**Judaism**

**Introduction**
Judaism is the religious culture of the Jewish People and is one of the world's oldest religions. Judaism makes up the cultural system of Jewish law, custom, and practice of the whole individual and community. It is a system in which everyone is under God's rule. Judaism originated in the Middle East and has spread throughout all parts of the world because of both voluntary migrations and forced exile or expulsions. The total world Jewish population is about 15 million, most of whom live in the United States, Israel, and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic.

**Central Beliefs**
With the many historical forms of Judaism, they all share similar characteristics. The most essential characteristic is the belief in one God who created the universe and continues to rule it. The God who created the world revealed himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The content of that revelation makes up the *Torah*, God's will for humankind stated in his commandments. A second major concept in Judaism is that of the covenant, or agreement, between God and the Jewish people. The Jews would acknowledge God, agreeing to obey his laws. God, in turn, would acknowledge Israel as his chosen people.

Jewish People believe that goodness and obedience will be rewarded and sin punished by God’s judgment after death. Then at the end of times, God will send his Messiah to redeem the Jews and deliver them to their Promised Land. Although all forms of Judaism come from the Hebrew bible, Judaism is mainly derived from the rabbinic movement during the first centuries of the Christian era. At the turn of the 3rd century, the rabbis, or Jewish sages, produced the *Mishnah*, the earliest document of rabbinic literature.

**Messiah**In Judaism, the Messiah or the Anointed One is the Hebrew name for the promised deliverer of humanity. Christians accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah. However, the Jewish religion contends that the Messiah is yet to come and Jesus Christ was just another prophet.

**Jerusalem**
Jerusalem is the capital and largest city of Israel. It is located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem is considered the holiest city of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because of this, Jerusalem has been the center of many battles for the rights of the city. Throughout history, the Persian, Syrian, Jewish, Roman, and Muslim Empires have controlled Jerusalem.

**Worship and Practices**
From tradition, Jewish pray in a congregation three times a day. The study of *Torah*, the revealed will of God, also is considered an act of worship. The *Torah* is read religiously each Sabbath. The Sabbath is spent in prayer, study, rest, and family feasting. Over the course of a year, the entire Torah will be read on Sabbath and festival days. The Jewish year includes five major festivals— *Passover, Shabuoth, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur*—and two minor ones— *Hanukkah and Purim.*

**Synagogue**
Synagogues are assembly houses for community prayer, study, and meeting. It’s the central institution of the community. Modern Jews sometimes use the word *temple* instead of synagogue. Styles of synagogues vary in design, but they all have these components in common: the ark where the Torah scrolls are held must face the wall facing Jerusalem and the *Ner Tamid,* the everlasting flame, must be lit in front of the ark.

**Rabbi**
A rabbi has no more authority to perform rituals than any other adult male member of the Jewish community does. A rabbi is simply a teacher, a person formally educated in halakhah (Jewish law). He instructs the community, answers questions and settles disputes regarding the Jewish law. When a person has completed the necessary course of study, he is given a written document known as a semikhah, which confirms his authority to make such decisions.

Rabbis are the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community. They must minister to the community, lead community religious services and deal with many of the administrative matters related to the synagogue. It is important to note that the rabbi's status does not give him the authority to conduct religious services. Any Jew sufficiently educated to know what he is doing can lead a religious service. A service led by such a Jew is just as valid as a service led by a rabbi. It is not unusual for a community to be without a rabbi, or for Jewish services to be conducted without a rabbi.

**Torah**
The *Torah* is the foundation of Jewish religion and law and refers to the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. But the word "torah" can also be used to refer to the entire Jewish bible. The body of scripture known to non-Jews as the Old Testament is considered the Jewish *Torah*. The text of the *Torah* is more or less the same in Jewish translations as the text in the Christian *Bible*. The differences in the translations are very minimal. Also, there are some occasional, slight differences in the numbering of verses between the two.

**Sabbath**
Sabbath is holy day of rest observed by the followers of Judaism on the seventh day of the week, Saturday. The *Torah* describes the Sabbath as a reminder of God's rest after the Creation. The Sabbath is also the celebration the Hebrews' liberation from Egypt. The specific kinds of work prohibited in scripture include the lighting of fire, plowing, harvesting, and cooking. During the Sabbath, Jews eat more elaborately and leisurely. The Sabbath is a day for the family to get together to enjoy each other’s company and to rest up for the upcoming week.

**Bar Mitzvah**
"Bar Mitzvah" literally means "son of the commandment." "Bar" is "son" in Aramaic, and "Mitzvah" means "commandment" in both Hebrew and Aramaic. Under Jewish Law, children do not need to observe the commandments, but are encouraged to do so to learn the obligations they will have as adults. At the age of 13 (12 for girls), children become obligated to observe the commandments. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony formally marks the crossing over from childhood to adulthood. At this age, they have right to take part in leading religious services, to count as a member of the synagogue, to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts and to marry.

**Yom Kippur**
Yom Kippur is a holiday that falls on the tenth day of the month of *Tishri* in the Jewish calendar. (September or October on the American calendar.) It is the most important day of the Ten Penitential Days, which begins the New Year. Yom Kippur is the most sacred of all Jewish holidays. Yom Kippur is a day for confession, repentance, and prayers for forgiveness of wrongdoings committed during the year against God and His covenant. It is also the day in which a Jewish person’s fate is set for the upcoming year. Jewish people spend the day fasting and almost never ending prayer.

**Hanukkah**Hanukkah is an annual Jewish festival celebrated throughout eight consecutive days. It is celebrated on the 25th day in the Jewish month of Kislev, which usually falls in December. Hanukkah honors the rededication of the Jewish faith to God after years of being oppressed by the king of Syria and dictator of Palestine.

**Christianity**

 **Introduction**
With an approximately 1.7 billion people worldwide, Christianity is arguably the largest religion in the world today. Started at around 30 AD, Christianity is based on the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. Christianity was founded in the first century in Palestine by the disciples of Jesus. Many missionaries spread it, despite heavy persecution, throughout the Roman Empire. Perhaps the most notable missionary was Paul. The various books written by Jesus’ followers after his death, called the New Testament, along with the Old Testament makes up the Christian *Bible*. The *Bible* holds all the teachings of Jesus on how all Christians should live out their lives.

**Central Beliefs**The central figure in Christianity is Jesus Christ. As the Son of God, he came to earth to teach about love and fellowship. He represents the person that all Christians must strive to be. Christians believe that he is the only one that ever lived on earth that can be called perfect from all worldly sins. The important thing to understand was that Jesus was God. He was here on earth to teach of God’s plan for all of humanity and to save the people of the world from their transgressions.

In Christianity, God is almighty and rules over all of heaven and earth. He is the one that created the earth and one day will cast judgment over the entire earth. Christians understand that through Jesus Christ, people can be saved from this judgment. By believing that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, the Spirit of God is exists in all believers, and that God is almighty in power. A person can be saved from this judgment.

**Bible**
Next to Jesus, the *Bible* is the foundation of Christianity. It holds the teachings and expectations for Christians. It is his written word through his servants for his people. The *Bible* consists of 39 books from the Old Testament and 27 book from the New Testament. The Old Testament describes the old covenant God made with Israel while the New Testament is about the new covenant through Jesus Christ and God’s people. The entire book includes personal stories, poetic works, prophetic stories, God’s laws for his people, and apocalyptic works.

**Jesus Christ**
Jesus was born about 7 BC in Bethlehem in Judea, by the Mary. With his miraculous birth, he is considered the Son of God and God himself. Most texts begin with Jesus’ ministry after his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and of his fasting in the wilderness for 40 days. During the final day of his fast, the Devil tried to tempt him, but failed.

After his encounter with the Devil, Jesus moved to Capernaum to begin his teaching. As the numbers of his followers increased, Jesus began training disciples to work with him. Once trained, he and his disciples traveled to nearby towns to preach the word of God. Much of what he taught challenged the authority of religious and civil leaders. Jesus gained as many enemies as followers.

As their ministry grew, it was reveled to his disciples that Jesus was the Messiah. This revelation also led to the death of Jesus. Threatened by Jesus growth in popularity, the leaders devised a plan to kill him. With the aid of one of the twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, Jesus was arrested and sentenced to death.

After being found guilty for blasphemy and other charges, he was sentenced to death. Jesus was executed by crucifixion. Three days after his death, Jesus arose from his tomb and appeared to his disciples. After a brief time with his disciples, Jesus ascended into heaven.

**Paul**Paul was born under the name Saul and was a great persecutor of Christians. Born and raised under the Jewish law, Saul hated Christians. Then on a journey, Saul became a Christian when Jesus came to him in a vision. After this revelation Saul changed his name to Paul and said that this vision meant the end of all religions to him. He was convinced that Christianity was God's call to the entire world. After taking this call from God, he built many churches. Paul was transformed from the greatest persecutor of Christians to the greatest missionary of Christianity. He is the author of 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament. His ministry ended when he was executed in Rome in the year 62 AD.

**Constantine the Great**
Constantine was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. Constantine was born in Nis, which is now Serbia. In 312 AD, right before a major battle, Jesus appeared to him in a dream, giving him a sign that he will be victorious. He won the battle and Constantine looked upon Jesus as the deliverer of victory. Constantine ended the persecution of Christians by issuing the Edict of Milan, which ordered the people to live peacefully with Christians in the Roman Empire. He built numerous churches within the Roman Empire and was eventually baptized before his death.

**Resurrection**All Christians’ faith rests on Christ's resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Christ concluded his public ministry here on earth, by proving that he was God. His death and resurrection paved the path for the redemption of all of humanity that believed. In Christian beliefs, all who have died will be resurrected from their earthly bodies and judged by God.

**Eucharist**Eucharist or communion is practiced to remember Jesus. In this practice, bread and wine are symbolically used or transformed by an ordained minister and taken by the minister and members of the congregation. By performing this ritual, Christians are following Jesus' command at the Last Supper, "Do this in remembrance of me." The bread represents his body that was broken for humanity. The wine represents the blood that he shed for all.

**Baptism**Christian churches use baptism as a symbol for a person’s declaration of faith in Jesus Christ and their commitment to the repentance of sins. Churches regard this as a sacred ritual ordained by God. Water has always represented purification in any religion. In Christianity, a new believer often is baptized with water in front of the congregation to declare their faith in God. Even Jesus was baptized before the start of his public ministry to the world. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commanded all his disciples to baptize all the nations for the glory of God.

**Easter**Easter is the annual celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. and the principal feast of the Christian year. It is celebrated on a Sunday on varying dates between March 22 and April 25. Easter is a culmination of a entire week. The Sunday before Easter is called Palm Sunday. It is celebrated to remember the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Holy Thursday, which is also known Maundy Thursday is in memory of the Last Supper of Christ with his disciples. Good Friday commemorates his crucifixion on the cross.

**Christmas**On December 25th of each year, Christian celebrates the birth of the Jesus Christ. The Christmas story according to the *Bible* goes as follows: While traveling the countryside to fulfill a government order, Mary and Joseph entered the town of Bethlehem to find shelter. The inn they found had no rooms left so the innkeeper let them stay in the stable with the animals. After the birth of Christ, a star appeared over the stable symbolizing thee birth of a king. This star led many people to the baby Jesus along with the Magi or Three Kings. They arrived carrying gifts for the baby Jesus.

**Jerusalem**Jerusalem is the capital and largest city of Israel. It is located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem is considered the holiest city of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because of this, Jerusalem has been the center of many battles for the rights of the city. Throughout history, the Persian, Syrian, Jewish, Roman, and Muslim Empires have controlled Jerusalem.

**Islam**

 **Introduction**
 Islam is a major world religion founded in Arabia. Based on the teachings of a man
 named Muhammad, one who practices Islam is called a Muslim. A practicing
 Muslim follows the teachings from the *Koran*, *(sometimes written as Qu’ran)*. It’s
 the written revelation from Allah to Muhammad. The Muslim population is
 estimated at more than 1 billion covering many different areas of the world. It is most
 common in Africa, the Middle East, and sections of Asia and Europe. There are 6
 million Muslims in the United States alone.

**Central Theme**
Monotheism is the central theme of Islam—a belief in only one God, Allah, who is omnipotent. According to Islam, God has four fundamental functions: creation, sustenance, guidance, and judgment. The overall purpose of humanity is to serve Allah, to worship him alone and to construct a moral lifestyle.

The *Koran* declares that making the earth a better place is every human’s job in this world. The *Koran* criticizes humans for their selfishness, which causes them to lose sight of their Creator. Because of this, individuals must go beyond their selfishness and develop an inner moral quality of *taqwa* (meaning, "to guard against danger"). Each individual goal is for the good of human kind, not themselves.

Islam teaches that, because of humanity's moral weakness, God sent prophets to teach both individuals and nations correct moral and spiritual behaviors. Since the messages of all prophets emanate from the same divine source, religions are basically one. All prophets are human, but they are the most perfect examples of what humans should be. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet and that the Koran is the final and most perfect revelation of God. The Koran is supposed to be superior to all earlier revelations from God. Muslims also believe in a final judgment when individuals will be judged according to their deeds.

**The Five Pillars of Faith**Once a Muslim, each member must carry out five essential duties, called The Five Pillars of Faith. They are listed below:

1. A Muslim must acknowledge that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet"
2. A Muslim must pray five times daily facing *Mecca*: at dawn, at noon, in the midafternoon, at dusk, and after dark.
3. Each Muslim must pay a *zagat* to the government.
4. A Muslim must fast for the month of Ramadan. During the fasting month, one must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset.
5. A Muslim must make a pilgrimage to Mecca*.* Every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able to do so must make this pilgrimage at least once in his or her lifetime.

**The Koran**
The *Koran* is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Muhammad. Muhammad memorized the words and then taught his Companions. Then scribes, who checked with Muhammad during his lifetime, wrote down the words. Not one word of its 114 chapters has been changed over the centuries.

The Koran is the primary source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects that concern all human beings: wisdom, beliefs, worship, and law. However, it focuses on the relationship between God and His creatures. It also provides guidelines for a just society, proper human relationships and equal divisions of power.

**Muhammad**
Muhammad was born in Mecca in the year 570 AD . At this time, Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and honesty. With these qualities, he was sought after for his ability to solve problems. He meditated often in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal al-Nur, "Mountain of Light". At the age of 40, while meditating, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation continued for twenty-three years and is now known as the *Koran*. From the *Koran*, he preached his message to all those of The Middle East. Before the he died at the age of 63, most of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

**Mosque**
Mosques serve as the main place of worship for all Muslims. The first mosque was the courtyard of the house Muhammad, located in Medina, Saudi Arabia. The wall of the courtyard facing Mecca called the qibla wall—had a roof covering the area where prayers were recited. The other three walls were covered with shallow arcades. This setup has became the mosque design throughout time. In Islamic societies, mosques also serve as social and political centers. They serve as courts, schools, and assembly halls. Libraries, hospitals, and treasuries are often connected to the mosques.

**Zagat**This tax was originally imposed by Muhammad (and later by Muslim states) on the wealthy members of the community, primarily to help the poor. In most Muslim states zakat has become voluntary, but it is still recognized as an essential duty. Every Muslim must give generously.

**Ramadan**
Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic year. It is the holy month of fasting commanded by the Koran for all adult Muslims. According to the Koran, the fast was established so that believers could become more holy. This month was designated because it was the month in which Muhammad received his first revelation from God. The fast begins each day at dawn and ends at sunset. During the fast, Muslims are forbidden to eat, drink, or smoke.

**Mecca**
Mecca is a city in western Saudi Arabia. The population is about 1,500,000. Mecca is the birthplace of Muhammad, founder of Islam, and is the most sacred of city in Islam. According to Islamic tradition, Muslims around the world must face Mecca during their daily prayers. Every year, during the last month of the Islamic calendar, more than one million Muslims make a pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca.

**Jerusalem**Jerusalem is the capital and largest city of Israel. It is located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem is considered the holiest city of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because of this, Jerusalem has been the center of many battles for the rights of the city. Throughout history, the Persian, Syrian, Jewish, Roman, and Muslim Empires have controlled Jerusalem.

**Hinduism**

**Introduction**
Hinduism originated in the area now called India and is still practiced by 80% of its inhabitants. Hinduism is considered a major world religion because of its approximately 700 million believers and its has influence on many other religions during its long history. Some authorities date it back to about 1500 BC and consider it the oldest religion in the world. This religion cannot be traced to a specific founder and does not have only one "holy book" as a spiritual guide. Unlike most other religions, Hinduism does not promote the worship of one particular deity. A Hindu may worship one or many different manifestations of the divine. They consider themselves successful Hindus when the reach the *"Ultimate Reality"* or *nirvana* in their lives.

**Central Beliefs**According to Hindu beliefs, Brahman is the principle source of the universe. This divine intelligence exists in all beings. Thus all the Hindu gods and goddesses are manifestations of the one Brahman. Hinduism is based on the concept of reincarnation, in which all living beings, from plants to gods, live in a cycle of living and dying.

Life is determined by the law of karma. According to karma, the quality of rebirth is determined by the moral behavior displayed in the previous life. In this view, life on earth is regarded as temporary and a challenge. The goal of existence is to reach liberation from the cycle of rebirth and death and enter into an indescribable state called *moksha* (liberation). The ones who reach this state no longer struggle with the cycle of life and death.

**Deities**
Shiva is the Hindu god that represents both the destructive and creative forces of the universe. He often depicted wearing a cobra around his neck and the Ganges River flowing from his head. Shiva is also the god of selflessness and meditation. Some Hindus worship Shiva as the supreme deity. Hindus also consider him as the god of salvation and destruction.

Kali, Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi and other forms of the Divine Mother, or Devi, are depicted as consorts of particular gods and major powers in their own right. Through the Divine Mother, all life comes to have form. Her power is often referred to as *shakti*.

Vishnu is the other major god of Hinduism. He is thought of as the preserver of the universe. Some writings refer to him as the eternal, almighty spirit that existed with primitive waters believed to have been present before the creation of the world. Vishnu, when in one of his mortal forms is shown sleeping on a great serpent and floating on water. While in his godly form, he is seen in either black or blue. He can be seen in various colors while in mortal form. Normally, in his godly form, he is seen with four arms: One hand holds a lotus; a second holds a conch; a third holds a discus, which always returns by itself after being thrown; and the fourth carries a mace.

Rama is a Hindu deity worshiped throughout Hinduism as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. Rama is represented as the ideal hero of the Sanskrit epic poem the *Ramayana.* He was meant to be a secular hero in the epic, but he is seen in the first and sixth books as an incarnation of Vishnu. Rama comes to earth to kill the demon king Ravana.

Krishna is the eighth incarnation of the god Vishnu. According to legend, Vishnu appeared as Krishna to rid the world of a tyrannical king named Kamsa, a son of a demon. Many legends tell of Krishna's miracles and heroic exploits. He mostly appears in the epic poem *Mahabharata* in which he helps the hero Arjuna. Right before a decisive battle, Krishna delivers a speech to Arjuna. This speech became the famous commentary on duty and life known as the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

**Sacred Writings***Mahabharata*, Sanskrit for Great Story,is one of the great epic poems of ancient India. Written between 300 BC and AD 300, it was meant to be a secular work. However, because of its many religious qualities, it has given many ideas for Hindus to live by. The *Mahabharata* focuses on a contest between two noble families for the possession of a kingdom in northern India. One segment of the poem, the *Bhagavad-Gita,* is a dialogue between Krishna and the hero Arjuna on the meaning of life. It has given insight for centuries to devout Hindu believers on the true meaning of life.

*Ramayana* is the shorter of the two great Sanskrit epics of ancient India. Rich in descriptions and poetic language, the *Ramayana* consists of seven books and 24,000 couplets. Written in 3rd century BC, the *Ramayana* tells the story of *Rama*, and his wife, Sita. Rama and Sita are generally seen as ideal examples of great manly heroism and wifely devotion. Reciting the *Ramayana* is considered a religious act, and scenes from the epic are portrayed throughout India and Southeast Asia.

**Bhagavad-Gita**
Bhagavad-Gita is a Sanskrit poem consisting of 700 verses divided into 18 chapters. Most Hindus regard it as their most important text and the essence of their belief.

**Nirvana**
Nirvana is the supreme state free from suffering and individual existence. It is a state often referred to as "self realization" or "God realization". It’s the ultimate religious goal of all Hindus. The attainment of nirvana breaks the otherwise endless rebirth cycle of transmigration. Hindus call this nirvana "eternal bliss". However, no one can describe in words what nirvana is. It can only be experienced directly.

**Transmigration**
Transmigration is passing of the soul at death into a new body or new form of being. Transmigration and reincarnation, the soul's rebirth in a new body, are roughly the same. Transmigration occurs until a soul reaches the perfect state of nirvana, or God.

**Yoga**
Yoga is one of the six classic systems of Hindu philosophy that practices certain disciplines to achieve freedom from the limitations of the flesh and lead to the fulfillment of knowledge. The goal of Yoga is not to achieve peace within, channeling, or the working of miracles, but the acquirement of knowledge. In fact, the Yoga doctrine insists that physical and mental training should be used only as a means to spiritual needs.

Yoga practice forms a ladder to perfect knowledge through eight stages: self-control, religious observance, postures, regulation of the breath, restraint of the senses, steadying of the mind, meditation, and profound contemplation.

**Buddhism**

**Introduction**
Buddhism began in northeastern India and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhism is divided into two major branches: *Theravada,* the Way of the Elders, and *Mahayana,* the Great Vehicle. Buddhism is now prevalent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, (where *Theravada* is popular) and in China, Japan, Taiwan, Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Korea, and Vietnam, and India (where *Mahayana* is more common).. There are about 300 million Buddhists in the world.

**Central Theme**
Buddhism teaches its followers that in this life they are only temporary vessels of body, emotions, thoughts, tendencies, and knowledge. Buddhists believe that there is no sense of self or soul when in this world. A fundamental concept of Buddhism is the notion that the goal of one’s life is to break the cycles of death and birth. Reincarnation exists because of the individual’s craving and desires to live in this world. The ultimate goal of a Buddhists is to achieve freedom from the cycle of reincarnation and attain nirvana. The enlightened state in which the person is free from greed, hate, and ignorance. The way to nirvana involves the person showing love for others, being compassionate and sympathetic of other people, and showing patience in everything. A Buddhist must also follow five main principles which prohibit killing, stealing, ill language, sexual immorality, and the use of toxic substances. When one successfully follows these principles, the three roots of evil (, hate, and deceit) can be overcome.

**Buddha**
Buddha was born in Kapilavastu, India, which is present-day Nepal. He was the son of king of the Sakya clan. His name Siddhartha Gautama is a combination of the family name, Gautama, and his given name, Siddhartha. The title of *Buddha* means "Enlightened One."

Buddha married at an early age and lived the life of self-indulgence. However, he found that this life was dull and left his home in search of enlightenment. On his journey, he met an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. From these encounters, he determined that suffering was a shared characteristic of all humankind.

Then he came upon a calm and peaceful monk. From this encounter, he changed his outlook on life. This new life called for him to forsake his family, wealth, and power in order to be free to search for truth. This decision is known as the Great Renunciation.

About 528 BC, while sitting under a tree, he experienced the Great Enlightenment. Through this revelation, he discovered the way to salvation from suffering. From this revelation, Buddha traveled through the valley of the Ganges River, teaching his doctrines, attracting followers, and establishing religious communities.

**Tipitaka**
The *Tipitaka,* which is divided into three sections, is the fundamental scripture of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhists regard the *Tipitaka* as the complete teachings Buddha. *Mahayana* Buddhists also use the *Tipitaka*, but they regard the *Mahayana* sutras, or journals of the Buddha, as more important. Buddha’s disciples orally passed down the content of the *Tipitaka*.

The three section of the *Tipitaka* are the *Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka.* Rules and regulations for Buddhist monks and nuns are described in the *Vinaya Pitaka*. The actual experiences of Buddha are documented in the *Sutta Pitaka*. Along with the documentation of his experiences, there are extensive commentaries on myths and legends about Buddha. The doctrine of the absence of self and suffering is also found in this section of the *Tipitaka*. The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* contains works that teaches on the *Theravada* positions from Buddha's teaching. These works are now considered to be mainly for advanced students of Buddhism.

According to Buddhist sources, the *Tipitaka* was written down after 50 BC in Sanskrit. The word "tipitaka" means "three baskets". The *Tipitaka* spread with the growth of Buddhism.

**Theravada**The *Theravada* branch of Buddhism is called the "Doctrine of the Elders". This branch uses the *Tipitaka* as its main spiritual guide and abides by the original teachings of Buddha. *Theravada* is also known as the "Lesser Vehicle" in Buddhism. For centuries, *Theravada* has been the main religion of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. Today, there are over 100 million *Theravada* Buddhists around the world. This branch teaches its followers to refrain from all kinds of evil, gather together all that is good, and to purify the mind. These goals can be achieved by developing an ethical mindset, meditation, and a deep thirst for knowledge.

Followers of the *Theravada* branch describe themselves as imperfect beings that have a temporary stay on this earth. When an individual understands this nature of existence, they find nothing valuable in this world. Through this knowledge, there is no sense of greed in their lives. Then with this knowledge, a *Theravada* Buddhist can reach the state of perfection and enter nirvana.

**Mahayana**The *Mahayana* branch of Buddhism is often called the "Greater Vehicle" because of its more liberal beliefs. Instead of regarding Buddha as a divine being, the *Mahayana* believes that Buddha was a manifestation of a divine being. They believe that Buddha takes on three entities: essence, godlike form, and body. Essence is the collection of his spiritual qualities that make him Buddha. In his godlike form, he is seen meditating and revealing himself to his people. In his body form, he is shown as a mortal that walked the earth like his believers. They believe that the *Tipitaka* is an important resource, but they also use other *sutras*, or written records of Buddha’s experiences, as forms of teachings to live by.

Unlike the teachings of *Theravada* Buddhism, a *Mahayana* Buddhist is expected to lead others into nirvana. *Mahayana* Buddhists believe that they have the ability to do so and see it as a duty. In the *Theravada* doctrine, people can only find nirvana for themselves. A *Mahayana* Buddhist also believes that each individual has the ability to gain Buddhahood in his life.

**The Eightfold Path**
The Eightfold Path illustrates the moral principles in which all Buddhists should practice. It goes into detail about the basis of all Buddhist teachings: morality, meditation, and wisdom. This is the eightfold path:
1) Right Knowledge 2) Right Thinking 3) Right Speech 4) Right Conduct 5) Right Livelihood
6) Right Effort 7) Right Mindfulness 8) Right Concentration

Following the Noble Eightfold Path helps a person realize that greed and selfishness cause all earthly suffering. With this new understanding, one’s suffering may end.

**Nirvana**
Nirvana is the supreme state free from suffering and individual existence. It is a state Buddhists refer to as "Enlightenment". It is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists. The attainment of nirvana breaks the otherwise endless rebirth cycle of reincarnation. Buddhists also consider nirvana as freedom from all worldly concerns such as greed, hate, and ignorance. No one can describe in words what nirvana is. It can only be experienced directly.

**Soul**
Buddhists believe that they are temporary vessels in this world and that until they attain enlightenment or Buddhahood, they do not know their own self or soul. They believe that this world is an illusion and that as a result, one cannot know one’s true nature.

**Christianity** Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| When Founded | Place where this religion began | Founder |
|  |  |  |
| Present Day Percentage of World Followers | Present Day Mainly Located in  | Draw Symbol of religion |
|  |  |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Sacred Writings** |
| **Main Historical Figures/Individuals** |
| **Major Beliefs and Ideas** |
| **Important Places of Worship** |
| **Holy Days of the Year** |

**Judaism**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| When Founded | Place where this religion began | Founder |
|  |  |  |
| Present Day Percentage of World Followers | Present Day Mainly Located in  | Draw Symbol of religion |
|  |  |  |

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| --- |
| **Sacred Writings** |
| **Main Historical Figures/Individuals** |
| **Major Beliefs and Ideas** |
| **Important Places of Worship** |
| **Holy Days of the Year** |

**Islam**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| When Founded | Place where this religion began | Founder |
|  |  |  |
| Present Day Percentage of World Followers | Present Day Mainly Located in  | Draw Symbol of religion |
|  |  |  |

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| **Sacred Writings** |
| **Main Historical Figures/Individuals** |
| **Major Beliefs and Ideas** |
| **Important Places of Worship** |
| **Holy Days of the Year** |

**Hinduism**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| When Founded | Place where this religion began | Founder |
|  |  |  |
| Present Day Percentage of World Followers | Present Day Mainly Located in  | Draw Symbol of religion |
|  |  |  |

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| --- |
| **Sacred Writings** |
| **Main Historical Figures/Individuals** |
| **Major Beliefs and Ideas** |
| **Important Places of Worship** |
| **Holy Days of the Year** |

**Buddhism**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| When Founded | Place where this religion began | Founder |
|  |  |  |
| Present Day Percentage of World Followers | Present Day Mainly Located in  | Draw Symbol of religion |
|  |  |  |

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| **Sacred Writings** |
| **Main Historical Figures/Individuals** |
| **Major Beliefs and Ideas** |
| **Important Places of Worship** |
| **Holy Days of the Year** |