

“Wisdom of the Major Religions of the World”

HINDUISM: Brahman (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute) is within us (Atman) but ignorance or illusion keeps us from realizing this. Practicing morality and yoga help us to realize that we all share the same spark of divinity. We live many lifetimes because of the law of karma but the ultimate goal is to escape the cycle of reincarnation and achieve moksha or absorption into Brahman.

BUDDHISM: Life is impermanent and involves suffering. Suffering can be overcome by getting rid of selfishness, the isolated ego, greed, and desire. Nirvana (inner peace and breaking the cycle of rebirth) can be achieved by following the Eightfold Path to enlightenment and by having compassion for all living beings.

JAINISM: Enlightened beings practice “ahimsa” (non-injury or non-violence in thought, word, and deed toward all living creatures).

SIKHISM: Everyone should be “sikhs” (disciples or students) of God, the great guru or teacher. We should respect the way God made us. We are all equal in the sight of God.

CONFUCIANISM: Humanity-at-its-best can be achieved through moral education and by right relationships.

TAOISM: The Tao or the Way of Nature/Life is a mystery. We can find harmony by conforming to the flow of nature/life. There is a unity behind the complementary forces of yin and yang that tends toward the good of the whole.

ZOROASTRIANISM: Act, hope, pray, and believe that the forces of good will defeat the forces of evil.

JUDAISM: “God is one. Therefore, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5) “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) “This is what the Lord requires: only to do the right thing, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6: 8) “Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us all?” (Malachi 2: 10)

CHRISTIANITY: “Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are children of your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5: 44-45) “Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called the sons and daughters of God.” (Matthew 5: 9)

ISLAM: Peace comes through submission of one’s will to the will of “the God” (Allah in Arabic). Submit by daily prayers, caring for the needy, by fasting, and by striving (jihad in Arabic) in the cause of God.

BAHA’I FAITH: God reveals progressively through many different manifestations or prophets. The most recent prophet, Baha’u’llah, emphasized the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humanity.

NATIVE AMERICAN: Respect Mother Earth and the natural gifts of the Great Spirit.

The Golden Rule According to the Major World Religions

- HINDUISM: "Whatever you consider injurious to yourself, never do to others. This is the essence of dharma." (Mahabharata, Udyoga Parvan 39, 71)
- BUDDHISM: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (Udana-Varga 5, 18)
- JAINISM: "In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, regard all creatures as you would regard your own self." (Mahavira)
- SIKHISM: "Be not estranged from another for God dwells in every heart." (Guru Granth Sahib)
- CONFUCIANISM: "Is there one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one's life? Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: do not do to others what you would not have them do to you." (Analects: Sayings of Confucius 15, 23)
- TAOISM: "Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss." (Lao Tzu in Tai Shang Kan Ying P'ien)
- SHINTOISM: "The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form."
- ZOROASTRIANISM: "That nature alone is good which refrains from doing to another whatever is not good for its own self." (Dadistan-i-Dinik 94, 5)
- JUDAISM: When Rabbi Hillel was asked to teach the entire Torah while standing on one foot, he replied: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow men and women. That is the entire Torah; all the rest is commentary." He then added: "Now go and study." (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)
- CHRISTIANITY: "Treat others the way you want them to treat you. This is the Law and the Prophets." (Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 7: 12)
- ISLAM: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brothers and sisters that which he desires for himself." (Hadith of Muhammad)
- BAHA'I FAITH: "Lay not upon any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself." (Gleanings of Baha'u'llah)
- UNITARIAN: "We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."
- NATIVE AMERICAN: "Great Spirit, grant that I may not criticize my neighbor until I have walked a mile in his moccasins."
- AFRICAN TRIBAL: "Anyone going to take a pointed stick to pinch a bird should first try it on themselves to feel how it hurts." (Yoruba proverb from Nigeria)

The Declaration of a Global Ethic

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear.

Peace eludes us. The planet is being destroyed. Neighbors live in fear. Women and men are estranged from each other. Children die. This is abhorrent!

We condemn the abuses of Earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential, the hunger that weakens the human body, the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

We condemn the social disarray of the nations, the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin, the anarchy overtaking our communities, and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion.

But this agony need not be!

It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos.

We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions:

We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.

We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action.

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order.

We declare:

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water, and soil.

We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice, there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

(This declaration was presented to the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993.)

Charter for Compassion

A call to bring the world together...

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity, and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women: (1) to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion; (2) to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate; (3) to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions, and cultures; (4) to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity; and (5) to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous, and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological, and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

(This charter was created by Karen Armstrong and presented to the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia on December 6, 2009)

GROUND RULES FOR INTERRELIGIOUS, INTERIDEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE
Leonard Swidler

1. The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn—that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly.
2. Interreligious, interideological dialogue must be a two-sided project—within each religious or ideological community, and between religious or ideological communities.
3. Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. Conversely, each participant must assume complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners. In brief: no trust, no dialogue.
4. In interreligious, interideological dialogue, we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, and our practice with our partner's practice.
5. All participants must define themselves. (Only a Jew, for example, can define from the inside what it means to be a Jew. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside.) It is mandatory that all dialogue partners define what it means to be an authentic member of their own tradition.
6. Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to points of disagreement.
7. Dialogue can take place only between equals.
8. Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust. (Hence it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust.)
9. Persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological tradition. (A lack of self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary but even impossible because we enter into dialogue primarily so that WE can learn—which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a misstep, if it has all the right answers.)
10. Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within."

--from Toward a Universal Theology of Religion, edited by Leonard Swidler, pp. 13-16.

Theses argued by the Ecumenical Theologian Hans Küng

“The most fanatical, the cruelest political struggles are those that have been colored, inspired, and legitimized by religion.”

“The religions of the world share a responsibility for bringing peace to our torn and warring world.”

“There will be no peace among the nations of the world without peace among the religions of the world.”

“There will be no religious peace without interreligious dialogue.”

“There will be no global peace without global justice.”

“There will be no better global order without a common global ethic.”

“No world survival without a world ethic.”

“A common global ethic assumes a practice of the universal Golden Rule.”

COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.

In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.

Dialogue complicates positions and issues.

Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.

Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.

It is acceptable to change one's position.

Dialogue is flexible in nature.

Dialogue stresses the skill of synthesis.

Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than either of the original solutions.

Dialogue strives for multiplicity in perspective.

Dialogue affirms the relationship between the participants through collaboration.

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.

Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.

In debate, winning is the goal.

In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.

Debate simplifies positions and issues.

Debate defends assumptions as truth.

Debate causes critique of the other position.

It is a sign of weakness and defeat to change one's position.

Debate is rigid in nature.

Debate stresses the skill of analysis.

Debate defends one's own position as the best solution and excludes other solutions.

Debate strives for singularity in perspective.

Debate affirms one's own strength in opposition to other points of view.

Debate creates a closed-minded attitude and a determination to be right.

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.

In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other position.

Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.

Dialogue encourages de-polarization of an issue.

In dialogue, everyone is part of the solution to the problem.

Dialogue affirms the idea of people learning from each other.

Dialogue remains open-ended.

In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenges, to show that it is right.

Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

In debate, one searches for glaring differences.

In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.

Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or depreciates the other position.

Debate encourages polarization of an issue.

In debate, one person or viewpoint attempts to win over the other.

Debate affirms the idea of people learning individually in competition with others.

Debate implies a conclusion.

Selected Bibliography about
Religious Teachings about Life after Death

- Moreman, Christopher. Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions.
- Badham, Paul and Linda, eds. Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World.
- Kramer, Kenneth. The Sacred Art of Dying: How World Religions Understand Death.
- Johnson, Christopher, and Marsha McGee, eds. How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife.
- Segal, Alan. Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion.
- Raphael, Simcha Paull. Jewish Views of the Afterlife.
- Sonsino, Rifat, and Daniel Syme. What Happens after I Die?: Jewish Views of Life after Death.
- Küng, Hans. Eternal Life? Life after Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem.
- Rahner, Karl. On the Theology of Death.
- Stendal, Krister, ed. Immortality and Resurrection.
- Hick, John. Death and Eternal Life.
- Smith, Jane Idelman and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad. The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection.
- Stevenson, Ian. Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation and Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect.
- Tucker, Jim. Life before Life: Children's Memories of Previous Lives.
- Shroder, Tom. Old Souls: Compelling Evidence from Children Who Remember Past Lives.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, ed. Karma and Rebirth in Classical India.
- Becker, Carl. Breaking the Circle: Death and the Afterlife in Buddhism.
- Rinbochay, Lati, and Jeffrey Hopkins. Death, Intermediate State, and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism.
- Watts, Alan. Death.

Hebrew Scriptures: Hosea 6: 1-2; Isaiah 26: 19; Ezekiel 37: 4, 11-13; Daniel 12: 2-3; Ecclesiastes 12: 7.
Other ancient Jewish writings: Wisdom 2: 23; Second Maccabees 7; 9, 23 and 12: 43-44.
Talmud: Abot 4: 21; Berakot 17a.

Christian Scriptures: Matthew 25: 31-46 and 28: 1-20; Mark 12: 18-27 and 16: 1-20; Luke 24: 1-53;
John 11: 25-26 and John 20-21; First Corinthians 15; Philippians 3: 20-21.

Passages from the Qur'an: 3: 185; 10: 56; 23: 115-116; 34: 3-5; 36: 78-81; 45: 24-26; 50: 17-19; 57: 20;
87: 16-19.

Baha'i Faith: Gleanings of Baha'u'llah, #81; Baha'i World Faith, p.379; Some Answered Questions, p. 228; Tablets of Abdul-Baha, Abbas, 206; The Hidden Words, #32.

Hinduism: Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads.

Buddhism: Dhammapada and Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Taoism: Chuang Tzu, 23.

Ancient Egypt: The Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Confucianism

K'ung Fu-tzu (Kung the Master or Confucius; 551 - 479 B.C.) was China's most famous teacher. He taught history and good government. All around him was the decay and cruelty of the declining Chou dynasty. Confucius believed that people could improve their situation through education. Confucius called for a return to the old ways. He called his teachings "the Way of the Ancients." The veneration of elders and ancestors is a traditional trait of the Chinese. There are five major Confucian concepts:

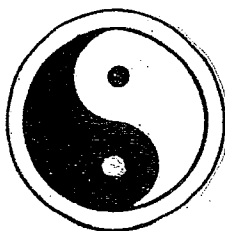
1. **Jen**: good-heartedness and other-centeredness that should underlie all social interaction. It is often translated as "love" and "humaneness." Jen involves concern for others, courtesy, unselfishness, compassion, and the belief that all humans are our brothers and sisters.
2. **Chun tzu**: the Superior Person or the Mature Person. Confucius believed that the virtuous person is superior to the person of royal birth. The Superior or Mature Person is the model of human perfection. The Superior or Mature Person habitually acts for the good of others.
3. **Li**: doing things the right way, etiquette, ritual, and proper conduct in the five basic relationships: between parent and child; husband and wife; elder sibling and younger sibling; elder friend and younger friend; and ruler and subjects.
4. **Te**: the power of virtue and moral example; the power to rule by good example rather than by brute force.
5. **Wen**: Education; cultivation of music, art, poetry, painting, and aesthetics; the "arts of peace" as opposed to the "arts of war."

Taoism

The Tao (pronounced "dow") is the way or path of nature. According to the Old Master, **Lao Tzu** (born around 600 B.C.), "the Tao that can be named is not the real eternal Tao." No word or name can define nature's deepest mystery. The Tao is the ultimate source of all things. The Tao manifests itself as the natural flow, patterns, and cycles of nature which work in harmony with each other. The universe is composed of the complementary forces of yin and yang. These forces, powers, and energies are found together in nature to show continuity and dependence upon each other.

Yin

negative
female
feminine
mysterious
unconscious
passive
dark
soft
cold
water
wet
earth
left



Yang

positive
male
masculine
revealing
conscious
active
bright
hard
warm
land
dry
air
right

1. **Wu wei** is non-action and non-interference with the flow of nature; letting things follow their natural course through spontaneity.
2. **Qi** (chi) is the flow of energy within the human body. T'ai chi is the Taoist method of slow motion exercise and meditation.
3. **Te** is the power that enables a person to follow the Tao.
4. **Pu** is a state of purity, free from prejudicial dualisms such as right and wrong or good and evil. It is considered the ultimate goal to enable an individual to be in mental unity and alignment with the Tao.
5. Three Jewels of Taoism: compassion, moderation, and humility.

Confucianism

Confucius was a teacher who wanted his ethical philosophy to influence political leaders. His teachings are collected together in the Analects or "Sayings of Confucius."

Philosophically, Confucianism is more idealistic: concerned more with the way life ought to be.

Practically, more concerned with common sense.

There is a single unifying force called "T'ien," meaning Heaven.

Confucius emphasized harmony within **society**.

Confucianists have promoted conformity to society and good government. Confucius wanted people to be educated and cultivated.

Confucianists are most comfortable in cities.

Humans become fully human by becoming social.

We humans must play our social roles as children, siblings, parents, spouses, and citizens.

Etiquette and rituals are solutions to the problem of how to live in peace with each other.

Jen, the primary Confucian virtue, is stated in positive terms as seeking the welfare of others. The other Confucian virtues involve activity.

The chun tzu (the mature educated person) is the Confucian model.

Confucianism is patriarchal.

Use language and logic to distinguish between opposites such as superior and inferior, strong and weak, beautiful and ugly, right and wrong, good and bad.

Confucius was more interested in people than the gods. He emphasized education and morality, not worship. Confucius was not divine. He is honored on Teachers Day.

Taoism

Lao Tzu was a court official who supposedly became bored with court life and then wrote the Tao Te Ching (pronounced dow da jing), the Classic of the Way and Its Power or Virtue.

Philosophically, Taoism is more realistic: concerned more with the way life is.

Practically, more romantic and fanciful.

There is a single unifying force called "the Tao," meaning the Way or path of nature.

Taoism emphasized harmony within **nature**.

Taoists have been more concerned with nature, individual freedom, and a more personal path to meaning. Be natural and spontaneous.

Taoists are drawn to mountain areas which they revere as rich in chi (cosmic energy).

Humans become fully human by becoming natural. (This teaching sounded like rebellion and anarchy to many Chinese rulers.)

We humans must reverse the socialization process by living in freedom and in harmony with the Tao.

Etiquette and rituals build barriers that separate people from harmony with nature and restrict the free movement of the Tao.

Wu wei, the central Taoist virtue, is usually stated in negative terms as "non-interference" with the way of nature. Taoist virtues involve "not doing": live simply and effortlessly in harmony with nature. Taoists see achievements as foolish.

The intuitively spontaneous sage (zhenren) who acts without expectations or goals is the Taoist model. Taoist sages balance their chi and live a long life.

Taoism emphasizes the mysterious feminine.

Language and logic that produce these dualistic judgments are both false and dangerous. Accept differences not as opposites but as complements, as yin and yang in life and in nature.

Lao Tzu did not make any references to gods or the afterlife. Later Taoists, however, worshipped gods and had temples where people would pray and meditate.

Notes on Hinduism – Vedanta

1. Ultimate Reality is “**Brahman**,” the one Absolute Spirit or Universal Consciousness that can be thought of and worshipped in thousands of different ways. God-without-attributes is known as “Nirguna Brahman.” God-with-personal-attributes is known as “Saguna Brahman.” Hinduism teaches that the one God has many different forms and can be called by many different names. According to Hindu mythology, there are 330 million gods/goddesses that are different expressions, manifestations, and symbols of Saguna Brahman. The three main expressions are

Brahma, the creator

Vishnu, the preserver

Shiva, the destroyer

Hindus believe that the universe is continually created, preserved, and destroyed. This present universe is the result of previous universes and there will be future universes. There is an endless cycle of existence in various forms.

2. In contrast to Christianity that believes that Jesus is the only one divine incarnation, Hinduism holds that there have been many divine incarnations. Krishna, Rama, Buddha, and others are considered to be incarnations of Vishnu.
3. Each person’s inner self or “**atman**” is “God within.” Many Hindus use the greeting called **namaste** by folding their hands and bowing toward others. This gesture means “the Divine within me honors the Divine within you” or “I worship the God within you.” But **maya** (the ignorance or illusion that we are separate from Brahman) clouds our knowledge of Brahman as well as the realization that “Atman is Brahman.”
4. The goal of life is to achieve God-consciousness and find Brahman within oneself and within all other beings. This can be done by practicing **ahimsa** (non-violence) and practicing **yoga** (which means to “join” or “yoke”). The yoga that involves physical exercise is called **hatha yoga**. The four basic styles or disciplines of spiritual yoga are

karma yoga: the path of unselfish action, service, and work

bhakti yoga: the path of devotion and love

jnana yoga: the path of knowledge about spiritual reality

raja yoga: the path of meditation

All forms of yoga involve moral living, motivation, and self-discipline.

5. **Reincarnation**: the jiva or individualized soul passes through many earthly forms following the moral law of cause and effect, the “**law of karma**”: doing good deeds brings reward but doing evil deeds brings punishment. The goal is to eventually escape the cycle of reincarnation by reaching the timeless state of **moksha**, total peace and union with or “absorption” into Brahman.
6. Sources of Hindu wisdom written in the language **Sanskrit**:
 - Vedas**: ancient poems and hymns praising Brahman
 - Brahmanas**: rules for worship
 - Upanishads**: philosophical answers about the purpose of life and death
 - Great Epics**: about heroes and various gods such as the **Ramayana** (Lord Rama) and the **Bhagavad Gita** (Lord Krishna)
7. Major castes in traditional India (there are thousands of subcastes):
 - brahmins**: priests, intellectuals
 - kshatriyas**: royalty, politicians, military, police
 - vaishyas**: artists, skilled workers, producers, farmers
 - shudras**: unskilled laborers, servants

“untouchables” or outcastes were called **harijans** (children of God) by Mahatama Gandhi

8. Four stages of a human’s life:
 - student**: devoted to study, acquiring a profession, and developing character
 - householder**: devoted to marriage, family, profession, and social responsibility
 - retirement**: time to pursue one’s interests and developing a philosophy of life
 - “**sannyasin**”: a spiritual pilgrim who gives up family and social responsibilities and devotes time to spiritual activities in order to prepare for death and the next life

Basic Teachings of Buddhism

1. **Siddhartha Gautama** (563-483 B.C.E.) was raised as a prince near the border of northern India and Nepal. His father Shuddhodana was the king of the Gautama clan of the Shakya tribe. His mother Mahamaya died seven days after giving birth to Siddhartha. His aunt Mahaprajapati raised him. At age 16, Prince Siddhartha married Yashodhara. When Siddhartha was 29, his wife was pregnant with their son Rahula. He left them after seeing many people suffer and then spent the next six years in the forests with Hindu holy men. After experiencing the futility of the two extremes of pleasure-seeking (up to age 29) and asceticism (from age 29 to 35), Prince Siddhartha sat under the Bodhi (wisdom) Tree and discovered the Middle Path and the Four Noble Truths. At Bodh Gaya when he was 35 years old, he became known as “**the Buddha**,” which means the Enlightened One or the Awakened One, and as “Shakyamuni,” the sage of the Shakya tribe. He spent the last forty-five years of his life teaching his philosophy to the people of northern India. During this time, his son became a monk, his aunt and wife became bhikshunis or Buddhist nuns, and his father became one of his disciples.

2. The Four Noble Truths:

A. Dukka: Life is imperfect; it is a series of sufferings and frustrations.

Every human being experiences the trauma of birth, sickness, the fear of growing old, the fear of death, and the separation from what one loves. Frustration and anxiety come from our difficulty in facing the basic fact of life—that everything is impermanent and transitory. Suffering and frustration arise when we resist the constant flow of life and try to cling to things, events, people, or ideas as if they were fixed forms. Buddha’s doctrine of impermanence or **anicca** means that there is no permanent “ego” or “self” inside of us. Buddha taught the doctrine of **anatta** that there is no permanent spiritual substance which retains its separate identity forever.

B. Tanha: The cause of suffering and frustration is selfishness, greed, clinging, craving, grasping, and the desire for private fulfillment.

We cause much of our own suffering and frustration. Out of ignorance, we harm ourselves by clinging to the poisons of greed, hatred, delusion, and lust. Out of ignorance, we often treat ourselves as permanent egos. Out of ignorance, we divide the perceived world into individual and isolated things. Out of ignorance, we forget that everything is interconnected (the law of dependent origination).

C. Nirodha: Suffering is cured by restraining selfish desires, greed, and craving after permanence.

Suffering is real but it can be stopped. The Buddha taught that karma is a function of our selfish desires. If we would free ourselves from the narrow limits of self-interest, if we would realize the interconnectedness of all life throughout the universe, and if we would treat all beings with love and compassion, then we would be released from rebirth, suffering, and frustration. We could then reach a state of total liberation or freedom called **nirvana**. When one achieves nirvana, the false notions of a separate permanent ego have forever disappeared, and the oneness of all life has become a constant sensation. To achieve nirvana is to attain awakening or enlightenment or Buddhahood. The purpose of Buddhism is to shatter the false notion of ego!

D. Magga: Enlightenment or release from suffering comes from following the Eightfold Path:

The path to enlightenment has eight interconnected parts or aspects like the Buddhist wheel that has eight spokes. This path shows the right or correct way to live life free of suffering:

1. Right Views
2. Right Intent Wisdom
3. Right Speech
4. Right Conduct Morality
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness Mental Discipline
8. Right Concentration

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ASIAN RELIGIONS AND MIDDLE EASTERN RELIGIONS

There are two different families of the world's major religions. Most of the religions which began in Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism) share a common worldview and emphasize similar aspects of life. Most of the religions which began in the Middle East (Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith) also share a common worldview and emphasize similar aspects of life. Although exceptions exist, below are the basic differences between these two different families of religions.

Asian Religions

1. Divinity is understood in terms of monism, pantheism, or polytheism.
2. The world is based on a harmonious dualism of complementary aspects.
3. Mysticism, as an intuitive grasp of the Truth, is stressed.
4. Revelation comes through a flash of insight while performing spiritual disciplines.
5. Meditation, as a way of being one with divinity, is emphasized.
6. Beliefs focus on the dynamics of nature.
7. Religions espouse a cyclical view of time, with recurring cycles of creation and destruction.

Middle Eastern Religions

1. Divinity is understood in terms of monotheism: one personal supernatural Creator.
2. The world is based on a conflictful dualism of good and evil.
3. Prophecy, as teachings about the Word of God, is stressed.
4. Revelation is given to prophets, often through angelic messengers.
5. Morality, as a way of doing the will of God, is emphasized.
6. Beliefs focus on human destiny primarily.
7. Religions espouse a linear view of time, reaching from creation to a Last Judgment.

Notes on Islam

- ISLAM:** peace through submission to the will of Allah (Arabic for "the God")
MUSLIM: one who submits or surrenders to the will of Allah; a member of Islam
SALAAM: peace in Arabic
SHALOM: peace in Hebrew
JERUSALEM: city of peace, holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims

- Abraham**
(1800s B.C.E.; Genesis 12-25)

Hagar (Gn 16, 21)

Sarah (Gn 12-23)

Ishmael (Gn 16, 17, 21, 25)

Isaac (Gn 21-28)

Jacob/Israel & 12 sons

Ishmaelites (Gn 25:12-18)

Israelites (Gn 25 on)

Arabs

Jews

Muhammad

(570-632 C.E. from Mecca)

3. Prophetic Religions of the Middle East

Revelation/Inspiration of Prophets Chosen by God

Judaism

Hebrew Scriptures

Christianity

Hebrew Scriptures

Christian Scriptures

Islam

Hebrew Scriptures

Christian Scriptures

Qur'an

Baha'i Faith

Hebrew Scriptures

Christian Scriptures

Qur'an

Baha'u'llah's writings

4. Incarnation: the belief that God/gods take(s) on human form.

Christianity believes that Jesus is the only divine-human, the "Son of God."

Hinduism and some forms of Buddhism believe in many divine incarnations: Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Jesus, and others.

Judaism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith do not accept the belief in divine incarnation.

According to Islam, the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus, and Muhammad are all prophets of God. Muhammad is called the "seal of the prophets" because he received from God through Angel Gabriel the Qur'an, believed to be the final revelation by Muslims.

5. Of the seven billion humans on our planet, about 1.5 billion are Muslims. Although the vast majority of people in the Middle East are Muslim, more Muslims live outside the Middle East (about 75-80%) in Northern Africa, India (over a 100 million), and South Asia. The country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia (over 200 million). There are about 5 million Muslims in the United States (almost two percent of the U.S. population).