized cult with a priesthood and dedicated sites of worship or sacrifice, while magic is prevalent in all societies, regardless of whether they have organized religion or more general systems of animism or shamanism. Religion and magic became conceptually separated with the development of western monotheism, where the distinction arose between supernatural events sanctioned by mainstream religious doctrine (“miracles”) and mere magic rooted in folk belief or occult speculation. In pre-monotheistic religious traditions, there is no fundamental distinction between religious practice and magic; tutelary deities

concerned with magic are sometimes called “hermetic deities” or “spirit guides.”

Animism

Animism refers to the belief that non-human entities are spiritual beings, either intrinsically or because spirits inhabit them for a period of time. Unlike supernatural forces, animist spirits may be inherently good or evil. Often, these spirits are thought to be the souls of deceased relatives, and they are not worshiped as deities. Daoism and Shinto are the most animistic of the World Religions.

While animists believe everything to be spiritual in nature, they do not necessarily see the spiritual nature of everything in existence as being united (monism), the way pantheists do. Animism puts more emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual soul. In pantheism, everything shares the same spiritual essence — there are no distinct spirits and/or souls. Because humans are considered a part of nature, rather than superior to, or separate from it, animists see themselves on roughly equal footing with other animals, plants, and natural forces, and subsequently have a moral imperative to treat these agents with respect.

In animist societies, ritual is considered essential to win the favor of the spirits that ward off other malevolent spirits and provide food, shelter, and fertility. Shamans, also sometimes called medicine men or women, serve as mediums between the physical world and the world of spirits.

Animism is thought to be the belief system that laid the groundwork for the notion of a soul and the animation of traditionally inanimate objects, allowing every world religion to take those basic principles in other directions.

Theism

The term **theism**, first introduced by Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688), derives from the Greek word *theos* meaning “**god**”. It refers to any belief system that incorporates the existence of a deity. A **deity** is a supernatural being thought of as holy, divine or sacred. Though they take a variety of forms, deities are often expressed as taking human form. They are usually immortal, and are commonly assumed to have personalities, consciousness and intellects comparable (albeit superior) to those of humans. Typically, deities do not reveal themselves directly to humans, but make themselves known through their effects in the world. They are thought to dwell mainly in otherworldly or holy places like Heaven, Hell, the sky, the underworld, or in a supernatural plane or celestial sphere.

When only one deity is recognized, the faith tradition is called **monotheistic**. Typically, monotheistic traditions conceive of God as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and active in governance and organization of the world and the universe. The most prominent modern day monotheistic religions include Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

In contrast to monotheism, **deism** is the belief that at least one deity exists and created the world, but that the creator(s), though transcendent and supreme, does/do not alter the original plan for the universe. Deism typically rejects supernatural events (prophecies, miracles and divine revelations) prominent in organized religion. Instead, deism holds that religious beliefs must be founded on human reason and observed features of the natural world, and that these sources reveal the existence of a supreme being as creator.

Faith traditions involving more than one deity are called polytheistic. **Polytheism** recognizes multiple gods as being distinct and separate beings. Examples include the Egyptian and the Greek religions.

Monism views multiple gods as being connected under the

umbrella of a greater whole. Hinduism is considered a monistic faith as each of their deities are really avatars of one universal principle, the Brahman.

Henotheism is the belief that while only one deity is worshiped other deities may exist and other people are justified in worshipping those other deities.

Monolatry refers to the belief that there may be more than one deity, but that only one is worthy of being worshiped.⁽¹⁴⁾

It is also important to note that every society also has **nonbelievers** , such as **atheists** , who do not believe in a divine being or entity, and **agnostics** , who hold that ultimate reality (such as God) is unknowable. While typically not an organized group, atheists and agnostics represent a significant portion of the population. It is important to recognize that being a nonbeliever in a divine entity does not mean the individual subscribes to no morality. Indeed, many Nobel Peace Prize winners and other great humanitarians over the centuries would have classified themselves as atheists or agnostics.⁽¹⁵⁾

Distinguishing the World Religions from Everyday Religion

Before looking at each of the World Religions in our course, we should first understand how scholars typically distinguish a World Religion. There are eight religions that scholars designate as World Religions; a category can be further split into western and eastern World Religions.

Western World Religions include:

- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam

Eastern World Religions include:

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Confucianism
- Taoism
- Shinto

There are three features, which distinguish a world religion from a non-world religion. The three features include:

1. **Longevity** : the religion must have withstood the tests of time
2. **Membership** : the membership of the religion is much larger than non-world religions
3. **Spanning of Continents** : one can find the religion outside of its original place of origin

These features have remained relatively consistent since the term World Religion was first coined in the Nineteenth century. At the time, the term was utilized to identify those religions whose followers extended beyond national borders. However, the categorization is not without its faults. For example, the following questions must be considered.

1. How long is longevity?
2. How many members make it large enough?
3. How far away from the place of origin is far enough?

Regardless of the answers to these questions, the world religion designation remains useful when distinguishing them from everyday religion.⁽¹⁾

PART II

MODULE 2: HINDUISM

6. Introduction

World Religions – Hinduism

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the religion of Hinduism. The module Learning Unit will familiarize students with Indian religious history as well as Hindu beliefs and practices. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Indian religious history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will argue for whether or not they believe that Hinduism is a religion defined by permanence or impermanence. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Characterize Indian religious practice during the Vedic Age.
- Distinguish religious practice in the Vedic and Upanishadic

eras.

- Identify the similarities and differences between the Vedas, Upanishads, and Baghavad Gita.
- Describe essential elements related to Hindu theology (e.g. reincarnation, the soul, permanence/impermanence).
- Explain the place of the caste system within Indian society and culture.
- Identify the function of religious practices found within Hindu tradition.
- Describe the role and function of the gods within Hinduism. ⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 2

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 2 Discussion
- Complete Hinduism Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 2 Quiz

7. Etymology and History of Hinduism

Introduction

Hinduism is the predominant religion of India. Among other practices and philosophies, Hinduism includes a wide spectrum of laws and prescriptions of “daily morality” based on karma, dharma, and societal norms. Hinduism is a conglomeration of distinct intellectual or philosophical points of view, rather than a rigid common set of beliefs.

Hinduism is formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder. Among its direct roots is the historical Vedic religion of Iron Age India and, as such, Hinduism is often called the “oldest living religion” or the “oldest living major religion” in the world.

Hinduism, with about one billion followers (950 million estimated in India), is the world’s third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. ⁽²⁾

Etymology

The word **Hindu** is derived (through Persian) from the Sanskrit word Sindhu, the historic local appellation for the Indus River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, which is first mentioned in the Rig Veda.

The word Hindu was borrowed by European languages from the Arabic term al-Hind, referring to the land of the people who live across the River Indus, itself from the Persian term Hindū, which

refers to all Indians. By the 13th century, Hindustān emerged as a popular alternative name of India, meaning the “land of Hindus.”

It was only towards the end of the 18th century that European merchants and colonists began to refer to the followers of Indian religions collectively as Hindus. The term Hinduism was introduced into the English language in the 19th century to denote the religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions native to India.⁽²⁾

History

Hinduism developed over many centuries from a variety of sources: cultural practices, sacred texts, and philosophical movements, as well as local popular beliefs. The combination of these factors is what accounts for the varied and diverse nature of Hindu practices and beliefs. Hinduism developed from several sources.

Prehistoric and Neolithic culture, which left material evidence including abundant rock and cave paintings of bulls and cows, indicating an early interest in the sacred nature of these animals.⁽³⁾

Indus Valley Civilization

The **Indus Valley civilization**, located in what is now Pakistan and northwestern India, flourished between approximately 2500 and 1700 B.C.E., and persisted with some regional presence as late as 800 B.C.E. The civilization reached its high point in the cities of Harrapa and Mohenjo-Daro. Although the physical remains of these large urban complexes have not produced a great deal of explicit religious imagery, archaeologists have recovered some intriguing items, including an abundance of seals depicting bulls, among these a few exceptional examples illustrating figures seated in yogic positions; terracotta female figures that suggest fertility; and small

anthropomorphic sculptures made of stone and bronze. Material evidence found at these sites also includes prototypes of stone linga (phallic emblems of the Hindu god Shiva).

According to recent theories, Indus Valley peoples migrated to the Gangetic region of India and blended with indigenous cultures, after the decline of civilization in the Indus Valley. A separate group of Indo-European speaking people migrated to the subcontinent from West Asia. These peoples brought with them ritual life including fire sacrifices presided over by priests, and a set of hymns and poems collectively known as the Vedas.⁽³⁾

Upanishads

The 9th and 8th centuries BCE witnessed the composition of the earliest Upanishads. **Upanishads** form the theoretical basis of classical Hinduism and are known as **Vedanta** (conclusion of the Veda). The older Upanishads launched attacks of increasing intensity on the rituals. The diverse monistic speculations of the Upanishads were synthesized into a theistic framework by the sacred Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita.

The major Sanskrit epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, were compiled over a protracted period during the late centuries BCE and the early centuries CE. They contain mythological stories about the rulers and wars of ancient India, and are interspersed with religious and philosophical treatises. The later Puranas recount tales about devas and devis, their interactions with humans, and their battles against rakshasa.

Increasing urbanization of India in 7th and 6th centuries BCE led to the rise of new ascetic or shramana movements, which challenged the orthodoxy of rituals. **Mahavira** (c. 549–477 BCE), proponent of Jainism, and Buddha (c. 563 – 483), founder of Buddhism were the most prominent icons of this movement.⁽²⁾

Persia

Persia held dominance in northern India until the conquest of Alexander the Great in 327 BCE. One year later, Alexander had defeated the Achaemenid Empire and firmly conquered the Indian subcontinent. Again, foreign influences were brought to bear on the region, giving rise to the Greco-Buddhist culture, which impacted all areas of culture in northern India from art to religion to dress. Statues and reliefs from this period depict Buddha, and other figures, as distinctly Hellenic in dress and pose (known as the Gandhara School of Art). Following Alexander's departure from India, the Maurya Empire (322–185 BCE) rose under the reign of Chandragupta Maurya (322–298) until, by the end of the third century BCE, it ruled over almost all of northern India. ⁽²⁾

Maurya Empire

The **Maurya Empire** proved short-lived, in large part due to poor financial administration. Following its collapse, the country splintered into many small kingdoms and empires (such as the Kushan Empire) in what has come to be called the **Middle Period**. This era saw the increase of trade with Rome (which had begun c. 130 BCE) following Augustus Caesar's conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE (Egypt had been India's most constant partner in trade in the past). This was a time of individual and cultural development in the various kingdoms, which finally flourished in what is considered the **Golden Age of India** under the reign of the Gupta Empire (320–550 CE). The empire declined slowly under a succession of weak rulers until it collapsed around 550 CE. ⁽²⁾

India's Independence

In 712 CE the Muslim general Muhammed bin Quasim conquered northern India, establishing himself in the region of modern-day Pakistan. The Muslim invasion saw an end to the indigenous empires of India and, from then on, independent city-states or communities under the control of a city would be the standard model of government. The Islamic Sultanates rose in the region of modern-day Pakistan and spread northwest. The disparate world views of the religions, which now contested each other for acceptance in the region and the diversity of languages spoken, made the unity and cultural advances, such as were seen in the time of the Guptas, difficult to reproduce. Consequently, the Islamic Mughal Empire easily conquered the region. India would then remain subject to various foreign influences and powers (among them the Portuguese, the French, and the British) until finally winning its independence in 1947 CE. ⁽²⁾

8. The Hindu Theology of Samsara and Yoga

The Hindu Theology of Samsara

Common to virtually all Hindus are certain beliefs, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Belief in many gods, which are seen as manifestations of a single unity. These deities are linked to universal and natural processes.
- Preference for one deity while not excluding or disbelieving others.
- Belief in the universal law of cause and effect (karma) and reincarnation.
- Belief in the possibility of liberation and release (moksha) by which the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara) can be resolved.⁽³⁾

The concept of **Samsara** is reincarnation, the idea that after we die our soul will be reborn again in another body — perhaps in an animal, perhaps as a human, perhaps as a god, but always in a regular cycle of deaths and resurrections.

Another concept is **Karma**, which literally means “action,” the idea that all actions have consequences, good or bad. Karma determines the conditions of the next life, just like our life is conditioned by our previous karma. There is no judgement or forgiveness, simply an impersonal, natural and eternal law operating in the universe. Those who do good will be reborn in better conditions while those who are evil will be reborn in worse conditions.

Dharma means “right behavior” or “duty,” the idea that we all have a social obligation. Each member of a specific caste has a particular set of responsibilities, a dharma. For example, among the Kshatriyas (the warrior caste), it was considered a sin to die in bed; dying in the battlefield was the highest honor they could aim for. In other words, dharma encouraged people of different social groups to perform their duties as best as they could.

Moksha means “liberation” or release. The eternal cycle of deaths and resurrection can be seen as a pointless repetition with no ultimate goal attached to it. Seeking permanent peace or freedom from suffering seems impossible, for sooner or later we will be reborn in worse circumstances. Moksha is the liberation from this never-ending cycle of reincarnation, a way to escape this repetition. But what would it mean to escape from this cycle? What is it that awaits the soul that manages to be released from samsara? To answer this question we need to look into the concept of atman and Brahman.

The Upanishads tell us that the core of our own self is not the body, or the mind, but **atman** or “**Self**”. Atman is the core of all creatures, their innermost essence. It can only be perceived by direct experience through meditation. It is when we are at the deepest level of our existence.

Brahman is the one underlying substance of the universe, the unchanging “**Absolute Being**”, the intangible essence of the entire existence. It is the undying and unchanging seed that creates and sustains everything. It is beyond all description and intellectual understanding.

One of the great insights of the Upanishads is that atman and Brahman are made of the same substance. When a person achieves moksha or liberation, atman returns to Brahman, to the source, like a drop of water returning to the ocean. The Upanishads claim that it is an illusion that we are all separate: with this realization we can be freed from ego, from reincarnation and from the suffering we experience during our existence. Moksha, in a sense, means to be reabsorbed into Brahman, into the great World Soul. ⁽⁴⁾

The following passage explains in metaphorical terms the idea that atman and Brahman are the same:

*“As the same fire assumes different shapes When it consumes
objects differing in shape, So does the one Self take the shape
Of every creature in whom he is present.” (Katha Upanishad
II.2.9 ⁽⁴⁾)*

How is moksha achieved?

There are many ways according to the Upanishads: Meditation, introspection, and also from the knowledge that behind all forms and veils the subjective and objective are One, that we are all part of the Whole. In general, the Upanishads agree on the idea that men are naturally ignorant about the ultimate identity between atman, the self within, and Brahman. One of the goals of meditation is to achieve this identification with Brahman, and abandon the ignorance that arises from the identification with the illusory or quasi-illusory nature of the common sense world. ⁽⁴⁾

Yogas

One accrues karma over the course of one's life by fulfilling the duties associated with one's caste, as well as through the various yogas. In whatever way a Hindu defines the goal of life; there are several methods of yoga that sages have taught for reaching that goal. Texts dedicated to Yoga include the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, and, as their philosophical and historical basis, the Upanishads.

Paths that one can follow to achieve the spiritual goal of life (moksha, Samadhi, or nirvana) include:

- Bhakti Yoga (the path of love and devotion)
- Karma Yoga (the path of right action)
- Rāja Yoga (the path of meditation)
- Jñāna Yoga (the path of wisdom)

An individual may prefer one or some yogas over others, according to his or her inclination and understanding. Some devotional schools teach that bhakti is the only practical path to achieve spiritual perfection for most people, based on their belief that the world is currently in the Kali Yuga (one of four epochs which are part of the Yuga cycle). Practice of one yoga does not exclude others. Many schools believe that the different yogas naturally blend into and aid other yogas. For example, the practice of jnana yoga, is thought to inevitably lead to pure love (the goal of bhakti yoga), and vice versa. Someone practicing deep meditation (such as in raja yoga) must embody the core principles of karma yoga, jnana yoga, and bhakti yoga, whether directly or indirectly. ⁽²⁾

9. Caste System in Ancient India

Caste System in Ancient India

Ancient India in the Vedic Period (c. 1500–1000 BCE) did not have social stratification based on socio-economic indicators; rather, citizens were classified according to their Varna or castes. ‘Varna’ defines the hereditary roots of a newborn; it indicates the color, type, order or class of people.

Four principal categories are defined:

- Brahmins (priests, gurus, etc.)
- Kshatriyas (warriors, kings, administrators, etc.)
- Vaishyas (agriculturalists, traders, etc., also called Vysyas)
- Shudras (laborers)

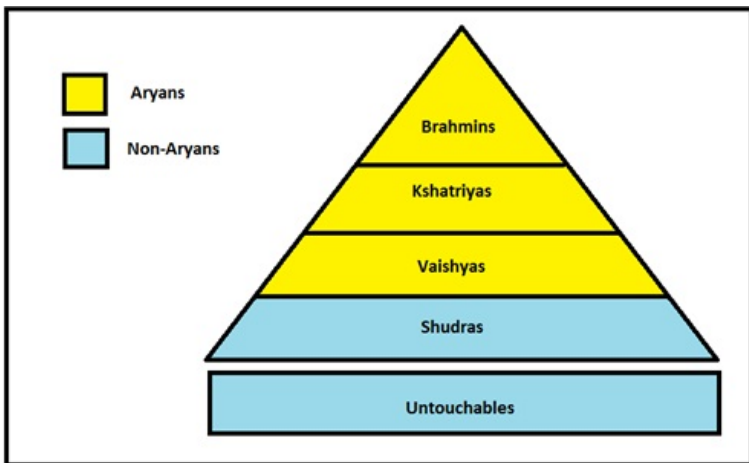


Figure 2-1: Caste System by Saylor Foundation is licensed under CC-BY 3.0 .

Each Varna propounds specific life principles to follow; newborns are required to follow the customs, rules, conduct, and beliefs fundamental to their respective Varnas. ⁽⁵⁾

The lowest caste was the Dalits, the untouchables, who handled meat and waste, though there is some debate over whether this class existed in antiquity. At first, it seems this caste system was merely a reflection of one's occupation but, in time, it became more rigidly interpreted to be determined by one's birth and one was not allowed to change castes nor to marry into a caste other than one's own. This understanding was a reflection of the belief in an eternal order to human life dictated by a supreme deity. ⁽⁶⁾

Purpose of the Varna System

The caste system in ancient India had been executed and acknowledged during, and ever since, the Vedic period that thrived around 1500–1000 BCE. The segregation of people based on their Varna was intended to decongest the responsibilities of one's life, preserve the purity of a caste, and establish eternal order.

The underlying reason for adhering to Varna duties is the belief in the attainment of moksha on being dutiful. Belief in the concept of Karma reinforces the belief in the Varna life principles. As per the Vedas, it is the ideal duty of a human to seek freedom from subsequent birth and death and rid oneself of the transmigration of the soul, and this is possible when one follows the duties and principles of one's respective Varna. According to the Vedas, consistent encroachment on others' life responsibilities engenders an unstable society. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras form the fourfold nature of society, each assigned appropriate life duties and ideal disposition. Men of the first three hierarchical castes are called the twice-born; first, born of their parents, and second, of their guru after the sacred thread initiation they wear over their shoulders. The Varna system is seemingly embryonic

in the Vedas, later elaborated and amended in the Upanishads and Dharma Shastras.⁽⁵⁾

Varna System: Brahmins

Brahmins were revered as an incarnation of knowledge itself, endowed with the precepts and sermons to be discharged to all Varnas of society. They were not just revered because of their Brahmin birth but also their renunciation of worldly life and cultivation of divine qualities, assumed to be always engrossed in the contemplation of Brahman, hence called Brahmins. Priests, gurus, rishis, teachers, and scholars constituted the Brahmin community. They would always live through the Brahmacharya (celibacy) vow ordained for them. Even married Brahmins were called Brahmachari (celibate) by virtue of having intercourse only for reproducing and remaining mentally detached from the act. However, anyone from other Varnas could also become a Brahmin after extensive acquisition of knowledge and cultivation of one's intellect.

Brahmins were the foremost choice as tutors for the newborn because they represent the link between sublime knowledge of the gods and the four Varnas. This way, since the ancestral wisdom is sustained through guru-disciple practice, all citizens born in each Varna would remain rooted to the requirements of their lives. Normally, Brahmins were the personification of contentment and dispellers of ignorance, leading all seekers to the zenith of supreme knowledge, however, under exceptions; they lived as warriors, traders, or agriculturists in severe adversity. The ones bestowed with the titles of Brahma Rishi or Maha Rishi were requested to counsel kings and their kingdoms' administration. All Brahmin men were allowed to marry women of the first three Varnas, whereas marrying a Shudra woman would, marginally, bereft the Brahmin

of his priestly status. Nevertheless, a Shudra woman would not be rejected if the Brahmin consented.

Brahmin women, contrary to the popular belief of their subordination to their husbands, were, in fact, more revered for their chastity and treated with unequalled respect. As per Manu Smriti, a Brahmin woman must only marry a Brahmin and no other, but she remains free to choose the man. She, under rare circumstances, is allowed to marry a Kshatriya or a Vaishya, but marrying a Shudra man is restricted. The restrictions in inter-caste marriages are to avoid subsequent impurity of progeny born of the matches. A man of a particular caste marrying a woman of a higher caste is considered an imperfect match, culminating in ignoble offspring.⁽⁵⁾

Varna System: Kshatriyas

Kshatriyas constituted the warrior clan, the kings, rulers of territories, administrators, etc. It was paramount for a Kshatriya to learn weaponry, warfare, penance, austerity, administration, moral conduct, justice, and ruling. All Kshatriyas would be sent to a Brahmin's ashram from an early age until they became wholly equipped with requisite knowledge. Besides austerities like the Brahmins, they would gain additional knowledge of administration. Their fundamental duty was to protect their territory, defend against attacks, deliver justice, govern virtuously, and extend peace and happiness to all their subjects, and they would take counsel in matters of territorial sovereignty and ethical dilemmas from their Brahmin gurus. They were allowed to marry a woman of all Varnas with mutual consent. Although a Kshatriya or a Brahmin woman would be the first choice, Shudra women were not barred from marrying a Kshatriya.

Kshatriya women, like their male counterparts, were equipped with masculine disciplines, fully acquainted with warfare, rights to

discharge duties in the king's absence, and versed in the affairs of the kingdom. Contrary to popular belief, a Kshatriya woman was equally capable of defending a kingdom in times of distress and imparting warfare skills to her descendants. The lineage of a Kshatriya king was kept pure to ensure continuity on the throne and claim sovereignty over territories. ⁽⁵⁾

Varna System: Vaishyas

Vaishya is the third Varna represented by agriculturalists, traders, money lenders, and those involved in commerce. Vaishyas are also the twice-born and go to the Brahmins' ashram to learn the rules of a virtuous life and to refrain from intentional or accidental misconduct. Cattle rearing was one of the most esteemed occupations of the Vaishyas, as the possession and quality of a kingdom's cows, elephants, horses, and their upkeep affected the quality of life and the associated prosperity of the citizens.

Vaishyas would work in close coordination with the administrators of the kingdom to discuss, implement, and constantly upgrade the living standards by providing profitable economic prospects. Because their life conduct exposes them to objects of immediate gratification, their tendency to overlook the law and despise the weak is perceived as probable. Hence, the Kshatriya king would be most busy with resolving disputes originating of conflicts among Vaishyas.

Vaishya women, too, supported their husbands in business, cattle rearing, and agriculture, and shared the burden of work. They were equally free to choose a spouse of their choice from the four Varnas, albeit selecting a Shudra was earnestly resisted. Vaishya women enjoyed protection under the law, and remarriage was undoubtedly normal, just as in the other three Varnas. A Vaishya woman had equal rights over ancestral properties in case of the untimely death

of her husband, and she would be equally liable for the upbringing of her children with support from her husband. ⁽⁵⁾

Varna System: Shudras

The last Varna represents the backbone of a prosperous economy, in which they are revered for their dutiful conduct toward life duties set out for them. Scholarly views on Shudras are the most varied since there seemingly are more restrictions on their conduct. However, *Atharva Veda* allows Shudras to hear and learn the *Vedas* by heart, and the *Mahabharata*, supports the inclusion of Shudras in ashrams and their learning the *Vedas*. Becoming officiating priests in sacrifices organized by kings was, however, to a large extent restricted. Shudras are not the twice-born, hence they are not required to wear the sacred thread like the other Varnas. A Shudra man was only allowed to marry a Shudra woman, but a Shudra woman was allowed to marry from any of the four Varnas.

Shudras would serve the Brahmins in their ashrams, Kshatriyas in their palaces and princely camps, and Vaishyas in their commercial activities. Although they are the feet of the primordial being, educated citizens of higher Varnas would always regard them as a crucial segment of society, for an orderly society would be easily compromised if the feet were weak. Shudras, on the other hand, obeyed the orders of their masters, because their knowledge of attaining moksha by embracing their prescribed duties encouraged them to remain loyal. Shudra women, too, worked as attendants and close companions of the queen and would go with her after marriage to other kingdoms. Many Shudras were also allowed to be agriculturalists, traders, and enter occupations held by Vaishyas. These detours of life duties would, however, be under special circumstances, on perceiving deteriorating economic situations. The Shudras' selflessness makes them worthy of unprecedented regard and respect. ⁽⁵⁾

Gradual Withdrawal from the Ancient Varna Duties

Despite the life order being arranged for all kinds of people, by the end of the Vedic period, many began to deflect and disobey their primary duties. As a large Varna populace became difficult to handle, the emergence of Jainism propounded the ideology of one single human Varna and nothing besides. Many followed the original Varna rules, but many others, disapproving opposing beliefs, formed modified sub-Varnas within the primary four Varnas. This process, occurring between 700 CE and 1500 CE, continues to this day, as India is now home to a repository of the primary four Varnas and hundreds of sub-Varnas, making the original four Varnas merely 'umbrella terms' and perpetually ambiguous.

The subsequent rise of Islam, Christianity, and other religions also left their mark on the original Varna system in India. Converted generations reformed their notion of Hinduism in ways that were compatible with the conditions of those times. The rise of Buddhism, too, left its significant footprint on the Varna system's legitimate continuance in renewed conditions of life. Thus, soulful adherence to Varna duties from the peak of Vedic period eventually diminished to subjective makeshift adherence, owing partly to the discomfort in practicing Varna duties and partly to external influence.⁽⁵⁾

10. Sacred Text

Sacred Text: The Vedas

The **Vedas** are a collection of hymns and other religious texts composed in India between about 1500 and 1000 BCE. It includes elements such as liturgical material, as well as mythological accounts, poems, prayers, and formulas considered to be sacred by the Vedic religion. ⁽⁷⁾

The origin of the Vedas can be traced back as far as 1500 BCE, when a large group of nomads called the Aryans, coming from central Asia, crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains, migrating into the Indian subcontinent. We do not know much about the authors of these texts: In Vedic tradition the focus tends to be on the *ideas* rather than on the *authors*, which may allow one to look at the message without being influenced by the messenger.

Vedic literature is religious in nature and as such tends to reflect the worldview, spiritual preoccupations, and social attitudes of the Brahmans or priestly class of ancient India. The Vedas were first composed sometime around 1500–1000 BCE in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent— present day Pakistan and northwest India — and they were transmitted orally over many generations before eventually being committed to writing. Like the Homeric epics, parts of the Vedas were composed in different periods. The oldest of these texts is the Rig-Veda, but it is not possible to establish precise dates for its composition. It is believed that the entire collection was completed by the end of the second millennium BCE.

In general, the Vedas have a strong priestly bias, as the priestly class had the monopoly in the edition and transmission of these texts.

The **Rig-Veda** is the largest and most important text of the Vedic

collection; it includes 1028 hymns and it is divided into ten books called **mandalas**. It is a difficult text, written in a very obscure style and filled with metaphors and allusions that are hard to understand for the modern reader. The **Sama-Veda** has verses that are almost entirely from the Rig-Veda, but are arranged in a different way since they are to be chanted. The **Yajur-Veda** is divided into the White and Black Yajur-Veda and contains explanatory commentaries on how to perform religious rituals and sacrifices. The **Atharva-Veda** contains charms and magical incantations and has a more folkloristic style.

The Vedas present a multitude of gods, most of them related to natural forces such as storms, fire, and wind. As part of its mythology, Vedic texts contain multiple creation stories, most of them inconsistent with each other. Sometimes the Vedas refer to a particular god as the greatest god of all, and later another god will be regarded as the greatest god of all.

Some elements of the religion practiced by the natives of India before Vedic times still persist in the Vedas. The Pre-Vedic religion, the oldest known religion of India, which was found in India before the Aryan migrations, was apparently an animistic and totemic worship of many spirits dwelling in stones, animals, trees, rivers, mountains, and stars. Some of these spirits were good, others were evil, and great magic skill was the only way to control them. Traces of this old religion are still present in the Vedas. In the Atharva-Veda, for example, there are spells to obtain children, to avoid abortion, to prolong life, to ward off evil, to woo sleep, and to harm or destroy enemies.⁽⁷⁾

Sacred Text: The Upanishads

The **Upanishads** are a collection of texts of religious and philosophical nature, written in India probably between c. 800 BCE and c. 500 BCE, during a time when Indian society started to

question the traditional Vedic religious order. Some people during this time decided to engage in the pursuit of spiritual progress, living as ascetic hermits, rejecting ordinary material concerns, and giving up family life. Some of their speculations and philosophy were compiled into the Upanishads. There is an attempt in these texts to shift the focus of religious life from external rites and sacrifices to internal spiritual quests in the search for answers.

Etymologically, the name **Upanishad** is composed of the terms **upa** (near) and **shad** (to sit), meaning something like “**sitting down near**.” The name is inspired by the action of sitting at the feet of an illuminated teacher to engage in a session of spiritual instructions, as aspirants still do in India today.

The books, then, contain the thoughts and insights of important spiritual Indian figures. Although we speak of them together as a body of texts, the Upanishads are not parts of a whole, like chapters in a book. Each is complete in itself. Therefore, they represent not a consistent philosophy or worldview, but rather the experiences, opinions, and lessons of many different men and women. ⁽⁴⁾

Sacred Text: Bhagavad Gita

The **Bhagavad Gita** is an ancient Indian text that became an important work of Hindu tradition in terms of both literature and philosophy. The earliest translations of this work from Sanskrit into English occurred around 1795 CE by Sir Charles Wilkins. The name Bhagavad Gita means “**the song of the Lord**”. It is composed as a poem and it contains many key topics related to the Indian intellectual and spiritual tradition. Although it is normally edited as an independent text, the Bhagavad Gita became a section of a massive Indian epic named “The Mahabharata,” the longest Indian epic. There is a part in the middle of this long text, consisting of 18 brief chapters and about 700 verses: this is the section known as the Bhagavad Gita. It is also referred to as the **Gita**, for short.

Around the time when the Gita was written, asceticism was seen in India as the ideal spiritual life. Ascetics from different sects along with Jains and Buddhists all agreed that leaving everything behind (family, possessions, occupations, etc.) was the best way to live in a meaningful way.

The Bhagavad Gita revolves around the following questions:

How can someone live a life spiritually meaningful without withdrawing from society?

What can someone who does not want to give up family and social obligations do to live the right way?

The Gita challenges the general consensus that only ascetics and monks can live a perfect spiritual life through renunciation and emphasizes the value of an active spiritual life.

The Plot of the Gita

The plot of the Gita is based on two sets of cousins competing for the throne: The **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas** .

Diplomacy has failed, so these two clans' armies meet on a battlefield in order to settle the conflict and decide which side will gain the throne. This is a major battle and it takes place in Kurukshetra, "the field of the Kurus," in the modern state of Haryana in India.

Arjuna , the great archer and leader of the Pandavas, is a member of the Kshatriyas caste (the warrior rulers caste). He looks out towards his opponents and recognizes friends, relatives, former teachers, and finally realizes that controlling the kingdom is not worth the blood of all his loved ones. Emotionally overwhelmed, Arjuna drops down, casts aside his bow and arrows, and decides to quit. He prefers to withdraw from battle; he prefers **inaction** instead of being responsible for the death of the people he loves.

His chariot driver is the god Vishnu, who has taken the form of Krishna. **Krishna** sees Arjuna quitting and begins to persuade Arjuna that he should stick to his duty as a warrior and engage the enemy.

The Bhagavad Gita is presented as a conversation between Arjuna and Krishna, a man and a god, a seeker and a knower.⁽⁸⁾

PART III

MODULE 3: BUDDHISM

II. Introduction

World Religions – Buddhism

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the religion of Buddhism. The module Learning Unit will familiarize students with Buddhist religious history as well as Buddhist beliefs and practices. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Buddhist history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will argue for whether or not they believe that Buddhism is a religion defined by permanence or impermanence. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Describe the life of Siddhartha Guatama.
- List and describe the Four Noble Truths.

- Compare and contrast elements of Buddhist theology with the theology of other Indian religious traditions.
- Describe essential elements related to Buddhist theology (e.g. reincarnation, the soul, permanence/impermanence).
- Identify the function of religious practices found within Hindu tradition.
- Identify how the Buddhist religion became a migratory religion.
- Identify similarities and differences between the three Buddhist schools. ⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 3

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 3 Discussion
- Complete Buddhism Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 3 Quiz

12. Early Years and History of Buddhism

Introduction

Buddhism is a religion indigenous to the Indian subcontinent that encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices largely based on teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, who is commonly known as the Buddha (meaning “the awakened one” in Sanskrit and Pāli). The Buddha lived and taught in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE. He is recognized by Buddhists as an awakened or enlightened teacher who shared his insights to help sentient beings end suffering (*dukkha*) through eliminating ignorance (*avidyā*) by way of understanding and seeing dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and eliminating craving (*taṇhā*), and thus attain the highest happiness, *nirvāṇa*.

Two major branches of Buddhism are generally recognized:

Theravada (“The School of the Elders”)

Theravada has a widespread following in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar etc.).

Mahayana (“The Great Vehicle”)

Mahayana is found throughout East Asia (China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan etc.) and includes the traditions of Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Shingon, and Tiantai (Tendai).

In some classifications, **Vajrayana** —practiced mainly in Tibet and Mongolia, and adjacent parts of China and Russia—is recognized as a third branch, while others classify it as a part of Mahayana.

While Buddhism remains most popular within Asia, both branches are now found throughout the world. Estimates of Buddhists

worldwide vary significantly depending on the way Buddhist adherence is defined. Conservative estimates are between 350 and 750 million. Higher estimates are between 1.2 and 1.7 billion. It is also recognized as one of the fastest growing religions in the world.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Three Jewels

Buddhist schools vary on the exact nature of the path to liberation, the importance and canonicity of various teachings and scriptures, and especially their respective practices. The foundations of Buddhist tradition and practice are the **Three Jewels** :

- The Buddha
- The Dharma (the teachings)
- The Sangha (the community)

Taking “refuge in the triple gem” has traditionally been a declaration and commitment to being on the Buddhist path, and in general distinguishes a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist.

Other practices may include following ethical precepts; support of the monastic community; renouncing conventional living and becoming a monastic; the development of mindfulness and practice of meditation; cultivation of higher wisdom and discernment; study of scriptures; devotional practices; ceremonies; and in the Mahayana tradition, invocation of buddhas and bodhisattvas.⁽¹⁹⁾

Early Years of the Buddha and the Four Sights

There is no agreement on when Siddhartha was born. This is still a question mark both in scholarship and Buddhist tradition. Several dates have been proposed, but the many contradictions and

inaccuracies in the different chronologies and dating systems make it impossible to come up with a satisfactory answer free of controversy.

Modern scholarship agrees that the Buddha passed away at some point between 410 and 370 BCE, about 140–100 years before the time of Indian Emperor Ashoka's reign (268–232 BCE). Both scholars and Buddhist tradition agree that the Buddha lived for 80 years. More exactness on this matter seems impossible.

Siddhartha's caste was the Kshatriya caste (the warrior rulers caste). He belonged to the Sahkya clan and was born in the Gautama family. Because of this, he became to be known as Shakyamuni “sage of the Shakyas”, which is the most common name used in the Mahayana literature to refer to the Buddha. His father was named Śuddhodana and his mother, Maya. ⁽²⁰⁾

According to this narrative, shortly after the birth of young prince Gautama, an astrologer visited the young prince's father and prophesied that Siddhartha would either become a great king or renounce the material world to become a holy man, depending on whether he saw what life was like outside the palace walls.

Śuddhodana was determined to see his son become a king, so he prevented him from leaving the palace grounds. But at age 29, despite his father's efforts, Gautama ventured beyond the palace several times. In a series of encounters—known in Buddhist literature as the four sights—he learned of:

1. The suffering of ordinary people, encountering an old man
2. A sick man
3. A corpse
4. An ascetic holy man, apparently content and at peace with the world

These experiences prompted Gautama to abandon royal life and take up a spiritual quest. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Historical Context

After leaving Kapilavastu, Siddhartha practiced the yoga discipline under the direction of two of the leading masters of that time: Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra. Siddhartha did not get the results he expected, so he left the masters, engaged in extreme asceticism, and five followers joined him. For a period of six years Siddhartha tried to attain his goal but was unsuccessful. After realizing that asceticism was not the way to attain the results he was looking for, he gave up this way of life. ⁽²¹⁾

After eating a meal and taking a bath, Siddhartha sat down under a tree of the species *ficus religiosa*, where he finally attained Nirvana (perfect enlightenment) and became known as the Buddha.

Soon after this, the Buddha delivered his first sermon in a place named Sarnath, also known as the “deer park,” near the city of Varanasi. This was a key moment in the Buddhist tradition, traditionally known as the moment when the Buddha “*set in motion the wheel of the law*.” The Buddha explained the middle way between asceticism and a life of luxury, **the four noble truths** (suffering, its origin, how to end it, and the eightfold path or the path leading to the extinction of suffering), and the impersonality of all beings.

The Buddha's first disciples joined him around this time, and the Buddhist monastic community, known as Sangha, was established. Sariputra and Mahamaudgalyayana were the two chief disciples of the Buddha. Mahakasyapa was also an important disciple who became the convener of the First Buddhist Council. From Kapilavastu and Sravasti in the north, to Varanasi, Nalanda and many other areas in the Ganges basin, the Buddha preached his vision for about 45 years. During his career he visited his hometown, met his father, his foster mother and even his son, who joined the Sangha along with other members of the Shakya clan. Upali, another disciple of the Buddha, joined the Sangha around this time: he was a Shakya and regarded as the most competent monk in

matters of monastic discipline. Ananda, a cousin of the Buddha, also became a monk; he accompanied the Buddha during the last stage of his life and persuaded him to admit women into the Sangha, thus establishing the Bhikkhuni Sangha, the female Buddhist monastic community.

During his career, some kings and other rulers are described as followers of the Buddha. The Buddha's adversary is reported to be Davadatta, his own cousin, who became a follower of the Buddha and turned out to be responsible for a schism of the Sangha, and he even tried to kill the Buddha.

The last days of the Buddha are described in detail in an ancient text named Mahaparinirvana Sutra. We are told that the Buddha visited Vaishali, where he fell ill and nearly died. Some accounts say that here the Buddha delivered his last sermon. After recovering, the Buddha travelled to Kushinagar. On his way, he accepted a meal from a smith named Cunda, which made him sick and led to his death. Once he reached Kushinagar, he encouraged his disciples to continue their activity one last time and he finally passed away.⁽²¹⁾

Forming of Two Separate Buddhist Lines

About a century after the death of Buddha, during the Second Buddhist Council, we find the first major schism ever recorded in Buddhism: The Mahasanghika School.

Many different schools of Buddhism had developed at that time. Buddhist tradition speaks about 18 schools of early Buddhism, although we know that there were more than that, probably around 25.

A Buddhist school named Sthaviravada (in Sanskrit “**school of the elders**”) was the most powerful of the early schools of Buddhism. Traditionally, it is held that the Mahasanghika School came into existence as a result of a dispute over monastic practice. They also seem to have emphasized the supramundane nature of the

Buddha, so they were accused of preaching that the Buddha had the attributes of a god. As a result of the conflict over monastic discipline, coupled with their controversial views on the nature of the Buddha, the Mahasanghikas were expelled, thus forming two separate Buddhist lines: the **Sthaviravada** and the **Mahasanghika** .

During the course of several centuries, both the Sthaviravada and the Mahasanghika schools underwent many transformations, originating different schools.

- The **Theravada** School, which still exists in our day, emerged from the Sthaviravada line, and is the dominant form of Buddhism in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.
- The Mahasanghika School eventually disappeared as an ordination tradition.
- During the 1st century CE, while the oldest Buddhist groups were growing in south and south-east Asia, a new Buddhist school named **Mahayana** (“ **Great Vehicle** ”) originated in northern India. This school had a more adaptable approach and was open to doctrinal innovations.
- **Mahayama** Buddhism is today the dominant form of Buddhism in Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Mongolia, Korea, and Vietnam. ⁽²⁰⁾

13. Buddhist Expansion Across Asia

Buddhist Expansion Across Southern Asia

During the time of Ashoka's reign, trade routes were opened through southern India. Some of the merchants using these roads were Buddhists who took their religion with them. Buddhist monks also used these roads for missionary activity. Buddhism entered Sri Lanka during this time. A Buddhist chronicle known as the Mahavamsa claims that the ruler of Sri Lanka, Devanampiya Tissa, was converted to Buddhism by Mahinda, Ashoka's son, who was a Buddhist missionary, and Buddhism became associated with Sri Lanka's kingship. The tight relationship between the Buddhist community and Lankan's rulers was sustained for more than two millennia until the dethroning of the last Lankan king by the British in 1815 CE.

After reaching Sri Lanka, Buddhism crossed the sea into Myanmar (Burma). Despite the fact that some Burmese accounts say that the Buddha himself converted the inhabitants of Lower and Upper Myanmar, historical evidence suggests otherwise. Buddhism co-existed in Myanmar with other traditions, such as Brahmanism and various local animists' cults. The records of a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim named Xuanzang (Hsüan-tsang, 602-664 CE) state that in the ancient city of Pyu (the capital of the Kingdom of Sri Ksetra, present day Myanmar), a number of early Buddhist schools were active. After Myanmar, Buddhism travelled into Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, around 200 CE. Archaeological records from about the 5th century CE support the presence of Buddhism in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula.⁽²⁰⁾

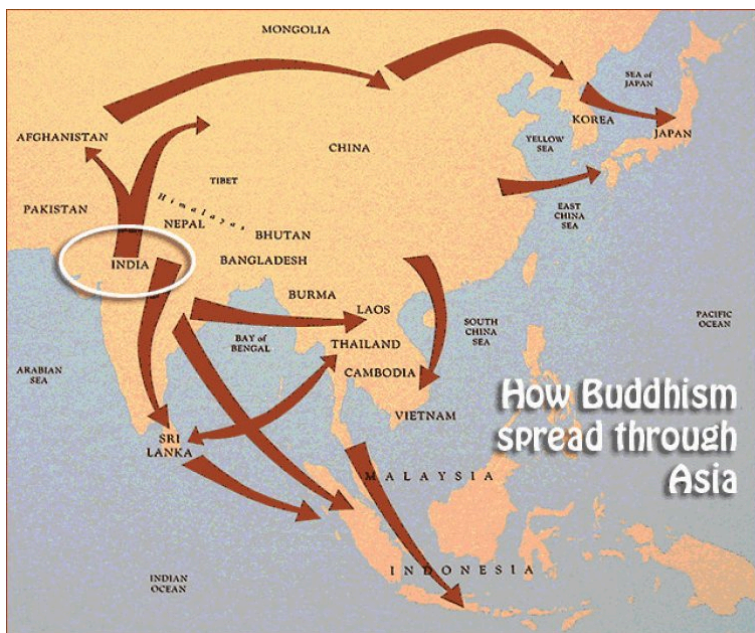


Figure 3-1 : Map of How Buddhism Spread Through Asia by Be Zen licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 .

While Buddhism was flourishing all over the rest of Asia, its importance in India gradually diminished. Two important factors contributed to this process: a number of Muslim invasions, and the advancement of Hinduism, which incorporated the Buddha as part of the pantheon of endless gods; he came to be regarded as one of the many manifestations of the god Vishnu. In the end, the Buddha was swallowed up by the realm of Hindu gods, his importance diminished, and in the very land where it was born, Buddhism dwindled to be practiced by very few. ⁽²⁰⁾

Buddhist Expansion Across Central and East Asia

Expansion into China

Buddhism entered China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). The first Buddhist missionaries accompanied merchant caravans that travelled using the Silk Road, probably during the 1st century BCE. The majority of these missionaries belonged to the Mahayana school.

The initial stage of Buddhism in China was not very promising. Chinese culture had a long-established intellectual and religious tradition and a strong sense of cultural superiority that did not help the reception of Buddhist ideas. Many of the Buddhist ways were considered alien by the Chinese and even contrary to the Confucian ideals that dominated the ruling aristocracy. The monastic order received a serious set of critiques: It was considered unproductive and therefore was seen as placing an unnecessary economic burden on the population, and the independence from secular authority emphasized by the monks was seen as an attempt to undermine the traditional authority of the emperor.

Despite its difficult beginning, Buddhism managed to build a solid presence in China towards the fall of the Han dynasty on 220 CE, and its growth accelerated during the time of disunion and political chaos that dominated China during the Six Dynasties period (220-589 CE). The collapse of the imperial order made many Chinese skeptical about the Confucian ideologies and more open to foreign ideas. Also, the universal spirit of Buddhist teachings made it attractive to many non-Chinese rulers in the north who were looking to legitimate political power. Eventually, Buddhism in China grew strong, deeply influencing virtually every aspect of its culture.

Expansion into Korea

From China, Buddhism entered Korea in 372 CE, during the reign of King Sosurim, the ruler of the Kingdom of Koguryo, or so it is stated in official records. There is archaeological evidence that suggests that Buddhism was known in Korea from an earlier time.

Expansion Into Tibet

The official introduction of Buddhism in Tibet (according to Tibetan records) took place during the reign of the first Tibetan emperor Srong btsan sgam po (Songtsen gampo, 617-649/650 CE), although we know that the proto-Tibetan people had been in touch with Buddhism from an earlier time, through Buddhist merchants and missionaries. Buddhism grew powerful in Tibet, absorbing the local pre-Buddhist Tibetan religions. ⁽²⁰⁾

14. Buddhism Today

Buddhism Today

In the 21st century CE, it is estimated that 488 million (9-10% of the world population) people practice Buddhism. Approximately half are practitioners of Mahayana schools in China and it continues to flourish. The main countries that practice Buddhism currently are China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Due to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism has been adopted by international practitioners, notably westerners, in a variety of different countries.

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‘Socially Engaged Buddhism,’ which originated in 1963 in war-ravaged Vietnam, a term coined by Tchich Nhat Hanh, the international peace activist, is a contemporary movement concerned with developing Buddhist solutions to social, political and ecological global problems. This movement is not divided between monastic and lay members and includes Buddhists from Buddhist countries, as well as western converts. Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka are the major Buddhist countries (over 70% of population practicing) while Japan, Laos, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam have smaller but strong minority status.

New movements continue to develop to accommodate the modern world. Perhaps the most notable are the Dalit Buddhist Movement (Dalits are a group of Indians known as the

‘untouchables’ because they fall outside the rigid caste system but who are now gaining respect and status supported by UN); New Kadampa Tradition, led by Tibetan monk Gyatso Kelsang, which claims to be Modern Buddhism focused on lay practitioners; and the Vipassana Movement, consisting of a number of branches of modern Theravada Buddhism which have moved outside the monasteries, focusing on insight meditation.⁽²²⁾

Buddhist Theology

The Buddha was not concerned with satisfying human curiosity related to metaphysical speculations. The Buddha ignored topics, such as the existence of god, the afterlife, and creation stories. During the centuries, Buddhism has evolved into different branches, and many of them have incorporated a number of diverse metaphysical systems, deities, astrology and other elements that the Buddha did not consider. In spite of this diversity, Buddhism has a relative unity and stability in its moral code.⁽²⁰⁾

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Truths, also commonly known as ‘The Four Noble Truths’ explain the basic orientation of Buddhism. They are the truths understood by the ‘worthy ones,’ those who have attained enlightenment or nirvana.

The four truths are dukkha (the truth of suffering); the arising of dukkha (the causes of suffering); the stopping of dukkha (the end of suffering), and the path leading to the stopping of dukkha (the path to freedom from suffering).⁽²³⁾

Analogy of Understanding the Four Noble Truths

The Four Truths are often best understood using a medical framework:

- Truth 1 is the diagnosis of an illness or condition
- Truth 2 is identifying the underlying causes of it
- Truth 3 is its prognosis or outcome
- Truth 4 is its treatment

Truth 1: The Truth of Suffering

All humans experience surprises, frustrations, betrayals, etc., which lead to unhappiness and suffering. Acknowledging or accepting that we will encounter difficulties in daily life as an inevitable and universal part of life as a human being is the first truth. Within this, there are **two types of suffering** :

- Natural suffering: Disasters, wars, infections, etc.
- Self-inflicted suffering: Habitual reacting and unnecessary anxiety and regret

Truth 2: The Causes of Suffering

All suffering lies not in external events or circumstances but in the way we react to and deal with them, our perceptions and interpretations. Suffering emerges from craving for life to be other than it is, which derives from the **3 poisons** :

- Ignorance (Delusion) of the fact that everything, including the self, is impermanent and interdependent.
- Desire (Greed) of objects and people who will help us to

avoid suffering.

- Aversion (Anger) to the things we do not want, thinking we can avoid suffering. We can learn to look at each experience as it happens and be prepared for the next. ⁽²³⁾

Truth 3: The End of Suffering

We hold limiting ideas about ourselves, others, and the world, of which we need to let go. We can unlearn everything from our social conditioning and so bring down all barriers or separations. ⁽²³⁾

Truth 4: The Path that Frees us from Suffering

The mind leads us to live in a dualistic way, but if we are aware of and embrace our habits and illusions, we can abandon our expectations about the ways things should be and instead accept the way they are. We can use mindfulness and meditation to examine our views and gain an accurate perspective.

This Truth contains the **Eightfold Path** leading out of samsara to nirvana. It consists of:

1. Right View: Accepting the fundamental Buddhist teachings
2. Right Resolve: Adopting a positive outlook and a mind free from lust, ill-will, and cruelty
3. Right Speech: Using positive and productive speech as opposed to lying, frivolous or harsh speech
4. Right Action: Keeping the five precepts — refraining from killing, stealing, misconduct, false speech, and taking intoxicants
5. Right Livelihood: Avoiding professions which harm others such as slavery or prostitution
6. Right Effort: Directing the mind towards wholesome goals

7. Right Mindfulness: Being aware of what one is thinking, doing, and feeling at all times
8. Right Meditation: Focusing attention in order to enter meditational states

These eight aspects of the path are often divided into 3 groups: **Insight** (Right View, Right Resolve), **morality** (Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood), and **meditation** (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Meditation).

This eightfold path is not linear, passing from one stage to the next, but cumulative so that ideally all eight factors are practiced simultaneously. ⁽²³⁾

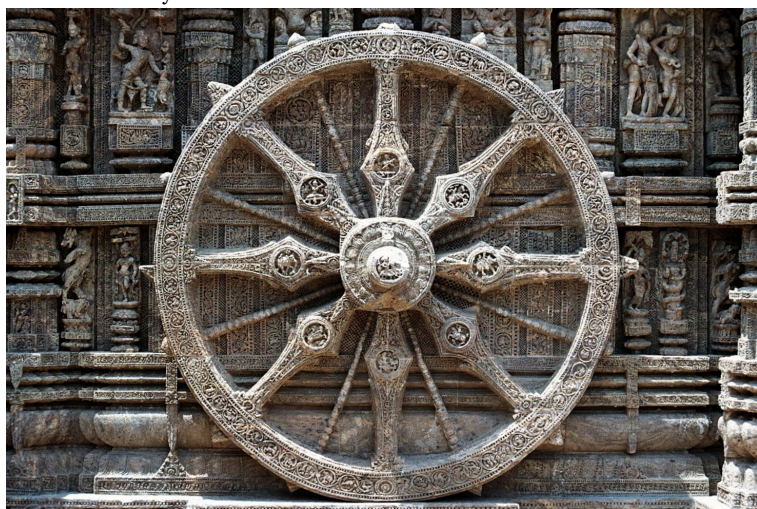


Figure 3-2 : Dharma Wheel by Ibolya Horvath is licensed under CC-BY 3.0 . The Dharmachakra (Wheel of the law with eight spokes) represents the Eightfold Path.

Karma and Samsara

In Buddhism, essentially there is no soul. The unresolved karmas

manifest into a new form composed of five skandhas (constituent elements of a being) in one of the six realms of samsara. The eventual nirvana (salvation) comes through the annihilation of residual karma, which means the ceasing of the alleged existence of being. The actions with intention (cetana) carried out by the mind, body, and speech and which are driven by ignorance, desire, and hatred lead to implications that tie one down in samsara. Following the eightfold path — the set of eight righteous ways of thinking and acting suggested by Buddha — one can attain nirvana.

Dukkha (Suffering)

Dukkha is defined in more detail as the human tendency to cling to or crave impermanent states or objects, which keep us caught in samsara, the endless cycle of repeated birth, suffering and dying. It is thought that the Buddha taught the Four Truths in the very first teaching after he had attained enlightenment as recorded long after his physical death in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra ('The Discourse that Sets Turning the Wheel of Truth'), but this is still in dispute. They were recognized as perhaps the most important teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni only at the time the commentaries were written, c. 5th century CE. ⁽²³⁾

15. Three Schools of Buddhism

Three Schools of Buddhism

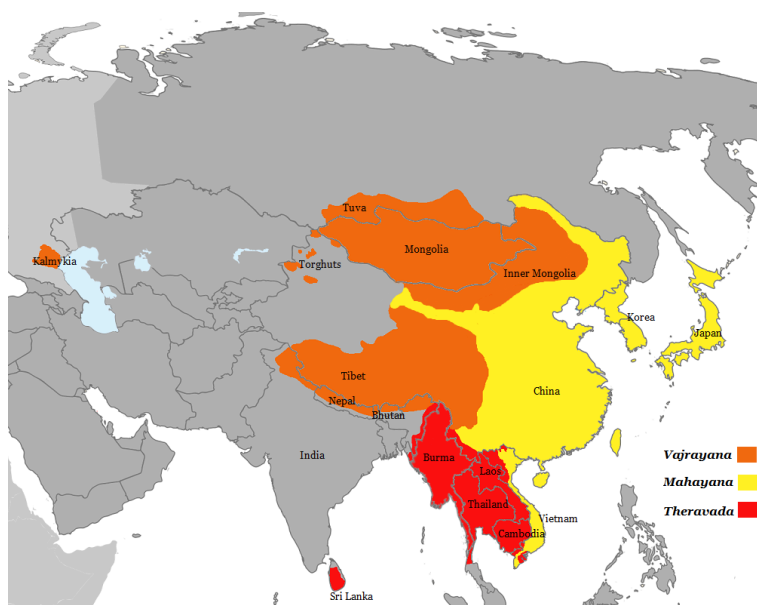


Figure 3-3 : Map of the Main Modern Buddhist Sects by Rupert Gethin is licensed under CC-BY-SA 3.0 . Map illustrating the major centers for the three schools of Buddhism. Burma, Sri, Lanka, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia are shaded red for Theravada. Tibet and Mongolia are shaded orange for Vajrayana. China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan are shaded yellow for Mahayana.

To clarify this complex movement of spiritual and religious thought and religious practice, it may help to understand the three main

classifications of Buddhism to date: Theravada (also known as Hinayana, the vehicle of the Hearers), Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

These are recognized by practitioners as the three main routes to enlightenment (Skt: bodhi, meaning awakening), the state that marks the culmination of all the Buddhist religious paths. The differences between them are as follows:

Click each tab to reveal the content under each one.

Vajrayana

Vajrayana, the Diamond School, originally exclusive to Tibet (in 20th century CE the Chinese occupation of Tibet forced it out of the country), emphasizes the permanence of the Buddha's teachings as symbolized by the vajra (thunderbolt), a ritual implement used for ceremonies, employs Tantra (techniques to reach enlightenment quickly) and focuses mainly on lay practitioners.

Mahayana

Mahayana uses Sanskrit as its main language, and monastic and lay followers work for the liberation of all sentient beings, making compassion and insight (wisdom) its central doctrines.

Theravada

Theravada is the only remaining school from the Early Buddhist period. Its central texts are in Pali (Pāli Canon), the spoken language of the Buddha; and its exclusively monastic devotees strive to become enlightened for their own liberation.

It is significant that Theravada texts exclusively concern the Buddha's life and early teachings; whereas, due to widespread propagation (spreading of the teachings), Mahayana and Vajrayana texts appear in at least six languages. Mahayana texts contain a mixture of ideas, the early texts probably composed in south India and confined to strict monastic Buddhism, the later texts written in northern India and no longer confined to monasticism but lay thinking also. ⁽²²⁾

Mahayana Doctrine of the Bodhisattva

As mentioned, the main tenets of this Mahayana Buddhism are compassion (karuna) and insight or wisdom (prajna). The perfection of these human values culminates in the Bodhisattva, a model being who devotes him or herself altruistically to the service of others, putting aside all self-serving notions; in contrast, is the preceding pursuit of self-interested liberation (Hinayana or Sravakayana). Bodhisattva (Skt; Pali: Bodhisatta) means an enlightened being or one who is oriented to enlightenment. This ideal human being is inspired by the life story of Buddha Shakyamuni who began by generating the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings in the form of a vow. Then he embarked on a religious life by cultivating the Six Perfections (paramitas).

Early Mahayana texts stipulate that a Bodhisattva can only be male, but later texts allow female Bodhisattvas. The term Bodhicitta is used to describe the state of mind of a Bodhisattva, and there are 2 aspects:

- The **relative** , a mind directed towards enlightenment, the ceasing of all cravings and attachments
- The **absolute** , a mind whose nature is enlightenment

A Bodhisattva must place him or herself in the position of others,

in order to be selfless and embody compassion: in other words, to exchange him or herself for the other. ⁽²²⁾

Buddhist Texts

Buddhist scriptures and other texts exist in great variety. Different schools of Buddhism place varying levels of value on learning the various texts. Some schools venerate certain texts as religious objects in themselves, while others take a more scholastic approach. Buddhist scriptures are mainly written in Pali, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese. Some texts still exist in Sanskrit and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.

The followers of Theravada Buddhism take the scriptures known as the Pali Canon as definitive and authoritative, while the followers of Mahayana Buddhism base their faith and philosophy primarily on the Mahayana sutras and their own vinaya. The Pali sutras, along with other, closely related scriptures, are known to the other schools as the agamas.

Over the years, various attempts have been made to synthesize a single Buddhist text that can encompass all of the major principles of Buddhism. In the Theravada tradition, condensed 'study texts' were created that combined popular or influential scriptures into single volumes that could be studied by novice monks. Later in Sri Lanka, the Dhammapada was championed as a unifying scripture.

The Pali Tripitaka, which means " **three baskets** ," refers to:

- Vinaya Pitaka: This contains disciplinary rules for the Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as explanations of why and how these rules were instituted, supporting material, and doctrinal clarification.
- Sutta Pitaka: This contains discourses ascribed to Gautama Buddha.
- Abhidhamma Pitaka: This contains material often described as

systematic expositions of the Gautama Buddha's teachings.

Mahayana Sutras

The Tripitaka Koreana in South Korea, an edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon carved and preserved in over 81,000 wood printing blocks.

The Mahayana sutras are a very broad genre of Buddhist scriptures that the Mahayana Buddhist tradition holds are original teachings of the Buddha. Some adherents of Mahayana accept both the early teachings (including in this the Sarvastivada Abhidharma, which was criticized by Nagarjuna and is, in fact, opposed to early Buddhist thought) and the Mahayana sutras as authentic teachings of Gautama Buddha, and claim they were designed for different types of persons and different levels of spiritual understanding.

The Mahayana sutras often claim to articulate the Buddha's deeper, more advanced doctrines, reserved for those who follow the bodhisattva path. That path is explained as being built upon the motivation to liberate all living beings from unhappiness. Hence, the name Mahayana (lit., The Great Vehicle).⁽¹⁹⁾

PART IV

MODULE 4:
CONFUCIANISM AND
DAOISM

16. Introduction

World Religions – Confucianism and Daoism

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the Chinese religions of Daoism and Confucianism. The module will familiarize students with Chinese religious history as well as Daoist and Confucian beliefs and practices. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Chinese religious history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will argue for how far self-control governs the practices and beliefs of the Chinese Religions. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments. ⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Explain the role and function of the Dao within the Daoist religious tradition.
- Describe essential elements related to Daoist theology (e.g. wu wei, yin/yang).
- List the Five Great Relationships and describe their significance within Confucian thought.
- Describe the essential virtues of Confucianism (e.g. xiao, ren, li, junzi).
- Describe the historical relationship between Confucianism and the Chinese state.
- Recognize the influence of Laozi and Confucius on their respective religions.
- Recognize similarities and differences between Daoism and Confucianism. ⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 4

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 4 Discussion
- Complete Confucianism and Daoism Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 4 Quiz
- Submit Rough Draft: Comparative Religion Essay

17. Religious Practice During the Shang and Zhou Dynasties

Introduction to Chinese Religions

Religious practices in ancient China go back over 7,000 years. Long before the philosophical and spiritual teachings of Confucius and Lao-Tzu developed or before the teachings of the Buddha came to China, the people worshipped personifications of nature and then of concepts like “wealth” or “fortune” which developed into a religion. These beliefs still influence religious practices today. For example, the Tao te Ching of Taoism maintains that there is a universal force known as the Tao which flows through all things and binds all things but makes no mention of specific gods to be worshipped; still, modern Taoists in China (and elsewhere) worship many gods at private altars and in public ceremonies which originated in the country’s ancient past. ⁽²⁴⁾

An Overview of Chinese Religious History

Chinese Prehistoric Religious Practice

In China, religious beliefs are evident in the Yangshao Culture of the Yellow River Valley, which prospered between 5000-3000 BCE. At the Neolithic site of Banpo Village in modern Shaanxi Province (dated to between c. 4500-3750 BCE) 250 tombs were found

containing grave goods, which point to a belief in life after death. There is also a ritualistic pattern to how the dead were buried with tombs oriented west to east to symbolize death and rebirth. Grave goods provide evidence of specific people in the village who acted as priests and presided over some kind of divination and religious observance.

The Yangshao Culture was matrilineal, meaning women were dominant, so this religious figure would have been a woman based on the grave goods found. There is no evidence of any high-ranking males in the burials, but a significant number of females. Scholars believe that the early religious practices were also matrilineal and most likely animistic, where people worship personifications of nature, and usually feminine deities were benevolent and male deities malevolent, or at least more to be feared.

These practices continued with the Qijia Culture (c. 2200–1600 BCE) who inhabited the Upper Yellow River Valley but whose culture could have been patriarchal. Examinations of the Bronze Age site of Lajia Village in modern-day Qinghai Province (and elsewhere) have uncovered evidence of religious practices. Lajia Village is often referred to as the “Chinese Pompeii” because it was destroyed by an earthquake, which caused a flood and the resulting mudslides buried the village intact. Among the artifacts uncovered was a bowl of noodles which scientists have examined and believe to be the oldest noodles in the world and precursors to China’s staple dish “Long-Life Noodles.” Even though not all scholars or archaeologists agree on China as the creator of the noodle, the finds at Lajia support the claim of religious practices there as early as c. 2200 BCE. There is evidence that the people worshipped a supreme god who was king of many other lesser deities. ⁽²⁴⁾

Religious Practice During the Shang Dynasty

By the time of the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) these religious

beliefs had developed so that now there was a definite “**king of the gods**” named **Shangti** and many lesser gods of other names. Shangti presided over all the important matters of state and was a very busy god. He was rarely sacrificed to because people were encouraged not to bother him with their problems. Ancestor worship may have begun at this time but more likely, started much earlier.

Evidence of a strong belief in **ghosts**, in the form of **amulets** and **charms**, goes back to at least the Shang Dynasty and ghost stories are among the earliest form of Chinese literature. Ghosts (known as guei or kwei) were the spirits of deceased persons who had not been buried correctly with due honors or were still attached to the earth for other reasons. They were called by a number of names but in one form, jiangshi (“stiff body”), they appear as **zombies**. Ghosts played a very important role in Chinese religion and culture and still do. The ritual still practiced in China today known as **Tomb Sweeping Day** (usually around 4 April) is observed to honor the dead and make sure they are happy in the afterlife. If they are not, they are thought to return to haunt the living. The Chinese visit the graves of their ancestors on Tomb Sweeping Day during the Festival of Qingming, even if they never do at any other time of the year, to tend the graves and pay their respects.

When someone died naturally or was buried with the proper honors, there was no fear of them returning as a ghost. The Chinese believed that, if the person had lived a good life, they went to live with the gods after death. These spirits of one’s ancestors were prayed to so they could approach Shangti with the problems and praise of those on earth. Tanner (2010) writes:

Ancestors were represented by a physical symbol such as a spirit tablet engraved or painted with the ancestor’s honorific name. Rituals were held to honor these ancestors, and sacrifices of millet ale, cattle, dogs, sheep, and humans were offered. The scale of the sacrifices varied, but at important rituals, hundreds of animals and/or human sacrifices would be slaughtered. Believing that the spirits

of the dead continued to exist and to take an interest in the world of the living, the Shang elite buried their dead in elaborate and well-furnished tombs.

The spirits of these ancestors could help a person in life by revealing the future to them. Divination became a significant part of Chinese religious beliefs and was performed by people with mystical powers (what one would call a “psychic” in the modern day) one would pay to tell one’s future through oracle bones. It is through these oracle bones that writing developed in China. The mystic would write the question on the shoulder bone of an ox or turtle shell and apply heat until it cracked; whichever way the crack went would determine the answer. It was not the mystic or the bone that gave the answer but one’s ancestors who the mystic communed with. These ancestors were in touch with eternal spirits, the gods, who controlled and maintained the universe. ⁽²⁴⁾

Religious Practice During the Zhou Dynasty

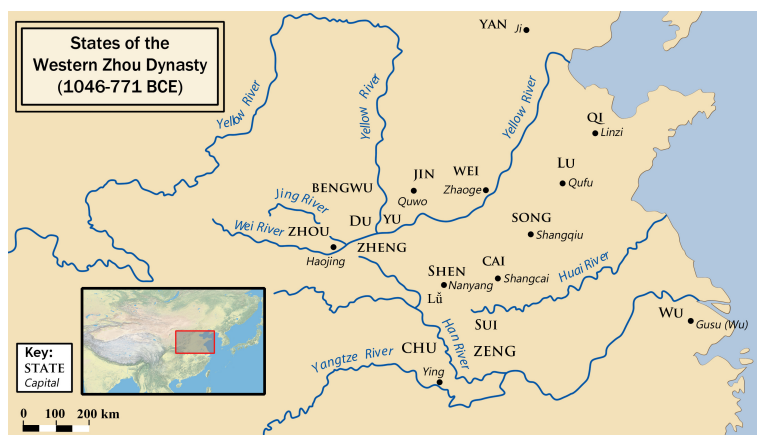


Figure 4-1: States of the Western Zhou Dynasty by Philg88 is licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 .

In the **Zhou Dynasty** (c. 1046–226 BCE) the concept of the **Mandate of Heaven** was developed. The Mandate of Heaven was the belief that Shangti ordained a certain emperor or dynasty to rule and allowed them to rule as long as they pleased him. When the rulers were no longer taking care of the people responsibly, they were said to have lost the Mandate of Heaven and were replaced by another. Modern scholars have seen this simply as a justification for changing a regime, but the people at the time believed in the concept. The gods were thought to watch over the people and would pay special attention to the emperor. People continued a practice, which began toward the end of the Shang Dynasty, of wearing charms and amulets of their god of choice or their ancestors for protection or in the hope of blessings, and the emperor did this as well. Religious practices changed during the latter part of the Zhou Dynasty owing to its decline and eventual fall, but the practice of wearing religious jewelry continued.

The Zhou Dynasty is divided into two periods: **Western Zhou** (1046–771 BCE) and **Eastern Zhou** (771–226 BCE). Chinese culture and religious practices flourished during the Western Zhou period but began to break apart during the Eastern Zhou. Religious practices of divination, ancestor worship, and veneration for the gods continued, but during the Spring and Autumn Period (772–476 BCE) philosophical ideas began to challenge the ancient beliefs.

Confucius (c. 551–479 BCE) encouraged ancestor worship as a way of remembering and honoring one's past but emphasized people's individual responsibility in making choices and criticized an over-reliance on supernatural powers. Mencius (c. 372–289 BCE) developed the ideas of Confucius, and his work resulted in a more rational and restrained view of the world.

The work of **Lao-Tzu** (c. 500 BCE) and the development of **Taoism** might be seen as a reaction to Confucian principles if not for the fact that Taoism developed many centuries before the traditional date assigned to Lao-Tzu.

It is much more probable that Taoism developed from the original nature/folk religion of the people of China than that it was created

by a 6th-century BCE philosopher. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that the rationalism of Confucianism probably developed as a reaction to the emotionalism and spiritualism of those earlier beliefs. ⁽²⁴⁾

Warring States Period

Religious beliefs developed further during the next period in China's history, The **Warring States Period** (476–221 BCE), which was very chaotic. The seven states of China were all independent now that the Zhou had lost the Mandate of Heaven, and each one fought the others for control of the country. Confucianism was the most popular belief during this time, but there was another, which was growing stronger.

A statesman named Shang Yang (died 338 BCE) from the region of Qin developed a philosophy called **Legalism**, which maintained that people were only motivated by self-interest, were inherently evil, and had to be controlled by law. Shang Yang's philosophy helped the State of Qin overpower the six other states and from that the Qin Dynasty was founded by the first emperor, Shi Huangti, in 221 BCE. ⁽²⁴⁾

18. Religious Practice During the Qin and Han Empires

Religious Practice During the Qin and Han Empires

Qin Dynasty

During the **Qin Dynasty** (221–206 BCE), Shi Huangti banned religion and burned philosophical and religious works. Legalism became the official philosophy of the Qin government and the people were subject to harsh penalties for breaking even minor laws. Shi Huangti outlawed any books, which did not deal with his family line, his dynasty, or Legalism, even though he was personally obsessed with immortality and the afterlife, and his private library was full of books on these subjects. Confucian scholars hid books as best as they could and people would worship their gods in secret but were no longer allowed to carry amulets or wear religious charms.

Han Dynasty

Shi Huangti died in 210 BCE while searching for immortality on a tour through his kingdom. The Qin Dynasty fell soon after, in 206 BCE, and the Han Dynasty took its place. The **Han Dynasty** (202 BCE–220 CE) at first continued the policy of Legalism but abandoned it under Emperor Wu (141–87 BCE). **Confucianism** became the state religion and grew more and

more popular even though other religions, like Taoism, were also practiced.

During the Han Dynasty, the emperor became distinctly identified as the mediator between the gods and the people. The position of the emperor had been seen as linked to the gods through the Mandate of Heaven from the early Zhou Dynasty, but now it was his express responsibility to behave so that heaven would bless the people.

Arrival of Buddhism

In the 1st century CE, Buddhism arrived in China via trade through the Silk Road. According to the legend, the Han emperor Ming (28–75 CE) had a vision of a golden god flying through the air and asked his secretary who that could be. The assistant told him he had heard of a god in India who shone like the sun and flew in the air, and so Ming sent emissaries to bring Buddhist teachings to China. Buddhism quickly combined with the earlier folk religion and incorporated ancestor worship and veneration of Buddha as a god.

Buddhism was welcomed in China and took its place alongside Confucianism, Taoism, and the blended folk religion as a major influence on the spiritual lives of the people. When the Han Dynasty fell, China entered a period known as **The Three Kingdoms** (220–263 CE), which was similar to the Warring States Period in bloodshed, violence, and disorder. The brutality and uncertainty of the period influenced Buddhism in China which struggled to meet the spiritual needs of the people at the time by developing rituals and practices of transcendence. The Buddhist schools of Ch'an (better known as **Zen**), Pure Land, and others took on form at this time.⁽²⁴⁾

Religious Practice During the Empire

and Beyond



Figure 4-2: Tang Dynasty, Tang's Provinces, and Border Powers by 742 CE by Yug is licensed under CC-BY-SA 3.0 .

The major religious influences on Chinese culture were in place by the time of the **Tang Dynasty** (618–907 CE) but there were more to come. The second emperor, Taizong (626–649 CE), was a Buddhist who believed in toleration of other faiths and allowed Manichaeism, Christianity, and others to set up communities of faith in China. His successor, Wu Zeitian (690–704 CE), elevated Buddhism and presented herself as a Maitreya (a future Buddha) while her successor, Xuanzong (712–756 CE), rejected Buddhism as divisive and made Taoism the state religion.

Although Xuanzong allowed and encouraged all faiths to practice in the country, by 817 CE Buddhism was condemned as a dividing force, which undermined traditional values. Between 842–845 CE Buddhist nuns and priests were persecuted and murdered and temples were closed. Any religion other than Taoism was prohibited, and persecutions affected communities of Jews,

Christians, and any other faith. The emperor Xuanzong II (846–859 CE) ended these persecutions and restored religious tolerance. The dynasties, which followed the Tang up to the present day all had their own experiences with the development of religion and the benefits and drawbacks which come with it, but the basic form of what they dealt with was in place by the end of the Tang Dynasty. ⁽²⁴⁾

Rise of the Song Dynasty

The chaos and political void caused by the collapse of the Tang Dynasty led to the break-up of China into five dynasties and ten kingdoms, but one warlord would, as had happened so often before, rise to the challenge and collect at least some of the various states back into a resemblance of a unified China.

The **Song Dynasty** was, thus, founded. Although the Song Dynasty were able to govern over a united China after a significant period of division, their reign was beset by the problems of a new political and intellectual climate which questioned imperial authority and sought to explain where it had gone wrong in the final years of the Tang dynasty. A symptom of this new thinking was the revival of the ideals of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism as it came to be called, which emphasized the improvement of the self within a more rational metaphysical framework. This new approach to Confucianism, with its metaphysical add-on, now allowed for a reversal of the prominence the Tang had given to Buddhism, seen by many intellectuals as a non-Chinese religion. ⁽⁵⁵⁾

Foundation of Chinese Culture

Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and the early folk religion combined to form the basis of Chinese culture. Other religions

have added their own influences but these four belief structures had the most impact on the country and the culture. Religious beliefs have always been very important to the Chinese people even though the People's Republic of China originally outlawed religion when it took power in 1949 CE. The People's Republic saw religion as unnecessary and divisive, and during the Cultural Revolution temples were destroyed, churches burned, or converted to secular uses. In the 1970's CE the People's Republic relaxed its stand on religion and since then has worked to encourage organized religion as "psychologically hygienic" and a stabilizing influence in the lives of its citizens. ⁽²⁴⁾

19. Daoism

Daoism: An Overview

Taoism (also known as **Daoism**) is a Chinese philosophy attributed to Lao Tzu (c. 500 BCE), which contributed to the folk religion of the people primarily in the rural areas of China and became the official religion of the country under the Tang Dynasty. Taoism is therefore both a philosophy and a religion. It emphasizes doing what is natural and " *going with the flow* " in accordance with the Tao (or Dao), a cosmic force which flows through all things and binds and releases them. The notion that humans should reconnect with their natural selves by "going with the flow" is called **wu wei** .

The philosophy grew from an observance of the natural world, and the religion developed out of a belief in cosmic balance maintained and regulated by the Tao. The original belief may or may not have included practices, such as ancestor and spirit worship, but both of these principles are observed by many Taoists today and have been for centuries.

Taoism exerted a great influence during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) and the emperor Xuanzong (reigned 712–756 CE) decreed it a state religion, mandating that people keep Taoist writings in their home. It fell out of favor as the Tang Dynasty declined and was replaced by Confucianism and Buddhism but the religion is still practiced throughout China and other countries today. ⁽²⁵⁾

Origins of Daoism

The historian Sima Qian (145–86 BCE) tells the story of **Lao-Tzu** , a

curator at the Royal Library in the state of Chu, who was a natural philosopher. Lao-Tzu believed in the harmony of all things and that people could live easily together if they only considered each other's feelings once in a while and recognized that their self-interest was not always in the interest of others. Lao-Tzu grew impatient with people and with the corruption he saw in government, which caused the people so much pain and misery. He was so frustrated by his inability to change people's behavior that he decided to go into exile.

As he was leaving China through the western pass, the gatekeeper Yin Hsi stopped him because he recognized him as a philosopher. Yin Hsi asked Lao-Tzu to write a book for him before he left civilization forever and Lao-Tzu agreed. He sat down on a rock beside the gatekeeper and wrote the TAO-TE-CHING (THE BOOK OF THE WAY). He stopped writing when he felt he was finished, handed the book to Yin Hsi, and walked through the western pass to vanish into the mist beyond. Sima Qian does not continue the story after this, but presumably (if the story is true) Yin Hsi would have then had the Tao-Te-Ching copied and distributed.

The Tao Te Ching

THE TAO-TE-CHING is not a 'scripture' in any way. It is a book of poetry presenting the simple way of following the Tao and living life at peace with one's self, others, and the world of changes.

A typical verse advises, "*Yield and overcome / Empty and become full / Bend and become straight*" to direct a reader to a simpler way of living.

Instead of fighting against life and others, one can yield to circumstances and let the things, which are not really important go. Instead of insisting one is right all the time, one can empty one's self of that kind of pride and be open to learning from other people.

Instead of clinging to old belief patterns and hanging onto the past, one can bend to new ideas and new ways of living.

THE TAO-TE-CHING was most likely not written by Lao-Tzu at the western pass and may not have been written by him at all. Lao-Tzu probably did not exist and the TAO-TE-CHING is a compilation of sayings set down by an unknown scribe. Whether the origin of the book and the belief system originated with a man named Lao-Tzu or when it was written or how, is immaterial (the book itself would agree); all that matters is what the work says and what it has come to mean to readers.

The TAO-TE-CHING is an attempt to remind people that they are connected to others and to the earth and that everyone could live together peacefully if people would only be mindful of how their thoughts and actions affect themselves, others, and the earth.

Yin-Yang Thought

A good reason to believe that Lao-Tzu was not the author of the TAO-TE-CHING is that the core philosophy of Taoism grew up from the peasant class during the Shang Dynasty long before the accepted dates for Lao-Tzu. During the Shang era, the practice of divination became more popular through the reading of oracle bones, which would tell one's future. Reading oracle bones led to a written text called the I-CHING (c. 1250–1150 BCE), the BOOK OF CHANGES, which is a book still available today providing a reader with interpretations for certain hexagrams, which supposedly tell the future.

A person would ask a question and then throw a handful of yarrow sticks onto a flat surface (such as a table) and the I-CHING would be consulted for an answer to the person's question. These hexagrams consist of **six unbroken lines** (called **Yang**) and **six broken lines** (called **Yin**). When a person looked at the pattern the yarrow sticks made when they were thrown, and then consulted the

hexagrams in the book, they would have their answer. The broken and the unbroken lines, the **yin and yang**, were both necessary for that answer because the principles of yin and yang were necessary for life.

“Yin-yang thought began as an attempt to answer the question of the origin of the universe. According to yin-yang thought, the universe came to be as a result of the interactions between the two primordial opposing forces of yin and yang. Because things are experienced as changing, as processes coming into being and passing out of being, they must have both **yang**, or “*being*,” and **yin**, or “*lack of being*.” The world of changing things that constitutes nature can exist only when there are both yang and yin. Without yang nothing can come into existence. Without yin nothing can pass out of existence.”

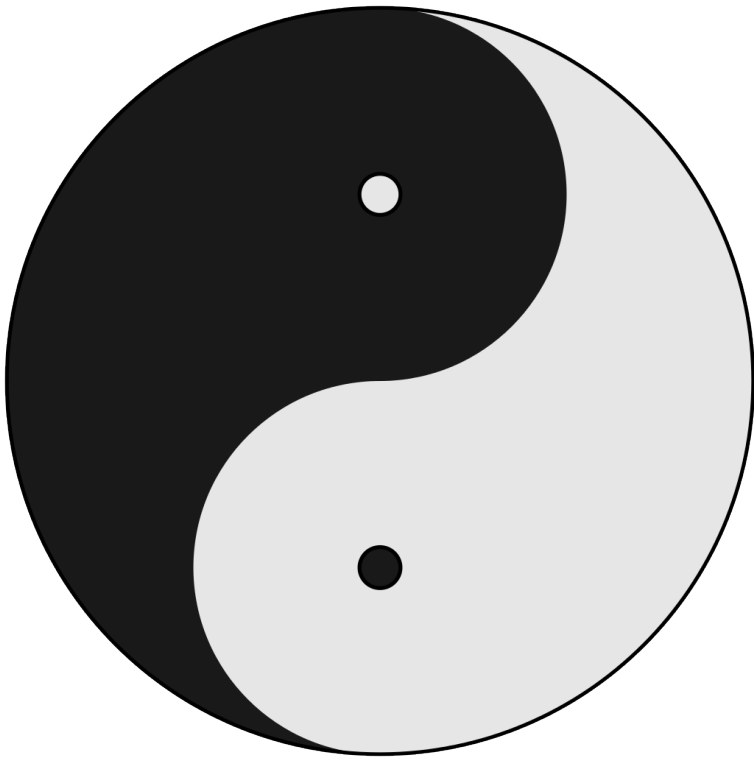


Figure 4-3 : Yin and Yang by Kiem resides in the Public Domain .

Although Taoism and the TAO-TE-CHING were not originally associated with the symbol known as the yin-yang, they have both come to be because the *philosophy of Taoism embodies the yin-yang principle and yin-yang thought* . Life is supposed to be lived in balance, as the symbol of the yin and the yang expresses. The yin-yang is a symbol of opposites in balance – dark/light, passive/aggressive, female/male – everything except good and evil, life and death, because nature does not recognize anything as good or evil and nature does not recognize a difference between life and non-life. All is in harmony in nature, and Taoism tries to encourage people to accept and live that kind of harmony as well. ⁽²⁵⁾

Taoist Beliefs

Other Chinese texts relating to Taoism are the CHAUNG-TZU (also known as the Zhuangzi, written by Zhuang Zhou, c. 369–286 BCE) and the DAOZANG from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) and Song Dynasty (960–1234 CE), which was compiled in the later Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE). All of these texts are based on the same kinds of observation of the natural world and the belief that human beings are innately good and only needed a reminder of their inner nature to pursue virtue over vice. There are no “bad people” according to Taoist principles, only people who behave badly. Given the proper education and guidance toward understanding how the universe works, anyone could be a “good person” living in harmony with the earth and with others.

According to this belief, the way of the Tao is in accordance with nature while resistance to the Tao is unnatural and causes friction. The best way for a person to live, according to Taoism, is to submit to whatever life brings and be flexible. If a person adapts to the changes in life easily, that person will be happy; if a person resists the changes in life, that person will be unhappy. One’s ultimate goal is to live at peace with the way of the Tao and recognize that everything that happens in life should be accepted as part of the eternal force, which binds and moves through all things.

Unlike Buddhism (which came from India but became very popular in China), Taoism arose from the observations and beliefs of the Chinese people. The principles of Taoism impacted Chinese culture greatly because it came from the people themselves and was a natural expression of the way the Chinese understood the universe. The concept of the importance of a harmonious existence of balance fit well with the equally popular philosophy of Confucianism (also native to China). Taoism and Confucianism were aligned in their view of the innate goodness of human beings, but differed in how to bring that goodness to the surface and lead people to act in better, unselfish, ways.

Taoist Rituals

This belief in allowing life to unfold in accordance with the Tao does not extend to Taoist rituals, however. The rituals of Taoist practice are absolutely in accordance with the Taoist understanding, but have been influenced by Buddhist and Confucian practices so that, in the present day, they are sometimes quite elaborate. Every prayer and spell which makes up a Taoist ritual or festival must be spoken precisely and every step of the ritual observed perfectly.

Taoist religious festivals are presided over by a **Grand Master** (a kind of *High Priest*) who officiates, and these celebrations can last anywhere from a few days to over a week. During the ritual, the Grand Master and his assistants must perform every action and recitation in accordance with tradition or else their efforts are wasted. This is an interesting departure from the usual Taoist understanding of "*going with the flow*" and not worrying about external rules or elaborate religious practices.

Taoist rituals are concerned with honoring the ancestors of a village, community, or city, and the Grand Master will invoke the spirits of these ancestors while incense burns to purify the area. Purification is a very important element throughout the ritual. The common space of everyday life must be transformed into sacred space to invite communion with the spirits and the gods. There are usually four assistants who attend the Grand Master in different capacities, either as musicians, sacred dancers, or readers. The Grand Master will act out the text as read by one of his assistants, and this text has to do with the ascent of the soul to join with the gods and one's ancestors. In ancient times, the ritual was performed on a staircase leading to an altar to symbolize ascent from one's common surroundings to the higher elevation of the gods. In the present day, the ritual may be performed on a stage or the ground, and it is understood from the text and the actions of the Grand Master that he is ascending.

The altar still plays an important part in the ritual as it is seen

as the place where the earthly realm meets with the divine. Taoist households have their own private altars where people will pray and honor their ancestors, household spirits, and the spirits of their village. Taoism encourages individual worship in the home, and the rituals and festivals are community events which bring people together, but they should not be equated with worship practices of other religions such as attending church or temple. A Taoist can worship at home without ever attending a festival, and throughout its history most people have. Festivals are very expensive to stage and are usually funded by members of the town, village, or city. They are usually seen as celebrations of community, though are sometimes performed in times of need such as an epidemic or financial struggle. The spirits and the gods are invoked during these times to drive away the dark spirits causing the problems.

Legacy

Taoism significantly influenced Chinese culture from the Shang Dynasty forward. The recognition that all things and all people are connected is expressed in the development of the arts, which reflect the people's understanding of their place in the universe and their obligation to each other. During the Tang Dynasty, Taoism became the state religion under the reign of the emperor Xuanzong because he believed it would create harmonious balance in his subjects and, for a while, he was correct. Xuanzong's rule is still considered one of the most prosperous and stable in the history of China and the high point of the Tang Dynasty.

Taoism has been nominated as a state religion a number of times throughout China's history but the majority preferred the teachings of Confucius (or, at times, Buddhism), most likely because of the rituals of these beliefs, which provide a structure Taoism lacks. Today, Taoism is recognized as one of the great world religions and

continues to be practiced by people in China and throughout the world.⁽²⁵⁾

20. Confucianism

Confucianism: An Overview

Confucius (or Kongzi) was a Chinese philosopher who lived in the 6th century BCE and whose thoughts, expressed in the philosophy of **Confucianism**, have influenced Chinese culture right up to the present day. Confucius has become a larger than life figure and it is difficult to separate the reality from the myth. He is considered the first teacher and his teachings are usually expressed in short phrases, which are open to various interpretations. Chief among his **philosophical ideas** is the importance of a virtuous life, filial piety and ancestor worship. Also emphasized is the necessity for benevolent and frugal rulers, the importance of inner moral harmony and its direct connection with harmony in the physical world and that rulers and teachers are important role models for wider society.

Life of Confucius

Confucius is believed to have lived from c. 551 to c. 479 BCE in the state of Lu (now Shandong or Shantung). However, the earliest written record of him dates from some four hundred years after his death in the Historical Records of Sima Qian (or Si-ma Ts'ien). Raised in the city of Qufu (or K'u-fou), Confucius worked for the Prince of Lu in various capacities, notably as the Director of Public Works in 503 BCE and then the Director of the Justice Department in 501 BCE. Later, he travelled widely in China and met with several minor adventures, including imprisonment for five days due to a case of mistaken identity. Confucius met the incident with typical restraint

and was said to have calmly played his lute until the error was discovered. Eventually, Confucius returned to his hometown where he established his own school in order to provide students with the teachings of the ancients. Confucius did not consider himself a 'creator' but rather a 'transmitter' of these ancient moral traditions. Confucius' school was also open to all classes, rich and poor.

It was whilst he was teaching in his school that Confucius started to write. Two collections of poetry were the BOOK OF ODES (Shijing or Shi king) and the BOOK OF DOCUMENTS (Shujing or Shu king). The SPRING AND AUTUMN ANNALS (Lin Jing or Lin King), which told the history of Lu, and the BOOK OF CHANGES (Yi Jing or Yi king) was a collection of treatises on divination.

Unfortunately for posterity, none of these works outlined Confucius' philosophy. Confucianism, therefore, had to be created from second-hand accounts and the most reliable documentation of the ideas of Confucius is considered to be the *Analects*, although even here there is no absolute evidence that the sayings and short stories were actually said by him and often the lack of context and clarity leave many of his teachings open to individual interpretation.

The other three major sources of Confucian thought are *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *Mean*. With *Analects*, these works constitute the **Four Books of Confucianism**, otherwise referred to as, the **Confucian Classics**. Through these texts, Confucianism became the official state religion of China from the second century BCE. ⁽²⁶⁾

Confucian Philosophy

The Confucian system looks less like a religion than a philosophy or way of life. This may be because it focuses on earthly relationships and duty and not on deities or the divine. Confucianism teaches that the **gentleman-scholar** is the highest calling. Confucius believed that the gentleman, or *junzi*, is a role model and the highest calling

for a person. The gentleman holds fast to high principles regardless of life's hardships. The gentleman does not remove himself from the world but fulfills his capacity for goodness. He does so by a commitment to virtue developed through moral formation.

Though ritual is quite important, there is not much concern with an afterlife or eschatology. Whereas a religion like Hinduism devotes much of its doctrine to accomplishing spiritual fulfillment, Confucianism is concerned with social fulfillment. Unlike Buddhism, there are no monks. There are no priests or religious leaders. It does not have many of the conventions of a religion.

Confucius did not give his followers a god or gods to be worshipped. Confucianism is not against worship, but teaches that social duties are more important. The focus is on ethical behavior and good government and social responsibility. ⁽²⁶⁾

Relationships

Relationships are important in Confucianism. Order begins with the family. Children are to respect their parents. A son ought to study his father's wishes as long as the father lives; and after the father is dead, he should study his life, and respect his memory (Confucius 102).

A person needs to respect the position that s/he has in all relationships. Due honor must be given to those people above and below oneself. This makes for good social order. The respect is typified through the idea of **Li**. Li is the term used to describe Chinese proprietary rites and good manners. These include ritual, etiquette, and other facets that support good social order. The belief is that when Li is observed, everything runs smoothly and is in its right place.

Relationships are important for a healthy social order and harmony. The relationships in Li are

- Father over son
- Older brother over younger
- Husband over wife
- Ruler over subject
- Friend is equal to Friend

Each of these relationships is important for balance in a person's life. There are **five main relationship principles** : *hsiao* ,*chung* , *yi* , *xin* , and *jen* .

- **Hsiao** is love within the family. Examples include love of parents for their children and of children for their parents. Respect in the family is demonstrated through Li and Hsiao.
- **Chung** is loyalty to the state. This element is closely tied to the five relationships of Li. Chung is also basic to the Confucian political philosophy. An important note is that Confucius thought that the political institutions of his day were broken. He attributed this to unworthy people being in positions of power. He believed rulers were expected to learn self-discipline and lead through example.
- **Yi** is righteousness or duty in an ordered society. It is an element of social relationships in Confucianism. Yi can be thought of as internalized Li.
- **Xin** is honesty and trustworthiness. It is part of the Confucian social philosophy. Confucius believed that people were responsible for their actions and treatment of other people. Jen and Xin are closely connected.
- **Jen** is benevolence and humaneness towards others. It is the highest Confucian virtue and can also be translated as love. This is the goal for which individuals should strive.

Together, these principles balance people and society. A balanced, harmonious life requires attention to one's social position.

For Confucius, correct relationships establish a well-ordered hierarchy in which each individual fulfills her/his duty. ⁽¹⁾

Confucian Rituals

Birth rituals center on *T'ai-shen* or the spirit of the fetus. These rituals are designed to protect an expectant mother. A special procedure is prescribed for disposal of placenta. The mother is given a special diet and is allowed rest for a month after delivery. The mother's family supplies all the items required by the baby on the first, fourth and twelfth monthly anniversaries of the birth. Maturity is no longer being celebrated, except in traditional families. A ceremony in which a group meal is served celebrates a young adult who is coming of age; s/he is served chicken.

Marriage rituals are very important. They are conducted in six stages. At the proposal stage, the couple exchanges eight Chinese characters. These characters are the year, month, day, and hour of each of their births. If anything unfavorable happens within the bride-to-be's family during the next three days, the proposal is considered to have been rejected. The engagement stage occurs after the wedding day is selected. The bride may announce the wedding with invitations and a gift of cookies made in the shape of the moon. This is the formal announcement. The dowry is the third stage. The bride's family carries it to the groom's home in a procession. The bride-price is then sent to the bride by the groom's parents. Gifts by the groom to the bride, equal in value to the dowry, are sent to her. Procession is the fourth stage. It is brief but important. The groom visits the bride's home and brings her back to his house. The procession is accompanied by a great deal of singing and drum beating. The marriage ceremony and reception is the stage in which the couple recite their vows, toast each other with wine, and then take center stage at a banquet. The morning after the ceremony is the final stage. The bride serves breakfast to the groom's parents, who then reciprocate. This completes the marriage.

Death rituals seem elaborate to many Westerners. At the time of death, the relatives cry loudly. This is a way of informing the

neighbors. The family begins mourning. They dress in clothes made of rough material. The corpse is washed and placed in a coffin. Mourners bring incense and money to offset the cost of the funeral. Food and significant objects of the deceased are placed in the coffin. A Buddhist, Christian, or Taoist priest performs the burial ceremony. Liturgies are performed on the seventh, ninth, and forty-ninth days after the burial. On the first and third anniversaries of the death, friends, and family follow the coffin to the cemetery. They carry a willow branch which symbolizes the soul of the person who has died. The branch is carried back to the family altar where it is used to “install” the spirit of the deceased.

Legacy

Following his death in 479 BCE, Confucius was buried in his family's tomb in Qufu (in Shandong) and, over the following centuries, his stature grew so that he became the subject of worship in schools during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and temples were established in his name at all administrative capitals during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). Throughout the imperial period an extensive knowledge of the fundamental texts of Confucianism was a necessity in order to pass the civil service selection examinations. Educated people often had a tablet of Confucius' writings prominently displayed in their houses and sometimes also statues, most often seated and dressed in imperial costume to symbolize his status as ‘the king without a throne’. Portrait prints were also popular, especially those taken from the lost original attributed to Wu Daozi (or Wu Taoutsi) and made in the 8th century CE. Unfortunately, no contemporary portrait of Confucius survives but he is most often portrayed as a wise old man with long grey hair and moustaches, sometimes carrying scrolls.

The teachings of Confucius and his followers have, then, been an integral part of Chinese education for centuries and the influence of

Confucianism is still visible today in contemporary Chinese culture with its continued emphasis on family relationships and respect, the importance of rituals, the value given to restraint and ceremonies, and the strong belief in the power and benefits of education.⁽²⁶⁾

PART V

MODULE 5: SHINTO

2I. Introduction

World Religions – Shinto

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the religion of Shinto. The module will familiarize students with Japanese religious history as well as Shinto beliefs and practices. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Shinto history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will assess the religion of Shinto through lenses of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the weekly module assessments. ⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Discuss the extent to which China influenced Japanese culture and religion.
- Identify the how the Shinto faith evolved from the Meiji

Restoration to the end of WWII.

- Identify essential elements related to Shinto theology.
- Discuss the importance of sacred space within Japanese epistemology.
- Identify the role of myth in shaping Japanese religion.
- Describe the role that the gods play within the Shinto faith. ⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 5

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 5 Discussion
- Complete Shinto Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 5 Quiz

22. Definition and History of Shinto

Shinto Defined

Shinto , meaning ‘*way of the gods*,’ is the oldest religion in Japan. The faith has neither a founder nor prophets and there is no major text, which outlines its principal beliefs. The resulting flexibility in definition may well be one of the reasons for Shinto’s longevity, and it has, consequently, become so interwoven with Japanese culture in general that it is almost inseparable as an independent body of thinking. Thus, Shinto’s key concepts of **purity, harmony, family respect** , and **subordination of the individual before the group** have become parts of the Japanese character whether the individual claims a religious affiliation or not.⁽²⁷⁾

History

Origins

Unlike many other religions, Shinto has no recognized founder. The peoples of ancient Japan had long held animistic beliefs, worshipped divine ancestors and communicated with the spirit world via shamans; some elements of these beliefs were incorporated into the first recognized religion practiced in Japan, Shinto, which began during the period of the **Yayoi culture** (c. 300 BCE – 300 CE). For example, certain natural phenomena and geographical features were given an attribution of divinity. Most obvious amongst these

are the sun goddess **Amaterasu** and the wind god **Susanoo** . Rivers and mountains were especially important, none more so than **Mt. Fuji** , whose name derives from the Ainu name ‘ *Fuchi* ,’ the god of the volcano.

In Shinto, gods, spirits, supernatural forces and essences are known as **kami** , and governing nature in all its forms, they are thought to inhabit places of particular natural beauty. In contrast, evil spirits or demons (**oni**) are mostly invisible with some envisioned as giants with horns and three eyes. Their power is usually only temporary, and they do not represent an inherent evil force. Ghosts are known as **obake** and require certain rituals to send away before they cause harm. Some spirits of dead animals can even possess humans, the worst being the fox, and these individuals must be exorcised by a priest. ⁽²⁷⁾

Pre-State Shinto

Buddhism arrived in Japan in the 6th century BCE as part of the Sinification process of Japanese culture. Other elements not to be ignored here are the principles of Taoism and Confucianism that travelled across the waters just as Buddhist ideas did, especially the Confucian importance given to purity and harmony. These different belief systems were not necessarily in opposition, and both Buddhism and Shinto found enough mutual space to flourish side by side for many centuries in ancient Japan.

By the end of the **Heian period** (794-1185 CE), some Shinto kami spirits and Buddhist bodhisattvas were formally combined to create a single deity, thus creating **Ryobu Shinto** or ‘ *Double Shinto* .’ As a result, sometimes images of Buddhist figures were incorporated into Shinto shrines and some Shinto shrines were managed by Buddhist monks. Of the two religions, Shinto was more concerned with life and birth, showed a more open attitude to women, and was much closer to the imperial house. The two religions would not be officially separated until the 19th century CE. ⁽²⁷⁾

By the mid-17th century, **Neo-Confucianism** was Japan's dominant legal philosophy and contributed directly to the development of the **kokugaku**, a school of Japanese philology and philosophy that originated during the Tokugawa period. Kokugaku scholars worked to refocus Japanese scholarship away from the then-dominant study of Chinese, Confucian, and Buddhist texts in favor of research into the early Japanese classics. The Kokugaku School held that the Japanese national character was naturally pure and would reveal its splendor once the foreign (Chinese) influences were removed. The “**Chinese heart**” was different from the “**true heart**” or “**Japanese heart**.” This true Japanese spirit needed to be revealed by removing a thousand years of Chinese learning. Kokugaku contributed to the emperor-centered nationalism of modern Japan and the revival of Shinto as a national creed in the 18th and 19th centuries. ⁽²⁸⁾

State Shinto

Prior to 1868, most Japanese more readily identified with their feudal domain rather than the idea of “Japan” as a whole. But with the introduction of mass education, conscription, industrialization, centralization, and successful foreign wars, **Japanese nationalism** became a powerful force in society. Mass education and conscription served as a means to indoctrinate the coming generation with “*the idea of Japan*” as a nation instead of a series of **Daimyo** (domains), supplanting loyalty to feudal domains with loyalty to the state. Industrialization and centralization gave the Japanese a strong sense that their country could rival Western powers technologically and socially. Moreover, successful foreign wars gave the populace a sense of martial pride in their nation.

The rise of Japanese nationalism paralleled the growth of nationalism within the West. Certain conservatives such as Gondō Seikei and Asahi Heigo saw the rapid industrialization of Japan as something that had to be tempered. It seemed, for a time, that

Japan was becoming too “Westernized” and that if left unimpeded, something intrinsically Japanese would be lost. During the **Meiji period**, such nationalists railed against the unequal treaties, but in the years following the First World War, Western criticism of Japanese imperial ambitions and restrictions on Japanese immigration changed the focus of the nationalist movement in Japan. ⁽²⁸⁾

The Rise of Fascism

In the 1920s and 1930s, the supporters of Japanese statism used the slogan **Showa Restoration**, which implied that a new resolution was needed to replace the existing political order dominated by corrupt politicians and capitalists, with one which (in their eyes), would fulfill the original goals of the Meiji Restoration of direct Imperial rule via military proxies. Japan had no strong allies and its actions had been internationally condemned, while internally popular nationalism was booming. Local leaders, such as mayors, teachers, and Shinto priests were recruited to indoctrinate the populace. The Japanese government, in fact, nationalized the various Shinto Shrines for the sake of promoting the emperor as a divine being, and a descendent of Amaterasu.

Japan's expansionist vision grew increasingly bold. Many of Japan's political elite aspired to have Japan acquire new territory for resource extraction and settlement of surplus population. These ambitions led to the outbreak of the **Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937**. After their victory in the Chinese capital, the Japanese military committed the infamous **Nanking Massacre**. ⁽²⁹⁾

Japan also attempted to exterminate Korea as a nation. The continuance of Korean culture itself became illegal. Worship at Japanese Shinto shrines was made compulsory. The school curriculum was radically modified to eliminate teaching of the Korean language and history. ⁽³⁰⁾

The United States opposed Japan's aggression towards its Asian

neighbors responded with increasingly stringent economic sanctions intended to deprive Japan of the resources. Japan reacted by forging an alliance with Germany and Italy in 1940, known as the **Tripartite Pact**, which worsened its relations with the U.S. In July 1941, the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands froze all Japanese assets when Japan completed its invasion of French Indochina by occupying the southern half of the country, further increasing tension in the Pacific. War between Japan and the U.S. became an inevitability following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. ⁽²⁹⁾

Shrine Shinto

The loss of World War II placed Japan in the precarious position of a country occupied by the Allied but primarily American forces, which shaped its post-war reforms. The Emperor was permitted to remain on the throne, but was ordered to renounce his claims to divinity, which had been a pillar of the State Shinto system. Today, the shrines in Japan operate independently from the state, to ensure the separation of religion and state. ⁽³¹⁾

Kami

In the Shinto religion **kami** is an all-embracing term, which signifies gods, spirits, deified mortals, ancestors, natural phenomena, and supernatural powers. All of these kami can influence people's everyday lives and so they are worshipped, given offerings, solicited for aid and, in some cases, appealed to for their skills in divination. Kami are attracted by purity – both physical and spiritual – and repelled by the lack of it, including disharmony. Kami are particularly associated with nature and may be present at sites, such as mountains, waterfalls, trees, and unusually shaped rocks. For this

reason, there are said to be 8 million kami, a number referred to as **yaoyorozu-no-kamigami** . Many kami are known nationally, but a great many more belong only to small rural communities, and each family has its own ancestral kami.

The reverence for spirits thought to reside in places of great natural beauty, meteorological phenomena, and certain animals goes back to at least the 1st millennium BCE in ancient Japan.

Add to these the group of Shinto gods, heroes, and family ancestors, as well as bodhisattvas assimilated from Buddhism, and one has an almost limitless number of kami.

Common to all kami are their **four mitama** (*spirits or natures*) one of which may predominate depending on circumstances:

- Aramitama (wild or rough)
- Nigimitama (gentle, life-supporting)
- Kushimatama (wondrous)
- Sakimitama (nurturing)

This division emphasizes that kami can be capable of both good and bad. Despite their great number, kami can be classified into various categories. There are different approaches to categorization, some scholars use the function of the kami, others their nature (water, fire, field, etc.).⁽³²⁾



Figure 5-1 : The Seven Gods of Fortune or Shichifukujin of Japanese Folklore by Doctor Boogaloo resides in the Public Domain .

Kami are appealed to, nourished, and appeased in order to ensure their influence is, and remains, positive. Offerings of rice wine, food, flowers and prayers can all help achieve this goal. Festivals, rituals, dancing and music do likewise. Shrines from simple affairs to huge

sacred complexes are built in their honor. Annually, the image or object (*goshintai*) thought to be the physical manifestation of the kami on earth is transported around the local community to purify it and ensure its future well-being. Finally, those kami thought to be embodied by a great natural feature, Mt. Fuji being the prime example, are visited by worshippers in an act of pilgrimage.⁽³²⁾

23. Japanese Creation Story

Japanese Creation Story

The islands of Japan are the subject of a particularly colorful creation myth. Standing on the bridge or stairway of heaven (known as *Ama-no-hashidate* , which connected heaven — *Ama* — to earth), the two gods **Izanami** and **Izanagi** used a jewel encrusted spear to stir the ocean. Withdrawing the spear, salt crystallized into drops on the tip and these fell back into the ocean as islands.

The first island to be created was **Onogoro-shima** and the gods immediately used the island to build a house and host their **wedding ceremony** . The ritual involved circling around a pillar (or in some versions the spear) with the two gods moving in opposite directions. However, during this sacred marriage ritual **Izanami** , *the female deity* , wrongly spoke first when they passed each other and as a consequence of this impiety their first child was a miscarriage and born an ugly weakling without bones. This was the god **Hiruko** (later Ebisu) who would become the patron of fishermen and one of the seven gods of good luck. Hiruko was abandoned by his parents and set in a basket for the sea to take it where it would.

The second child was the island of **Awa** but Izanami and Izanagi were still not satisfied with their offspring and they asked their parents the seven invisible gods the reason for their misfortune. Revealing that the reason was their incorrect performance of the marriage ritual, the couple repeated the ceremony, this time making sure **Izanagi** , *the male deity* , spoke first. ⁽³³⁾

The couple then continued to create more auspicious offspring, including the **eight principal islands of Japan** — Awaji, Shikoku, Oki, Tsukushi (Kyushu), Iki, Tsu, Sado, and Oyamato.

Also created were a prodigious number of kami. Other **notable children** were Oho-wata-tsu-mi (*god of the sea*), Kuku-no-shi (*god*

of the trees), Oho-yama tsu-mi (*god of the mountains*) and Kagutsuchi (*god of fire*), often referred to in hushed tones as Homusubi during ritual prayers. (33)



Figure 5-2 : Illustration of Izanami and Izanagi by Kobayashi Eitaku resides in the Public Domain .



Figure 5-3 : Meotoiwa or Wedded Rocks (“husband and wife cliff”) Futami, Japan by Taku resides in the Public Domain .The wedded rocks known as Meotoiwa are located in Japan near Ise jingu. They represent the two creator gods of the Shinto religion, Izanami and Izanagi.

In Japanese art the two gods are most often depicted standing on **Ama-no-Hashidate** stirring the ocean with their spear. The heavenly couple is also famously referenced in the shrine of the **wedded rocks of Meotoiwa** , on the coast of Futami. Here, two large rocks stand in the sea and are attached by a sacred long rope (*shimenawa*) of plaited rice straw weighing over a ton, symbolic of the matrimonial bond between the two deities. Atop the larger rock, which represents Izanagi, there is a white gate or torii, which marks the site as a sacred shrine. Due to the obvious humidity of the site, the *shimenawa* is replaced several times a year with great ceremony. ⁽³³⁾

24. Shinto Shrines and Festivals

Shinto Shrines

Shinto shrines, or **jinja**, are the sacred locations of one or more kami, and there are some 80,000 in Japan. Certain natural features and mountains may also be considered shrines. Early shrines were merely rock altars on which offerings were presented. Then, buildings were constructed around such altars, often copying the architecture of thatched rice storehouses. From the Nara period in the 8th century CE temple design was influenced by Chinese architecture – upturned gables, and a prodigious use of red paint and decorative elements. Most shrines are built using Hinoki Cypress.

Shrines are easily identified by the presence of a **torii** or “*sacred gateway*.” The simplest are merely two upright posts with two longer crossbars and they symbolically separate the sacred space of the shrine from the external world. These gates are often festooned with **gohei**, twin paper or metal strips each ripped in four places and symbolizing the kami’s presence.

A shrine is managed by a head priest (*guji*) and priests (*kannushi*), or in the case of smaller shrines, by a member of the shrine elders committee, the sodai. The local community supports the shrine financially. Finally, private households may have an ancestor shrine or *kamidana*, which contains the names of the family members who have passed away and honors the ancestral kami. ⁽²⁷⁾

Features of Shrines

The typical Shinto shrine complex or **jinja** includes some or all of the following common architectural features, depending on its size and importance: ⁽²⁷⁾

Torii



Figure 5-4 : Torii, Fushimi Inari Shrine by James Blake Wiener is licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 .

Torii are sacred gateways, which symbolically separate the sacred space of the shrine from the external world. The simplest and most common are merely two upright posts with two longer crossbars (*kasagi* and *nuki*), known as the **myojin torii** , but there are many variations, such as the ornate **ryobu torii** , which usually stand in water, and **miwa torii** , which has a triple gate. Torii are usually made of wood but they can also be of stone, steel, copper, or concrete. Many torii are painted red, and they are often festooned

with **gohei** , twin paper, cloth or metal strips each ripped in four places symbolizing the kami's presence. ⁽³⁴⁾

Romon

A **romon** is a large gate building, which marks the entrance to the main shrine. From the outside, it seems to have two stories, especially when there is a small balcony running around the building, but actually, it has only one. The central entrance is flanked by covered bays, which contain guardian figure statues known as *zuijin* . ⁽³⁴⁾

Honden

The **honden** or shrine's main hall contains an image or manifestation of the particular kami or spirit worshipped there, the *goshintai* . The interior is divided into two parts: the *naijin* or inner sanctuary and the *gejin* or outer sanctuary. The *naijin* contains the *goshintai* and is almost always closed to anyone except the shrine's chief priest and even he may not have actually seen the *goshintai* . Sometimes the doors of the *naijin* may be opened on special occasions, such as shrine anniversaries. Around the *honden* is a fence, the *tamagaki* , which limits the sacred area of typically white gravel or sand and it may even limit the view of the *honden* from outside. ⁽³⁴⁾

Haide



Figure 5-5: Izumo-taisha Layout by Unknown Artist resides in the Public Domain .

The **haide** or oratory hall is for ceremonies and worship and is usually the most impressive building at the shrine. It may stand-alone or be connected to the **honden** by a short covered corridor. ⁽³⁴⁾

Heiden

The **heiden** , located between the **honden** and the **haide** , is a building (or simply part of a covered corridor) used for prayers and making offerings (*heihaku*). The term *shaden* refers to the *honden*, *haide*, and *heiden*, all together . ⁽³⁴⁾

Important Shinto Shrines



Ise Grand Shrine by Fg2 resides in the Public Domain .

The most important Shinto shrine is the **Ise Grand Shrine** dedicated to Amaterasu with a secondary shrine to the harvest goddess Toyouke. Beginning in the 8th century CE, a tradition arose of rebuilding exactly the shrine of Amaterasu at Ise every 20 years to preserve its vitality. The broken-down material of the old temple is carefully stored and transported to other shrines where it is incorporated into their walls.

The second most important shrine is that of **Okuninushi** at Izumo-taisha. These two are the oldest Shinto shrines in Japan. Besides the most famous shrines, every local community had and still has small shrines dedicated to their particular kami spirits. Even modern city buildings can have a small Shinto shrine on their roof. Some shrines are even portable. Known as **mikoshi**, they can be moved so that ceremonies can be held at places of great natural beauty such as waterfalls. ⁽²⁷⁾

Worship & Festivals

The sanctity of shrines means that worshippers must cleanse themselves (*oharai*) before entering them, commonly by washing their hands and mouth with water. Then, when ready to enter, they make a small money offering, ring a small bell or clap their hands twice to alert the kami and then bow while saying their prayer. A final clap indicates the end of the prayer. It is also possible to request a priest to offer one's prayer. Small offerings might include a bowl of sake (rice wine), rice, and vegetables.

As many shrines are in places of natural beauty such as mountains, visiting these shrines is seen as an act of pilgrimage, **Mt. Fuji** being the most famous example. Believers sometimes wear **Omamori**, too, which are small, embroidered sachets containing prayers to guarantee the person's well-being. As Shinto has no particular view on the afterlife, Shinto cemeteries are rare. Most followers are cremated and interred in Buddhist cemeteries.

The calendar is punctuated by religious festivals to honor particular kami. During these events, portable shrines may be taken to sites linked to a kami, or there are parades of colorful floats, and worshippers sometimes dress to impersonate certain divine figures.

Amongst the most important annual festivals are the three-day **Shogatsu Matsuri** or Japanese New Year festival, the Obon Buddhist celebration of the dead returning to the ancestral home, which includes many Shinto rituals, and the annual local matsuri when a shrine is transported around the local community to purify it and ensure its future well-being.⁽²⁷⁾

PART VI

MODULE 6: JUDAISM

25. Introduction

World Religions– Judaism

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the religion of Judaism. The module will familiarize students with Jewish religious history as well as the beliefs and practices of Judaism. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Jewish history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will argue for a theme that has defined Jewish religious history from antiquity to the modern era. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments. ⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Describe the importance of the Hebrew Bible to the Jewish faith.
- Discuss the significance of turning point moments within

ancient Israelite and early Jewish tradition.

- Recognize how Judaism spread and developed following the Jewish diaspora.
- Identify essential elements related to Jewish theology.
- Discuss the relationship between ritual and memory within Jewish tradition.
- Identify important elements within the Jewish festival tradition.
- Compare and contrast the major religious schools within Judaism. ⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 6

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 6 Discussion
- Complete Judaism Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 6 Quiz

26. History of Judaism

Judaism

Judaism is the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish people. Judaism is a **monotheistic religion** originating in the Hebrew Bible (also known as the **Tanakh**) and explored in later texts, such as the **Talmud**. Judaism is considered by religious Jews to be the expression of the covenantal relationship God established with the Children of Israel.

Judaism claims a historical continuity spanning more than 3,000 years. Judaism has its roots as a structured religion in the Middle East during the Bronze Age. Of the major world religions, Judaism is considered one of the oldest monotheistic religions. The Hebrews / Israelites were already referred to as “Jews” in later books of the Tanakh such as the Book of Esther, with the term Jews replacing the title “Children of Israel”. Judaism’s texts, traditions and values strongly influenced later Abrahamic religions, including Christianity, Islam and the Baha’i Faith. Many aspects of Judaism have also directly or indirectly influenced secular Western ethics and civil law.

Jews are an ethnoreligious group and include those born Jewish and converts to Judaism. In 2010, the world Jewish population was estimated at 13.4 million, or roughly 0.2&percent; of the total world population. About 42&percent; of all Jews reside in Israel and about 42% reside in the United States and Canada, with most of the remainder living in Europe. The largest Jewish religious movements are Orthodox, Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism.⁽³⁵⁾

History

Origins

At its core, the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) is an account of the Israelites' relationship with God from their earliest history until the building of the Second Temple (c. 535 BCE). **Abraham** is hailed as the first Hebrew and the father of the Jewish people. As a reward for his act of faith in one God, he was promised that **Isaac**, his second son, would inherit the Land of Israel (then called Canaan). Later, **Jacob** and his children were enslaved in Egypt, and God commanded **Moses** to lead the Exodus from Egypt.

At Mount Sinai they received the **Torah — the five books of Moses**. These books, together with *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* are known as Tanakh, as opposed to the Oral Torah, which refers to the Mishna and the Talmud.

Eventually, God led them to the land of Israel where the tabernacle was planted in the city of Shiloh for over 300 years to rally the nation against attacking enemies. As time went on, the spiritual level of the nation declined to the point that God allowed the Philistines to capture the tabernacle. The people of Israel then told the prophet Samuel that they needed to be governed by a permanent king, and Samuel appointed Saul to be their King. When the people pressured Saul into going against a command conveyed to him by Samuel, God told Samuel to appoint David in his stead.

Antiquity

The United Monarchy was established under Saul and continued under King David and Solomon with its capital in Jerusalem. After Solomon's reign the nation split into two kingdoms, the **Kingdom of Israel** (in the north) and the **Kingdom of Judah** (in the south).

The Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrian ruler Sargon II in the late 8th century BCE, with many people from the capital Samaria being taken captive to Media and the Khabur River valley.

The Kingdom of Judah continued as an independent state until it was conquered by a Babylonian army in the early 6th century BCE, destroying the First Temple that was at the center of ancient Jewish worship. The Judean elite were exiled to Babylonia and this is regarded as the **First Jewish Diaspora**. Later many of them returned to their homeland after the subsequent conquest of Babylonia by the Persians seventy years later, a period known as the Babylonian Captivity. A new Second Temple was constructed, and old religious practices were resumed.

During the early years of the **Second Temple**, the highest religious authority was a council known as the Great Assembly, led by Ezra of the Book of Ezra. Among other accomplishments of the Great Assembly, the last books of the Bible were written at this time and the canon sealed. Hellenistic Judaism spread to Ptolemaic Egypt from the 3rd century BCE. After the Great Revolt (66–73 CE), the Romans destroyed the Temple. Hadrian built a pagan idol on the Temple grounds and prohibited circumcision; these acts of ethnocide provoked the Bar Kokhba revolt 132–136 CE after which the Romans banned the study of the Torah and the celebration of Jewish holidays, and forcibly removed virtually all Jews from Judea. This became known as the **Second Jewish Diaspora**. In 200 CE, however, Jews were granted Roman citizenship and Judaism was recognized as a *religio licita* (“legitimate religion”), until the rise of Gnosticism and Early Christianity in the fourth century.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the expulsion of the Jews, Jewish worship stopped being centrally organized around the Temple, prayer took the place of sacrifice, and worship was rebuilt around the community (represented by a minimum of ten adult men) and the establishment of the authority of rabbis who acted as teachers and leaders of individual communities.

Historical Jewish Groupings (to 1700)

Around the 1st century CE there were several small Jewish sects: the **Pharisees** , **Sadducees** , **Zealots** , **Essenes** , and **Christians** . After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, these sects vanished.

- **Christianity** survived, but by breaking with Judaism and becoming a separate religion.
- The **Pharisees** survived but in the form of Rabbinic Judaism (today, known simply as “Judaism”).
- The **Sadducees** rejected the divine inspiration of the Prophets and the Writings, relying only on the Torah as divinely inspired. Consequently, a number of other core tenets of the Pharisees’ belief system (which became the basis for modern Judaism), were also dismissed by the Sadducees.
- The **Samaritans** practiced a similar religion, which is traditionally considered separate from Judaism.

Like the Sadducees who relied only on the Torah, some Jews in the 8th and 9th centuries rejected the authority and divine inspiration of the oral law as recorded in the Mishnah (and developed by later rabbis in the two Talmuds), relying instead only upon the Tanakh.

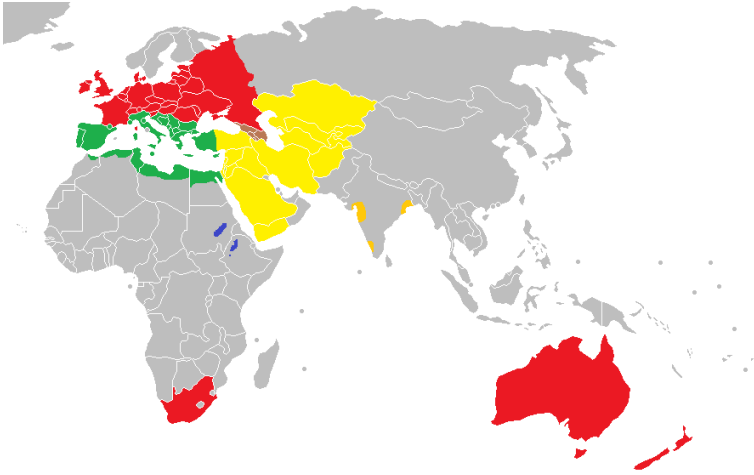


Figure 6-1 : Geographic Correspondence to Jewish Ethnic Divisions by BedrockPerson is licensed under CC-BY-SA 4.0 .

Over a long time, Jews formed distinct ethnic groups in several different geographic areas — amongst others, the **Ashkenazi Jews** (of central and Eastern Europe), the **Sephardi Jews** (of Spain, Portugal, and North Africa), the **Beta Israel of Ethiopia**, and the **Yemenite Jews** from the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Many of these groups have developed differences in their prayers, traditions and accepted canons; however these distinctions are mainly the result of their being formed at some cultural distance from normative (rabbinic) Judaism, rather than based on any doctrinal dispute.

Persecutions

Antisemitism arose during the Middle Ages, in the form of persecutions, pogroms, forced conversion, expulsions, social restrictions and ghettoization. This was different in quality to any repressions of Jews in ancient times. Ancient repression was

politically motivated and Jews were treated no differently than any other ethnic group would have been. With the rise of the Churches, attacks on Jews became motivated instead by theological considerations specifically deriving from Christian views about Jews and Judaism. ⁽³⁵⁾

27. The Enlightenment and The Holocaust

The Enlightenment and New Religious Movements

In the late 18th century CE, Europe was swept by a group of intellectual, social and political movements known as the **Enlightenment**. The Enlightenment led to reductions in the European laws that prohibited Jews to interact with the wider secular world, thus allowing Jews access to secular education and experience. A parallel Jewish movement, **Haskalah** or the "*Jewish Enlightenment*" began, especially in Central Europe and Western Europe, in response to both the Enlightenment and these new freedoms. It placed an emphasis on integration with secular society and a pursuit of non-religious knowledge through reason. With the promise of political emancipation many Jews saw no reason to continue to observe Jewish law and increasing numbers of Jews assimilated into Christian Europe. Modern religious movements of Judaism all formed in reaction to this trend.

In Central Europe, followed by Great Britain and the United States, **Reform Judaism** and **Liberal Judaism** developed, relaxing legal obligations (especially those that limited Jewish relations with non-Jews), emulating Protestant decorum in prayer, and emphasizing the ethical values of Judaism's Prophetic tradition.

Modern Orthodox Judaism developed in reaction to Reform Judaism, by leaders who argued that Jews could participate in public life as citizens equal to Christians, while maintaining the observance of Jewish law. Meanwhile, in the United States, wealthy Reform Jews helped European scholars, who were Orthodox in practice but critical (and skeptical) in their study of the Bible and Talmud, to

establish a seminary to train rabbis for immigrants from Eastern Europe. These progressive Orthodox rabbis were joined by Reform rabbis— who felt that Jewish law should not be entirely abandoned, to form the **Conservative** movement. Orthodox Jews who opposed the Haskalah formed Haredi Orthodox Judaism. ⁽³⁵⁾

The Holocaust



Figure 6-2 : Budapest, Hungary — Captured Jewish women, 20–22 October 1944 by Faupel is licensed underCC-BY-SA 3.0 Germany .

Unfortunately, economic crisis and racist nationalism made Jews the target of anti-Semitic hatred again in the twentieth century. This culminated in the horrific period known as the Holocaust. The Holocaust (from the Greek meaning “whole” and “burnt”) also known as the **Shoah** (the Hebrew word for “catastrophe” and Yiddish word for “destruction”) was the mass murder or genocide of approximately six million Jews during World War II. It was a program of systematic state-sponsored murder by Nazi Germany,

led by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, throughout German-occupied territory.

Of the nine million Jews who had resided in Europe before the Holocaust, approximately two-thirds were killed. Over one million Jewish children were killed in the Holocaust, as were approximately two million Jewish women and three million Jewish men. A network of over 40,000 facilities in Germany and German-occupied territory were used to concentrate, hold, and kill Jews and other victims.

Some scholars argue that the mass murder of the Romani and people with disabilities should be included in the definition, and some use the common noun “holocaust” to describe other Nazi mass murders, including those of Soviet prisoners of war, Polish and Soviet civilians, and homosexuals.

Recent estimates based on figures obtained since the fall of the Soviet Union indicates some ten to eleven million civilians and prisoners of war were intentionally murdered by the Nazi regime.

The persecution and genocide were carried out in stages. Various laws to remove the Jews from civil society, most prominently the **Nuremberg Laws**, were enacted in Germany years before the outbreak of World War II. Concentration camps were established in which inmates were subjected to slave labor until they died of exhaustion or disease. Where Germany conquered new territory in Eastern Europe, specialized units called *Einsatzgruppen* murdered Jews and political opponents in mass shootings.

The occupiers required Jews and Romani to be confined in overcrowded ghettos before being transported by freight train to extermination camps where, if they survived the journey, most were systematically killed in gas chambers. Every arm of Germany's bureaucracy was involved in the logistics that led to the genocides, turning the Third Reich into what one Holocaust scholar has called “a genocidal state”.⁽³⁶⁾

28. The Re-Establishment of the Nation of Israel in the Twentieth Century

The Re-Establishment of the Nation of Israel in the Twentieth Century



Figure 6-3 : Map of Israel, 1947–1949 by Christophe cage is licensed under CC-BY-SA 3.0 .

After thousands of years of the Jewish Diaspora, with Jews living as minorities in countries across the globe, a movement called **Zionism** , with the goal of establishing a Jewish homeland and sovereign state, emerged in the late 19th century. The political movement was formally established by the Austro-Hungarian journalist, Theodor Herzl in 1897 following the publication of his book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State).

The movement was energized by rising anti-Semitism in Europe and anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia and aimed at encouraging Jewish migration to Ottoman Palestine. The movement was eventually successful in establishing Israel on May 14, 1948, as the homeland for the Jewish people.

- Advocates of Zionism view it as a national liberation movement for the repatriation to their ancestral homeland of a persecuted people residing as minorities in a variety of nations.
- Critics of Zionism view it as a colonialist, racist, and exceptionalist ideology that led advocates to violence during Mandatory Palestine, followed by the exodus of Palestinians and the subsequent denial of their human rights.⁽³⁷⁾

Spectrum of Observance

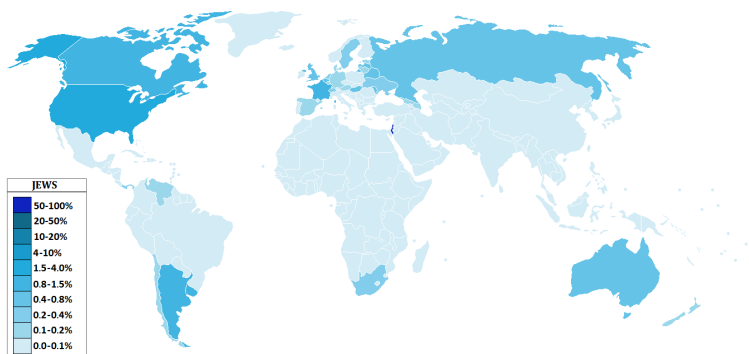


Figure 6-4 : Map of the distribution of Jews in the world by Skalskal resides in the Public Domain .

Countries such as the United States, Israel, Canada, United Kingdom, Argentina and South Africa contain large Jewish populations. Jewish religious practice varies widely through all levels of observance. According to the 2001 edition of the National Jewish Population Survey, in the United States' Jewish community—the world's second largest—4.3 million Jews out of 5.1 million had some sort of connection to the religion. Of that population of connected Jews, 80&percent; participated in some sort of Jewish religious observance, but only 48&percent; belonged to a synagogue, and fewer than 16&percent; attend regularly.

Birth rates for American Jews have dropped from 2.0 to 1.7 (Replacement rate is 2.1.). Intermarriage rates range from 40-50&percent; in the US, and only about a third of children of intermarried couples are raised as Jews. Due to intermarriage and low birth rates, the Jewish population in the U.S. shrank from 5.5 million in 1990 to 5.1 million in 2001. This is indicative of the general population trends among the Jewish community in the Diaspora, but a focus on total population obscures growth trends in some denominations and communities, such as Haredi Judaism. ⁽³⁵⁾

Origin of the Term “Judaism”

The term Judaism derives from the Latin *Iudaismus*, which derived from the Greek *Ioudaïsmos*. This ultimately came from the Hebrew **Yehudah** or “Judah.” The first appearance of the term Judaism appears in the book of Second Maccabees, dated to the 2nd century BCE.

According to traditional Jewish Law, a Jew is anyone born of a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism in accordance with Jewish Law. American Reform Judaism and British Liberal Judaism accept the child of one Jewish parent (father or mother) as Jewish if the parents raise the child with a Jewish identity.

All mainstream forms of Judaism today are open to sincere converts, although conversion has traditionally been discouraged since the time of the Talmud. The conversion process is evaluated by an authority and the convert is examined on his or her sincerity and knowledge. **Converts** are given the name “ben Abraham” or “bat Abraham” (son or daughter of Abraham).

Traditional Judaism maintains that a Jew, whether by birth or conversion, is a Jew forever. Thus a Jew who claims to be an atheist or converts to another religion is still considered by traditional Judaism to be Jewish. According to some sources, the Reform movement has maintained that a Jew who has converted to another religion is no longer a Jew, and the Israeli Government has also taken that stance after Supreme Court cases and statutes. However, the Reform movement has indicated that this is not so cut and dry, and different situations call for consideration and differing actions. For example, Jews who have converted under duress may be permitted to return to Judaism “without any action on their part but their desire to rejoin the Jewish community” and “A proselyte who has become an apostate remains, nevertheless, a Jew.”



Figure 6-5 : Jewish Insignia resides in the Public Domain .

The question of what determines Jewish identity in the State of Israel was given new impetus when, in the 1950s, David Ben-Gurion requested opinions on **mi hu Yehudi** (" *who is a Jew* ") from Jewish religious authorities and intellectuals worldwide in order to settle citizenship questions. This is still not settled, and occasionally resurfaces in Israeli politics. ⁽³⁵⁾

29. Defining Character and Principles of Faith

Defining Character and Principles of Faith

Defining Character

Unlike other ancient Near Eastern gods, the Hebrew God is portrayed as unitary and solitary; consequently, the Hebrew God's principal relationships are not with other gods, but with the world, and more specifically, with the people He created.

Judaism thus begins with an **ethical monotheism** — *the belief that God is one, and concerned with the actions of humankind* .

According to the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), God promised Abraham to make of his offspring a great nation. Many generations later, he commanded the nation of Israel to love and worship only one God; that is, the Jewish nation is to reciprocate God's concern for the world. He also commanded the Jewish people to love one another; that is, Jews are to imitate God's love for people. These commandments are but two of a large corpus of commandments and laws that constitute this covenant, which is the substance of Judaism.

Moreover, as a non-creedal religion, some have argued that Judaism does not require one to believe in God. For some, observance of Jewish law is more important than belief in God per se. In modern times, some liberal Jewish movements do not accept the existence of a personified deity active in history.

Core Tenets

Scholars throughout Jewish history have proposed numerous formulations of Judaism's core tenets, all of which have met with criticism. The most popular formulation is **Maimonides'** thirteen principles of faith, developed in the 12th century. Even his list did not go without criticism, however. Along these lines, the ancient historian Josephus emphasized practices and observances rather than religious beliefs, associating apostasy with a failure to observe Jewish law and maintaining that the requirements for conversion to Judaism included circumcision and adherence to traditional customs.

In modern times, Judaism lacks a centralized authority that would dictate an exact religious dogma. Because of this, many different variations on the basic beliefs are considered within the scope of Judaism. Even so, all Jewish religious movements are, to a greater or lesser extent, based on the principles of the Hebrew Bible and various commentaries such as the Talmud and Midrash.

Judaism also universally recognizes the Biblical Covenant between God and the Patriarch Abraham, as well as the additional aspects of the Covenant revealed to Moses, who is considered Judaism's greatest prophet. In the Mishnah, a core text of Rabbinic Judaism, acceptance of the Divine origins of this covenant is considered an essential aspect of Judaism and those who reject the Covenant forfeit their share in the World to Come. ⁽³⁵⁾

Jewish Bible

The Jewish Bible is an anthology of Judean texts written, composed, and compiled between the 8th century BCE and 2nd century BCE. Thus, the Hebrew Bible did not begin as a single book; rather, it developed over time through the compilation of many Judean texts. The texts, though, were not always understood as divinely inspired,

authoritative, holy texts; the role of Judean texts in religious expression developed between the 6th century BCE and 1st century CE. ⁽³⁸⁾

The Jewish Bible includes the same thirty-nine books that comprise the Christian Old Testament. Jews, of course do not refer to these texts as the Old Testament, as the title suggests that these scriptures are in some way obsolete. Fittingly, the Jewish Bible is sometimes referred to as the Hebrew Bible as all but two of its thirty-nine books—Daniel and Ezra—were composed entirely in Hebrew. More commonly, Jews refer to their Bible as the Tanakh.

The term Tanakh is actually an acronym that stands for the three sections of the Hebrew Bible:

Torah

The section includes the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, or the **Pentateuch**. They are referred to as the Torah, or **Law**, because they are comprised largely of legal materials, including the Ten Commandments.

Nevi'im

The term is the pluralized form of a Hebrew word that means **prophet**. This section includes the historical books in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings) along with the major prophetic books (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and minor prophetic books (e.g. Amos, Habakkuk, Joel, Obadiah, etc.).

Kethuvi'im

The term is the pluralized form of a Hebrew word that

means **writing** . This section is more or less a catch all for various literary genres including petitionary literature (Psalms and Lamentations), wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes), and one apocalyptic text (Daniel).⁽³⁵⁾

Jewish Legal Literature

The basis of Jewish law and tradition (**halakha**) is the Torah (also known as the “Pentateuch” or the ” Five Books of Moses “). According to rabbinic tradition there are 613 commandments in the Torah. Some of these laws are directed only to men or to women, some only to the ancient priestly groups, the Kohanim and Leviyim (members of the tribe of Levi), some only to farmers within the Land of Israel. Many laws were only applicable when the Temple in Jerusalem existed, and fewer than 300 of these commandments are still applicable today.

While there have been Jewish groups whose beliefs were claimed to be based on the written text of the Torah alone (e.g., the Sadducees, and the Karaites), most Jews believed in what they call the oral law. These oral traditions were transmitted by the Pharisee sect of ancient Judaism, and were later recorded in written form and expanded upon by the rabbis.

Rabbinic Judaism (which derives from the Pharisees) has always held that the books of the Torah (called the written law) have always been transmitted in parallel with an oral tradition. To justify this viewpoint, Jews point to the text of the Torah, where many words are left undefined, and many procedures mentioned without explanation or instructions; this, they argue, means that the reader is assumed to be familiar with the details from other, i.e., oral, sources. This parallel set of material was originally transmitted orally, and came to be known as “the oral law.”

By the time of Rabbi Judah haNasi (200 CE), after the destruction of Jerusalem, much of this material was edited together into the Mishnah. Over the next four centuries this law underwent

discussion and debate in both of the world's major Jewish communities (in Israel and Babylonia), and the commentaries on the Mishnah from each of these communities eventually came to be edited together into compilations known as the two Talmuds. These have been expounded by commentaries of various Torah scholars during the ages.

Halakha , the rabbinic Jewish way of life, then, is based on a combined reading of the Torah, and the oral tradition — the Mishnah, the halakhic Midrash, the Talmud and its commentaries. The Halakha has developed slowly, through a precedent-based system. ⁽³⁵⁾

30. Jewish Observances and Religious Buildings

Jewish Observances

Jewish Ethics

Jewish ethics may be guided by halakhic traditions, by other moral principles, or by central Jewish virtues. Jewish ethical practice is typically understood to be marked by values such as:

- Justice
- Truth
- Peace
- Loving-kindness (*chesed*)
- Compassion
- Humility
- Self-respect

Specific Jewish ethical practices include practices of **charity** (*tzedakah*) and **refraining from negative speech** (*lashon hara*). Proper ethical practices regarding sexuality and many other issues are subjects of dispute among Jews.

Prayers

Traditionally, Jews recite prayers three times daily, **Shacharit** , **Mincha** , and Ma'ariv with a fourth

prayer, **Mussaf** added on Shabbat and holidays. At the heart of each service is the **Amidah** or *Shemoneh Esrei* . Another key prayer in many services is the declaration of faith, the **Shema Yisrael** (or *Shema*). The Shema is the recitation of a verse from the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4):

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad— “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God! The Lord is One!”



Figure 6-6 : Prayers at the Wailing Wall, Jerusalem, Israël by Paul Arps is licensed under CC-BY 2.0 .

Most of the prayers in a traditional Jewish service can be recited in solitary prayer, although communal prayer is preferred. Communal prayer requires a quorum of ten adult Jews, called a minyan. In nearly all Orthodox and a few Conservative circles, only male Jews are counted toward a minyan; most Conservative Jews and members of other Jewish denominations count female Jews as well.

In addition to prayer services, observant traditional Jews recite prayers and benedictions throughout the day when performing various acts. Prayers are recited upon waking up in the morning,

before eating or drinking different foods, after eating a meal, and so on. The approach to prayer varies among the Jewish denominations. Differences can include the texts of prayers, the frequency of prayer, the number of prayers recited at various religious events, the use of musical instruments and choral music, and whether prayers are recited in the traditional liturgical languages or the vernacular. In general, Orthodox and Conservative congregations adhere most closely to tradition, and Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues are more likely to incorporate translations and contemporary writings in their services. Also, in most Conservative synagogues, and all Reform and Reconstructionist congregations, women participate in prayer services on an equal basis with men, including roles traditionally filled only by men, such as reading from the Torah. In addition, many Reform temples use musical accompaniment such as organs and mixed choirs.

Religious Clothing

Kippah or **yarmulke** is a slightly rounded brimless skullcap worn by many Jews while praying, eating, reciting blessings, or studying Jewish religious texts, and at all times by some Jewish men. In Orthodox communities, only men wear kippot; in non-Orthodox communities, some women also wear kippot. Kippot range in size from a small round beanie that covers only the back of the head, to a large, snug cap that covers the whole crown.

Tzitzit are special knotted “fringes” or “tassels” found on the four corners of the tallit, or prayer shawl. The tallit is worn by Jewish men and some Jewish women during the prayer service. Customs vary regarding when a Jew begins wearing a tallit. In the Sephardi community, boys wear a tallit from bar mitzvah age. In some Ashkenazi communities it is customary to wear one only after marriage. A tallit katan (small tallit) is a fringed garment worn under the clothing throughout the day. In some Orthodox circles, the fringes are allowed to hang freely outside the clothing.

Tefillin , known in English as phylacteries, are two square leather boxes containing biblical verses, attached to the forehead and wound around the left arm by leather straps. They are worn during weekday morning prayer by observant Jewish men and some Jewish women.



Figure 6-7 : Handmade Yarmulkes at a stand in the Old City of Jerusalem by galit hadari Pikiwiki Israel is licensed under CC-BY 2.5 .

Kittel , a white knee-length overgarment, is worn by prayer leaders and some observant traditional Jews on the High Holidays. It is traditional for the head of the household to wear a kittel at the Passover seder in some communities, and some grooms wear one under the wedding canopy. Jewish males are buried in a tallit and sometimes also a kittel, which are part of the tachrichim (burial garments).⁽³⁵⁾

Jewish Holidays

Jewish holidays are special days in the Jewish calendar, which celebrate moments in Jewish history, as well as central themes in the relationship between God and the world, such as creation, revelation, and redemption.

Shabbat, the weekly day of rest lasting from shortly before sundown on Friday night to nightfall Saturday night, commemorates God's day of rest after six days of creation. It plays a pivotal role in Jewish practice and is governed by a large corpus of religious law. At sundown on Friday, the woman of the house welcomes the Shabbat by lighting two or more candles and reciting a blessing. The evening meal begins with the **Kiddush**, a blessing recited aloud over a cup of wine, and the **Mohrtzi**, a blessing recited over the bread. It is customary to have **challah**, two braided loaves of bread, on the table.

During Shabbat, Jews are forbidden to engage in any activity that falls under 39 categories of **melakhah**, translated literally as “work.” In fact, the activities banned on the Sabbath are not “work” in the usual sense:

They include such actions as lighting a fire, writing, using money and carrying in the public domain. The prohibition of lighting a fire has been extended in the modern era to driving a car, which involves burning fuel, and using electricity.

Three Pilgrimage Festivals

Jewish holy days (*chaggim*), celebrate landmark events in Jewish history, such as the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah, and sometimes mark the change of seasons and transitions in the agricultural cycle.

The three major festivals, **Passover** , **Sukkot** , and **Shavuot** , are called ” **regalim** ” (derived from the Hebrew word “regel” or foot). On the three regalim, it was customary for the Israelites to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the Temple.

- **Passover** (Pesach) is a week-long holiday beginning on the evening of the 14th day of Nisan (the first month in the Hebrew calendar), that **commemorates the Exodus from Egypt** . Outside Israel, Passover is celebrated for eight days. In ancient times, it coincided with the barley harvest. It is the only holiday that centers on home-service, the **Seder** . Leavened products (chametz) are removed from the house prior to the holiday, and are not consumed throughout the week. Homes are thoroughly cleaned to ensure no bread or bread by-products remain, and a symbolic burning of the last vestiges of chametz is conducted on the morning of the Seder. Matzo is eaten instead of bread.
- **Shavuot** (“Pentecost” or “Feast of Weeks”) **celebrates the revelation of the Torah to the Israelites on Mount Sinai** . Also known as the Festival of Bikurim, or first fruits, it coincided in biblical times with the wheat harvest. Shavuot customs include all-night study marathons known as Tikkun Leil Shavuot, eating dairy foods (cheesecake and blintzes are special favorites), reading the Book of Ruth, decorating homes and synagogues with greenery, and wearing white clothing, symbolizing purity.
- **Sukkot** (“Tabernacles” or “The Festival of Booths”) **commemorates the Israelites’ forty years of wandering through the desert on their way to the Promised Land** . It is celebrated through the construction of temporary booths called sukkot (*sing* . sukkah) that represent the temporary shelters of the Israelites during their wandering. It coincides with the fruit harvest, and marks the end of the agricultural cycle. Jews around the world eat in sukkot for seven days and nights. Sukkot concludes with Shemini Atzeret,

where Jews begin to pray for rain and Simchat Torah, “Rejoicing of the Torah,” a holiday which marks reaching the end of the Torah reading cycle and beginning all over again. The occasion is celebrated with singing and dancing with the Torah scrolls. Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are technically considered to be a separate holiday and not a part of Sukkot.

High Holy Days

The **High Holidays** (Yamim Noraim or “Days of Awe”) revolve around judgment and forgiveness.

- **Rosh Hashanah** (also Yom Ha-Zikkaron or “Day of Remembrance”, and Yom Teruah, or “Day of the Sounding of the Shofar”) is the **Jewish New Year** (literally, “head of the year”), although it falls on the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, Tishri. Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the 10-day period of atonement leading up to Yom Kippur, during which Jews are commanded to search their souls and make amends for sins committed, intentionally or not, throughout the year. Holiday customs include blowing the shofar, or ram’s horn, in the synagogue, eating apples and honey, and saying blessings over a variety of symbolic foods, such as pomegranates.
- **Yom Kippur** (“Day of Atonement”) is the **holiest day of the Jewish year**. It is a day of communal fasting and praying for forgiveness for one’s sins. Observant Jews spend the entire day in the synagogue, sometimes with a short break in the afternoon, reciting prayers from a special holiday prayerbook called a “Machzor.” Many non-religious Jews make a point of attending synagogue services and fasting on Yom Kippur. On the eve of Yom Kippur, before candles are lit, a prefast meal,

the “seuda mafseket,” is eaten. Synagogue services on the eve of Yom Kippur begin with the Kol Nidre prayer. It is customary to wear white on Yom Kippur, especially for Kol Nidre, and leather shoes are not worn. The following day, prayers are held from morning to evening. The final prayer service, called “Ne’ilah,” ends with a long blast of the shofar.

Purim

Purim is a **joyous Jewish holiday** that commemorates the deliverance of the Persian Jews from the plot of the evil Haman, who sought to exterminate them, as recorded in the biblical Book of Esther.

It is characterized by public recitation of the Book of Esther, mutual gifts of food and drink, charity to the poor, and a celebratory meal (Esther 9:22). Other customs include drinking wine, eating special pastries called *hamantashen*, dressing up in masks and costumes, and organizing carnivals and parties.

Purim is celebrated annually on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar, which occurs in February or March of the Gregorian calendar.

Hanukkah

Hanukkah, also known as the **Festival of Lights**, is an eight-day Jewish holiday that starts on the 25th day of Kislev (Hebrew calendar). The festival is observed in Jewish homes by the kindling of lights on each of the festival’s eight nights, one on the first night, two on the second night and so on.

The holiday was called **Hanukkah** (meaning “dedication”) because it marks the re-dedication of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Spiritually, Hanukkah commemorates the

” **Miracle of the Oil** .” According to the Talmud, at the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem following the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire, there was only enough consecrated oil to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days – which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate new oil.

Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Bible and was never considered a major holiday in Judaism, but it has become much more visible and widely celebrated in modern times, mainly because it falls around the same time as Christmas and has national Jewish overtones that have been emphasized since the establishment of the State of Israel.

Other Days

Tisha B'Av or ” **the Ninth of Av** ” is a day of mourning and fasting commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and in later times, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.

The modern holidays of **Yom Ha-shoah** (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and **Yom Ha'atzmaut** (Israeli Independence Day) commemorate the horrors of the Holocaust and the achievement of Israeli independence, respectively. ⁽³⁵⁾

Synagogues and Religious Buildings

Synagogues are Jewish houses of prayer and study. They usually contain separate rooms for prayer (the main sanctuary), smaller rooms for study, and often an area for community or educational use. There is no set blueprint for synagogues and the architectural shapes and interior designs of synagogues vary greatly. The Reform movement mostly refers to their synagogues as temples.

Some traditional features of a synagogue are:

- The **Ark** (called *aron ha-kodesh* by Ashkenazim and *hekhal* by Sephardim) where the Torah scrolls are kept (the ark is often closed with an ornate curtain (*parochet*) outside or inside the ark doors).
- The elevated reader's **platform** (called *bimah* by Ashkenazim and *tebah* by Sephardim), where the Torah is read (and services are conducted in Sephardi synagogues).
- The **eternal light** (*ner tamid*), a continually lit lamp or lantern used as a reminder of the constantly lit menorah of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- The **pulpit** , or *amud* , a lectern facing the Ark where the hazzan or prayer leader stands while praying.

In addition to synagogues, other buildings of significance in Judaism include yeshivas, or institutions of Jewish learning, and mikvahs, which are ritual baths. ⁽³⁵⁾

31. Purity and Life-Cycle Events

Purity

Dietary Laws: Kashrut

The Jewish dietary laws are known as **kashrut** . Food prepared in accordance with them is termed **kosher** , and food that is not kosher is also known as **treifah** or **treif** . People who observe these laws are colloquially said to be “keeping kosher.”

Many of the laws apply to animal-based foods. For example:

- For **mammals** to be considered kosher, they must have *split hooves* and *chew their cud* . The pig is arguably the most well-known example of a non-kosher animal. Although it has split hooves, it does not chew its cud.
- For **seafood** to be kosher, the animal must have *fins and scales* . Certain types of seafood, such as shellfish, crustaceans, and eels, are therefore considered non-kosher.
- Concerning **birds** , a list of non-kosher species is given in the Torah. The exact translations of many of the species have not survived, and some non-kosher birds' identities are no longer certain. However, traditions exist about the kashrut status of a few birds. For example, both chickens and turkeys are permitted in most communities.
- Other types of animals, such as **amphibians** , **reptiles** , and most **insects** , are prohibited altogether.

In addition to the requirement that the species be considered

kosher, meat and poultry (but not fish) must come from a healthy animal slaughtered in a process known as shechitah. Without the proper slaughtering practices even an otherwise kosher animal will be rendered treif. The slaughtering process is intended to be quick and relatively painless to the animal. Forbidden parts of animals include the blood, some fats, and the area in and around the sciatic nerve. Jewish law also forbids the consumption of meat and dairy products together. The waiting period between eating meat and eating dairy varies by the order in which they are consumed and by community, and can extend for up to six hours. Based on the Biblical injunction against cooking a kid in its mother's milk, this rule is mostly derived from the Oral Torah, the Talmud and Rabbinic law. Chicken and other kosher birds are considered the same as meat under the laws of kashrut, but the prohibition is Rabbinic, not Biblical.

The use of dishes, serving utensils, and ovens may make food treif that would otherwise be kosher. Utensils that have been used to prepare non-kosher food, or dishes that have held meat and are now used for dairy products, render the food treif under certain conditions. Furthermore, all Orthodox and some Conservative authorities forbid the consumption of processed grape products made by non-Jews, due to ancient pagan practices of using wine in rituals. Some Conservative authorities permit wine and grape juice made without rabbinic supervision.

The Torah does not give specific reasons for most of the laws of kashrut. However, a number of explanations have been offered, including maintaining ritual purity, teaching impulse control, encouraging obedience to God, improving health, reducing cruelty to animals and preserving the distinctness of the Jewish community.

The various categories of dietary laws may have developed for different reasons, and some may exist for multiple reasons. For example, people are forbidden from consuming the blood of birds and mammals because, according to the Torah, this is where animal souls are contained. In contrast, the Torah forbids Israelites from eating non-kosher species because “they are unclean.”

The Kabbalah describes sparks of holiness that are released by the act of eating kosher foods, but are too tightly bound in non-kosher foods to be released by eating. Survival concerns supersede all the laws of kashrut, as they do for most halakhot.

Laws of Ritual Purity

The Tanakh describes circumstances in which a person who is **tahor** (*ritually pure*) may become **tamei** (*ritually impure*). Some of these circumstances are contact with human corpses or graves, seminal flux, vaginal flux, menstruation, and contact with people who have become impure from any of these. In Rabbinic Judaism, Kohanim, members of the hereditary caste that served as priests in the time of the Temple, are mostly restricted from entering grave sites and touching dead bodies.

Family Purity

An important subcategory of the ritual purity laws relates to the segregation of menstruating women. These laws are also known as **niddah** , literally " *separation* ," or " *family purity* ." Vital aspects of **halakha** for traditionally observant Jews, they are not usually followed by Jews in liberal denominations.

Especially in Orthodox Judaism, the Biblical laws are augmented by Rabbinical injunctions. For example, the Torah mandates that a woman in her normal menstrual period must abstain from sexual intercourse for seven days. A woman whose menstruation is prolonged must continue to abstain for seven more days after bleeding has stopped. The Rabbis conflated ordinary niddah with this extended menstrual period, known in the Torah as **zavah** , and mandated that a woman may not have sexual intercourse with her husband from the time she begins her menstrual flow until seven

days after it ends. In addition, Rabbinical law forbids the husband from touching or sharing a bed with his wife during this period. Afterwards, purification can occur in a ritual bath called a **mikveh** .

Traditional Ethiopian Jews keep menstruating women in separate huts and, similar to Karaite practice, do not allow menstruating women into their temples because of a temple's special sanctity. Emigration to Israel and the influence of other Jewish denominations have led to Ethiopian Jews adopting more normative Jewish practices.⁽³⁵⁾

Life-Cycle Events

Life-cycle events, or rites of passage, occur throughout a Jew's life that serve to strengthen Jewish identity and bind him or her to the entire community.

Brit milah

Welcoming male babies into the covenant through the rite of circumcision on their eighth day of life. The baby boy is also given his Hebrew name in the ceremony. A naming ceremony intended as a parallel ritual for girls, named **zeved habat** or *brit bat* , enjoys limited popularity.

Bar mitzvah and Bat mitzvah

This passage from childhood to adulthood takes place when a female Jew is twelve and a male Jew is thirteen years old among Orthodox and some Conservative congregations. In the Reform

movement, both girls and boys have their bat/bar mitzvah at age thirteen. This is often commemorated by having the new adults, male only in the Orthodox tradition, lead the congregation in prayer and publicly read a “portion” of the Torah.

Marriage

Marriage is an extremely important lifecycle event. A wedding takes place under a **chupah**, or *wedding canopy*, which symbolizes a “happy house.” At the end of the ceremony, the groom breaks a glass with his foot, symbolizing the continuous mourning for the destruction of the Temple, and the scattering of the Jewish people.

Death and Mourning

Judaism has a multi-staged mourning practice.

- The first stage is called the **shiva** (literally “seven,” observed for one week) during which it is traditional to sit at home and be comforted by friends and family.
- The second is the **shloshim** (observed for one month) and for those who have lost one of their parents.
- A third stage, **avelut yud bet chodesh**, which is observed for eleven months.⁽³⁵⁾

PART VII

MODULE 7: CHRISTIANITY

32. Introduction

World Religions – Christianity

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the religion of Christianity. The module will familiarize students with Christian religious history as well as the beliefs and practices of Christianity. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Christian history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will order four figures from Christian history from greatest to least based on their contribution to Christian tradition. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Describe the development of the New Testament in the early Christian era.

- Explain significant elements associated with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Discuss and identify the importance of the apostle Paul for shaping Christian practice and teaching.
- Discuss the social context that gave rise to Christianity in the Roman Empire.
- Recognize the importance of the seven sacraments within the Christian ritual tradition.
- Identify essential elements related to Christian theology.
- Recognize the ways in religious challenges shaped Christian theology over the course of its history. ⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 7

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 7 Discussion
- Complete Christianity Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 7 Quiz
- Submit Comparative Religion Essay

33. History of Christianity

Christianity

Jesus Christ (c. ⁶ / 4 BCE – c. 30 CE), also called Jesus son of Joseph, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of Galilee or simply “Christ,” was a Jewish religious leader who became a central figure in Christianity, regarded by most Christian branches as God himself. He is also considered an important prophet in Muslim tradition and the precursor of Prophet Muhammad.

Christ was not originally Jesus’ name. It was customary among ancient Jews to have only one name and add either the father’s name or the name of their place of origin. This is why during his life; Jesus was called sometimes Jesus of Nazareth and other times Jesus son of Joseph, which is supported by Christian sources (Luke 4.22; John 1.45; 6.42; Acts 10.38). The word, Christ, is not a name but a title derived for the Greek word *christos*, a term analogous to the Hebrew expression Meshiah, “*The anointed one.*” Many Jews hoped that the former glory of Israel would be restored by a newly anointed son of King David, and they used the Messiah title to refer to this restorer. Early Christian literature sometimes combined the name of Jesus and his title using them together as Jesus’ name: Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus. The reason for this is that the early followers of Jesus’ teachings believed he was the Messiah. ⁽³⁹⁾

History

The life of Jesus began in north and central Palestine, a region between the Dead Sea and the Jordan River in the east and the Eastern Mediterranean in the west. This region was under Roman

control since the 1st century BCE, initially as a tributary kingdom. The Roman campaigns, coupled with internal revolts and the incursion of the Parthians, made the region very unstable and chaotic up until 37 BCE, when **Herod the Great** (c.73 BCE – 4 BCE) became king. The region gradually gained political stability and became prosperous. Although Jewish in religion, Herod was a vassal king who served the interests of the Roman Empire.

After Herod's death in 4 BCE, the Romans intervened again in order to split up the Herodian kingdom between three of Herod the Great's sons.

- **Galilee** in the north and **Perea** in the southeast were entrusted to **Herod Antipas** (c. 20 BCE – c. 39 CE), whose reign (4 BCE – 39 CE) covered the entire life of Jesus.
- **Philip the Tetrarch** was appointed ruler over northern **Transjordania**.
- **Herod Archelaus** was made ruler of **Samaria**, **Judea**, and **Idumea**, and he exercised his power with tyranny and brutality; some of these abuses are recorded in the gospel of Matthew (2.20–23). The combination of killings, revolts, and social turbulence in Archelaus' realm was too much for the patience of Roman authorities: in 6 CE the **Emperor Augustus** deposed and exiled Archelaus, sending him to Gaul, and his domain became the Roman Province of Iudaea in 6 CE (sometime spelled **Judea**, not to be confused with Judea proper, the region between Samaria and Idumea). Thus, Iudaea was under direct Roman administration and rulers directly appointed by the Roman Emperor governed the Province.

None of the gospels shows much interest in dating accurately the birth of Jesus, and there are no references to the Roman dating system, or to any other dating systems used in the Bible. Matthew simply states that Jesus' birth occurred "in the days of **Herod** the king [**Herod the Great**]." The exact year for Jesus' birth is not known for certain, but there is enough ground to believe that he

could not have been born any later than 4 BCE. Moreover, though this is the latest he could have been born, it could well be an earlier date, even as early as 17 BCE according to some scholars.

Map of first century Iudaea Province outlining regions of Phoenicia, Galilee, Samaria, Perea, Idumea, and Iudaea proper. Regions referenced in text.

Figure 7-1: Map of the First Century Iudaea Province by Robert W. Funk is licensed under CC-BY 3.0 .

Like the Buddha, Confucius, Socrates and many other great teachers of Antiquity, Jesus left no written records. To say that he never wrote anything is to contradict the gospel of John (8.7) where we read that Jesus wrote something in the sand with his finger, but after more than two millennia, we can safely assume that these lines, whatever they were, are long gone. Details about his life survived in early Christian oral tradition for many decades until the slow process of committing them to writing started.

The earliest Christian records mentioning the life of Jesus are the letters ascribed to Saint Paul, many of which are actually of uncertain authorship. Some of these letters date back to approximately 65 CE, maybe a few years earlier. The details in these letters do not offer details of the life of Jesus outside the Last Supper and his execution.

The Gospels

We also have the gospels. The word "**gospel**" means '*good news*' (from Old English) and refers to the accounts of the life of Jesus. Many different gospels have come down to us but only a group of four are accepted by Christian tradition to be inspired by God.

This group is known as the "**canonical gospels**" and includes the gospels according to **Matthew** , **Mark** , **Luke** , and **John** .

The remaining gospels are known as "**apocryphal**" or "**non-**

canonical gospels ” and are not considered to be divinely inspired. Three of the four canonical gospels are labelled as ” **synoptic gospels** ” (Matthew, Mark and Luke), because their content presents many similarities. John, however, presents a very different picture of events.

The earliest of the four canonical gospels is believed to be Mark, written probably around 65–70 CE. Its content is not arranged chronologically, but according to subjects, such as miracle stories, parables, pronouncement stories, etc. The only segment arranged chronologically is the Passion narrative (14.1–16.8). The two later synoptic gospels are Matthew, written around 85–90 CE, and Luke, about 90–100 CE. It is widely believed that the authors of these two gospels used Mark as their main source. In addition to Mark, there is a hypothetical source of the teaching of Jesus used by the authors of Matthew and Luke, which is known as the “Q” source (from the German word *Quelle*, “ source ”).⁽³⁹⁾

34. Life of Jesus and The Apostle Paul

Life of Jesus

Jesus was born towards the end of the reign of Herod the Great (died 4 BCE) and brought up in Nazareth, Galilee. He was named Jesus (Yeshu'a in Aramaic, Yehoshua or Joshua in Hebrew, Iesous in Greek, Iesus in Roman) and was conceived between the engagement and marriage of his parents whose names were Mary (Miriam in Hebrew and Mariam in Aramaic) and Joseph (Yossef in Hebrew, Yosep in Aramaic).

In Matthew 13.55 it is said that his father was a carpenter, and Mark 6.3 says that this was also Jesus' profession. It was a common practice during that time that sons would follow their father's occupation, so it would be safe to believe that Jesus was a carpenter. Although not certain, it is probable that Jesus' education included a detailed study of the Hebrew Scriptures, a very common practice among the devout poor in Israel. ⁽³⁹⁾

Jesus' Public Ministry

His public ministry began after being baptized by **John the Baptist**. According to the gospel of Luke, this was when Jesus was about 30 years of age. According to Mark (11.27-33), Jesus saw John the Baptist as an authority and possibly a source of inspiration. It seems that he performed baptisms parallel to John the Baptist (John 3.22). After the arrest of John the Baptist (Mark 1.14), Jesus began a new kind of

ministry, spreading the message of the kingdom of God approaching and stressing the importance of repentance by the people of Israel.

Jesus was heavily influenced by the prophet Isaiah, who considered the coming of the reign of God a central topic (Isa. 52.7). Many of Jesus' teachings have allusions to Isaiah, and he also quotes him on many occasions. Jesus is presented as an **eschatological prophet** announcing the definitive coming of God, its salvation, and the end of time.

Jesus gradually gained popularity and thousands of followers are mentioned in the gospels. He shared some attributes with the Pharisees and the Essenes, two of the Jewish sects at that time.

- Like the Pharisees, Jesus' teaching methods included the expression of thoughts about the human condition in the form of aphorisms and parables, and he also shared the belief in the genuine authority of Hebrew sacred scriptures.
- Unlike the Pharisaic teachers, Jesus believed that outward compliance with the law was not of utmost importance and that values such as the love for enemies were more important. Moreover, Jesus summed up his ethical views in the double command concerning love:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12.28-31; Matthew 22.35-40 and Luke 10.25-28).

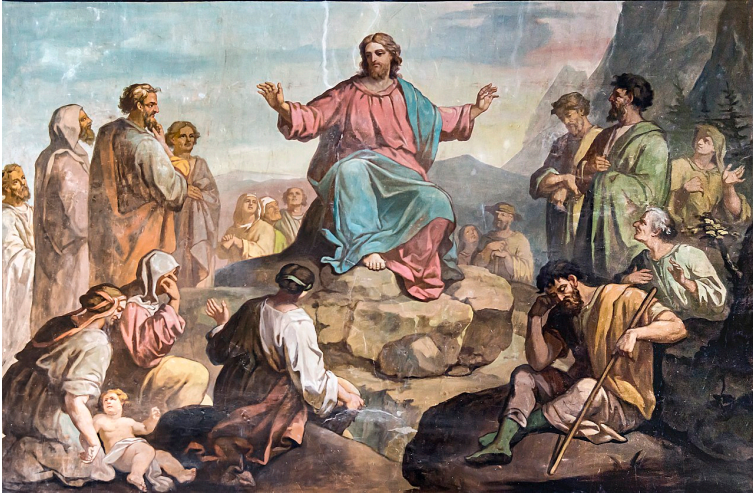


Figure 7-2: The Sermon on the Mountain by Arsène Robert is licensed under CC-BY-SA 4.0 .

The Essenes had a very simple way of life, a pacifist spirit, common ownership of property, common meals, they practiced exorcisms, and they stressed the love for each other, all practices seen in the ministry of Jesus. ⁽³⁹⁾

Jesus' **prophetic preaching** (the coming of God's kingly rule) and his **wisdom teaching** (the command of love) are never explicitly linked to one another. This gap has been subject to endless discussions and interpretations in many traditions. A possible interpretation is that only the coming of God's kingdom makes it possible for people to love God in complete obedience and to love their neighbors, including enemies. This is, however, a matter of speculation. ⁽³⁹⁾

Jesus' Arrest and Condemnation to Death

At some point towards the end of his career, Jesus moved to Jerusalem, Judea, reaching the climax of his public life. Here he

engaged in different disputes with his many adversaries. At the same time, some religious authorities were seeking to entrap him into self-incrimination by raising controversial topics, mostly of a theological nature. The gospels offer different reasons as to why the **Sanhedrin** (the Jewish court) was interested in executing Jesus, but only John (11.47-53) seems convincing enough: Jesus was seen as a trouble-maker who threatened public harmony.

A Roman intervention to restore order, thus breaking the fine balance between Jewish and Roman power, did not interest the Sanhedrin. An arresting party finally took Jesus to the Sanhedrin, where he was judged, found guilty of blasphemy, and condemned to death. However, the execution order had to be issued by a Roman authority; the Jewish court did not have such power at that time. Therefore, Jesus was brought to the procurator of Rome who ordered Jesus' execution. Because Jesus never denied the charges, he should have been convicted and not executed, as the Roman law required in case of confession for such a penalty. On a hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus was finally crucified and killed, which was not a Jewish form of punishment but a common Roman practice.⁽³⁹⁾

The Apostle Paul

Paul was a follower of Jesus Christ who famously converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus after persecuting the very followers of the community that he joined. However, as we will see, Paul is better described as one of the founders of the religion rather than a convert to it. Scholars attribute seven books of the New Testament to Paul; he was an influential teacher and a missionary to much of Asia Minor and present-day Greece.

In the last century, scholars have come to appreciate Paul as the actual founder of the religious movement that would become Christianity. Paul was a Diaspora Jew, a member of the party of the Pharisees, who experienced a revelation of the resurrected Jesus.

After this experience, he traveled widely throughout the eastern Roman Empire, spreading the “good news” that Jesus would soon return from heaven and usher in the reign of God (“the kingdom”). Paul was not establishing a new religion; he believed that his generation was the last before the end time when this age would be transformed. However, as time passed and Jesus did not return, the second century Church Fathers turned to Paul’s writings to validate what would ultimately be the creation of Christian dogma. Thus, Paul could be viewed as the founder of Christianity as a separate religion apart from Judaism.

Paul’s Letters and the Law of Moses

In the New Testament, we have fourteen letters traditionally assigned to Paul, but the scholarly consensus now holds that of the fourteen, seven were actually written by Paul:

- 1 THESSALONIANS
- GALATIANS
- PHILEMON
- PHILIPPIANS
- 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS
- ROMANS

The others were most likely written by a disciple of Paul’s, using his name to carry authority. We understand these letters to be circumstantial, meaning they were never intended as systematic theology or as treatises on Christianity. In other words, the letters are responses to particular problems and circumstances as they arose in the various communities. They were not written as universal dictates to serve as Christian ideology but only came to have importance and significance over time.

Paul was a Pharisee, and claims that when it came to “the Law,” he

was more zealous and knew more about the law than anyone else. For the most part in his Letters, the Law at issue was the Law of Moses. He was of the tribe of Benjamin (and thus Luke could use the prior name Saul, a quite famous Benjaminite name; name changes often go with a change of viewpoint in terms of a new person — Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter, etc.).

Paul has also become the most famous convert in history. Being struck blind on the road to Damascus has become a metaphor for sudden enlightenment and conversion.

In GALATIANS, Paul said he received a vision of the resurrected Jesus, who commissioned him to be the Apostle to the gentiles. This was crucial for Paul in terms of his authority. Everyone knew that he was never one of the inner circle, so a directive straight from Jesus was the way in which Paul argued that he had as much authority as the earlier Apostles. This is also crucially important in unraveling Paul's views of the Law of Moses when it comes to his recruitment area, and something that should always be borne in mind when trying to analyze his views.

Paul's job, as he saw it, was to bring "*the good news*" to the gentiles. Almost everything he writes about the Law pertains to this. The Law of Moses was never understood to be applied to the gentiles in Israelite tradition, so gentiles need not be subject to circumcision, dietary laws, or Sabbath regulations. These three are the focus, as they are physical rituals that keep communities separated, and Paul sought to breakdown barriers between communities.

Another phase of Paul's became the basis of centuries of commentary, culminating in Martin Luther's separation from the Church of Rome. Paul claimed that gentiles are saved by faith alone, and not by works of the Law.

We cannot confirm where or how Paul died. Paul's letter to the Romans is most likely one of his last surviving works in which he told his audience that he was going to Jerusalem for a visit and then would come to Rome to see them (with plans to continue on

to Spain). Luke told the story of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, where he (as a Roman citizen) had the right of appeal to the Emperor in Rome. The Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome, continuing his preaching. It is only in later, second-century, narratives that we find legendary material of Paul's trial in Rome (with alleged letters between Paul and the Stoic philosopher, Seneca). After conviction, he was beheaded and his body buried outside the walls of the city, on the road to Ostia, so that his grave would not become a shrine. Years later, this site would become the current basilica in Rome, **St. Paul's, Outside-the-Walls**, and the Vatican has always claimed that his body rests in a sarcophagus within the church. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

35. The Growth and Spread of Early Christianity

The Growth and Spread of Early Christianity

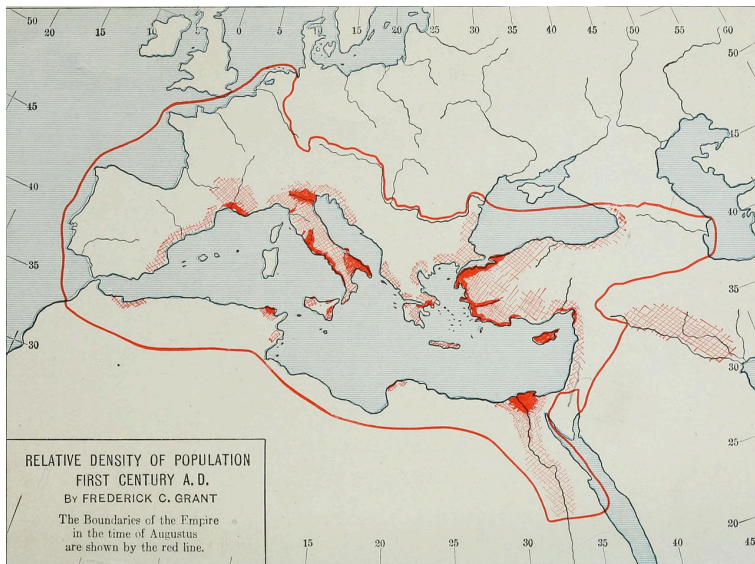


Figure 7-3: The Early Days of Christianity by Frederick C. Grant resides in the Public Domain .

Persecution of Christians

Members of the Early Christian movement often became political targets and scapegoats for the social ills and political tensions of specific rulers and turbulent periods during the first three

centuries, CE; however, this persecution was sporadic and rarely Empire-wide.⁽⁴¹⁾

The first recorded official persecution of Christians on behalf of the Roman Empire was in 64 CE, when, as reported by the Roman historian Tacitus, Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome. According to Church tradition, it was during the reign of Nero that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome. However, modern historians debate whether the Roman government distinguished between Christians and Jews prior to Nerva's modification of the *Fiscus Judaicus* in 96, from which point practicing Jews paid the tax and Christians did not.

The **Diocletianic or Great Persecution** was the last and most severe persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, which lasted from 302–311 CE. In 303, the emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius issued a series of edicts rescinding the legal rights of Christians and demanding that they comply with traditional Roman religious practices.

Later edicts targeted the clergy and ordered all inhabitants to sacrifice to the Roman gods (a policy known as universal sacrifice). The persecution varied in intensity across the empire—it was weakest in Gaul and Britain, where only the first edict was applied, and strongest in the Eastern provinces.

During the Great Persecution, Diocletian ordered Christian buildings and the homes of Christians torn down, and their sacred books collected and burned during the Great Persecution. Christians were arrested, tortured, mutilated, burned, starved, and condemned to gladiatorial contests to amuse spectators. The Great Persecution officially ended in April of 311, when Galerius, senior emperor of the Tetrarchy, issued an edict of toleration which granted Christians the right to practice their religion, though it did not restore any property to them. Constantine, Caesar in the western empire, and Licinius, Caesar in the east, also were signatories to the edict of toleration.⁽⁴²⁾

Edict of Milan

In 313, Constantine and Licinius announced in the Edict of Milan “that it was proper that the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best,” thereby granting tolerance to all religions, including Christianity.

The Edict of Milan went a step further than the earlier Edict of Toleration by Galerius in 311, and returned confiscated Church property. This edict made the empire officially neutral with regard to religious worship; it neither made the traditional religions illegal, nor made Christianity the state religion (as did the later Edict of Thessalonica in 380 CE). The Edict of Milan did, however, raise the stock of Christianity within the empire, and it reaffirmed the importance of religious worship to the welfare of the state. (42)

The Nicene Creed

In 325 CE Constantine invited clerics from across the empire to a conference at Nicaea where he made a plea for unity.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Under the supervision of Emperor Constantine I, the **Nicene Creed** (325 CE) was composed by an **ecumenical council**, which was and is accepted as authoritative by most Christian groups, but not by the Eastern Orthodox Church (at least, the second version in 381 CE is rejected for adding in the Filioque Clause—“And the Son”).

The Nicene Creed describes the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, his role in the future judgment of humanity, how Jesus is “homooousis” — of the same substance with God, how and why the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped as part of the holy family, discusses the requirement of baptism, and minimizes the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, interestingly.⁽⁴¹⁾

The Athanasian Creed

Although there are others, the **Athanasian Creed** (328 CE) also proved important in pushing back against the heresies of the day, namely **Docetism** and **Arianism**.⁽⁴¹⁾

- Docetism held that Jesus' humanity was merely an illusion, thus denying the incarnation (Deity becoming human).
- Arianism held that Jesus, while not merely mortal, was not eternally divine and was, therefore, of lesser status than the Father.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Christianity: State Religion of Roman Empire

By the 5th century CE, Christianity had become the state religion of the Roman Empire, leading to a dramatic change in how the faith played out in greater society. This caused a shift in Christianity from private to public worship; from a distinctly Jewish character to one more aligned with the Gentiles; from an individual matter to more of a community affair; from a seeker-driven faith to an exclusively chosen body of believers; from a looser, more informal structure to that of distinct strata of operation and authority; and from gender empowering to more specific gender-specific limitations. Additionally, Christian leaders had to figure out how Christianity integrated with Roman law and government, dealt with barbarian peoples, and still maintained the essence of Jesus' teachings and missions for his followers.⁽⁴¹⁾

Christianity in the Early Middle Ages

With the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the west, the papacy became a political player, first visible in Pope Leo's

diplomatic dealings with Huns and Vandals. The church also entered into a long period of missionary activity and expansion among the various tribes. **Catholicism** spread among the Germanic peoples, the Celtic and Slavic peoples, the Hungarians, and the Baltic peoples. Christianity has been an important part of the shaping of Western civilization, at least since the 4th century. ⁽⁴³⁾

Around 500, **St. Benedict** set out his **Monastic Rule**, establishing a system of regulations for the foundation and running of monasteries. **Monasticism** became a powerful force throughout Europe, and gave rise to many early centers of learning, most famously in Ireland, Scotland and Gaul, contributing to the Carolingian Renaissance of the 9th century.

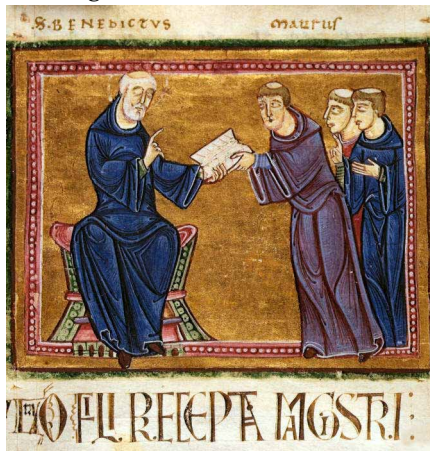


Figure 7-4: St. Benedict delivering his rule to the Monks of his Order resides in the Public Domain .

In the 7th century Muslims conquered Syria (including Jerusalem), North Africa and Spain. Part of the Muslims' success was due to the exhaustion of the Byzantine Empire in its decades long conflict with Persia. Beginning in the 8th century, with the rise of Carolingian leaders, the papacy began to find greater political support in the Frankish Kingdom.

The Middle Ages brought about major changes within the church. Pope Gregory the Great dramatically reformed ecclesiastical

structure and administration. In the early 8th century, iconoclasm—the destruction of religious icons—became a divisive issue, when it was sponsored by the Byzantine emperors. The Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787) finally pronounced in favor of icons. In the early 10th century, Western Christian monasticism was further rejuvenated through the leadership of the great Benedictine Monastery of Cluny.⁽⁴³⁾

Christianity in the High and Late Middle Ages

In the west, from the 11th century onward, older cathedral schools developed into universities (see University of Oxford, University of Paris, and University of Bologna). The traditional medieval universities — evolved from Catholic and Protestant church schools — then established specialized academic structures for properly educating greater numbers of students as professionals. Prior to the establishment of universities, European higher education took place for hundreds of years in Christian cathedral schools or monastic schools, in which monks and nuns taught classes; evidence of these immediate forerunners of the later university at many places dates back to the 6th century AD.

Accompanying the rise of the “new towns” throughout Europe, mendicant orders were founded, bringing the consecrated religious life out of the monastery and into the new urban setting. The two principal mendicant movements were the **Franciscans** and the **Dominicans** founded by St. Francis and St. Dominic respectively. Both orders made significant contributions to the development of the great universities of Europe. Another new order was the **Cistercians**, whose large isolated monasteries spearheaded the settlement of former wilderness areas. In this period, church building and ecclesiastical architecture reached new heights, culminating in the orders of Romanesque and Gothic architecture and the building of the great European cathedrals.

The Crusades

From 1095 under the pontificate of Urban II, the Crusades were launched. These were a series of military campaigns in the Holy Land and elsewhere, initiated in response to pleas from the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I for aid against Turkish expansion. The Crusades ultimately failed to stifle Islamic aggression and even contributed to Christian enmity with the sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade.

Over a period stretching from the 7th to the 13th century, the Christian Church underwent gradual alienation. This resulted in the **Great Schism** in 1054, dividing the Church into the so-called Latin or Western Christian branch, the **Roman Catholic Church**, and an Eastern, largely Greek, branch, the **Orthodox Church**.

These two churches disagree on a number of administrative, liturgical, and doctrinal issues, most notably papal primacy of jurisdiction. The Second Council of Lyon (1274) and the Council of Florence (1439) attempted to reunite the churches, but in both cases the Eastern Orthodox refused to implement the decisions and the two principal churches remain in schism to the present day. However, the Roman Catholic Church has achieved union with various smaller eastern churches.

Beginning around 1184, following the crusade against the Cathar heresy, various institutions, broadly referred to as the **Inquisition**, were established with the aim of suppressing heresy and securing religious and doctrinal unity within Christianity through conversion and prosecution.⁽⁴³⁾

36. Protestant Reformation and Counter – Reformation

Protestant Reformation and Counter – Reformation

In the early 16th century, movements were begun by two theologians, **Martin Luther** and **Huldrych Zwingli**, who aimed to reform the Church; these reformers are distinguished from previous ones in that they considered the root of corruptions to be doctrinal (rather than simply a matter of moral weakness or lack of ecclesiastical discipline) and thus they aimed to change contemporary doctrines to accord with what they perceived to be the “true gospel.”

The Protestant Reformation

The beginning of the **Protestant Reformation** is generally identified with **Martin Luther** and the posting of the 95 Theses on the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Early protest was against corruptions such as simony, episcopal vacancies, and the sale of indulgences. The Protestant position, however, would come to incorporate doctrinal changes, such as *sola scriptura* —“scripture alone”—and *sola fide* —“faith alone.”

The three most important traditions to emerge directly from the Protestant Reformation were the Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist, Presbyterian, etc.), and Anglican traditions, though the latter group identifies as both “Reformed” and “Catholic,” and some subgroups reject the classification as “Protestant.”

John Calvin was a French cleric and doctor of law turned Protestant reformer. He belonged to the second generation of the Reformation, publishing his theological tome, the *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION*, in 1536 (later revised), and establishing himself as a leader of the Reformed church in Geneva, which became an “unofficial capital” of Reformed Christianity in the second half of the 16th century.

Calvin’s theology is best known for his doctrine of (double) **predestination**, which held that God had, from all eternity, providentially foreordained who would be saved (*the elect*) and likewise who would be damned (*the reprobate*). Predestination was not the dominant idea in Calvin’s works, but it would seemingly become so for many of his Reformed successors.

The English Reformation

Unlike other reform movements, the **English Reformation** began by royal influence. **Henry VIII** considered himself a thoroughly Catholic King, and in 1521 he defended the papacy against Luther in a book he commissioned entitled, *The Defense of the Seven Sacraments*, for which Pope Leo X awarded him the title **Fidei Defensor** (Defender of the Faith). However, the king came into conflict with the papacy when he wished to annul his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, for which he needed papal sanction. Catherine, among many other noble relations, was the aunt of Emperor Charles V, the papacy’s most significant secular supporter. The ensuing dispute eventually leads to a break from Rome and the declaration of the King of England as head of the English Church. What emerged was a state church that considered itself both “Reformed” and “Catholic” but not “Roman” (and hesitated from the title “Protestant”), and other “unofficial” more radical movements such as the Puritans.

The Counter Reformation

The Protestant Reformation spread almost entirely within the confines of Northern Europe, but did not take hold in certain northern areas such as Ireland and parts of Germany.

The Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation is known as the **Counter Reformation**, or **Catholic Reformation**, which resulted in a reassertion of traditional doctrines and the emergence of new religious orders aimed at both moral reform and new missionary activity. The Counter Reformation reconverted approximately 33&percent; of Northern Europe to Catholicism and initiated missions in South and Central America, Africa, Asia, and even China and Japan. Protestant expansion outside of Europe occurred on a smaller scale through colonization of North America and areas of Africa.

Catholic missions was carried to new places beginning with the new **Age of Discovery**, and the Roman Catholic Church established a number of Missions in the Americas and other colonies in order to spread Christianity in the New World and to convert the indigenous peoples.

At the same time, missionaries, such as Francis Xavier, as well as other Jesuits, Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans were moving into Asia and the Far East. The Portuguese sent missions into Africa. While some of these missions were associated with imperialism and oppression, others (notably Matteo Ricci's Jesuit mission to China) were relatively peaceful and focused on integration rather than cultural imperialism.

English Puritans in the New World

The most famous colonization by Protestants in the New World was that of English Puritans in North America. Unlike the Spanish or French, the English colonists made surprisingly little effort to

evangelize the native peoples. The Puritans, or Pilgrims, left England so that they could live in an area with Puritanism established as the exclusive civic religion. Though they had left England because of the suppression of their religious practice, most Puritans had thereafter originally settled in the Low Countries but found the licentiousness there, where the state hesitated from enforcing religious practice, as unacceptable, and thus they set out for the New World and the hopes of a Puritan utopia. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

The Great Awakenings



Figure 7-5: Tent Revival during the Second Great Awakening by Kelloggs & Comstock resides in the Public Domain .

The **First Great Awakening** was a wave of religious enthusiasm among Protestants in the American colonies c. 1730–1740, emphasizing the traditional Reformed virtues of Godly preaching, rudimentary liturgy, and a deep sense of personal guilt and redemption by Christ Jesus. Historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom saw it as

part of a “great international Protestant upheaval” that also created Pietism in Germany, the Evangelical Revival, and Methodism in England. It centered on reviving the spirituality of established congregations, and mostly affected Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, German Reformed, Baptist, and Methodist churches, while also spreading within the slave population.

The **Second Great Awakening** (1800–1830s), unlike the first, focused on the unchurched and sought to instill in them a deep sense of personal salvation as experienced in revival meetings. It also sparked the beginnings of groups such as the Mormons, the Restoration Movement and the Holiness movement.

The **Third Great Awakening** began from 1857 and was most notable for taking the movement throughout the world, especially in English speaking countries. The final group to emerge from the “great awakenings” in North America was Pentecostalism, which had its roots in the Methodist, Wesleyan, and Holiness movements, and began in 1906 on Azusa Street, in Los Angeles. Pentecostalism would later lead to the Charismatic movement. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

37. “The Church” and Christian Theology

“The Church”

On 11 October 1962, Pope John XXIII opened the **Second Vatican Council, the 21st Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church**. The council was “pastoral” in nature, emphasizing and clarifying already defined dogma, revising liturgical practices, and providing guidance for articulating traditional Church teachings in contemporary times. The council is perhaps best known for its instructions that the Mass may be celebrated in the vernacular, as well as in Latin.

Over the last century, a number of moves have also been made to reconcile the schism between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Although progress has been made, concerns over papal primacy and the independence of the smaller Orthodox churches have blocked a final resolution of the schism.

Ecumenical movements within Protestantism have focused on determining a list of doctrines and practices essential to being Christian and thus extending to all groups which fulfil these basic criteria a (more or less) co-equal status, with perhaps one’s own group still retaining a “*first among equal*” standing. This process involved a redefinition of the idea of “**the Church**” from traditional theology. This **ecclesiology**, known as **denominationalism**, contends that each group (which fulfils the essential criteria of “*being Christian*”) is a sub-group of a greater “Christian Church,” itself a purely abstract concept with no direct representation, i.e., no group, or “denomination,” claims to be “the Church.” This ecclesiology is at variance with other groups that indeed consider themselves to be “the Church.” The “**essential criteria**” generally consist of belief in the Trinity, belief that Jesus Christ is the only way

to have forgiveness and eternal life, and that He died and rose again bodily. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Christian Theology

The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus, as the Messiah, was anointed by God as savior of humanity, and hold that Jesus' coming was the fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The Christian concept of the Messiah differs significantly from the contemporary Jewish concept.

The core Christian belief is: through belief in and acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, sinful humans can be reconciled to God and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of eternal life.

While there have been many theological disputes over the nature of Jesus over the earliest centuries of Christian history, Christians generally believe that Jesus is God incarnate and "true God and true man" (or both fully divine and fully human). Jesus, having become fully human, suffered the pains and temptations of a mortal man, but did not sin. As fully God, he rose to life again. According to the Bible, "God raised him from the dead," he ascended to heaven, is "seated at the right hand of the Father" and will ultimately return [Acts 1:9–11] to fulfill the rest of Messianic prophecy, such as the Resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment and final establishment of the Kingdom of God.

According to the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born from the Virgin Mary. Little of Jesus' childhood is recorded in the canonical Gospels, however infancy Gospels were popular in antiquity. In comparison, his adulthood, especially the week before his death, is well documented in the Gospels contained within the New Testament.

The Biblical accounts of Jesus' ministry include: his baptism, miracles, preaching, teaching, and deeds.

Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Christians consider the resurrection of Jesus to be the cornerstone of their faith (see 1 Corinthians 15) and the most important event in human history. Among Christian beliefs, the death and resurrection of Jesus are two core events on which much of Christian doctrine and theology is based. According to the New Testament Jesus was crucified, died a physical death, was buried within a tomb, and rose from the dead three days later [Jn. 19:30-31] and [Mk. 16:1, 16]. The New Testament mentions several resurrection appearances of Jesus on different occasions to his twelve apostles and disciples, including “more than five hundred brethren at once,” [1Cor. 15:6] before Jesus' Ascension to heaven. Jesus' death and resurrection are commemorated by Christians in all worship services, with special emphasis during Holy Week, which includes Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are usually considered the most important events in Christian theology, partly because they demonstrate that Jesus has power over life and death and therefore has the authority and power to give people eternal life.

Christian churches accept and teach the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus with very few exceptions. Some modern scholars use the belief of Jesus' followers in the resurrection as a point of departure for establishing the continuity of the historical Jesus and the proclamation of the early church. Some liberal Christians do not accept a literal bodily resurrection, seeing the story as richly symbolic and spiritually nourishing myth. Arguments over death and resurrection claims occur at many religious debates and interfaith dialogues. Paul the Apostle, an early Christian convert

and missionary, wrote, "*If Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless.*" [1Cor. 15:14]

Salvation

Paul of Tarsus, like Jews and Roman pagans of his time, believed that sacrifice can bring about new kinship ties, purity, and eternal life. For Paul the necessary sacrifice was the death of Jesus: Gentiles who are "*Christ's*" are, like Israel, descendants of Abraham and "*heirs according to the promise*" [Gal. 3:29]. The God who raised Jesus from the dead would also give new life to the "*mortal bodies*" of Gentile Christians, who had become with Israel the "*children of God*" and were therefore no longer "*in the flesh*" [Rom. 8:9,11,16].

Modern Christian churches tend to be much more concerned with how humanity can be saved from a universal condition of sin and death than the question of how both Jews and Gentiles can be in God's family. According to both Catholic and Protestant doctrine, **salvation** comes by Jesus' substitutionary death and resurrection. The Catholic Church teaches that salvation does not occur without faithfulness on the part of Christians; converts must live in accordance with principles of love and ordinarily must be baptized. Martin Luther taught that baptism was necessary for salvation, but modern Lutherans and other Protestants tend to teach that salvation is a gift that comes to an individual by God's grace, sometimes defined as "*unmerited favor*" even apart from baptism.

Christians differ in their views on the extent to which individuals' salvation is pre-ordained by God. Reformed theology places distinctive emphasis on grace by teaching that individuals are completely incapable of self-redemption, but that sanctifying grace is irresistible. In contrast Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Arminian Protestants believe that the exercise of "*free will*" is necessary to have faith in Jesus.

Trinity

Trinity refers to the teaching that the one God comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons: the **Father**, the **Son**(incarnate in Jesus Christ), and the **Holy Spirit**. Together, these three persons are sometimes called the Godhead, although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead. In the words of the Athanasian Creed, an early statement of Christian belief, "*the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God*". They are distinct from another: *the Father has no source, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father*. Though distinct, the three persons cannot be divided from one another in being or in operation.

The Trinity is an essential doctrine of mainstream Christianity. "*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*" represents both the immanence and transcendence of God. God is believed to be infinite and God's presence may be perceived through the actions of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. ⁽⁴³⁾

38. Symbols, Scriptures, and Rituals

Symbols

The **cross**, which is today one of the most widely recognized symbols in the world, was used as a Christian symbol from the earliest times. Tertullian, in his book *De Corona*, tells how it was already a tradition for Christians to trace repeatedly on their foreheads the sign of the cross. Although the cross was known to the early Christians, the crucifix did not appear in use until the 5th century.

Among the symbols employed by the primitive Christians, that of the **fish** seems to have ranked first in importance. From monumental sources, such as tombs it is known that the symbolic fish was familiar to Christians from the earliest times. The fish was depicted as a Christian symbol in the first decades of the 2nd century.⁽⁴³⁾

Scriptures

Christianity, like other religions, has adherents whose beliefs and biblical interpretations vary. Christianity regards the Biblical canon, the Old Testament and New Testament, as the inspired word of God.

The traditional view of inspiration is that God worked through human authors so that, what they produced was what God wished to communicate. Some believe that divine inspiration makes our present Bibles “inerrant.” Others claim inerrancy for the Bible in its original manuscripts, though none of those are extant. Still others

maintain that only a particular translation is inerrant, such as the King James Version. Another view closely related is Biblical infallibility or Limited inerrancy, which affirms that the Bible is free of error as a guide to salvation, but may include errors on matters such as history, geography, or science.

The Books of the Bible, considered to be inspired, among Judaism, and the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches vary, thus each define the canon differently, although there is substantial overlap. These variations are a reflection of the range of traditions and councils that have convened on the subject.

The Catholic and Orthodox canons, in addition to the Tanakh, also include the Deuterocanonical Books, as part of the Old Testament.

These Books appear in the Septuagint, but are regarded by Protestants to be apocryphal. However, they are considered to be important historical documents, which help to inform the understanding of words, grammar and syntax used in the historical period of their conception.

Some versions of the Bible include a separate Apocrypha section between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The New Testament, originally written in Koine Greek, contains 27 books, which are agreed upon by all churches.⁽⁴³⁾

Eschaton

The end of things, whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, or the end of the world, broadly speaking is **Christian eschatology** – the study of the destiny of humans as it is revealed in the Bible.

The major issues in Christian eschatology are the Tribulation, death and the afterlife, the Rapture, the Second Coming of Jesus,

Resurrection of the Dead, Heaven and Hell, Millennialism, the Last Judgment, the end of the world, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

Christians believe that the second coming of Christ will occur at the end of time after a period of severe persecution (the **Great Tribulation**). All who have died will be resurrected bodily from the dead for the Last Judgment. Jesus will fully establish the Kingdom of God in fulfillment of scriptural prophecies.

Death and Afterlife

Most Christians believe that human beings experience divine judgment and are rewarded either with eternal life or eternal damnation. This includes the general judgement at the resurrection of the dead as well as the belief (held by Roman Catholics, Orthodox and most Protestants) in a judgment particular to the individual soul upon physical death.

In Roman Catholicism, those who die in a state of grace, i.e., without any mortal sin separating them from God, but are still imperfectly purified from the effects of sin, undergo purification through the intermediate state of purgatory to achieve the holiness necessary for entrance into God's presence. Those who have attained this goal are called saints (Latin *sanctus*, "holy").

Some Christian groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists, hold to **mortalism**, the belief that the human soul is not naturally immortal, and is unconscious during the intermediate state between bodily death and resurrection. These Christians also hold to **Annihilationism**, the belief that subsequent to the final judgement, the wicked will cease to exist rather than suffer everlasting torment. Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a similar view.⁽⁴³⁾

Rituals and Rites

Liturgical Calendar

Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Eastern Christians, and traditional Protestant communities frame worship around a liturgical calendar. This includes holy days, such as **solemnities**, which commemorate an event in the life of Jesus or the saints, periods of fasting such as **Lent**, and other pious events, such as **memoria** or lesser festivals commemorating saints.

Christian groups that do *not* follow a liturgical tradition often retain certain celebrations, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. A few churches make no use of a liturgical calendar.

Sacraments



Figure 7-6: The Seven Sacraments by Jobas is licensed under CC-BY-SA 4.0 .

In Christian belief and practice, a **sacrament** is a rite, instituted by Christ that mediates grace, constituting a sacred mystery. The term is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum* , which was used to translate the Greek word for “mystery.” Views concerning both “what rites are sacramental,” and “what it means for an act to be a sacrament” vary among Christian denominations and traditions.

The most conventional functional definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, that conveys an inward, spiritual grace through Christ. The two most widely accepted

sacraments are **Baptism** and the **Eucharist** (or Holy Communion), however, the majority of Christians also recognize five additional sacraments: **Confirmation** (Chrismation in the Orthodox tradition), **Holy Orders**, **Confession**, **Anointing of the Sick**, and **Matrimony**. Taken together, these are the **Seven Sacraments**, as recognized by churches in the High Church tradition—notably Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Independent Catholic, Old Catholic, most Anglicans, and some Lutherans. Most other denominations and traditions typically affirm only Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments, while some Protestant groups, such as the Quakers, reject sacramental theology. Most Protestant Christian denominations that believe these rites do not communicate grace prefer to call them ordinances.

Baptism



Figure 7-7: Christ Baptised in Jordan by Charles Taylor resides in the Public Domain .

Baptism is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which a person is admitted to membership of the Church. Beliefs on baptism vary among denominations.

Firstly, differences occur on whether the act has any **spiritual significance** . Some churches hold to the doctrine of **Baptismal Regeneration** , which affirms that baptism creates or strengthens a person's faith, and is intimately linked to salvation. This view is held by Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, as well as Lutherans and Anglicans, while others simply acknowledge it as a purely symbolic act, an external public declaration of the inward change which has taken place in the person.

Secondly, there are differences of opinion on the **methodology of the act**. These methods being: Baptism by Immersion; if immersion is total, Baptism by Submersion; and Baptism by Affusion (pouring), and Baptism by Aspersio (sprinkling). Those who hold the first view may also adhere to the tradition of Infant Baptism.

Prayer

Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount displays a distinct lack of interest in the external aspects of prayer. A concern with the techniques of prayer is condemned as 'pagan,' and instead a simple trust in God's fatherly goodness is encouraged [Mat. 6:5–15]. Elsewhere in the New Testament this same freedom of access to God is also emphasized [Phil. 4:6] and [Jam. 5:13–19]. This confident position should be understood in light of Christian belief in the unique relationship between the believer and Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In subsequent Christian traditions, certain physical gestures are emphasized, including medieval gestures, such as genuflection or making the sign of the cross. Kneeling, bowing and prostrations are often practiced in more traditional branches of Christianity. Frequently in Western Christianity the hands are placed palms together and forward as in the feudal commendation ceremony. At other times the older orant posture may be used, with palms up and elbows in.

Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory prayer is prayer offered for the benefit of other people. There are many intercessory prayers recorded in the Bible, including prayers of the Apostle Peter on behalf of sick persons [Acts 9:40] and by prophets of the Old Testament in favor of other

people [1Ki 17:19–22]. In the New Testament book of James no distinction is made between the intercessory prayer offered by ordinary believers and the prominent Old Testament prophet Elijah [Jam 5:16–18]. The effectiveness of prayer in Christianity derives from the power of God rather than the status of the one praying.

The ancient church, in both Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity, developed a tradition of asking for the intercession of (deceased) saints, and this remains the practice of most Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and some Anglican churches. Churches of the Protestant Reformation however rejected prayer to the saints, largely on the basis of the sole mediatorship of Christ. The reformer, Huldrych Zwingli, admitted that he had offered prayers to the saints until his reading of the Bible convinced him that this was idolatrous.⁽⁴³⁾

PART VIII

MODULE 8: ISLAM

39. Introduction

World Religions – Islam

Module Introduction

This module will provide students with an introduction to the religion of Islam. The module will familiarize students with Islamic religious history as well as Islamic beliefs and practices. From there, students will complete the Timeline Activity, organizing important events from Islamic history in the proper order. On this module's Discussion Board, the student will assess how far the religion of Islam is a religion that is first and foremost defined by practice. Finally, the student will demonstrate proficiency of this Learning Unit through the module assessments. ⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

This module aligns with Learning Outcome 1, 2, 3, 5, and 5.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Explain significant elements associated with the life and teachings of Muhammad.
- List and analyze the Five Pillars of Islam.

- Discuss the significance of the Qur'an within the Islamic faith.
- Describe the historical development of the Islamic faith following the life of Muhammad.
- Recognize similarities and differences between Islam and other Western religious traditions.
- Identify ways in which Islam reflects a religion of practice.
- Identify essential elements related to Muslim theology.⁽¹⁾

Required Reading

Learning Unit 8

Assignments and Learning Activities

- Complete Module 8 Discussion
- Complete Islam Timeline Activity
- Complete Module 8 Quiz
- Complete Exam

40. History of Muhammad

Islam: A Brief Introduction

Islam is a monotheistic and Abrahamic religion articulated by the Qur'an, a book considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God (Allāh) and by the teachings and normative example (called the Sunnah and composed of Hadith) of Muhammad, considered by them to be the last prophet of God. An adherent of Islam is called a Muslim.

Muslims believe that God is one and incomparable and the purpose of existence is to love and serve God. Muslims also believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a primordial faith that was revealed at many times and places before, including through Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, whom they consider prophets. Muslims maintain that the previous messages and revelations have been partially misinterpreted or altered over time, but consider the Arabic Qur'an to be both the unaltered and the final revelation of God. Religious concepts and practices include the five pillars of Islam, which are basic concepts and obligatory acts of worship, and following Islamic law, which touches on virtually every aspect of life and society, providing guidance on multifarious topics from banking and welfare, to warfare and the environment.



Muslims praying towards Mecca by Antonio Melina/Agência Brasil

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Most Muslims are of two denominations, Sunni (75–90&percent;), or Shia (10–20&percent;). About 13&percent; of Muslims live in Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country, 25&percent; in South Asia, 20&percent; in the Middle East, and 15&percent; in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sizable minorities are also found in China, Russia, and the Americas. Converts and immigrant communities are found in almost every part of the world (see Islam by country). With about 1.57 billion followers or 23&percent; of earth's population, Islam is the second-largest religion and one of the fastest-growing religions in the world.⁽⁴⁵⁾

A Brief History of Muhammad

In Muslim tradition, Muhammad (c. 570 – June 8, 632) is viewed as the last in a series of prophets. During the last 22 years of his life, beginning at age 40 in 610 CE, according to the earliest surviving biographies, Muhammad reported revelations that he believed to be from God conveyed to him through the archangel Gabriel (Jibril). The content of these revelations, known as the Qur'an, was memorized and recorded by his companions. During this time, Muhammad preached to the people in Mecca, imploring them to abandon polytheism and to worship one God. Although some converted to Islam, Muhammad and his followers were persecuted by the leading Meccan authorities.

After 12 years of the persecution of Muslims by the Meccans and the Meccan boycott of Muhammad's relatives, Muhammad and the Muslims performed the Hijra ("emigration") to the city of Medina (formerly known as Yathrib) in 622 CE. There, with the Medinan converts and the Meccan migrants, Muhammad in Medina established his political and religious authority. A state was established in accordance with Islamic economic jurisprudence.

Within a few years, two battles were fought against the Meccan forces:

- First, the Battle of Badr in 624 CE, which was a Muslim victory.
- Then a year later, when the Meccans returned to Medina, the Battle of Uhud, which ended inconclusively.

The Arab tribes in the rest of Arabia then formed a confederation and during the Battle of the Trench besieged Medina with the intent of finishing off Islam. In 628 CE, a treaty was signed between Mecca and the Muslims and was broken by Mecca two years later. After the signing of the treaty many more people converted to Islam. At the same time, Meccan trade routes were cut off as Muhammad brought surrounding desert tribes under his control. By 629 CE Muhammad was victorious in the nearly bloodless Conquest of Mecca, and by the time of his death in 632 CE (at the age of 62) he united the tribes of Arabia into a single religious polity.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Early Caliphates

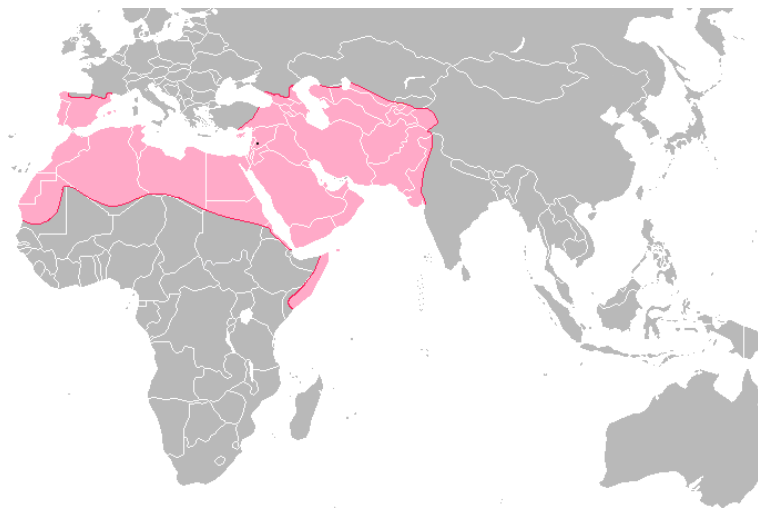


Figure 8-2: Map of Afro-Eurasia by Hisham10000 resides in the Public Domain . The Afro-Eurasia map highlights the regions of Spain, North Africa and the Middle East to show the extent of the Umayyad Caliphate in 750 CE.

With Muhammad's death in 632 CE, disagreement broke out over who would succeed him as leader of the Muslim community. Abu Bakr, a companion and close friend of Muhammad, was made the first caliph. The Quran was compiled into one book during this time.

Abu Bakr's death in 634 CE resulted in the succession of Umar ibn al-Khattab as the caliph, followed by Uthman ibn al-Affan, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and Hasan ibn Ali. The first caliphs are known as the "Rightly Guided Caliphs." Under them, the territory under Muslim rule expanded deeply into the Persian and Byzantine territories. When Umar was assassinated in 644 CE, the election of Uthman as successor was met with increasing opposition. The Quran was standardized during this time. In 656 CE, Uthman was also killed, and Ali assumed the position of caliph. After the first civil war (the "First Fitna"), Ali was assassinated by the Kharijites in 661 CE. Following this, Mu'awiyah seized power and began the Umayyad Dynasty.⁽⁴⁵⁾

After being united under the aegis of Islam, the Arabs—known as the Umayyads—began military campaigns outside of their realm. In the mid-seventh century, Muslim armies began invading parts of the increasingly vulnerable Sassanid and Byzantine empires, claiming land in what are now Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. In fact, so powerful were the Islamic army and navy that Byzantium was permanently crippled by the invasions.

The Umayyads went on to conquer northern Africa and invade India, building a kingdom that exceeded the size of the Roman Empire. But despite their success abroad, the Umayyads suffered a period of discord at home: a succession dispute resulted in a **division of Muslims** into **Sunni** and **Shi'a** factions. While the Sunnis retained temporary control of the caliphate, a Shi'ite uprising in 750 CE toppled the Umayyads and established Abbasid rule.

Under the Abbasids, mass conversion to Islam was encouraged, as was a dynamic Afro-Eurasian trade network. The Abbasids also established Persian as the official language, and encouraged the flowering of Islamic culture. ⁽⁴⁶⁾

When a Shi'a leader—Abu al-Abbas—usurped power from the reigning Sunni caliph in 750 CE, the Umayyad era officially came to a close. While al-Abbas tried to execute all members of the Sunni Umayyads, one leader escaped to the Iberian Peninsula, where he established a new Umayyad kingdom. However, Abd ar-Rahman I was not the first Muslim to invade Spain; Muslim Berbers had overthrown the Visigoths and established the kingdom of Al-Andalus in the early eighth century. Still, the Umayyads in Spain—known as the Caliphate of Cordoba—retained power until the 1000s. With the decline of the Caliphate, several smaller kingdoms, called “taifas,” claimed control over southern Spain. It was not until 1492, when the Christian monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella declared a holy war against the Spanish Muslims did Muslim control of the regions come to an end. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

4I. Islam in Late Middle Ages and the Modern Era

Islam in Late Middle Ages

The **Mongols**—nomads of central Eurasia—dominated world history during the thirteenth century. The Mongols invaded many postclassical empires and built an extensive cultural and commercial network. Led by Chinggis Khan and his successors, the Mongols brought China, Persia, Tibet, Eurasia Minor, and southern Russia under their control. The Mongol Empire also opened trade routes—primarily along the **Silk Road**—as well as lines of communication between Asia and the Middle East. Under Hulegu Khan, the Mongols sacked the Abbasid capital at Baghdad and decimated much of the Islamic civilization. They killed the last Abbasid caliphate and established the Ilkhanate, which ruled Persia until the fourteenth century. The Ilkhans embraced many religions, particularly Christianity, in their quest to create an alliance with Europe. However, beginning in 1295, the Ilkhans converted to Islam.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The Crusades—a series of religious wars launched to restore Christian control of the Holy Land—began in 1096 and were the most conspicuous sign of the rise and expansion of Christian Europe. The first crusade resulted in the division of Syria and Palestine into smaller Christian kingdoms, although subsequent crusades had less successful outcomes. Under the Muslim ruler Saladin, most of the Holy Land was reclaimed for Islam by the late 1100s; by 1251, Muslim armies had expelled all Christian kingdoms. The impact of the Crusades was twofold: first, they established a precedent for the rift between Western Christendom and the Middle Eastern Muslim world and second, they intensified

commercial contact between the two regions. While Europeans were interested in obtaining textiles, scientific knowledge, and medicine from the Muslim world, Muslims had little interest in European goods or culture. ⁽⁴⁹⁾

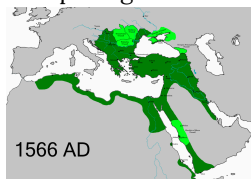


Figure 8-3: Ottoman Empire is licensed under CC-BY-SA 4.0.

Two powerful Muslim empires emerged in the Middle East in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Ottomans ruled Asia Minor, eastern Europe, northern Africa, and parts of the Middle East, while the Safavids built an empire that included present-day Afghanistan and Iran. Both, however, possessed a religious zeal for the expansion of Islam. The Ottomans emerged in the wake of Mongol defeat: they invaded the Balkans, captured Constantinople, and toppled Byzantium, forging a military state ruled by a sultanate and dominated by a warrior aristocracy. The Safavids also rose to power in the wake of the Mongol invasions. The Safavids were Shi'a Muslims who claimed leadership and established rule by a shah and his court. Both the Ottomans and the Safavids encouraged Islamic learning and cultural advancement while also bolstering trade. ⁽⁵⁰⁾

Islam in the Modern Era (1924–present)

By the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was in decline. The Ottomans, their imperial holdings much reduced since their heyday in the sixteenth century, became increasingly dependent on European resources to buoy their empire. Beginning in the late 1800s, Ottoman leaders embarked upon a policy of reform that they believed would modernize their state by implementing

constitutional government, educational systems, new technology, and new industry with European monies. As a result of this financial dependence, many European powers began to dominate or annex Ottoman holdings in the Middle East in the 1800s. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Ottomans allied themselves with the Central Powers—Austria-Hungary and Germany—but were defeated by the Allied forces in 1918.⁽⁵¹⁾

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the end of World War I, and the discovery of oil allowed European powers to gain new influence in the Middle East. Near the end of World War I, Britain and France negotiated for the partition of the Middle East between them, proclaiming territorial “mandates.” In addition, Britain promised European Zionists a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Not only were Britain and France interested in expanding their influence in the Middle East, but they were keen on exploiting the Middle East’s primary resource: oil. Oil fueled the development of industrial Europe, and by mandating control over Middle Eastern countries; Britain and France were guaranteed access to sought-after petroleum products.

Beginning in 1940s, Britain and France abandoned their protectorates and ended their mandates in the Middle East, largely due to conflicts that erupted between local governments and their foreign occupiers. Between 1941 and 1947, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt (with the exception of the British-dominated Suez Canal) became independent of European rule. And in 1948, Zionists established the state of Israel, a declaration that precipitated the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and decades of subsequent conflict. However, while many Middle Eastern nations became independent of British and French rule in the 1940s, the onset of the Cold War attracted new foreign interest in the region. As a result, the United States and the Soviet Union vied for control of the Middle East throughout much of the twentieth century.⁽⁵²⁾

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 (also known as the Iranian Revolution) overthrew the reigning shah (king) and established a

theocratic state. The leader of the revolt, a Shi'ite Muslim cleric, proclaimed himself Ayatollah—or “supreme leader”—of Iran.

The Ayatollah asserted the importance of the Islamic faith and decried Western influence and policy. The revolution established an important precedent in the Middle East by encouraging the proliferation of an Islamic ideology throughout the region. As a result, in the 1980s and 1990s, many fundamentalist Muslim groups emerged, including Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Many of these groups embraced an extreme strain of Islam as well as violent anti-Western sentiment. Islamic fundamentalists were responsible for numerous terrorist attacks against Western powers, including the 1998 embassy bombings in Africa and the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City.⁽⁵³⁾

At the same time, new Muslim intellectuals are beginning to arise, and are increasingly separating perennial Islamic beliefs from archaic cultural traditions. Liberal Islam is a movement that attempts to reconcile religious tradition with modern norms of secular governance and human rights. Its supporters say that there are multiple ways to read Islam's sacred texts, and stress the need to leave room for “independent thought on religious matters.” Women's issues receive a significant weight in the modern discourse on Islam.⁽⁴⁵⁾

42. Articles of Faith

Articles of Faith

God

Islam's most fundamental concept is a rigorous monotheism. Allāh is the term that Muslims use to refer to God. In Islam, God is beyond all comprehension and Muslims are not expected to visualize God. God is described and referred to by certain names or attributes, the most common being Al-Rahmān, meaning "The Compassionate" and Al-Rahīm, meaning "The Merciful" (See Names of God in Islam). Muslims believe that the creation of everything in the universe was brought into being by God's sheer command, "Be" *and so it is*, " and that the purpose of existence is to worship God.

Angels

Belief in angels is fundamental to the faith of Islam. The Arabic word for angel (malak) means, "messenger." According to the Qur'an, angels do not possess free will; they worship and obey God in total obedience. Angels' duties include:

- Communicating revelations from God
- Glorifying God
- Recording every person's actions
- Taking a person's soul at the time of death

Muslims believe that angels are made of light.

Revelations

Muslims believe that the verses of the Qur'an were revealed to Muhammad by God through the Archangel Gabriel (Jibrīl) on many occasions between 610 CE until his death on June 8, 632 CE. While Muhammad was alive, all of these revelations were written down by his companions (sahabah), although the prime method of transmission was orally through memorization.

The Qur'an is divided into 114 suras, or chapters, which combined, contain 6,236 āyāt, or verses. The chronologically earlier suras, revealed at Mecca, are primarily concerned with ethical and spiritual topics. The later Medinan suras mostly discuss social and moral issues relevant to the Muslim community. The Qur'an is more concerned with moral guidance than legal instruction, and is considered the "sourcebook of Islamic principles and values." Muslim jurists consult the hadith, or the written record of Prophet Muhammad's life, to both supplement the Qur'an and assist with its interpretation. The science of Qur'anic commentary and exegesis is known as tafsir. Rules governing proper pronunciation are called tajwid.

Muslims usually view "the Qur'an" as the original scripture as revealed in Arabic and that any translations are necessarily deficient, which are regarded only as commentaries on the Qur'an.

Prophets

Muslims identify the prophets of Islam as those humans chosen by God to be his messengers. According to the Qur'an, the descendants of Abraham were chosen by God to bring the "Will of God" to the peoples of the nations. Muslims believe that prophets are human and not divine, though some are able to perform miracles to prove their claim. Islamic theology says that all of God's messengers preached the message of Islam—submission to the will of God. The

Qur'an mentions the names of numerous figures considered prophets in Islam, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, among others.

In Islam, the “normative” example of Muhammad’s life is called the Sunnah (literally “trodden path”). This example is preserved in traditions known as hadith (“reports”), which recount his words, his actions, and his personal characteristics.

Resurrection and Judgment

Belief in the “Day of Resurrection,” Yawm al-Qiyāmah is also crucial for Muslims. They believe the time of Qiyāmah is preordained by God but unknown to man. The trials and tribulations preceding and during the Qiyāmah are described in the Qur'an and the hadith, and also in the commentaries of scholars. The Qur'an emphasizes bodily resurrection, a break from the pre-Islamic Arabian understanding of death.

On the Day of Resurrection, Muslims believe all mankind will be judged on their good and bad deeds. The Qur'an lists several sins that can condemn a person to hell, such as disbelief in God, and dishonesty; however, the Qur'an makes it clear God will forgive the sins of those who repent if he so wills. Good deeds, such as charity, prayer and compassion towards animals, will be rewarded with entry to heaven. Muslims view heaven as a place of joy and bliss, with Qur'anic references describing its features and the physical pleasures to come. Mystical traditions in Islam place these heavenly delights in the context of an ecstatic awareness of God.

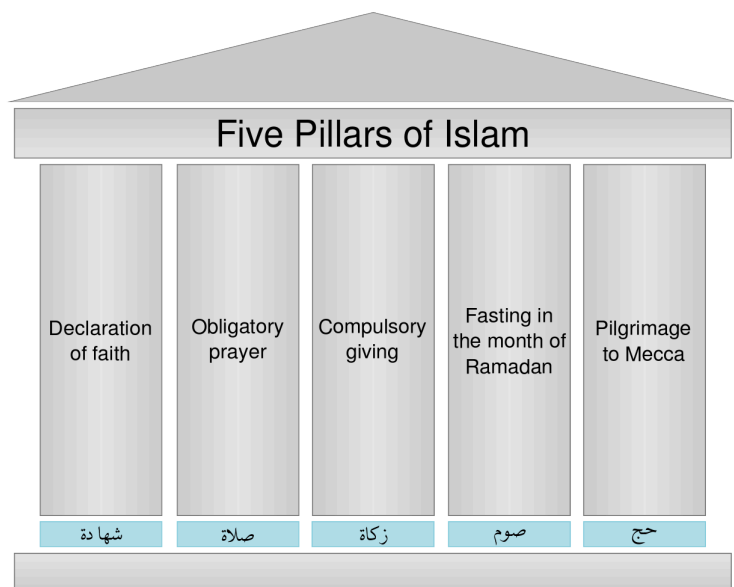
Art

Making images of human beings and animals is frowned on in many Islamic cultures with image-makers receiving punishment in the

Day of Resurrection. However this rule has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars and in different historical periods, and there are examples of paintings of both animals and humans in Mughal, Persian, and Turkish art. The existence of this aversion to creating images of animate beings has been used to explain the prevalence of calligraphy, tessellation, and pattern as key aspects of Islamic artistic culture. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

43. Five Pillars of Islam

Five Pillars of Islam



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The Pillars of Islam are five basic acts in Islam, considered obligatory for all believers. The Quran presents them as a framework for worship and a sign of commitment to the faith. They are:

- Shahadah (creed)
- Daily prayers (salat)
- Almsgiving (zakah)
- Fasting during Ramadan
- Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) at least once in a lifetime

The Shia and Sunni sects both agree on the essential details for the performance of these acts.

Prayer

Ritual prayers, called Ṣalāh or Ṣalāt, must be performed five times a day. Salah is intended to focus the mind on God, and is seen as a personal communication with him that expresses gratitude and worship. Salah is compulsory but flexibility in the specifics is allowed depending on circumstances. The prayers are recited in the Arabic language, and consist of verses from the Qur'an.

A mosque is a place of worship for Muslims, who often refer to it by its Arabic name, masjid. The word mosque in English refers to all types of buildings dedicated to Islamic worship, although there is a distinction in Arabic between the smaller, privately owned mosque and the larger, "collective" mosque. Although the primary purpose of the mosque is to serve as a place of prayer, it is also important to the Muslim community as a place to meet and study. Modern mosques have evolved greatly from the early designs of the 7th century, and contain a variety of architectural elements such as minarets.

Alms-giving

"Zakāt" ("alms") is giving a fixed portion of accumulated wealth by those who can afford it to help the poor or needy and for those employed to collect Zakat; also, for bringing hearts together, freeing captives, for those in debt (or bonded labour) and for the (stranded) traveller. It is considered a religious obligation (as opposed to voluntary charity) that the well-off owe to the needy because their wealth is seen as a "trust from God's bounty." Conservative estimates of annual Zakat are estimated to be 15 times global humanitarian

aid contributions. The amount of zakat to be paid on capital assets (e.g. money) is 2.5% (1/40), for people who are not poor. The Qur'an and the hadith also urge a Muslim to give even more as an act of voluntary alms-giving called ṣadaqah.

Fasting

Fasting (ṣawm) from food and drink (among other things) must be performed from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadhan. The fast is to encourage a feeling of nearness to God, and during it, Muslims should express their gratitude for and dependence on him, atone for their past sins, and think of the needy. Sawm is not obligatory for several groups for whom it would constitute an undue burden. For others, flexibility is allowed depending on circumstances, but missed fasts usually must be made up quickly.

Pilgrimage

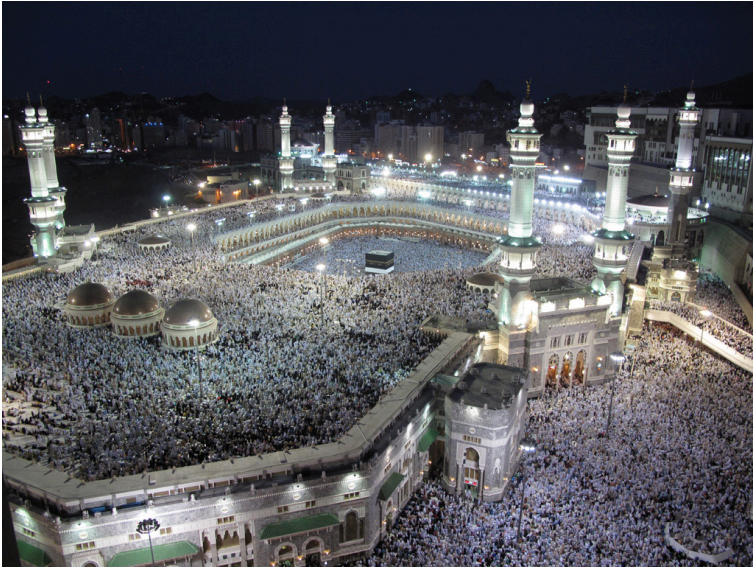


Figure 8-5: Pilgrimage to Mecca by Al Jazeera English is licensed under CC-BY-SA 2.0 .

The pilgrimage, called the ḥajj, has to be done during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah in the city of Mecca. Every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it must make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. Rituals of the Hajj include:

- Walking seven times around the Kaaba
- Walking seven times between Mount Safa and Mount Marwah recounting the steps of Abraham's wife, while she was looking for water in the desert before Mecca developed into a settlement
- Spending a day in the desert at Mina and then a day in the desert in Arafat praying and worshipping God and following the foot steps of Abraham
- Symbolically stoning the Devil in Mina recounting Abraham's

actions ⁽⁴⁵⁾

44. Schools of Islam

Schools of Islam

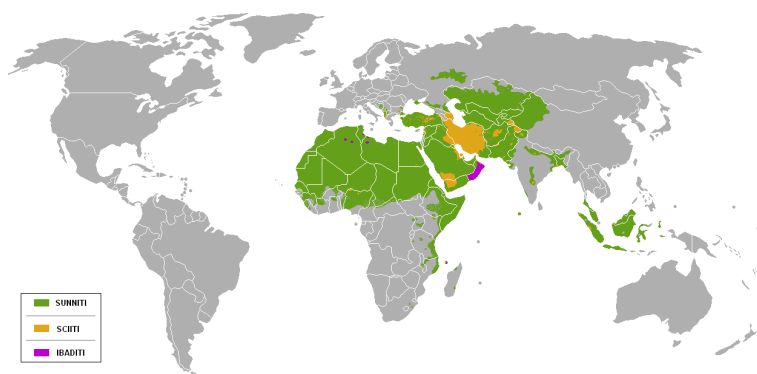


Figure 8-6: Map of the world by Ghibar is licensed under CC-BY-SA 3.0 .

Sunni

The largest denomination in Islam is Sunni Islam, which makes up 75&percent;-90&percent; of all Muslims. Sunni Muslims also go by the name Ahl as-Sunnah, which means “people of the tradition [of Muhammad].” These hadiths (“reports”), recounting Muhammad’s words, actions, and personal characteristics, are preserved in traditions known as Al-Kutub Al-Sittah (six major books). Sunnis believe that the first four caliphs were the rightful successors to Muhammad; since God did not specify any particular leaders to succeed him and those leaders were elected.

Shia

The Shi'a constitute 10–20% of Islam and are its second-largest branch.

Shia Islam has several branches, the largest of which is the Twelvers, followed by Zaidis and Ismailis. After the death of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (the great grand son of Abu Bakr and Ali ibn Abi Talib) considered the sixth Imam by the Shia's, the Ismailis started to follow his son Isma'il ibn Jafar and the Twelver Shia's (Ithna Asheri) started to follow his other son Musa al-Kazim as their seventh Imam. The Zaydis follow Zayd ibn Ali, the uncle of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, as their fifth Imam.

While Sunnis believe that Muhammad did not appoint a successor and a caliph should be chosen by the whole community, the Twelver Shias and the Ismaili Shias believe that during Muhammad's final pilgrimage to Mecca, he appointed his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor in the Hadith of the pond of Khumm. As a result, they believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib was the first Imam (leader), rejecting the legitimacy of the previous Muslim caliphs Abu Bakr, Uthman ibn al-Affan and Umar ibn al-Khattab.

Sufism

Sufism is a mystical-ascetic approach to Islam that seeks to find divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. By focusing on the more spiritual aspects of religion, Sufis strive to obtain direct experience of God by making use of “intuitive and emotional faculties” that one must be trained to use. However, Sufism has been criticized by the Salafi sect for what they see as an unjustified religious innovation. Many Sufi orders, or *tariqas*, can be classified as either Sunni or Shi'a, but others classify themselves simply as “Sufi.”⁽⁴⁵⁾

45. Women in Islam

Women in Islam

Women play a vital role in the story of Muhammad. Muhammad's loss of his own mother at an early age provides some context for his sensitivity to the cause of women throughout his life. When Muhammad began spending many hours alone in prayer, for instance, one of his concerns was the widespread discrimination he witnessed against women. Later in life, Muhammad will take on wives deemed poor and outcast by society as an act of kindness. In terms of his own story, Muhammad's first wife, Khadijah — a woman fifteen years his elder — will give the future prophet his first job as a caravan driven. Later, after Muhammad's first encounter with Gabriel left him frightened, Khadijah is also the one who consoles the future prophet, even encouraging him to return to the cave of his encounter. Khadijah is also among the first to convert to the new religion as well.

Muhammad's second wife, Aisha, will serve as an important figure for verifying Muhammad's piousness. She reports, for instance, "*I saw the Prophet being inspired Divinely on a very cold day and noticed the sweat dropping from his forehead (as the Inspiration was over).*" Aisha also proves pivotal in that her father, Abu Bakr, becomes the first recognized caliph following Muhammad's passing. Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, will prove an important figure as well, her husband Ali becoming the fourth caliph and the rightful successor of Muhammad within the Shiite Islamic tradition. ⁽¹⁾

After the rise of Islam, the Quran (the word of God) and the Hadith (the traditions of the prophet Muhammad) developed into Sharia, or Islamic religious law. Sharia dictates that women should cover themselves with a veil. Women who follow these traditions feel in

wearing the hijab is their claim to respectability and piety. One of the relevant passages from the Quran translates as:

“O PROPHET! TELL THY WIVES AND DAUGHTERS, AND THE BELIEVING WOMEN, THAT THEY SHOULD CAST THEIR OUTER GARMENTS OVER THEIR PERSONS, THAT ARE MOST CONVENIENT, THAT THEY SHOULD BE KNOWN AND NOT MOLESTED. AND ALLAH IS OFT-FORGIVING, MOST MERCIFUL” (Quran Surat Al-Ahzab 33:59).

These areas of the body are known as “**awrah**” (parts of the body that should be covered) and are referred to in both the Quran and the Hadith. “**Hijab**” can also be used to refer to the seclusion of women from men in the public sphere.

In pre-Islamic Arabian culture, women had little control over their marriages and were rarely allowed to divorce their husbands. Marriages usually consisted of an agreement between a man and his future wife’s family, and occurred either within the tribe or between two families of different tribes. As part of the agreement, the man’s family might offer property, such as camels or horses in exchange for the woman. Upon marriage, the woman would leave her family and reside permanently in the tribe of her husband. Marriage by capture, or “**Ba’al**,” was also a common pre-Islamic practice.

Under Islam, **polygyny** (the marriage of multiple women to one man) is allowed, but not widespread. In some Islamic countries, such as Iran, a woman’s husband may enter into temporary marriages in addition to permanent marriage. Islam forbids Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims. ⁽⁵⁶⁾

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PART X

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