

# Comparison of religions

## Introduction

I have written several comparative religious studies but this one is aimed at seeking agnostics who wish to survey various mainstream religions and just want the basic facts.

This is harder than one would suspect: for example, to study Hinduism thoroughly you would have to read multiple books of Hindu scripture, comprising thousands of pages, and still not understand the historical development over thousands of years or the modern application. Reading academic summaries of this is also time-consuming, complex and frequently ineffective; then again, which books do you choose – there are hundreds of varying uses. A simple but accurate evaluation, in concise terms, would really help most people.

My purpose here is to offer objective and subjective evaluations based on my own research and first hand experience. I intend to be as simple and concise as humanly possible.

## Many religions

When people think of the world's religions they normally consider four or five; however, there are hundreds of religions active today and this does not include those religions which have disappeared.

You can find encyclopaedias covering thousands of pages devoted to evaluating many of them; clearly this is a task far beyond my purpose here.

To illustrate this I will mention some obscure religions that you may be unaware of: the Grail Society, Urantia, Chen Tao, The Arcane School, Kardecism, Gedatsukai, Lifewave, The Bawa Muhaiyadden Fellowship, Subud, The Haiveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes, The Celestial Church of Christ, and so on.

Religions keep being generated every time some man (only occasionally a woman)<sup>1</sup> develops some odd idea or has some visions and starts a cult. They will keep increasing until the Last Day. Essentially they have no basis, no authority, no proof of divinity, no certain texts and yet people fall for the lie because it suits their personality.

## Well known religions ignored for comparison

This small paper can't evaluate all religions or it would be a huge book. I will ignore the following for the main comparison but give some basic details about them.

### Sikhism

This is a mixture of Hinduism and Islam. It is a monotheistic religion founded in the Punjab in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Guru Nanak.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Theosophy, Christian Science.

It accepts the Hindu concepts of karma and reincarnation but rejects the caste system, and has one sacred scripture, the *Adi Granth*.

The tenth and last of the series of gurus, Gobind Singh, prescribed the distinctive outward forms (the so-called five Ks) – long hair (to be covered by a turban) and uncut beard (*kesh*), comb (*kangha*), short sword (*kirpan*), steel bangle (*kara*), and short trousers for horse-riding (*kaccha*).

Sikhism is mostly confined to the Punjab in India with small groups operating in the west where Sikhs emigrated. It is very rare for westerners to become Sikhs.

### **Jainism**

A non-theistic (no god) religion founded in India in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by Vardhamana Mahavira as a revolt against Brahminism (Hinduism). There are two major sects: the white-robed *Svetambaras* and the naked *Digambaras*.

Its central teaching is non-injury to living creatures, including insects. Salvation is attained by perfection of the soul through successive lives (reincarnation).

There are about 3.6 million adherents in India, mostly in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

### **Judaism**

This was once the religion of Israelites following the Law of Moses but this has long past, though there is a small cult called ‘Torah Jews’ that still do this. It is a monotheistic religion in principle, but many mystical (Kabbala) Jews worship other things too.

Most modern Jews are not even Semites, let alone of Abrahamic decent, and they follow the *Talmud*, a series of books written by Pharisees in Babylon after the death of Christ containing the words and advice of rabbis. The Talmud is the true authoritative Scripture for modern Orthodox Jews and the State of Israel is founded upon it.

The Talmud is the most foul set of writings in the world. It teaches Jews to elevate themselves over all humanity believing that the world is their sole possession (‘the Chosen People’). Gentiles (non-Jews) are hated and despised and considered to be less than animals. Thus it enables Jews to lie, cheat, steal from, defraud, perjure themselves, and even murder Gentiles. Worse, it justifies paedophilia, incest and bestiality as well as blaspheming Christ, whom they hate.

Very few westerners seriously become Jews for religious reasons, though many become professing Jews in order to marry a Jewess.

### **Baha’i**

A modern monotheistic religion founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a development of Babism,<sup>2</sup> emphasising the essential oneness of humankind and of all religions and seeking world peace.

The Baha’i faith was founded by the Shi’ite Persian Baha’ullah [‘the glory of God’; Mirza Husayn-Ali; 1817–92], the claimed foretold prophet of Babism, and his son Abdul Baha [1844–1921]. Baha’ullah is claimed to be the 5<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Buddha, the reincarnation of Krishna, the messiah of the Jews, and the return of Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> A religion founded in 1844 by the Persian Mirza Ali Muhammad of Shiraz [1819–50], known as ‘the Bab’ (‘the gate’), who taught that a new prophet would follow Muhammad.

Sacred texts are the thousands of documents written by Baha'ullah in prison and exile. Doctrines include:

- Oneness of God, though he is known by many names.
- Oneness of religions. Founders of religions are manifestations of God. Religions are evolutionary stages in God's plan to unify mankind.
- Oneness of humanity. Eventually mankind will be unified.
- There is no clergy. There are various practices and feasts, mostly held in homes.
- There is a centralised 'inspired' council to determine issues.

This is a cult with only a very few western adherents but there are about 5 million followers worldwide. They tend to be idealists, pacifists and tolerant, but wishy-washy on doctrine. It is hard to understand their gullibility when life is obviously contradictory. For example, how can all religions be the same and part of the religious evolution if some (e.g. Islam) determine their destruction and persecution for apostasy? How can killing religious opponents be a part of a unified manifestation of one god?

### **Sufism**

This is the mystical cult within Islam, from the word for the simple woollen garment (*suf*) worn by early ascetics. Sufism arose in the early Islamic period as a reaction against the strict formality of orthodox teaching, and was organised after the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

It stresses seeking personal mystical union with God. Sufis abandon the formal rituals and doctrines of the Islamic theologians in favour of esoteric (mystical) practices and teachings to develop supposed communion with God.

Common Sufi practices include: asceticism (influenced by Neo-Platonism), meditational recitation and whirling dances.

Very few westerners have been attracted to Sufism in practice, some claim to follow its simple transcendent philosophy, though some aspects of its mysticism have been popular with New Agers.

### **Shintoism<sup>3</sup>**

Shinto = 'the Way of the Spirits'. It is a Japanese religion (though there are some Chinese adherents) dating from prehistoric times, based on the worship of ancestors and nature-spirits. In other words, it is a type of primitive spiritualism mixed with Buddhism.

Things that inspire awe – twisted trees, contorted rocks, dead warriors – are believed to enshrine *kami* ('spirits'). In early times each clan had its *kami*, like a totem. With the supremacy of the Yamato,<sup>4</sup> its Sun-goddess (Amaterasu) enshrined at the temple at Ise, became paramount.

Shinto is tolerant and adaptable, laying emphasis on high standards of behaviour and on daily rituals, rather than on doctrine. Shinto offers no code of conduct and no philosophy. It stresses ritual purity; at simple shrines worshippers rinse hands and mouth, bow, and offer food and drink.

The name Shinto was adopted in the 6<sup>th</sup> century to distinguish it from Buddhist and Confucian cults. There is no official Shinto scripture, although the *Kojiki* (Records of

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<sup>3</sup> Largely adopted from the New Oxford Encyclopaedia.

<sup>4</sup> The clan from which all the emperors of Japan are descended, claiming the Sun-goddess as ancestress.

Ancient Matters) and *Nihon-gi* (Chronicles of Japan), 8<sup>th</sup>-century compilations based on oral tradition, contain myths and stories about creation and the gods. During the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the spread of Confucianism introduced ancestor worship to Shinto, and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist beliefs became incorporated into the ancient religion.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the rise of the unified Japanese state saw the development of state Shinto: the emperor came to be worshipped as a descendant of the Sun-goddess Amaterasu. State Shinto was not classed as a religion but as a code of conduct requiring loyalty and obedience to the divine emperor; it informed all public life and encouraged extreme nationalism, until it was rescinded by the emperor (under US pressure) in 1945. It was replaced by the older form, shrine Shinto, the worship of *kami* in shrines or sanctuaries, tended by priests. In the home, the *kami* are housed within a *kamidana*, or 'godshelf'. Personal worship involves purification rites and daily prayers to the *kami*. Shinto is regarded as the religion of life, while Buddhism is seen as that of death; marriages are therefore celebrated according to Shinto tradition, while people generally choose Buddhist rites for funerals.

### **Zen Buddhism**

A Mahayana Buddhist sect of major importance in Japan which is strongly influenced by Taoism.

It originated in China in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and spread to Japan during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It seeks salvation through enlightenment, which is not achieved through obeying a scripture or rituals, but through *satori*, a sudden enlightenment experience, which is usually achieved under the guidance of a teacher. In other words it is mystical.

Meditation under a master, intellectual exercises, and physical endurance are stressed while some emphasise harmony with nature. Different branches of Zen teach different methods of achieving enlightenment, such as meditation, or a seating posture (*zazen*). Its strict discipline was admired by the samurai (Japanese warriors) and was associated with later rituals such as the tea ceremony.

A number of westerners adopted an intellectual form of Zen, without the accompanying traditional rituals, through popular books; such as '*The Way of Zen*' by Alan W Watts (1957). This had sections such as: 'Sitting quietly, doing nothing' and 'Empty and marvellous', which gives some indication of its Taoist basis and its denial of logical, rational philosophical structures.

### **Confucianism**

This is not really a religion but rather a system of philosophy and practical ethics.

It was founded by Confucius in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and developed by Mencius (Meng-tzu) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is one of the two major Chinese ideologies (the other is Taoism).

The basic concepts are ethical: love for one's fellows, filial piety, decorum, virtue, and the ideal of the superior man. The most famous writings are the works of Confucius and the mystical fortune telling book the *I Ching*.<sup>5</sup>

There are an estimated 5,800,000 followers of Confucianism in the world, mostly in China. While westerners may admire Confucius, very few have adopted Confucianism.

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<sup>5</sup> This is based on casting down Yarrow sticks and interpreting the patterns according to the encyclopaedia of designs in the *I Ching*, which each have a meaning.

### **Rastafarianism**

This is a 1930s Jamaican religious sect, an outgrowth of the Black liberation movement and also the 'Back to Africa' movement, holding that blacks are the chosen people. It was also influenced by the Universal Negro Improvement Association of Jamaican Marcus Garvey [1887-1940]. It began to grow significantly after 1950, especially amongst the poor in the Caribbean and Britain but split into several branches.

Rastafarians believe that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was the Messiah, and that black people will eventually return to their African homeland. 'Ras' (meaning 'prince') and 'Tafari' (meaning 'creator') Makonnen [1891-1975] was crowned Negus of Ethiopia in November 1930. He claimed to be a descendant of King Solomon and took the name Haile Selassie ('Might of the Trinity') and also the title 'King of Kings' and 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' (properly titles of Christ). Jamaican Leonard Howell taught that Selassie was the messiah fulfilling prophecies in Revelation 5:5, and 9:16 who would lead Africans out of slavery and back to Africa.

Teachings are apocalyptic and millennial: white oppression will be soon destroyed and Blacks will return to Africa in peace and security. Babylon (white society and religion) will be judged and a new age of harmony will ensue. Though the Bible is quoted often, interpretation is down to the individual. God is referred to as 'Jah' (a Hebrew abbreviation of Yahweh / Jave) who is believed to be within each Rastafarian in a mystical way.

Rastafarians (or 'Rastas') have distinctive codes of behaviour and dress, including: not cutting hair and the wearing of dreadlocks (inspired by Samson and the Nazarite vow, also inspired by a lion's mane); the smoking of cannabis ('ganga'); the rejection of Western medicine; and a diet that excludes pork, shellfish, and milk eating only organic food, mainly vegetables.

### **Zoroastrianism**

An ancient Persian (Iranian) monotheistic religion founded by the religious reformer Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC involving fire worship. He was an aristocrat and possibly a priest who received a vision from one of many gods then worshipped in Persian polytheism who urged belief in one god. Zarathustra's life is shrouded in mystery and legends intersperse his teachings, which are contained in the sacred text called the *Zend-Avesta*. There is also the *Gathas* (hymns) which contain his teachings, but they are unauthenticated.

The religion spread after King Vishtaspa's conversion (the Achaemenian dynasty, c.588 BC), stretching beyond Persia into the Middle East and Eastern Europe. While worship of Ahura Mazda [or Ormazd] was central, Zarathustra retained the ancient fire worship, with rituals being performed in front of fires in temples and elsewhere; however, he abolished orgiastic sacrificial practices. The Iranian fire temple is where a sacred flame is kept alight.

The explanation of creation and life involves myths regarding the supreme god, Ahura Mazda ['wise-lord'], who created twin spirits, one of which chose truth / light / life [Spenta Mainyu], the other untruth / darkness / death [Angra Mainyu or Ahriman]. Later formulations pit Ahura Mazda (now called Ormazd) against his own evil twin [Ahriman]. Ahura Mazda's good spirits are the *amesha spentas*, while Ahriman's spirit followers are the malevolent *devas* who are considered the source of all evil, death, suffering, and destruction in the world. The Earth is the battleground between them. Ahriman's principal epithet is *Druj* (Ancient Persian 'the lie').

Zoroastrianism survives today in isolated areas of Iran and in India, where followers are known as Parsees [or Parsis]. The Parsis emigrated to India from Iran in about the 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries, to avoid persecution by Muslims. Parsis in India live chiefly in Bombay and surrounding areas. In Iran, a sect called the Gabars, numbering about 25,000, maintains the traditions of Zoroastrianism. There are also significant Parsi communities outside India, for example in London.

Zoroastrian ideas can also be traced in the syncretism of other later movements, such as occult religions.

### **Mysticism**

There are literally hundreds of types of mysticism in the world, often forming a part of a larger religion, such as Roman Catholicism.

It relates to the practice of trying to commune with God supposedly within a person. There are a multitude of methods to do this, such as fasting, drugs, meditation, rituals, passivity inducing disciplines, etc.

Essentially, all the methods relate to forms of self-hypnosis resulting in an emotional experience, sometimes interpreted as a rebirth or climbing a ladder to heaven. It is a mere ruse to get people to convince themselves that they have communed with God when it is really a delving into the depths of the psyche, abandoning the will and intellect, and developing hyper-sensitive emotions that masquerade as to what the persons seeks.

In this suggestible state some mystics can manifest extraordinary physical feats while very many fall over backwards. The work of stage hypnotists can easily mimic the effects of mysticism with no religious content at all.

### **Occultism**

The occult (lit. 'hidden') is a catchall term to combine the following: magic, fortune telling and spiritualism ('spiritism' in the USA). There are very many branches of occultism; some claim to worship Satan while others deny this.

#### *Magic*

Magic is the manipulation of nature through various means, such as casting spells, incantations, rituals etc. in order to gain the assistance of supernatural forces by communing with spirit beings. It is often performed by witches in order to change something, such as the weather, healing, a person's love life, or gaining power of some sort. It is also used to place curses on people.

Many cultures have their own form of witchcraft, which is called by various names, such as shamanism, sorcery, witch-doctors, medicine-man, Wicca (a modern western form) etc.

#### *Divination*

Fortune telling, or divination, is the attempt to learn the future by the aid of supernatural means. There are a multitude of rituals that claim to do this, such as: Tarot cards, palm reading, reading tea leaves, numerology, augury, crystal balls, I Ching and so forth.

#### *Spiritualism*

Spiritualism, or clairvoyance, is the practice of trying to commune with spirits. These spirits are usually claimed to be the spirits of dead people – but this is a lie. Very often those who preside over this (Clairvoyants) have been proved to be frauds. Another method is the Ouija Board, where spirits are asked to move a cursor over letters.

*It is insidious*

Occultism is highly dangerous and many people pay for involvement in mental disease, paranoia and even suicide. When it works it is the result of evil spirits, not dead people. These are fallen angels whose only purpose is to deceive, conquer and kill. Beware.

**Theosophy ['Divine wisdom']**

Founded in New York by Helena Blavatsky [1831–91], now the Theosophical Society. It is a philosophical religion teaching communication with a pantheistic God through direct experience by mysticism, meditation, occult practices, and hidden meanings in sacred texts. Its HQ moved to India, where its leading exponent was Annie Besant [1847–1933]. Theosophy has themes in common with the earlier secretive Rosicrucianism.

Essentially Theosophy is a mixture of Hinduism, Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Hermetism and occultism. It was a chief spur to the later New Age mysticism.

**Rosicrucian Fellowship**

A mystical cult similar to Theosophy and Swedenborgianism. It is a very complex esoteric system that mixes Judaism and Christianity with Hinduism, Buddhism and occultism (spiritualism), but it also seeks to synthesise the truths of all religions (impossible, see later). Its terms are similar to Theosophy. The movement is spread across much of America but has little hold in the UK, yet it has 500 centres in the world.

The Rosicrucian ['Rosy Cross'] society claims to be a 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century religion which was devoted to the study of metaphysical, mystical, and alchemical teachings. This was said to be created by a mythical 15<sup>th</sup> century German knight called Christianus Rosenkreuz or Rosencreutz [1378-1484] in an anonymous pamphlet of 1614. He opposed Roman Catholicism and claimed to reveal the mysteries of the rose cross through philosophical speculation and 'spiritual alchemy'. It was a re-interpretation of Christianity in mystical and occult terms. It was also a secret society like the Freemasons; in fact Freemasonry derived much from it. It was aimed to be an alternative to the Jesuits.

A number of manifestos emerged that were the work of Lutheran spiritual reformers but only Johann Valentin Andreae can be certainly identified. They sought the spiritual transformation of man in following Rosencreutz. The earliest teachings had broad overtones of Christianity but by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the movement had become completely unorthodox. The movement also fragmented into different societies.

The largest faction (90%) is called AMORC,<sup>6</sup> based in California, which claims to be a charitable brotherhood and not a religion. Current teachings have evolved from the original allegorical calls to a new reformation with AMORC deriving much from Rudolf Steiner. Modern Rosicrucians see themselves as alchemists, Kabbalists, neo-Gnostics, occultists or Freemasons.

Key teachings include:

- Elitism.
- Pantheism, no personal god. God is composed of seven spirits making up the godhead, partly manifested in the Trinity.
- Reincarnation to purge past sins.
- Seven worlds with seven 'universal spirits' in control.

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<sup>6</sup> Ancient and Mystical Order *Rosae Crucis*.

- The cross represents man's evolutionary progress. Jesus was revealed to aid this progress.
- Jesus is a mere man equated with Buddha and others, called initiates, to help men; he is not the Son of God. Jesus and Christ are divided. Jesus was an initiated man; the 'Christ Spirit' was a manifestation of the Cosmic Christ. The Christ Spirit entered the body of Jesus. The 'Only Begotten' is an exalted being above all else in the cosmos, except the 'Power' which created it.
- The sovereign over these initiates is the one from Saturn called 'The Father'. The Holy Spirit (called 'Jehovah') is the highest initiate of the moon. The Son is the highest initiate from the sun.
- Man progresses every seven years and is evolving into a divine being.
- There is no vicarious atonement.
- There are three heavens attained through suffering and reincarnation.
- There are progressive races. The white race came from Atlantis; blacks came from Lemuria (both fabled continents, now sunk). Those from Atlantis will become the fathers of the modern Aryan race.

Thus Rosicrucianism today has nothing to do with Christianity at all but is a racist, elitist secret society that is typical of modern syncretism, being a mix of Christian themes with eastern religions, mysticism, alchemy and occultism.

### **New Ageism**

The New Age is a catchall term for a multitude of disciplines, rituals and beliefs that are alternatives to mainstream formal religions that arose out of the 1960s hippie movement. It is often connected to an interest in supposed spirituality, mysticism, holism, and environmentalism.

It is also a mixture of eastern mystical religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, mixed with occult ideas. Frequently, the teachings of early occult movements, such as Theosophy, Rosicrucianism and Anthroposophy, are added to the blend.

Sometimes the influence is more ancient, such as aspects from Gnosticism, Hermetism, neo-Platonism and alchemy [see glossary].

Common themes emerge from the hotchpotch, such as: an openness to any kind of mysticism; dualism; monism (everything is one); Pantheism (everything is God); and witchcraft. Characteristic practices include, staring at gemstones to aid meditation and healing; making dream-catcher artefacts;<sup>7</sup> banging Buddhist bells; saying mantras;<sup>8</sup> staring at mandalas;<sup>9</sup> drumming marathons; chanting; and so on.

### **Anthroposophy**

An educational, therapeutic, and creative system established by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner [1861-1925] to use natural means to enable physical and mental health. Somewhat influenced by Theosophy, Steiner lectured at the Theosophical Society in 1900 and headed that movement in Germany. His break with it arose from his concentration on Christ instead of oriental texts.

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<sup>7</sup> A circular craftwork with woven designs in it supposed to aid healthy dreams and ward off nightmares.

<sup>8</sup> A mystic formula of words chanted to gain spiritual power. The simplest is the Hindu word 'Om' representing heaven, air and earth.

<sup>9</sup> A circular figure or design representing the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism. Some designs are highly complex and intricate. Often stared at to induce passivity and supposed spiritual awareness.



Though it is chiefly known for the Steiner school system (Waldorf Schools), where kids are left to do what they want naturally, Steiner also advocated theological ideas that are still taken up by devotees. It is a sort of syncretism of Christianity and eastern mysticism, including reincarnation and karma, interpreting the Gospels in an esoteric manner. Steiner, however, developed all sorts of ideas about a range of subjects including: architecture, health care (Camp Hill communities), agriculture, medicine and economics.

The Anthroposophical Movement describes many organisations and activities that follow Steiner's ideas.

### **Animism**

This is a very primitive type of religion based upon the worship of the supposed spirits of animals or stones, weather phenomena (e.g. lightning) or other natural objects. A variant, Totemism, is where such a spirit is considered head of a clan and an emblem of this, such as an eagle, is the focus of the village (e.g. American Indian totem poles).

These spirits are said to be capable of good or evil and therefore must be propitiated and served; thus the religion is filled with superstitions and fears. No sane westerner would consider being an animist.

### **Scientology**

Scientology was created by science fiction writer L. (Lafayette) Ron Hubbard, something he did to make money. He openly admitted this, saying that if you really want to make money, start a religion.<sup>10</sup>

Hubbard was a failed science fiction writer who was a proven liar, fraud and modern snake-oil salesman. He published his best-seller, *'Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health'*, in 1950, inventing his religion on the back of this text-book in 1955. Hubbard died in 1986.

Dianetics is a crude counselling methodology, called 'auditing', similar to psychotherapy. It is intended to release individuals from past traumas by freeing them of the mental aberrations ('engrams') these traumas leave in the character ('clearing'). There was little original thinking in Hubbard's approach, most of it being basic principles of psychology.

After Hubbard invented psychological auditing he realised that he needed to make more money. So he began to add more and more processes in the auditing methodology (combined with a growing ridiculous mythology). Thus members had to rise through level after level to achieve greater amounts of spiritual freedom and each level cost a lot of money. Hubbard gradually created a 'religion' between 1952 and 1955 by adding science fiction myths to Dianetics. This is not worth summarising as it is ludicrous.

The movement was taken over by David Miscavige [b. 1962] who expanded it from just a psychological education resource to include health care, business, entertainment and publishing. It used mind-control, plus psychological, sexual and physical abuse in a top-down despotic hierarchy to garner millions of dollars. Many senior staff have been convicted and imprisoned; including Hubbard's wife. Scandal after scandal has come to light, including beatings, torture, kidnappings, sexual abuse, fraud, conspiracy, tax evasion, child abuse, brainwashing and so on; people that escape this cult take years to recover; some never do.

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<sup>10</sup> Time Magazine, 10 Feb. 1986. He originally stated this in 1949.

Numbers are now in steep decline from the 8 million in the 50s. In 2008 only 25,000 members were found in the USA. Multiple documentaries have exposed the dangers of this evil cult, many by former members, yet a number of celebrities are still embedded.

Scientology denies the true God and affirms many gods (like Mormonism). It is also pantheistic (merges God with the universe). It denies and blasphemes Jesus Christ. It ignores the concept of sin and evil. It avers that salvation is freedom from rebirth (like Hinduism) and denies that there is a Biblical heaven. It also demands strict allegiance to the cult (including separation from family) and total submission to the leadership with sanctions for failure of discipline.

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We now come to the main comparison of the chief world religions.

## Comparison of main religions

Subject	Christianity	Hinduism	Buddhism	Islam	Taoism / Daoism
Nomination	From its founder, 'Christ' (meaning Messiah, or anointed one), Christians were first called this in Antioch in the 1 <sup>st</sup> century.	Not an Indian term but the Persian designation of the Indus River.	Named after its founder who was called 'Buddha' when he became enlightened. 'Buddha' is literally 'enlightened', the past participle of <i>budh</i> 'know'.	'Islam' means submission and this is the basic tenet of the religion – submission to Allah through Muhammad's teaching.	The 'Dao' is the ultimate reality of all things; hence Daoism or Taoism.
History	<p>The Bible was compiled over 1500 years with unified teaching on getting right with God.</p> <p>The centre is Jesus Christ who died in about 33AD and was raised and ascended to heaven.</p> <p>The church was founded by the apostles of Christ after his death and this prospered to cover the whole world.</p>	<p>Developed over 5,000 years in India with many changing variations over time. Four periods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The Indus Valley Civilisation or Harappan culture</i> (from Harappa, a chief city) [4000-2000 BC].</li> <li>2. <i>The Vedic period, Vedism</i> [1500-500 BC].</li> <li>3. <i>The Epic, Puranic and Classical Age</i> [500 BC–500 AD].</li> <li>4. <i>Medieval Period</i> [500–1500 AD]</li> </ol> <p>It has no founder, is not prophetic, has no organisation, has no set creed and no essential doctrine, no single moral code.</p> <p>Three subsets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abstract monists, emphasising oneness (e.g. Transcendental Meditation)..</li> <li>2. Vishnuites: Vishnu</li> </ol>	<p>Founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, in north-east India in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to counter the sacrificial religion of orthodox Brahminism.</p> <p>In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC Buddhism was made the national religion of India by the emperor Asoka, where it spread over Asia.</p> <p>However, there are now few Buddhists in India, after being overcome by the Muslim invasions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.</p>	<p>Founded by the 'Prophet' Muhammad [or Mohammed; 570-632] in 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia; he succeeded in destroying the idolatry in the Arab world and welding the various warring tribes into a single community.</p> <p>After Mohammed's death, conquests by Muslims led to a great empire spreading from the Middle East into Africa, north India and Spain.</p>	<p>Philosophical Daoism developed from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC; its tenets are found in the Tao-Te-Ching [<i>Daodejin</i>], traditionally attributed to Laozi, and in the text known as the <i>Zhuangzi</i> after its author.</p> <p>A religious Daoism also developed and was officially recognised in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD; it incorporated certain Buddhist features and developed its own monastic system and cultic practices.</p>

		worship; (many variations of method and many incarnations worshipped), e.g. ISKCON (Krishna = Vishnu). 3. Shivaites: worship of Shiva.			
Denominations and sects	Multiple denominations with some being 'Christian' in name only. True Christians are those who have been born again (regenerated) and obey the Bible; these are called 'evangelicals'. These constitute a small minority. Major division: Protestantism vs. Roman Catholicism / Eastern Orthodoxy. Protestants fragmented into multiple denominations based on ecclesiology; such as: Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Episcopalians (Anglicans), Brethren, Independents. There are hundreds of minor heretical sects including: Quakers, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, etc.	Two main streams: Sankhya [dualistic, no creator.] & Vedanta [more popular, non-dualistic]. The main sect is Sikhism in India. There are hundreds of smaller sects. In the west there are multiple sects that are Hinduistic: Ananda Maga Yoga Society, Divine Light Mission, Rajneeshism, ISKCON, Meha Baba etc.	There are two major traditions, <i>Theravada</i> [few saved, monasticism, Buddha a teacher]; and <i>Mahayana</i> [all can be saved, various saviours, Buddha a saviour-god]. Zen is a major offshoot. Plus a number of smaller sects, such as Soka Gokkai, the lay organisation of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. In Tibet it is demon worship. In Japan it is militant nationalism.	The main divisions of Islam are Sunni (the majority, 90%, and the most fundamental) and Shi'ite (the minority). The split occurred in 10 <sup>th</sup> century. Shi'ites: Islam's leader must be a descendant of Muhammad; free will; imams exalted and inspired; Mahdi. Sunni: leader chosen by consensus; predestination; Islamic law closed in 10 <sup>th</sup> c.; no Mahdi. Mystical Islam is Sufism. There are many smaller sects following differing legal schools (interpretations of Muhammad's doctrines).	Not known for divisions in China but many offshoots in the west.
General dogmatics	The Bible is full of doctrinal teaching in rational form and instruction, plus other forms of more oblique wisdom found in poetry, proverbs, allegory, typology, symbolism and apocalyptic writings.	No dogmatics; teachings are formed from interpreting texts – hence multiple contrasting ideas. Many Hindus in a town will have conflicting teachings. Essentially man is god	The teachings of Buddha collected in oral tradition. No formal theological dogmatics only the four noble truths and the 8-Fold Path of right behaviour.	There is no formal systematic treatment of teaching on any doctrine given in the Qur'an. Doctrine and practice is derived from interpretations by legal	Sayings in the Tao-Te-Ching. No formal dogmatics. Emphasis on no teaching, unlearning.

		since men who find salvation become god. Hinduism was a synthesis of religious ideas over time in India.		schools (hence confictions). Practice derives from Muhammad's example.	
Basic theology	<p>God created the universe for his glory.          Man rebelled and sinned. God provided a salvation through Jesus Christ.          Men must believe his Gospel to be saved. God gives grace to the elect to do this.          The rest of mankind is left in sin, which is accounted for on the Last Day.</p>	<p>Man is trapped in this world undergoing many reincarnations until he eventually escapes and is joined to the impersonal world soul.          Men must reach the Brahmin class to gain nirvana.          There are huge variations in the methods employed in living right, and in essential theology. Five Hindus in a street may have five different theologies.          Summary of key principles: Pantheism, karmic retribution (cause and effect) reincarnation, final absorption into the world soul..</p>	<p>'Middle Way': spiritual path between the complexity of Hinduism and the world of sensuality.          Unlike Hinduism, nirvana is for anyone whatever class.          4 Noble Truths:          1. All existence is suffering.          2. The cause of suffering is desire.          3. Freedom from suffering is nirvana. You must eliminate cravings.          4. This is attained through the 'eightfold path' of ethical conduct.</p>	<p>Mixture of Judaism and Nestorianism (a Christian sect).  <i>Obedience</i>: to Muhammad.  <i>Submission</i>: of all to Allah.  <i>Dualism</i> (e.g. political: Muslims good, kaffirs evil; within Islam: men good women repressed); historical: Islam originally peaceful, after Medina, Islam became an intolerant religion of hatred and violence demanding killing or capturing all non-Muslims (kaffirs).  <i>Fatalism</i> (a sort of divine predestination).</p>	<p>Inaction ('Wu-Wei').          Detachment.          Get in tune with ultimate reality.          The goal is to become one with the Dao force.          Balance of opposites (yin and yang). Yin and yang stem from <i>T'ai Chi</i> (the 'absolutely transcendent'), the ultimate source and limit of reality.</p>
Pantheon	<p>One God in three Persons (not modes): the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.          God has many attributes: holiness, goodness, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, self-existence etc.</p>	<p>300 million gods / goddesses.          Three main gods today (not a trinity): Vishnu ('the preserver', manifest as Rama and Krishna), Shiva ('destroyer'), and Brahma (Brahman).          Brahma is the chief god and creator with manifestations such as Vishnu but no attributes; he is formless and abstract..</p>	No god.	<p>One God called 'Allah' based on an earlier Arabic moon god.</p>	<p>No god.          The ultimate reality is the Dao, in which being and not-being, life and death, are merely aspects of the same reality.          The Dao, as the origin of all creation and life force, is unknowable in its essence but observable in its manifestations.</p>

		<p>The earlier simple Vedic pantheon changed to a later non-Aryan hierarchy, hence some confusion.</p> <p>Some Hindus are pantheists, i.e. no personal god.</p> <p>Some are monotheists (Bhakti) choosing Krishna or Vishnu.</p> <p>The god of the <i>Gita</i> is personal and monotheistic but the god of the earlier <i>Vedas</i> is pantheistic and monistic.</p> <p>Modern ISKCON teaches monotheism (Krishna).</p>			
Christ	<p>Christ is the eternal Son of God.</p> <p>He is both man and divine. Creation was through him, to him, by him, for him.</p> <p>He is the Saviour and redeemer of men having died and been raised for sin.</p> <p>He is the only mediator between God and man.</p> <p>He is the Lord of Lords, and King of the Universe and the Judge of all men.</p>	<p>Christ is just one of the many incarnations of Brahman; a mere man. Others include: Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna (19<sup>th</sup> c.).</p>	<p>Jesus is a good teacher but less important than Gautama Buddha.</p>	<p>Jesus Christ was only a man; a prophet like Adam, Noah, Moses and Abraham. All these are subservient to Mohammed in authority. Christ did not die for the sin of men; Judas died on the cross.</p>	No mention.
Scriptures	The <i>Bible</i> .	<p>The <i>Vedas</i> (wisdom), the <i>Brahmanas</i> (rituals), the <i>Puranas</i>, the <i>Ramayana</i>, the <i>Mahabharata</i> (stories about gods), the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> ('song of the gods'; part of the <i>Vedas</i>), the <i>Upanishads</i> (lit. 'wisdom'; teachings,</p>	<p>Oral traditions of the four noble truths.</p> <p>1st c. BC oral tradition of Theravada Buddhism written in the <i>Pali Canon</i> (or <i>Tripitaka</i> – 'triple basket').</p>	<p>The <i>Quran</i> ['recitation']. The <i>Sunna</i> ['the way'] comprising: the <i>Hadith</i> ('tradition' the sayings of Muhammad) and the <i>Sira</i> (biography of Muhammad).</p>	<p>The Tao-te-Ching [<i>Daodejing</i>] by Lao-tzu (Laozi).</p> <p>The Zhuangzi.</p>

		inc. reincarnation) are the conclusion of the <i>Vedas</i> but stands on its own. Different texts over time taught conflicting doctrines.			
God's prophet and saviour	Jesus Christ.	Krishna the incarnation of Vishnu.	Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama). Some recognise 28 buddhas (Theravada). Mahayana added the doctrine of a <i>Bodhisattva</i> , a sort of saviour who puts off becoming a buddha in order to save others; thus millions of buddhas united in the absolute being. Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhists.	Muhammad.	Lao-Tzu.
Evidence of God's prophet being from God.	Jesus is a historical character mentioned in secular histories. Jesus proved his divinity when alive by many mighty miracles. He did not remain in the tomb but rose from the dead and showed himself to hundreds of witnesses. His disciples proved their authority by also performing many mighty miracles.	None. Avatars are a legend.	Siddhartha was just a man who died and his tomb is present.	Muhammad was just a man who died. Neither did he ever perform any miracles. Even his scriptures needed to be edited and re-written since he was not literate ('not a man of letters').	None.
Other prophets	There have been many prophets from OT times to the apostles. They all testified to Jesus.	Various avatars (incarnations of Vishnu). Demi-gods like Krishna (the 8 <sup>th</sup> avatar). His words to Arjuna form the Bhagavad Gita.	Sects have many revered teachers and some that claim to be buddhas.	Some traditions claim there were 224,000 prophets, others 124,000. Six of them had special commissions to start new dispensations (Adam, Noah, Abraham,	None, but many philosophers.

				Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad).	
Worship	<p>A spiritual matter involving the full submission of the believer to God, through Christ, in all reverence and praise.</p> <p>This attitude of worship continues throughout the life of the believer, even in mundane things, but in corporate gatherings involves a-cappella singing of praise and worship, Bible reading, teaching, thanksgiving, prayer, meditation and adoration.</p> <p>The centre of the Christian gathering is the bread and wine (The Lord's Supper), which focuses believer's attention on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as a memorial ritual.</p>	<p>Different regions of India worship different gods, such as Vishnu or Shiva. Brahmins worship Brahman; other castes worship other local gods.</p> <p>There are multiple different practices of worship in different systems and different areas. Some worship cows.</p>	<p>Worship was not a part of original Buddhism but many of the sects practice worship of statues of Buddha, relics and other idols.</p> <p>Some Buddhists have a temple (<i>caitya</i>), others use a relic mound (<i>stupa</i>) while monks worship in a monastery (<i>vihara</i>).</p> <p>Some sects have complex rituals involving chanting, gestures, using finger-cymbals, bell ringing etc.</p> <p>The complex fragmentation of Buddhism led to a wide variety of worship types and teaching.</p>	<p>There is no organised church or priesthood, but mullahs and ayatollahs are given authority. Prayer, preceded by ceremonial washing, is emphasised and can be performed in any clean place but meetings for prayer (worship) and preaching take place in a mosque.</p> <p>Muhammad is greatly revered. Prayer is spoken face down to the ground facing Mecca (but was originally facing Jerusalem). On Fridays Muslims should attend noon prayers at the mosque.</p> <p>Observance of the five pillars varies between Sunnis and Shi'ites.</p>	<p>Not relevant as there is no god.</p>
Creation	<p>God created the world in six literal, 24-hour days, out of nothing.</p> <p>There is no evolution of life. The features and seasons of the earth as we see them today are largely the result of the global flood.</p>	<p>The universe is god. Prakiti (basic material stuff) produces the world after each cosmic period. Creator = Brahma.</p> <p>The functions of the Supreme Mind (Brahma) designated in the word 'Om' or 'Aum'.</p>	<p>No personal creator god. 'Dependent origination' - all aspects of individual existence, or modes of being, are conditioned by others; in this world there is nothing permanent, independent, or absolute, not even the individual self, change is always possible.</p>	<p>God made the universe and all things good and brought life out of water.</p>	<p>Ancient Chinese creation myths.</p> <p>In the elemental chaos of elements and gases, resembling an egg, there was a dormant organising principle. After incubation for 18,000 years the egg hatched. Then the heavens and the earth came into existence.</p> <p>The lighter, most pure substances floated upward and became the</p>



					heavens. These elements were named yang. The heavier, more impure substances descended and became the earth. These were named yin.
Man	God created man from dust and breathed into him the Spirit creating a soul (personality). This resulted in man being a spirit / soul / body. Adam, the first man, rebelled against God, sinned and was placed under God's curse. This is called 'the Fall' of man. Henceforward, all men from Adam are born in sin and iniquity. Hence the need for salvation.	Man's soul ( <i>atman</i> ) is trying to get back to the world soul. Wrong behaviour has effects ( <i>karma</i> ) and leads to reincarnation over and over again.	Buddhism rejects the existence of the soul but clearly recognises a spiritual link between successive lives.	No formal dogma about man.	No formal dogma about man.
Sin	Sin is transgressing God's law; rebellion. All men are born in sin and incapable of doing God's will.	Man is trapped in <i>samsara</i> (Sanskrit, 'journeying through') rather than sin. This is the way in which successive lives are determined by the laws of <i>karma</i> . Good and evil are relative terms; whatever helps is good, whatever hinders is bad. Failure to make the most of the good results in trying again in a reincarnated life.	No sin, just wrong desire. Sin is that which hinders man's progress. Man is responsible for his own sin. Similar to Hinduism ( <i>samsara</i> ). Suffering is the result of past <i>karma</i> . The cause of such suffering is desiring wrong things	There is no original sin in Islam. Sin is failure to do Allah's will; i.e. the failure to do one's religious duty as outlined in the ' <i>Five Pillars of Islam</i> '. Disobeying Sharia law.	No sin. Sin is neither affirmed nor denied. Dao is more concerned with the balance of opposites (Yin / Yang) than with sin. Life's problems are resolved through meditation and observation.
Punishment for sin	Eternal condemnation.	Reincarnation.	Reincarnation.	Hell which is divided into seven storeys one below another, for different classes of the wicked.	No hell.

Salvation from sin	Man's works are unable to save him. Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone, who died to save his people from sin and death. Faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ.	Hopeless confusion and contradiction. Many ways: 1. Good behaviour. Man is saved through devotion, meditation, good works and self-control ( <i>Vedas</i> ). 2. Man's soul ( <i>atman</i> ) is part of the world soul ( <i>paramatman</i> ) stuck in <i>maya</i> (the world) struggling to return to the world soul ( <i>nirvana</i> ), which is achieved through reincarnation. The journey is by following duty ( <i>dharma</i> ) i.e. responsibility. Deliverance from reincarnation is <i>Moksha</i> . ( <i>Upanishads</i> ). 3. Yoga – disciplining life to restrain passions enabling escape from reincarnation. Most people are doomed to endless cycle of death and rebirth – this was opposed by Buddha. 4. Devotion (Bhakti); e.g. worship of Krishna.	Salvation is by self-effort, whatever is conducive to spiritual progress is good, and whatever tends to hinder spiritual progress is bad. The way to <i>nirvana</i> is by <i>dharma</i> (duty) – the dynamic that gives inner power and quality to life. Eliminating desire. Following the Noble Eight-fold Path to overcome karma.	Obey Muhammad. Man earns his own salvation and pays for his own sins by following the teachings of Muhammad.	Following the path through silence, stillness, and actionless action ( <i>wu wei</i> ) the Daoist aims to achieve unity with the Dao (life-force).
Final Judgment	On the Last Day by Jesus Christ. All men are measured by the standard of Jesus' life. The righteous are raised with a spiritual/material body. The wicked are condemned to eternal punishment in hell. The earth is destroyed and restored in purity.	None; only endless reincarnation.	None; only endless reincarnation.	On the Last Day.	There is a hell, as a sort of purgatory, with nine stages of punishments each governed by a demon king. Prayers can help people escape this judgment.

Heaven	A restored perfected earth where heaven (God's dwelling) and earth meet. It is populated by Christians who fellowship with God physically. A realm of immortal happiness.	None; final end is absorption into the universal principle. Release from reincarnation. An unconscious, amorphous lack of existence.	Nirvana, bliss, emptiness, removal of will and personality where the human life is transformed into spiritual consciousness and independent reality (enlightenment, becoming a buddha). Buddha never explained what nirvana was.	Paradise ( <i>Jannah</i> ) of sensual pleasure (not for women). There are many levels of Paradise depending on how righteous a person is on Earth.	After death the aim is to be an important ancestor in heaven. Immortality not nirvana.
Ethical standard	Imitating Jesus; obeying God's law; doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (the 'Golden Rule'), loving enemies, doing good to all. Christian good works are not mere self-effort but works inspired and empowered by the Spirit within.	No one set standard. Classic Hinduism is dominated by the caste system. Brahmin (priest, the highest class); Kshatriya (warrior or nobleman); Vaishya (peasant worker, traders, merchants); Shudra (slave, menial unskilled worker). Shudras are not allowed to hear the Vedas or to use them to find salvation. People outside the system, such as unsubjected groups or those with unacceptable practices, were Pariahs (untouchables). Practices include: food offerings, water, incense, flowers and coloured powders. Uttering Om. Worshipping the local god bare to the waist. Reverence for cows by some. Various festivals (e.g.	The eightfold path: ethical conduct, wisdom, and mental discipline (including meditation). [1. right knowledge; 2. right purpose or aspiration; 3. right speech; 4. right action; 5. right livelihood or job; 6. right effort; 7. right thought; 8. right concentration]. Various splinter groups arose out of Buddhism all teaching different methods. <i>Vajrayana</i> Buddhism: a mystical variant of Mahayana, similar to Indian Tantrism. <sup>11</sup> Uses mantras (magic chants); mudra (gestures); <i>mandalas</i> (meditation circles). There are many more.	Obeying the <i>Qur'an</i> . The <i>Qur'an</i> does not contain sufficient information for ethical practice so the <i>Sunna</i> ('the way') gradually developed over 200-300 years. Sharia Law, which developed from the Sunna. E.g. drinking, gambling and eating pork is forbidden; circumcision is also practised.	Follow the way of humility and piety. There is a high ethical standard. Non violence, moderation, humility, compassion, contentment with one's lot. Peace. Respect for the world. Self-knowledge and wisdom. Control of the senses. Denial of morality (unlearn what we know). Goodness, charity, justice.

<sup>11</sup> Tibetan Buddhist practices involving images, sounds movement, breath control and ritualised sexual intercourse to achieve experience of the enlightened self.

		Divali).			
Results of ethical standard	Toleration. Charitable works. Liberty of thought and speech. Establishment of literary forms. Caring society.	Caste system – persecution of untouchables. Advocating violence (e.g. Kali cults, thuggee), mysogeny (e.g. suttee).	Tolerance, mysticism, social impotence. Individualism. No incentive for social progress. Little social work.	Mysogeny, repression, slavery, violent conquest, persecution of kaffirs, executions the norm, genocide in war.	Toleration. Non-violence.
Examples of moral commands	Matt 5:44 'love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you'. Gal 6:10 'do good to all'.	'Wound not others, do no one injury by thought or deed, utter no word to pain thy fellow creatures.' (Law Code of Manu.) 'One disciplined by higher mind here casts off good and bad actions.' Gita 2.50.. No guilt attaches to one whose self is governed by his yoked mind.' Gita 4:21	'One should neither slay nor cause to slay ... As I am, so are other beings; thus let one not strike another.' Dhammapada. 'To avoid evil; to do good, to purify the mind, This is the advice given by all the Buddhas.' Dhammapada, 183. (Buddha's sayings in Pali Canon.)	Qur'an 8.12 'cut off their heads and even the tips of their fingers'. Qur'an 2:191 'Kill them wherever you find them'. Qur'an 4:89 'Take not friends from their ranks (unbelievers) ... seize them and slay them wherever you find them'.	'The highest virtue is to act without a sense of self. The highest kindness is to give without a condition. The highest justice is to see without a preference.' Whoever believes and respects the world, is worthy to be entrusted humanity.' Laozi.
Historical effect.	Establishing the protestant work ethic that transformed the west. Building the first hospitals, orphanages, universities, free health care, schools, Social reforms. Ending slavery.	Keeping nations primitive, no inspiration to succeed or progress.	Keeping nations primitive, no inspiration to succeed or progress.	Waging war on multiple nations over 1400 years. Killing over 700 million people. Enslaving millions. Brutal legal system that beheads women for minor crimes.	Keeping nations primitive, no inspiration to succeed or progress.
Moral objective	Serving God and following Jesus. Doing good to all.	Avoiding bad karma and reincarnation.	Avoiding bad karma and reincarnation. Overcoming desire.	Conquering the whole world and subjecting it to Allah.	Non action.
Religious rituals	Two sacraments: 1. water baptism; 2. the Lord's Supper. Attending a local church. Prayer and worship.	Multiple rituals in different forms; some have no ritual.	Originally no ritual but these developed over time in sects.	There are 'Five Pillars' of Islam: the profession, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and the <i>Hajj</i> ('pilgrimage').	Non-action, letting things happen. Certain Buddhist rituals were added after the 3 <sup>rd</sup> century.
Gatherings	The local church meeting on Sunday in a home for mutual edification.	Different sects have different types of gathering. Meetings, however, are not central to Hinduism.	Originally no set meetings. Today sects have various types of meetings including temples, monasteries and various local settings..	Gathering in the mosque to pray, worship and hear a teacher preach, at least on Friday. Certain festivals, e.g.	None necessary.

				Hajj, Oudh. Pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime.	
Angels	These are immaterial spirit beings created by God to be his messengers.	No angels.	No angels	Abstract symbols of God's power. Islamic creeds do not articulate the doctrines of angels or jinn or Satan very much, but they are popular with Muslims. They have pure bodies created of light.	Religious Taoism involves worship of local gods, like spirits.
The devil	The devil is a fallen angel that led a rebellion against God and strives to rule the world through sinful men.	No devil.	No devil.	<i>Iblis</i> is the Qur'anic name for the archangel Lucifer, cast out of heaven to become Satan (or <i>Shaitan</i> ).	No devil.
Demons	Demons are fallen angels led by Satan; disembodied spirits.	Stories and legends have demons as enemies.	No demons.	Demons are called Jinn, or satans, and they were created from smokeless flames. Somewhere above men and below angels.	No demons.
Eschatology (the end)	Mankind gets worse and worse in rebellion to God, culminating in a totalitarian world government of evil under Satan's control. Man's sin comes to fulness. Jesus will return as the Lord of Glory to finally destroy this evil world. All will die and be raised to face God's judgment. Christians will be changed instantly to have a glorified body. Christians give an account of their lives and some get rewarded. All live on a restored earth with Christ;	No specific teaching on eschatology.	No specific teaching on eschatology.	There is a return of Christ but it is not a major event because he is not God; it is just a sign. There is a judgment of men and there is a hell. Heaven is sensual pleasure. No specifics on the lead up to the end in the Qur'an (though some schools do have eschatological teachers). Sunnis: 23 minor signs plus 18 major signs (including resurrection, judgment, paradise,	No specific teaching on eschatology.

	<p>heaven and earth meet in bliss..  All wicked men stand before God for final judgment.  All sinners are condemned to eternal punishment called hell.</p>		<p>hell) in the Hadith which include: corruption of earth by an antichrist-type figure (<i>Dajjal</i>), followed by peace. Armageddon is called <i>fitnah</i>. These stem from borrowed concepts of the NT and Zoroastrianism. Many popular Shi'ite schools believe in the final appearance of a great prophet, sometimes called 'The Mahdi', who defeats the antichrist. Some claimed he would lead the world into peace. No mention in Qur'an.</p>	
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## Examples of modern cults arising from Hinduism

Hinduism has a long history of a certain man establishing a new sect with contradictory ideas and then generating a large following, only to fall into corruption, be exposed and face a downfall. In modern times many of these gurus have ended up very crooked, amassing large fortunes.

I need to give more information on these because they have been very popular in the west and their influence is still pervasive, especially in universities and amongst New Agers.

### Rajneeshism

If ever a Hindu cult was pure evil, this is it. Thousands of lives have been forever ruined by this monstrosity.

It was founded by Bhagwan Shree ['Sir God'] Rajneesh [1931-1990], born Rajneesh Chandra Mohan from central India. He grew up as a Jain but was fascinated with death (note the juxtaposition).<sup>12</sup> He gained a philosophy degree in 1957 then began teaching at university, resigning in 1966. Supposedly following god to work '*for the spiritual regeneration of humanity*' (a common Hindu god-complex), he wandered around Indian states. This mission failed and in 1979 he was poor and tired.

In Bombay he gathered some people to teach and his disciples increased, so he moved to Poona where he founded an Ashram (retreat, religious community). It was there he called himself Bhagwan ('God') and also started using orange clothes and a wooden bead necklace with his image for his disciples ('the orange people') called '*Sannyasins*' or '*Sanyas*' ('initiates') who paid for their teaching.

From 1978 he had tried missions in America where Time magazine noted that celebrities had started to come to him (riding on the back of the Human Potential Movement); thousands began to travel as pilgrims to his ashram in Poona. Many were attracted by his tantric sex yoga methods (involving nudity) and free love fornication. He also used a variety of psycho-spiritual therapies.

As the New Age movement spread in Britain and Europe, Rajneesh became more popular. The ashram population grew to 10,000 with thousands of western visitors. 500 centres were opened in 22 cities. By 1984 he had 359,000 followers.

Rajneesh's teaching (in books, tapes, films) were purchased; some were very expensive (e.g. \$170 for a video in 1984). His foundation became a multi-million dollar corporation. Rajneesh garnered a fleet of over 70 Rolls Royce cars (is a car necessary for a god?).

Rajneesh willingly stirred up controversy. He made outrageous statements about sex, repudiating all previous traditional morals: man is a hedonistic god, free to do what he wants; family is to be abandoned.

I watched a documentary on a typical ashram experience in the 80s; it was shocking. Groups of people were locked in a padded room for hours or even days to do what they wanted. After a time, girls were screaming, men were raging, people were fornicating, girls were raped, and people were attacked. Most emerged from this room broken. They were psychologically abused, violently attacked, some had broken arms or worse. Girls were in a state of shock, some having been raped multiple times. All this in the name of religion. I

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<sup>12</sup> Jains don't kill anything.

also saw friends that became Sannyasins psychologically ruined. It tended to be weak, vulnerable people that flocked hopefully to Rajneesh and they eventually left him as wrecks. I know people who, decades later, are still ruined.

Stories abounded of missing people, raped people, murdered people, threats, fires, explosions, abandoned children left to beg in the streets, drug busts, all enacted by disciples who considered this the new definition of love. Despite the scandals, local politicians submitted to the rising political power that Rajneesh had through his wealth.

By the early 80s, Rajneesh had been threatened with assassination and the ashram was guarded and entrants searched. After an explosion, a new headquarters was searched for. Police stated that this was rigged by Rajneesh because he was under investigation for tax arrears and charity fraud, plus criminal allegations. The *India Today* magazine ran a story called, 'The sins of Bhagwan'.

Rajneesh fled to New York and called for sacred cities to be established in all major centres of the world, self-supporting *sannyas*. With deluded devotees, Rajneesh built a new city in Oregon on an old movie ranch where he became doped up, more luxurious, more power-hungry, more sanctimonious, more deceitful, more authoritarian, - a complete hypocrite.

His disciples worked hard for no money. Local homes were purchased as residents were harassed to relocate. Some people feared that the cult would take over the entire state after multiple political manoeuvres. Many also worried that a Jonestown scenario would unfold, especially as Rajneesh was inculcating a fear of apocalypse in his followers. Eventually the attorney general caused the ashram to be abandoned. His main colleague and fixer, 'Ma' Anand Sheela, was arrested on charges of murder and assault.

Rajneesh went to Charlotte N.C. trying to avoid charges of overstaying his visa and arranging sham marriages to gain citizenship. While boarding a plane for Bermuda, he was arrested by federal agents and was found guilty of violating immigration laws. He had a ten year suspended sentence, a \$400,000 fine and was forced to exit the US. In 1986 the last Rajneesh commune in the US was closed. He went to Delhi but did not establish any formal ashrams and died in Poona in 1990.

His teachings are typical Hinduism: man is god, there is no sin but unconsciousness (ignorance of god), monism, pantheism, meditation, reincarnation, etc. But there are also some new ideas: following Rajneesh leads to divinity; disobedience is not a sin but a part of growth; open sex; freedom from inhibitions; abandon the family; god is neither he or she, Jesus was insane, the resurrection is fictitious, '*whatever your belief is, I'm going to destroy it*'.

Rajneesh was simply a typical charismatic, fake guru that managed to use his powers (including magic tricks) to delude vulnerable people. Such gurus are masters of deception. As one falls away, another new one arises.

### **ISKCON [International Society for Krishna Consciousness]**

Better known as 'Hare Krishnas'; a modern school of Vishnu. Popularised by its main adherent George Harrison whose hit song 'My Sweet Lord' is basically worship of Krishna.

The chief worship chant (mantra) is, '*Hare<sup>13</sup> Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama,<sup>14</sup> Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*'.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Hare' has various meanings. Most common is a) another name of the divinity (Vishnu); b) the energy (Shakti) of god.



It is a modern Hindu sect brought to the West (USA) in the 1960s by Abhay Charan De Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada [1896-1977], and based on the teachings of Guru Chaitanya [1486–1534]. Chaitanya instituted Vishnu worship as opposed to the worship of Shiva which prevailed at the time. He stated that Krishna was the supreme personality of God.

The most sacred text is the *Bhagavad Gita*, hence the monotheism as opposed to the pantheism of many Hindus. Incarnations of God are thus stated to be incarnations of Krishna; however, in historical Hinduism Krishna is an avatar of Vishnu and there cannot be an incarnation of Krishna.

Thus ISKCON declares that Jesus is Krishna's son, but still a man and not an incarnation of Krishna

Salvation is getting rid of karmic debt through devotion to Krishna.

Members attend temple services or dedicate themselves to an ascetic, monastic life of service and devotion to Krishna; often shaving their head. The way of Krishna Consciousness forbids alcohol and demands a vegetarian diet.

Followers stress the spiritual benefits of music, ecstatic trance, and chanting as a way of concentrating the mind in devotion, particularly the mantra. Full members often assume orange Hindu dress and customs, and are encouraged to chant and proselytise in the streets.

### **TM [Transcendental Meditation]**

This is based on a yoga method, or spiritual practice, founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the 1960s. It is a philosophy based on a religious exercise, and tenuously founded on the Upanishads. It was greatly popularised by the Beatles who went to India to study under him. After a time they rejected this, except George Harrison who continued in a form of Hinduism. The Beach Boys also became disciples.

Adherents were expected to pay a week's salary to be a member and get their own personal mantra from an adept. Chanting this mantra everyday was supposed to solve life's problems and enable union with the divine.

In the 1970s, after much scepticism, the Maharishi revamped the movement as a scientifically based, non-religious, psychological exercise to relieve stress and give inner peace.

TM is basically pantheistic and the goal is for a person to lose himself in the divine; this is eternal freedom. It advocates a rather aimless Hindu mysticism.

Salvation, such as it is, arises from personal realisation that one is in union with god ('the creative intelligence'). This arises through chanting the mantra and meditating. Life's problems are dismissed as being no problem; there are no problems at all. Sin is dismissed as being forgetfulness (unconsciousness) of being in union with the divine.

It is basically mystical aimlessness. Having studied under him, John Lennon considered that the Maharishi was a sham and wrote the song *Sexy Sadie* to denounce him ('*Sexy Sadie, you made a fool of everyone*').

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<sup>14</sup> The seventh incarnation or *avatar* of the Hindu god Vishnu as the son of King Dasharatha of Oudh. It is also another name for Krishna.

### **Divine Light Mission [Elan Vital]**

Founded in 1971 by Guru Maharaj Ji [1957-]. A wealthy Indian kid, he received revelation aged 13 that he was the saviour of humanity (!). He preached at Glastonbury Fayre in 1971 and gained many British hippie followers. He set up headquarters in Malibu, Los Angeles with a few devotees but in 1972 he gained 2,000 disciples in Colorado. From that point the movement grew exponentially. At one event in 1973 he spoke to 20,000 followers, seated on a throne and worshipped.

His practice was to touch a disciple and transmit divine energy called 'receiving knowledge'; which in reality was transmission of demonic forces. I saw people instantly changed from being normally functioning personalities into zombified, glazed-eyed, half-humans who lost all rational powers and often even articulation. As numbers grew, he appointed 'initiators' to work this transmission of power.

Guru Maharaj Ji was a corrupt fake used by the devil. He lost the support of his own mother whom he banished and who then denounced him as a drunken carouser and set up a rival cult. He amassed mounting debts. He was accused of smuggling. In 1974 he married an air stewardess whom he pronounced a goddess. His extravagant lifestyle led many followers to desert him. This supposed god bought many expensive cars and houses, living in luxury and eating things that Hindu avatars are not supposed to eat. American disciples dropped from over 50,000 to 7,000.

In the 1980s he changed the name of his cult to Elan Vital. He also adapted to western ways, wearing suits. Today his followers number several hundred thousand in many countries.

Teaching is basic Hinduism: man is divine - recognise the god within you (mysticism); pantheism; Maharaj is the incarnation of god; the Holy Spirit is knowledge flowing from Maharaj; enlightenment comes from relinquishing rationality; salvation is knowledge (Gnosticism).

There were five commandments: don't put off till tomorrow what can be done today, meditate, don't doubt, don't avoid *satsang* (gathering for teaching), have faith in god. There was also basic yoga called *siddha* and meditation.

Guru Maharaj Ji is just another deceiving guru that is able to use demonic forces to exhibit certain powers. Just because a person can do something phenomenal or esoteric doesn't mean that they are teaching truth.

### **Others**

There are many more Hindu gurus that have followers in the west, such as Sri ['Holy'] Chimnoy [1931-2007], Sai Baba of Shirdi [d. 1918], Saithya Sai Baba (the self-proclaimed avatar of Shirdi Sai Baba) [1926-2011], Meher Baba [1894-1969] etc. There are hundreds more.

Sects include: Ananda Maga Yoga Society, Satchidananda Ashram Integral Yoga Society, Vedanta Society, Hanuman Foundation, Self Realisation Fellowship, Sikh Dharma Organisation. There are many more.

### **Note**

If there are hundreds of gurus and multiple different sects that all teach different and contradictory doctrines and practices, how can any be true? Disciples that follow one and not another do so for entirely arbitrary and subjective reasons.

### **Character and typical history of Hindu gurus adopted by westerners**

- Career begins with claims of being holy, often when quite young.
- This usually accelerates into claims of being divine; either as being god or being an avatar / messiah of god.
- Titles include: Master, guru, fakir (by Muslims), satguru ('true guru'), saint, avatar, Sri (see glossary), Sai (Sufi term for holy man; in Hindu it means 'flower') etc.
- Claims to have the secret of blissful life.
- Teaching tends to be variations of Hinduism since Hinduism adapts to teach almost anything. Commonly: pantheism, monism, reincarnation, absorption into the divine, self-realisation.
- Practices tend to be a form of yoga or meditation. Some use kundalini yoga to express power (this gets people to fall over, scream, laugh or behave oddly after being touched).
- Usually claims to resolve karma and end reincarnation.
- Often there is the use of prestidigitation, or magic tricks, to astound followers, such as producing flower petals or gemstones out of thin air. Saithya Sai Baba was very good at this.
- Usually there is a basic following in India before being accepted in the west, often starting in America.
- Usually there are demands for money to begin membership and to continue learning.
- The guru becomes very rich and develops a large organisation.
- Ashrams are then set up in multiple countries.
- Wealth corrupts the guru who begins a licentious lifestyle with the trappings of hedonism (cars, houses, women, food, alcohol, drugs etc.).
- There are often scandals of various sorts: hurt people, abused people, dead people, missing people, tax evasion, fraud, corruption allegations etc.
- In many (not all) cases there are police investigations followed by charges and convictions.
- Membership levels diminish as the guru is scandalised in the media.
- The movement sometimes collapses as a result, but sometimes it reinvents itself and grows again.
- Sometimes the guru dies in scandal; at other times he continues quietly in India.
- Hard line fanatical followers continue the teaching of the guru even after his death and even after scandals. The corporation continues to make money.

### **Examples of modern cults arising from Buddhism**

- Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.
- Soka Gakkai.
- Tibetan Buddhism.
- Zen Buddhism.
- The Friends of the western Buddhist Order.
- The New Kadampa Tradition.
- The Dhammakaya Foundation.
- Shambhala International.
- Reiki.

- Reiyukai.
- Gedatsukai.
- Seicho no Ie.
- Shinnyoen.
- Rissho Koseikai.
- Kodo Kyodan.
- Bentenshu.
- God Light Association.
- Agonshu.
- Kofuku no Kagaku.

## Facts arising from the comparisons

### **All religions are not the same**

It is impossible to maintain that all religions are the same, clearly they have utterly contradictory ideas. You cannot unite a religion that has a heaven and a hell with a religion that denies both.

### **Hinduism and Christianity are opposites**

Hinduism is all embracing, absorbing ideas (even contradictory ideas) from all other religions while Christianity excludes them insisting on one Saviour and one salvation.

### **You cannot pick desired items from all the religions**

The various religions are self-contained. You cannot pick bits of one and bits of another and be true. For example, the Bible commands that one must not add to Scripture or take away from it, but you have to do both if you try to combine it with another religion. The Bible also condemns syncretism, the mixing of the true religion with another religion. The Bible also condemns idolatry, which is involved in adopting other religions.

### **Religions with obvious bad ethics cannot be worth following**

Faced with a choice between loving everybody (Christianity) and killing all those that do not follow your religion, clearly the latter is wicked and not to be considered.

Similarly, a religion that persecutes people within their religion, e.g. those placed on a lower scale (i.e. Hindu caste system), cannot be a good religion.

### **Religions with a history of brutality and violence cannot be a good religion**

Those religions which history proves killed millions in horrific ways are appalling. Beheading those who do not submit to your religion proves that you are not a righteous person and not to be trusted.

*What about Christianity; has it not started all wars?*

This is absolute nonsense and hardly worth considering.

First, Christianity did not start all wars, or even most wars. Thousands of wars were started by politicians for money, greed and power. Many were started for land-grabbing. Others were started by different religions to Christianity, notably Islam. Others began by a local revolution against oppression.

There were some European wars that were supposedly based upon opposing 'Christians', such as the Thirty Years War or the Smalkald War. In such wars there must be some observations.

Firstly true Christians are commanded not to kill, so genuine Christians will not go to war.

Secondly, some nations that claimed to be Christian (which is hard to prove) reacted in self-defence and not aggressively.

Genuine Christians throughout history have worked tirelessly to prevent wars.

The commands of Christ are what count, not the actions of people that claim to be 'Christian' but are not. Christ commanded us to do good to all, to serve all, to love all. Christianity is the opposite of a warlike religion.

### **Only Christianity has a saviour that rose from the dead**

This is the key touchstone; no other religion has a saviour that is alive in heaven.

There is no space here to write a full defence of the resurrection but key points are:

- Jesus definitely died on the cross. The centurion in charge could be executed for failing to achieve this. In any case, a spear was thrust into Jesus' side to check that he was dead. Thus Jesus did not recover and get out of the tomb, which had a large stone covering it requiring the strength of more than one man to move.
- Jesus was seen alive three days later by multiple people who did not expect him.
- Jesus manifested himself later to many other people, including four hundred at once.
- If Jesus did not rise, why did not contemporary witnesses disprove it?
- If Jesus was not raised, why did the Jewish priests not produce the body to stop the growth of Jesus worship?
- Contemporary secular historians, like Josephus, testified to the resurrection of Jesus.
- What else can explain the dramatic change of character in the disciples of Jesus. Before the cross they were weak, scared, puzzled, disenchanted. After seeing Jesus they were bold enough to face persecution and suffering with joy, ignoring attacks in order to continue to preach Jesus. They even went willingly into death.
- Every attempt in history to disprove the resurrection has failed.
- Many sceptics that investigated the resurrection in order to disprove it ended up becoming Christians.

### **Only Christianity has a historic track record of wonderful charitable good**

All the basic charitable aspects of western society derive from Christian principles and love. These include: the first organised hospitals, the first orphanages, the first schools, the first universities, charities for the poor, charities for the sick, charities for the old and so on. Florence Nightingale's reforms of military hospitals were based upon Christian charity and Biblical principles. Thousands of lives were saved thereby.

The basic principles of British Common Law is derived from Biblical laws. The judicial system was based on swearing upon the Bible until recently. British Parliamentary democracy emanated from Christian principles and was developed by Christians in power, such as Oliver Cromwell.

Most of the key social reforming movements were started by Christians, including: child working reforms, the abolition of slavery, prison reforms etc.

Very many of the scientists that have brought about modern technologies were Christians.

## Why it is impossible to combine all religions

It is not possible to combine all religions. To maintain that all religions are equally roads to God is simply stupid because they contain multiple contradictions; such as:

### Scared texts

Christianity: there is one Scripture – the Bible, which was inspired by God through men.

Others: There are no sacred texts; there are three; there are thousands. Scripture is written by God; by men; by prophets; by one prophet. The canon was closed 2,000 years ago; 1,000 years ago; a few hundred years ago; it is still open.

### God

Christianity: there is one personal God who subsists in three equal Persons. God is a transcendent God existing in a unity of three Persons.

Others: There are no gods; there is one God; there are many gods; there are millions of gods. There is a personal God; there is an impersonal god; there is a universal soul. God comprises many righteous men; god includes animals. God exists in many idols; God condemns making any idols.

### Christ

Christianity: Christ is God as well as man and the only mediator.

Others: Christ is merely a man; Christ is merely a prophet; Christ does not exist; Christ is denied and blasphemed.

### Creation

Christianity: God created the universe out of nothing.

Others: There is no creation at all; the world is an illusion; creation hatched from a giant egg; the world is merely an illusion.

### Man in sin

Christianity: Man is born in sin and needs salvation.

Others: Sin does not exist; sin is just a hindrance to progress, sin is just ignorance. Man is good; man is morally neutral. Man is slowly becoming a god; man is already a god; man is a part of the universe.

### Salvation

Christianity: Salvation from sin and death is by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for those who believe in him.

Others: There is no salvation. Salvation is having the right mind. Salvation comes through chanting; it comes through right action; it comes through inaction; it comes through stillness; it comes through living many lives.

### Practical life

Christianity: Man is called to do good and obey God's commandments

Others: Man is not commanded to do anything at all. All men are equal; all men are not equal but are divided into classes. Man's good works earn salvation. Man offers sacrifices and does not offer sacrifices. Men must perform ascetic disciplines; men can be hedonistic. Man should follow mysticism; man must not follow mysticism. Man can eat animals; man cannot harm any creature or even a rock; man can eat pork; man cannot eat pork. Man can drink alcohol; man cannot drink alcohol. Man must go on a pilgrimage to certain places; there is no pilgrimage. Man must not be violent; man must kill enemies of god.

### **Worship**

Christianity: Men must only worship God through Christ and no one else.

Others: Man must worship Allah and no one else; man must worship Krishna, Buddha, Vishnu, Agni, Ahura Mazda, and many more. Men should worship themselves; man should worship no one at all. Worship involves complicated rituals; worship involves no rituals at all. Worship involves special days of the week; worship involves no special days at all. Worship has annual festivals; worship involves no festivals. There is worship of god, a man, the universe and the devil.

### **The end and judgment**

Christianity: God judges men through Christ and condemns the wicked to hell. The righteous dwell with God on a restored earth.

Others: There is no end but continual cycles of ascent and descent. Judgment Day has already come. Judgment is merely symbolic and not real. There is no hell. There are seven hells. Hell is merely symbolic; hell is a real place. Hell is eternal, temporary and a few months at the same time. There is a Purgatory and yet there isn't. There is a golden age millennium and there isn't.

### **Heaven**

Christianity: heaven is currently the domain of God and angels but after the end God dwells with men on a restored earth as well.

Others: Heaven does not exist; heaven is merely symbolic. Heaven is now; heaven is in future. There is a physical heaven; there is a spiritual heaven. There is merely absorption into the world soul. At the end men are annihilated. Heaven involves consciousness; heaven is unconscious. There is one heaven; there are many heavens. Heaven involves sensual pleasure; heaven does not involve sensual pleasures. Men in heaven cease to be individuals; men in heaven are still individuals.

### **Conclusion**

One cannot blend all religions together; they are mutually exclusive and constantly contradict each other.

Some religions even violently contradict aspects of its own religion. There are multiple contradictory variations within Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

Many religions violently persecute religions or sects that fragmented off from the base religion; thus Hindus and Muslims, persecute their own people to death. Foundational religions also persecute other key religions. Islam kills and persecutes all other religions. Hindus and Sikhs kill Muslims.

Some religions seek peace (Jainism / Taoism / Bahai) while others seek world domination (Islam / Judaism).

The idea of unifying all religions into a compatible whole is just ludicrous.

## **Is doing nothing an option?**

No; it is not.

Like it or not, you are going to die. Do you not want to be assured of safety and security after death? Do you not desire a peaceful and happy eternity? If so, then you must make a commitment.

The Bible explains that after death is judgment and this will determine your eternal future. Only those who have trusted in Jesus and obeyed God will be saved from an eternal hell.

It is in your own interest to consider the claims of Christ, who alone promised forgiveness of sins, eternal life and proved his credentials by being raised from the dead.

## **Is atheism an option? [Reject religion]**

This is the denial of the existence of God or any other supernatural being. It is the denial of all religions. Atheists are usually rationalists, humanists, individualists, materialists or existentialists.

Atheism always breaks down in the right circumstances; it was commonly said that there were no atheists in the WWI trenches where death was imminent. The most vehement atheist has been seen to pray to God when faced with a dire threat.

History shows that it is the natural inclination of man to worship a divine creator, whatever the circumstances of the age or society. Primitive societies and deeply intellectual societies in history have all worshipped God, however feebly. Man is a worshipper. If he fails to worship God he worships himself or something worse.

Like agnosticism, atheism fails to properly appreciate the resurrection of Christ. It is a denial of facts.

## **Is agnosticism an option? [Be uncommitted]**

Agnosticism (from Greek *agnostos*, 'unknown') really means religious uncertainty. The agnostic holds that phenomena which cannot be proved or disproved by rational, material means (such as the existence of God) cannot be the subjects of belief or disbelief.

At first this appears to be a sane position; it trusts nothing until it is proven; but this is not a sensible reaction to religious feelings. For example, an agnostic does not believe in prayer because there is no rational proof for it; yet there have been numerous examples of powerful, specific answers to prayer that have no logical explanation to reason but are verifiable.

The chief matter to confront agnosticism is the resurrection of Jesus, which has multiple circumstantial proofs, sufficient to prove a case in a court of law. Hundreds of eyewitnesses, whose lives were threatened by asserting this fact, cannot be gainsaid.



Agnosticism also has no answer for the prospect of life after death that can be either bliss or condemnation depending upon belief in Christ or denial of Christ. Is agnosticism worth taking a chance on eternal damnation?

## **A short testimony**

In writing this work I can speak from experience as well as research.

As a teenager, despite a formal and dutiful Anglican Christian church background, I rejected the church and earnestly studied all forms of eastern religion and faith from about the age of 16. This followed a spiritual experience or revelation that I cannot explain or describe, but it triggered seeking.

I was especially interested in Hinduism, devouring the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads and courted with Transcendental Meditation (though I rejected it). I chanted to Krishna on occasion. I also heard Guru Maharaj Ji at the first Glastonbury Fayre; fortunately I was not taken in (unlike many friends who were captivated and became glazed-eye zombies). From Hinduism I learned to give my life to God alone.

I studied Buddhism to a degree and strongly admired Siddhartha Gautama, reading his life story in one night in a friend's room while they slept. I also read books about Zen Buddhism and mysticism, and discussed these often, though I struggled with the practice of Zen, which made no sense to me.

I studied the Tao-te-Ching and regularly sought divination from the I Ching and once the Egyptian Book of the Dead. I read Confucius and the Persian philosopher Omar Khayyam [1048-1131].

I met the founders of Baha'i in Britain and discussed their faith. I also got involved in the outskirts of occultism, such as spiritualism and clairvoyance (I knew numerologists, Tarot readers, Wiccans, students of Crowley and people who could astral travel). I read Aldous Huxley, Herman Hesse, Hippie underground literature and experimented with drugs.

I read works on Native American mythology and wisdom, Greek mythology, Celtic mythology, Teutonic myths and Scandinavian legends. I even read Voltaire and studied several philosophers to little avail. Though I had rejected the formal church I still read the Bible and admired Jesus.

After studying many religions, by the time I was 19 I tried to piece together the bits I favoured (I could even then see that bits were ridiculous or contradictory) and slowly gathered together my own combined philosophy on faith.

Having done all this, I tried to live my life and find answers to key questions – it all did me no good whatsoever. When life became turbulent and stressful none of these religions sustained me. Though I had read all their answers, I felt I had no answers to really communing with God or being assured of eternal life.

At this point I met some genuine Christians in what was then a sort of mini revival at the time (1971) at Art College. After first challenging them strongly in debates, I was impressed by their peaceful faith and went to a prayer meeting in a home. Here I met with the Lord Jesus Christ in a most powerful way that I cannot describe.

Though I was a changed person, I did not really know it and did not call myself a Christian. Later I was talking to two Christian girls at my flat and I was compelled to burn all my books on the occult and mysticism; no one told me to do this. As the fire consumed the books in the garden, the local cathedral bells began to chime on a Friday night.

I went back to the girls and said, '*I suppose I must be a Christian*'; and that was the beginning of my confession and repentance. I joined the vigorous Christian community at college and publicly testified to my many friends.

From that point I became a most ardent believer in Christ, studying everything I could and devouring knowledge. Within two weeks I gave a message at my college Christian Union, based on my experience, and became a pillar in that community. Within a few months I gave a message on the authorship of John's Gospel. Shortly after that I gave a message on the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation and the New Birth at my home church. These were faltering steps in developing my calling to ministry.

From the time of my conversion I was devoted to Jesus Christ and remain so to this day. Throughout a turbulent and very difficult life, God is my greatest friend and helper. Without the fellowship of the Lord through the Holy Spirit I would literally have not survived what I have been through.

Through studying the Bible and Christian fellowship, I have answers to all my urgent questions. Right from the start I was assured of eternal life through Christ and eternal security. I understood where I came from and where I was going. I knew that God was my Father and that Jesus would never let any one snatch me from his hand.

To this day I devote my time to glorifying God and worshipping Jesus 47 years later. I am more than ever committed to God through Jesus Christ than ever.

So, I don't write about religions academically but from experience. They all fall to pieces in comparison with the glory of Christ.

I implore you to flee to Jesus and seek the mercy of God; be reconciled to God.

**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Rm 3:23**

***There is* not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Eccles 7:20**

**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 Jn 1:8**

**No one living is righteous. Ps 143:2**

**We are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags. Isa 64:6**

**For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rm 6:23**

***There is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus. 1 Tim 2:5**

**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 1 Tim 1:15**

**The Father has sent the Son *as* Saviour of the world. 1 Jn 4:14**

**We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Jn 4:42**

**He [Jesus] is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him. Heb 7:25**

He Himself is the propitiation [appeasement] for our sins. 1 Jn 2:2

Acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God. Jer 3:13

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn 1:9

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Rm 10:9-10

Repent, and believe in the gospel. Mk 1:15

Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Acts 2:38

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. Jn 3:31

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Acts 16:31

Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Jn 3:15

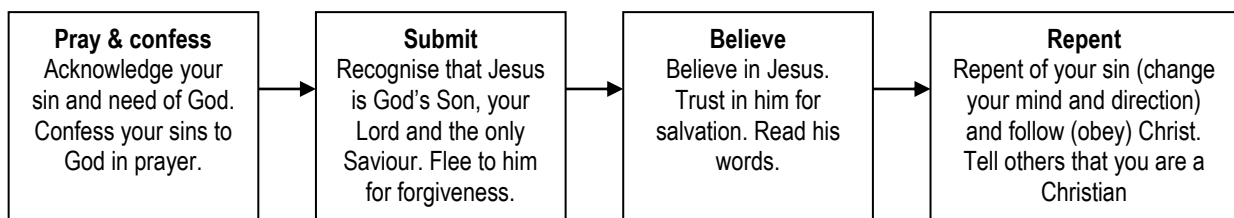
'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' ... this He spoke concerning the Spirit. Jn 7:38-39

We have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jn 6:69

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Rm 5:1-2

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Col 1:13-14

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Eph 1:7



## Conclusion

Living on earth provides multiple challenges to admit a divine, supreme power; only a fool would deny this.

Observing the wonders of nature that are inexplicable, seeing the power of wind and waves, examining the intricate structure of a human eye, knee or heart, observing the

moon being at exactly the right distance, noting that the earth is exactly at the right distance from the sun, seeing the intricate wonder of tiny creatures or even microbiology – all demand that there is an intelligent Creator. Even Darwin admitted that evolutionary theory (and it still is merely a theory) could not begin to explain the human eye.

Faced with the wonders of life on earth one has to come to terms with recognising that there is a God who made us all. If so then that God should be worshipped. Societies from time immemorial have come to this conclusion and have all been worshippers. Even when religion was forcibly put down, such as in Russia under Soviet rule or China under Communist totalitarianism, religion flowered after a time of persecution. There is a current renaissance of Christianity in Russia under Putin and millions of Christians meeting in homes in China. Faith cannot be killed or stifled; it flowers when attacked.

Modern atheists put their trust in rationalism, materialism, mechanism and scientism and even stated that religion would disappear; yet religion is more powerful than ever. The Enlightenment did not destroy the innate need of man to worship God; neither did the Enlightenment help humanity, which has seen world wars and global strife since then. Scientism gave us the nuclear bomb, the ballistic missile, depleted uranium bombs, anti-personnel mines, and so on. Rationalism gave us concentration camps, gulags, genocide, man-made pestilences, eugenics, slave labour, human trafficking, and so on. Rationalism and scientism provide no answer to the inner needs of mankind.

Only God can give man liberty of spirit and fulfil his inner needs. Only Jesus Christ can provide salvation and forgiveness of sins freely to all who genuinely seek them by faith. Only the Bible truly answers all the vital questions of mankind: who am I, where do I come from, why was I born, where am I going, what comes after death? Science won't help you understand these things; but God will explain these matters through his word, the Bible.

So, there are many religions and man has many poor excuses to avoid observing a religion, but only Christianity will satisfy the hungry heart. Only Jesus Christ will give you truth and liberty. Only the true God saves.

## Select glossary<sup>15</sup>

### Alchemy

Essentially a mixture of science and witchcraft. A pseudo-science originating independently in China, Greece, and India in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, seeking power of nature and especially the transmutation of metals into gold or seeking to manufacture an elixir of life, a universal medicine. Early alchemy degenerated into superstition and mysticism. Translations of Arabic alchemical texts led in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to a revival of alchemy in Europe. During the Renaissance alchemy fell into disrepute.

### Armageddon

Greek, from Hebrew *har mēgiddōn* 'hill of Megiddo' (lit. 'place of troops'), which is actually on the plain of Esdraelon to the south of Haifa near Mt Carmel in Galilee. This valley was historically a great battlefield for Israel (victory of Barak over Canaanites, and Gideon over Midianites, but also the place of the death of Saul and Josiah).

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<sup>15</sup> I acknowledge a partial debt here to the New Oxford Dictionary, [The Oxford Encyclopaedia](#), Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> century Dictionary, Pears Cyclopaedia and various other works, including those in the Bibliography. I have edited these according to my own knowledge and experience.

A symbolic last battle between good and evil in Revelation [Rev 16:16, 'And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon'] when the seventh angel pours out his bowl of wrath. Symbolic of the end of the world. It is not found anywhere else in the New Testament or the Septuagint Old Testament.

Meggido was chosen as the place of great slaughter and mourning for its historical connections but there is no mountain there, which emphasises its symbolic function. It is not a real place but in apocalyptic symbolism it refers to the general slaughter of mankind at the end. In fact the root word behind Meggido (*gadam*) means 'slaughter'.

Fools have variously claimed this event to be the battles of Austerlitz, Moscow, Leipzig or Waterloo. Many more claim there will be a human earthly battle at Meggido in the future.

Islam has a variation of this event, which it borrowed from Christianity via Nestorianism.

### **Ashram**

Sanskrit *āśrama* 'hermitage'. A place of religious retreat or community life modelled on the Indian ashram. In the Indian subcontinent or in Hindu cults: a hermitage, monastic commune or other religious community.

### **Astral travelling, astral projection**

Mystical experiences whereby a person presumes that their soul has left their body and they view their own material body from above. Claims to be able to visit other astral dimensions (places beyond material reality).

The CIA used adepts in this mystical discipline to spy on remote places based in a centre in Fort Bragg, USA. In reality, it is not the human soul leaving the body (which would be death) but communicating with evil spirits that masquerade as the soul, giving information or visions from a remote place. The same communication happens in seances.

### **Avatar**

Sanskrit *avatāra* 'descent', from *ava* 'down' + *tar-* 'to cross'.

Hinduism a manifestation of a deity or released soul in bodily form on earth; an incarnate divine teacher.

An *avatar* is born independently of the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*); it ensures that divine will is maintained on Earth, either by establishing new religious movements, or by intervening in human affairs. Most common are the ten *avatars* of Vishnu: Matsya, the fish; Kūrma, the tortoise; Varāha, the boar; Narasimha, the man-lion; Vāmana, the dwarf; Rāma the axe-wielder; Rāma, the prince in the Ramayana epic; Krishna; Buddha; and Kalki, who is yet to appear.

### **Bhakti**

Hinduism: devotional worship directed to one supreme deity, usually Vishnu (especially in his incarnations as Rama and Krishna) or Shiva, by whose grace salvation may be attained by all regardless of sex, caste, or class. It is followed by the majority of Hindus today.

### **Buddha**

Sanskrit, literally 'enlightened', past participle of *budh* 'know'.

Title given to the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama [c.563–c.460 BC]. Born an Indian prince, he renounced wealth and family to become an ascetic, and after achieving enlightenment while meditating, taught all who came to learn from him.

Buddhism: a person who has attained full enlightenment.

### **Chakra**

Sanskrit *cakra* 'wheel or circle', from an Indo-European base meaning 'turn', shared by 'wheel'.

Indian philosophy: the centres of spiritual power in the human body, usually considered to be seven in number. [See 'Kundalini'.]

### **Dao / Tao**

Chinese, literally (right) way.

Chinese philosophy) the absolute principle underlying the universe, combining within itself the principles of yin and yang and signifying the way, or code of behaviour, that is in harmony with the natural order. The interpretation of Tao in the Tao-te-Ching developed into the philosophical religion of Taoism.

### **Devi**

The great goddess of Hinduism.

Devi represents the different aspects of Shiva's wife under various names according to the forms she takes. As Parvati, mother of Ganesha [the elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati, the patron deity of prosperity and learning] and Karttikeya, she is the beautiful, benevolent goddess of the mountains and opponent of the demons.

As Kali, a goddess of fertility and time, she personifies the opposing forces of creation and destruction, and assumes a malevolent aspect: a black, hideous old woman, with a necklace of skulls, a belt of severed heads and a protruding tongue. As Durgā, she is the fierce goddess, often identified with Kali, depicted with eight or ten arms, riding a tiger or lion, and slaying the buffalo demon. [See 'Kali'.]

### **Dharma**

Hinduism; 'duty', 'responsibility', 'the way'.

The eternal law of the cosmos, inherent in the very nature of things. The cosmic law both upheld by the gods and expressed in right behaviour by humans. In Buddhism, it is interpreted as universal truth or law, especially as proclaimed by the Buddha. In Jainism, it is conceived both as virtue and as a kind of fundamental substance, the medium of motion.

### **Gnosticism**

An 2<sup>nd</sup> century blend of eastern and Greek religious thinking based upon a disciple gaining secret knowledge (Gk. 'Gnosis') from an adept. Various methods were used to do this. It was a dualistic religion (matter is evil, spirit is good) that could be ascetic or hedonistic. Many Gnostics tried to combine Christianity with paganism. There were also many offshoots, such as Manichaeism.

### **Guru**

A Hindu spiritual teacher. From Hindi and Punjabi, from Sanskrit *guru* 'weighty, grave' (compare with Latin *gravis*), hence 'elder', 'teacher'.

### **Hermetism**

A mixture of Greek philosophy, eastern religion and Egyptian pagan magic. A type of alchemy. Hermetism refers to the Greek God Hermes.

**Kali**

Hindi, 'the Black One'.

Kali is another name for the great goddess Shakti or Devi, the consort of Shiva, who is worshipped independently of him. Kali represents destructive, primal energy, and is associated with disease and death. She is often depicted as a fearsome and bloody figure bearing weapons. There have been many Kali cults that led to great violence in her name.

**Karma**

Sanskrit: 'action, effect'. The Hindu / Buddhist concept of the law of cause and effect. The sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences.

**Krishna**

Hinduism: one of the most popular gods, the eighth and most important avatar or incarnation of Vishnu. He is worshipped in several forms: as the child god whose miracles and pranks are extolled in the Puranas; as the divine cowherd whose erotic exploits, especially with his favourite, Radha, have produced both romantic and religious literature; and as the divine charioteer who preaches to Arjuna on the battlefield in the Bhagavad Gita. Most westerners that follow Hinduism worship Krishna rather than the old traditional gods.

**Kundalini**

Sanskrit, literally 'snake'.

A radical type of Indian yoga that seeks to release the 'serpent power' or female power in the body's chakra coiled at the base of the spine. A system of meditation directed towards the release of such energy.

It is very powerful and produces wild phenomena in the adherent, such as screaming, laughing, making wild noises, impersonating animals, falling over, slithering, dancing etc. Most gurus do not activate this power (usually by suggestion and a touch) because it is so dangerous; sometimes the adherent is psychologically damaged as a result; some are physically hurt.

**Maya**

Sanskrit *māyā*, from *mā* 'create'. Hinduism & Buddhism: the power by which the universe becomes manifest; the illusion or appearance of the phenomenal world.

**Mahdi**

In popular Muslim belief, a spiritual and temporal leader who will rule before the end of the world and restore religion and justice. The title has been claimed by various leaders; the most widely known of these was Muhammad Ahmad of Dongola in Sudan [1843–85], who proclaimed himself Mahdi in 1881 and launched a political and revolutionary movement which captured Khartoum and overthrew the Egyptian regime, killing British General Gordon [1833–85].

For Shi'ite Muslims the title 'Mahdi' refers to the twelfth imam.

**Monism**

All existence, the universe, is one, whether there is any divinity or not.

**Neo-Platonism**

Neo-Platonism was developed by the followers of Plotinus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

It combined ideas from Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and the Stoics with oriental mysticism. Predominant in pagan Europe until the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. It envisages the human soul rising above the imperfect material world through virtue and contemplation towards knowledge of the transcendent One.

It was a major influence on early Christian writers (who used its methodology not its theology), on later medieval and Renaissance thought, and on Islamic philosophy.

### **Nirvana**

Sanskrit, 'extinguished' or 'blown out'. Describing the state of bliss entered into by enlightened or liberated beings, before or after death.

In Hinduism, nirvana is the release from endless rebirths (samsara) into the highest form of consciousness in which the soul finds union with Brahman.

Buddhism: a transcendent state in which there is neither suffering, desire, nor sense of self, and the subject is released from the effects of karma. It represents the final goal of Buddhism: the perfect suspension of volition and cognition, and the removal of all traces of personal emotion.

### **Pantheism**

Everything is God; the universe is divine.

### **Sanskrit**

The ancient language of Hindus in India, belonging to a branch of the Indo-European family of languages.

It flourished in India as the language of learning for more than three millennia, well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but has been gradually eclipsed by English and the modern Indian languages (e.g. Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati) to which, as a spoken language, it gave rise, and is now used only for religious purposes. It is written in the Devanagari script.

### **Shiva**

Sanskrit, 'the kind or auspicious one'.

One of the most important of the deities found in the Hindu tradition. With Brahma and Vishnu, Shiva forms the Hindu tri-theism (*trimurti*).

Sometimes called Rudra (Sanskrit, 'howler'), Shiva may have evolved from an Aryan deity, who was the dreaded god of the storm and of the dead. Shiva is worshipped in several apparently contradictory aspects. He is seen as a giver of blessings, and is also a symbol of sensuality, represented by the *lingam* or phallus. On the other hand, he is sometimes depicted as an ascetic, seated in meditation in the Himalayas.

Shiva is better known as the god of destruction and dissolution. In his manifestation as Shiva Natarāja, the four-armed Lord of the Dance, he tramples on the forces of ignorance and chaos, and keeps creation in balance. His female consort appears variously as Pārvatī (see Devi), Durgā, or Kālī, and he is sometimes also paired with the great goddess, Shakti.

In benevolent aspect he lives with Pārvatī in the Himalayas and rides his bull, Nandi. In human form he is often shown with three eyes, wearing a skull necklace entwined with writhing snakes, and carrying a trident.



Shaivism, the cult of Shiva, is, with Vaishnavism and Shaktism, one of the three main forms of Hinduism. [See 'Kali'.]

### **Shakti**

A name of the great goddess or Devī, one of the most important of the deities worshipped by Hindus. As the Earth mother she is the object of widespread popular devotion in India. She is also the consort of Shiva, but is worshipped independently of him. In her benevolent aspect she is known as Umā, Pārvatī, or Ambikā ('little mother'), while in her fearful and destructive aspect she appears as Kālī or Durgā.

### **Sri [Sree, Shri, Shree]**

The core Sanskrit meaning is 'diffusing light of radiance' but it devolved to meaning 'grace, splendour, beauty, glory, holy' etc.

Si and Sri are also used as a polite term of address equivalent to the old English form 'esquire' or 'mister'. In terms of deities and gurus it was a term of veneration, in which case it means 'holy'. It is also used as a title for certain deities as: Rama, Krishna, Saraswati and Radha; thus 'Sri Krishna'.

### **Suttee**

In Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh practice, bodies are usually burned on funeral pyres built close to flowing water, into which the ashes are cast. If possible, devout Hindus return the ashes of the dead to the River Ganges in India.

It was traditionally expected that Hindu wives of a dead husband would throw themselves on to the funeral pyre. The practice was ended by the British in the Raj.

### **Thuggee**

The robbery and murder practised by the Hindu 'Thugs' in accordance with their ritual.

A 'Thug' (from Hindi *thag*, 'swindler') was a devotee of the Hindu goddess Kali, who was worshipped through ritual murder and sacrifice of travellers.

The thuggee centre was in remote central India, where victims were strangled. Eradication of the brotherhoods was difficult because of the secrecy of the cult. It was largely suppressed in the 1830s by the detective skills of William Sleeman, appointed to the task by Lord William Bentinck. Indians welcomed the intervention, and there has been no revival, but the term passed into the English language.

### **Yoga**

(Sanskrit, 'yoking', 'union') Any form of religious activity, particularly within Hinduism, designed to harness the practitioner to the knowledge of the divine. Hindu spiritual and ascetic discipline, a part of which, including breath control, simple meditation, and the adoption of specific bodily postures, is widely practised for health and relaxation.

In particular, yoga is one of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy, based on the yoga Sutras (doctrinal works) of Patañjali. The highest yogic form, Rāja yoga, aims at the spiritual purification and self-understanding of the practitioner through a series of eight stages, requiring expert teaching and guidance. The first four teach restraint and religious observance, followed by physical preparations involving postures (*āsanas*, such as the Lotus position) and breathing exercises (*prānāyāma*). The next stages involve the withdrawal of the senses, concentration of the mind, and meditation, until the final stage, samādhi, or union with the divine, is achieved.

The yoga widely known in the West is based on Hatha yoga, which forms one aspect of the ancient Hindu system of religious and ascetic observance and meditation, the highest form of which is raja yoga

In Western countries, the first four stages (the basis of Hatha yoga) have become popular as a form of exercise and relaxation, and the control of breathing and the use of postures in particular have been adapted to numerous fitness courses.

In a wider sense, yoga refers to the different paths leading to a spiritual liberation (moksha); as well as Rāja yoga, these include karma yoga (selfless action), *bhakti*-yoga, devotion to a personal deity, and *jñāna*-yoga, the way of intellectual knowledge. Yoga is not limited to Hindu practice and may be found within other religions, such as Tibetan Buddhism.

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