

Brief Survey of World Religions

The information in this overview comes mainly from Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>) and from a wonderful introduction to Asian religions by Paul Alan Laughlin.

Laughlin, P. A. (2005) *Getting Oriented: What every Christian Should Know about Eastern Religions, but Probably Doesn't*. Polebridge Press, Santa Rosa, CA.

Two concepts of the nature of God—two families of religions

1. Family I (monotheism): God is outside the universe, created the universe but no part of the universe is god or divine. God is not part of existence. God does not exist as things exist. No thing (nothing) is sacred.
 - a. Zoroastrianism (Parsee) (700 BCE) (Persian monotheism)
 - b. Judaism (600 BCE)
 - c. Christianity (30 CE)
 - d. Islam (600 CE)
2. Family II (monism): God is the force, energy, substance from which the universe is made and to which it returns. God is the life force in the universe. God is energy (modern physics says all matter is made of energy). Everything (every thing) is made of God stuff.
 - a. Hinduism (1500 BCE)
 - b. Buddhism (500 BCE)
 - c. Taoism (500 BCE)
 - d. Confucianism (500 BCE)

Prehistoric/ Animistic period

1. Animism: Everything is alive.
2. There are spirits everywhere. There is a tree god, a god of the river, a mountain god, a god of the wind, a god of the rain, a wolf god, an elephant god, a lion god, a tiger god, a snake god, etc.
3. Whether the crops grow, the sick are cured, there is a drought or rain, depends on the spirits.
4. If you make the spirits angry bad things happen to you.
5. If you please the spirits good things happen.
6. If you make them angry you can sometimes appease the spirits by doing things for them – feed them, promise you won't upset them any more, sacrifice to them
7. You can sometimes live in harmony with the spirits – usually involves 'respect'
8. Certain talismans/ charms/ incantations can be used to control the spirits.
9. The witchdoctor/ shaman/ priest is skilled at controlling the spirits. Derives power from his/her ability to control the spirits
10. One of the basic elements of these religions is fear. Tribe is controlled by fear.
11. Also emphasize living in harmony and respect for nature

- Xenophobia: fear of strangers or foreigners. Our spirits help us in battle, protect us from our enemies, and fight spiritual wars and battles against the spirits of the foreigners.

Polytheistic/ Ancient Period

- Mainly tribal religions. When the tribe was wiped out or era ended, the religion was no longer practiced. Examples: Greek, Roman, Egyptian, early Chinese religions.
- Emergence of gods with superhuman characteristics (Vishnu, Krishna, Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Baal, etc.)
- Gods had adventures, growth of myth and legend, stories with morals, stories of courage, stories that taught important lessons and dealt with the “Hard Questions.”
- God was like Superman, or Santa Claus. Some of the people believed in the gods when they were a child, and as an adult they recognized the important lessons taught but didn’t take the stories literally. Others understood the gods to be literal beings.
- Priests respected for their wise council concerning the regulation of human affairs, not just fear (though their power was feared as well).
- Beginnings of religious institutions. Temple cultures emerge. Social functions of religion emerge. (Provide prostitutes for the community, etc.)
- Some of the gods were needful creatures.
- Many of the gods were indifferent to human well-being. Didn’t pay attention to humans unless they did something to make them mad or unless they needed them for something.

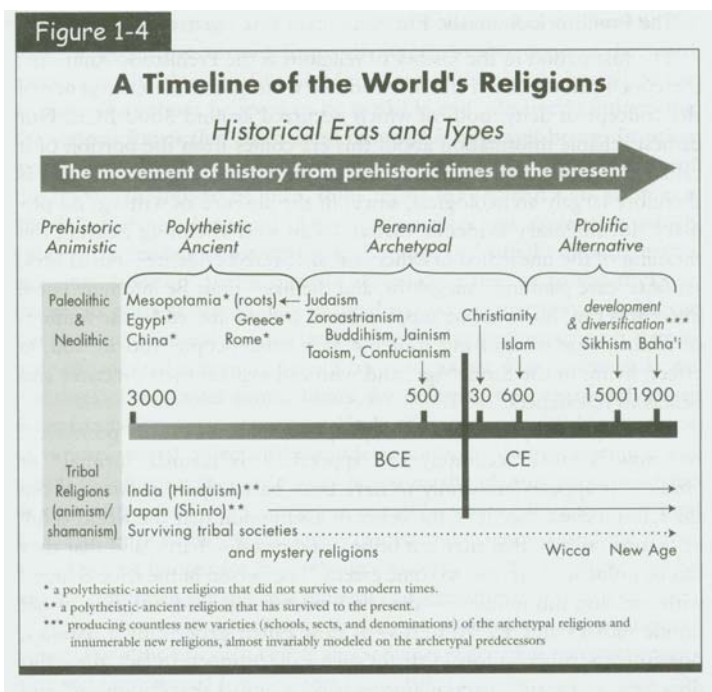


Figure 1: Timeline from Laughlin (2005)

Example

1. Gilgamesh epic: one of the oldest human writings. Dates from Polytheistic/ Ancient period (origins nearly 3000 BCE). Written long before the Bible.
2. Story of Noah as reported in Gilgamesh epic: gods upset because humans were so noisy, disturbed their sleep, regretted having made them, decided to wipe them out with a flood. They liked Noah so they spared him.
3. After the flood, there was nobody left to make sacrifices to the gods. As a result, the gods were starving to death. The big main god is described as leaning against the mountain, faint with hunger, afraid he is going to die of starvation. He regrets having wiped out the humans. Finally, Noah gets off the ark, builds an altar and makes a sacrifice. The gods feed on the smoke and smell of the roasting flesh.
4. Gods described as hovering around the smoke of the fire like flies around a pile of manure.

Theological concepts emerging in the prehistoric and polytheistic periods.

Appeasement: If the gods are angry, you can do things to appease them. If you live right the river god won't flood your village, the mountain god won't make the volcano erupt, etc. If you say the right incantation over the deer when you cook it, the deer god won't get mad. Sacrifices are made to feed the gods.

Retributive justice: If you make the gods mad they will make bad things happen to you. "God will get you for that."

Substitutionary atonement: A chicken or a bull can die for your sins. If you disobey the gods, or anger the gods in some way, something has to die. The gods will not forgive sin unless something dies but it doesn't have to be you. Sacrifices are made to keep the gods from killing you.

Depravity: grew out of xenophobia (fear of strangers or foreigners). These were scary times. Marauding strangers raid villages. Bloodthirsty enemies, unknown places, natural disasters, etc. Gods are on our side. Foreigners are evil. We are gods people; they are evil.

Power of talismans and incantations: Charms (talismans) and incantations can ward off evil spirits. Talismans and incantations can be used to control the gods. If you do the ritual just right, the gods have to obey you (you can summon the devil, force the gods to bless you, etc.) The genie has to grant you three wishes if you summon him. Perform a ritual or say an incantation over your fields or erect a talisman to guarantee good crops.

Development of Perennial or Archetypal Religions (Classical Period).

1. During this period religious concepts began to mature. A more sophisticated concept of god(s), better understanding of nature, greater understanding of human nature, and better ability to predict events contributed to this process.

2. Emergence of religions that did not die out with the cultures that produced them, have become classical religions that are the basis and inspiration for all religions that followed.
3. About 500 BCE was a turning point in the history of religion. Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, and Jainism all emerged between 600 BCE and 500 BCE.
4. Culture, civilization, commerce, transportation, and exploration had emerged by this time.
5. All had
 - a. A nameable founder
 - b. Emphasized a Divine Unity
 - i. single personal God (monotheism) (Family I)
 - ii. non-personal Absolute, Supreme Something (monism) (Family II)
 - c. Had scriptures

Prolific – Alternatives Period

This period was characterized by the development of thousands of sects, denominations, and alternative religions.

Islam (sometimes seen as the last of the classical religions to develop)

Baha'i

Theological Concepts emerging in the Classical Period

Natural justice/ Karma: good behavior has good consequences and bad behavior has bad consequences. Justice will be served, if not in this life then in the next.

Greater emphasis on love and caring: less about fear, more about living in harmony with each other and with nature.

Emphasis on plurality/ inclusiveness: a universal God is God over all people, all countries, all places, all times. We must try to understand and accept God's entire domain not just our tribe or village.

Justice supercedes moral laws: Creating a just society is more important than obeying rules.

God does not "need" people, people need God. God is in control, God cannot be controlled.

Asceticism: The idea that this life, this world, is incompatible with spiritual life and spiritual goals. One way to become more spiritual is to deny this world and the pleasures of this world. By suppressing the body, you enhance the soul. Sometimes suppressing the body involves extreme measures, celibacy, fasting, and poverty. In some traditions it can involve self-inflicted pain, and body mutilation. Many religions have an ascetic tradition. It is almost always a minor part of the tradition.

Survey of Major World Religions

Zoroastrianism

1. Iranian religion (ancient Persia). Also known as Parsee (in India). Probably originated 600 – 700 BCE but some evidence that some of the scriptures may be from 1500 BCE (or earlier).
2. First of the monotheistic religions (Family I). There is one God who is constantly battling the evil God called Satan.
 - a. Yes that is correct. It is monotheism but there are two Gods, one good and one evil.
 - b. This is the same idea sometimes found in Christianity today.
3. The teachings of Zoroaster are presented in seventeen liturgical, texts, or "hymns", the yasna which is divided into groups called *Gāthās*.
4. If basic precepts of Zoroastrianism are to be distilled into a single maxim, the maxim is *Humata, Hukhta, Huvarshata* (Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds).
5. A cosmic struggle between *Aša* "The Truth" (Pahlavi *Ahlāyīh*) and *Druj* "The Lie" (Pahlavi *Druz*) is presented as the foundation of our existence. This is often related to a struggle between *good* and *evil* in a Western paradigm. This may also be conceptualized as a battle between Darkness and Light. The two opposing forces in this battle are Ahura Mazdā (Ohrmazd) (God) and Ahriman (The Devil). In the *yasnas*, Zoroaster refers to these forces as "*the Better and the Bad.*"
6. Zoroaster describes Ahura Mazdā in a series of rhetorical questions, "Who established the course of the sun and stars? ... who feeds and waters the plants? ... what builder created light and darkness? Through whom does exist dawn, noon and night?" (Yasna 44, 4-6).
7. Judaism was much influenced by Zoroastrianism. After the exile the captives brought many Zoroastrian ideas back with them.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religious traditions. It grew out of the Vedic religion that developed during the polytheistic/ancient period (see figure 2).

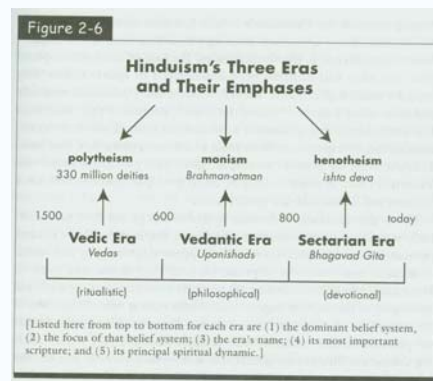


Figure 2: Periods of Hindu History (from Laughlin, 2005)

During the Vedantic period, a philosophical system developed to explain the origin of all the gods (see figures 3 and 4).

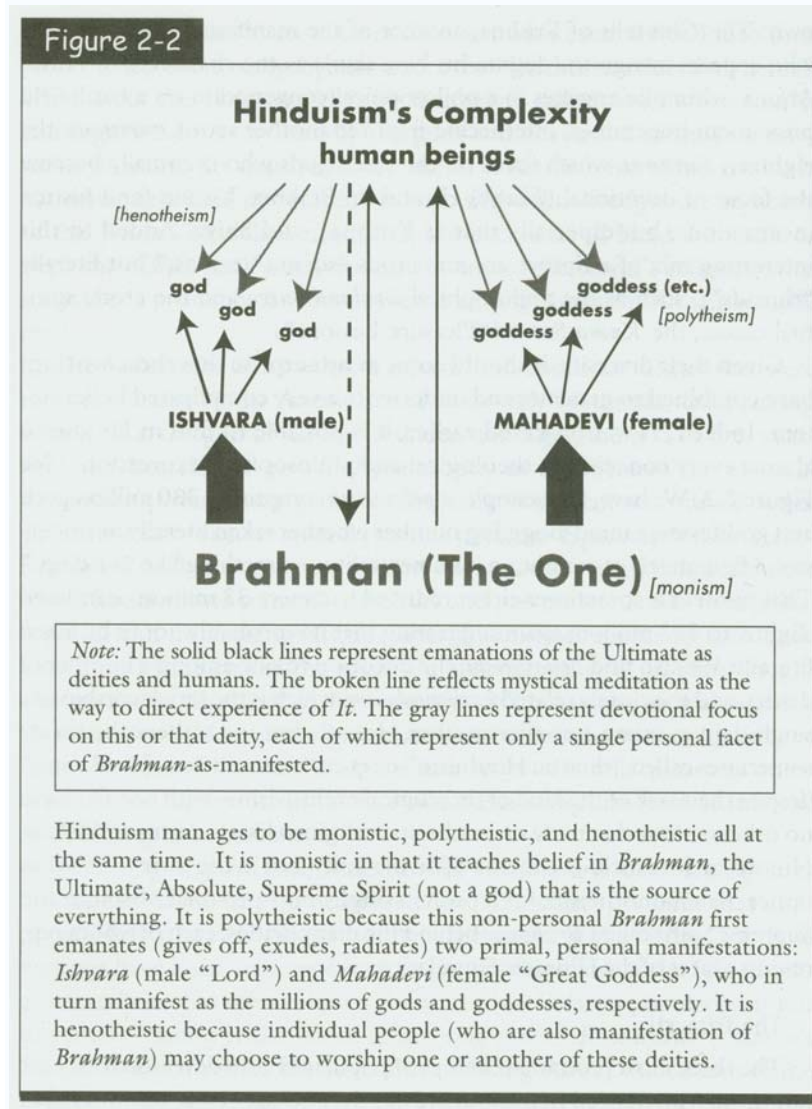


Figure 3: Brahman manifests existence (from Laughlin, (2005))

The Vedas depict Brahman as the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute or Universal Soul (Paramatman). **Brahman** is the indescribable, inexhaustible, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, original, first, eternal, both transcendent and immanent, absolute infinite existence, and the ultimate principle who is without a beginning, without an end, who is hidden in all and who is the cause, source, material and effect of all creation known, unknown and yet to happen in the entire universe. Brahman (not to be confused with the deity Brahmā) is seen as a panentheistic **Cosmic Spirit**. The personality behind Brahman is known as Parabrahman (The superior Brahman). Brahman may be viewed as without personal attributes (Nirguna Brahman) or with attributes (Saguna Brahman).

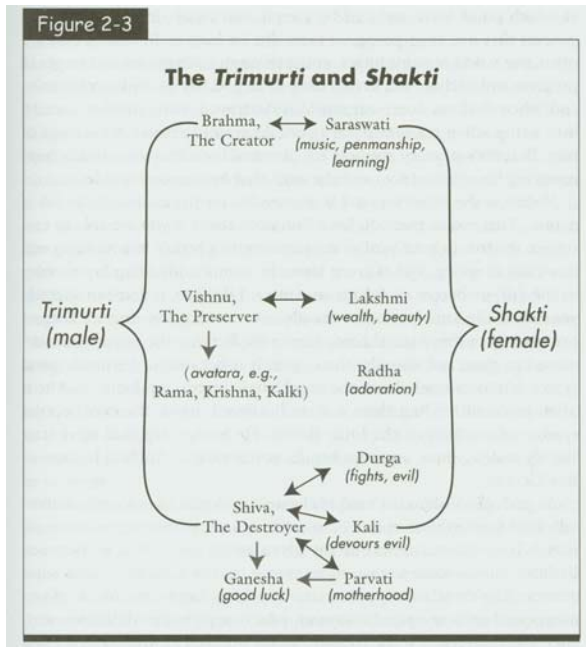


Figure 4: The main Hindu gods (from Laughlin, 2005)

Some Hindus are followers of one of the gods, some are followers of another. Which one you follow, depends on which village you are from, which family, and what is going on in your life. You may go to one temple when you are pregnant, a different temple when you are sick. No one path is seen as better than another, no one god is more true than another. Hindus teach that there are many paths to Brahman. Each person must choose his or her path and then do his or her best to walk that path. The paths are described in the scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*.

What can be said to be common to all Hindus is the belief in Dharma (duties and obligations), Samsara (Reincarnation/rebirth), Karma ("actions", leading to a cause and effect relationship), and Moksha (salvation) of every soul through a variety of paths, such as *Bhakti* (devotion: the way of the heart, focused on faith and love, devotion to one of the gods), *Karma* (action: the path of ethical action and duty – good works) and *Jnana* (knowledge: the way of insight, study of doctrine, scriptures, and divine truth), and of course, belief in God (Ishvara/Bhagavan) (see Figure 5).

Reincarnation or the soul's transmigration through a cycle of birth and death, until it attains Moksha, is governed by Karma. For almost all Hindus, reincarnation is non-personal. Your life force lives on after you die but your memories and experiences, your personality, dies with you. The idea of remembering "previous lives," is mostly a western distortion of Hindu belief.

Figure 2-5

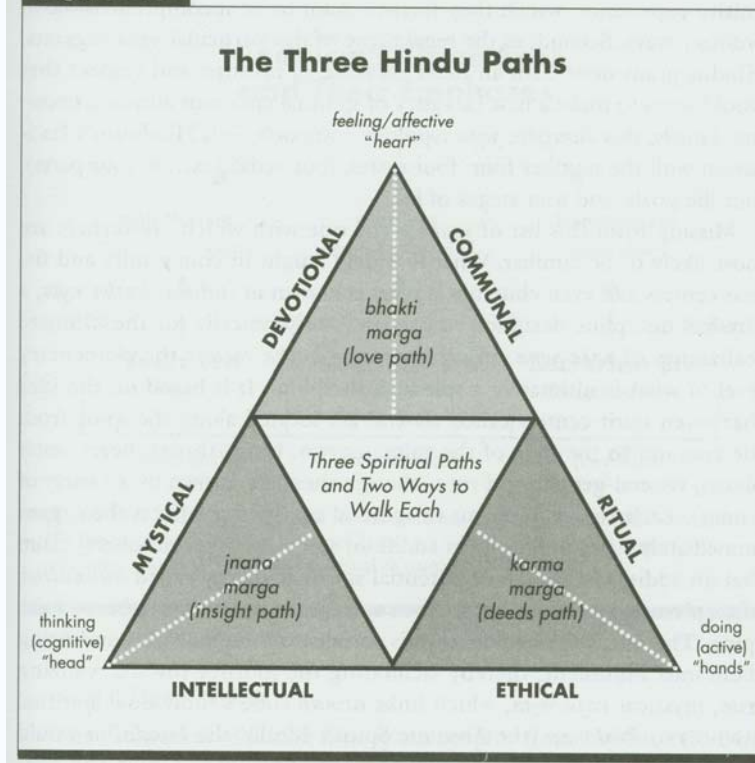


Figure 5: Paths to Enlightenment (from Laughling 2005)

The philosophy of *Karma* lays forth the results of free-willed actions, which leave their imprint on the soul or the self, called as ātman. These actions determine the course of life and the life cycle for the soul in its subsequent life. Virtuous actions take the soul closer to the Supreme Divine, and lead to a birth with higher consciousness. Evil actions hinder this recognition of the Supreme Divine, and the soul takes lower forms of worldly life.

Hindus believe that every living being is an eternally existing spirit (the soul or the self)(atman). (This includes insects, rodents, snakes, and cows. While cows are respected and protected, they are not worshiped.) Upon physical death, this soul passes from one body to another in accordance with the laws of Karma and reincarnation. Atman is neuter (has no sex), non-personal (has no memory of events or relationships in earlier lives). Atman is not immortal, it is eternal. Atman is not in the image of Brahman, it is Brahman.

All existence, as per Hinduism, from vegetation to mankind, are subjects to the eternal Dharma, which is the natural law. Even Heaven (Svarga Loka) and Hell (Naraka Loka) are temporary. Liberation from this material existence and cycle of birth and death, to join (absorb), reach or develop a relationship with the "universal spirit" (depending on belief), is known as moksha, which is the ultimate goal of all Hindus.

Asceticism and Indulgence: One of the paths available to Hindus is the path of asceticism. It is actually pretty rare but some Hindus decide, very early in life, to renounce society, in order to pursue a life-long ascetic path. They will take on a very demanding discipline that sometimes includes extreme body piercings, sleeping on thorns, refusing to sit or lie down for decades, covering their nude bodies with the ashes of the dead, etc. Tourist stops in India are frequented by people dressed up as ascetics who pose with the tourists for photographs for a fee.

Another path available to Hindus is the path of Tantrism who believe that spirit and flesh are not at odds but in continuity. Indulging the flesh, for example, by extreme sexual practices, is actually a path to spiritual realization. The *Kama Sutra* is a Tantric manual that is popular in the West as well.

Buddhism

1. There is controversy among scholars of religion concerning whether Buddhism constitutes a religion. There are no “gods” per se in Buddhism, though the “Grand Ultimate” is directly analogous to the Hindu Brahman. With approximately 708 million followers, Buddhism is a major movement. Its adherents are called **Buddhists**.
2. Buddhism was spread through missionary zeal and is now far more common outside India than in the country where it was founded.
3. Founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or “Enlightened One.”
 - a. Son of a wealthy king
 - b. Sneaked out of the Palace in search of enlightenment and encountered poverty and suffering of the masses.
 - c. Enlightened while meditating under the *Bo* tree “Tree of Enlightenment.”
 - d. Once enlightened he spoke only eternal truths.
4. The Buddha traveled around the country teaching, working miracles, starting monasteries, etc.
5. Died of food poisoning. At his death he achieved *nirvana* (union with the Grand Ultimate similar to *moksha*).
6. Buddhist scripture
 - a. *Tripitaka* – “Three Baskets” – contains the teachings of the Buddha
 - b. *Sutras* – discourses or lessons (there are a great many of these, some are more popular)
7. Buddhist teachings (see Figure 6).
 - a. There are Four Noble Truths
 - i. Life is painful or unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). We’re never satisfied or completely happy, even – and perhaps especially – when we get exactly what we want. We never stop wanting. We are all, therefore, in deep *dukkha*.
 - ii. The cause of suffering/unsatisfactoriness is craving (*tanha* – desire or clinging). We forever desire what we don’t have, and if we get it, it is never as good as we imagined or as something else we think

is better. The “grass is always greener” and “be careful what you wish for.” Stalking, abductions, insecurity, greed, envy, jealousy, murder, hate, war, all arise from these two principles.

- iii. There is an end to suffering/unsatisfactoriness. It is called *nirvana* – the bliss of non-attachment (letting go) that brings an end to craving and therefore suffering.

Figure 3-3

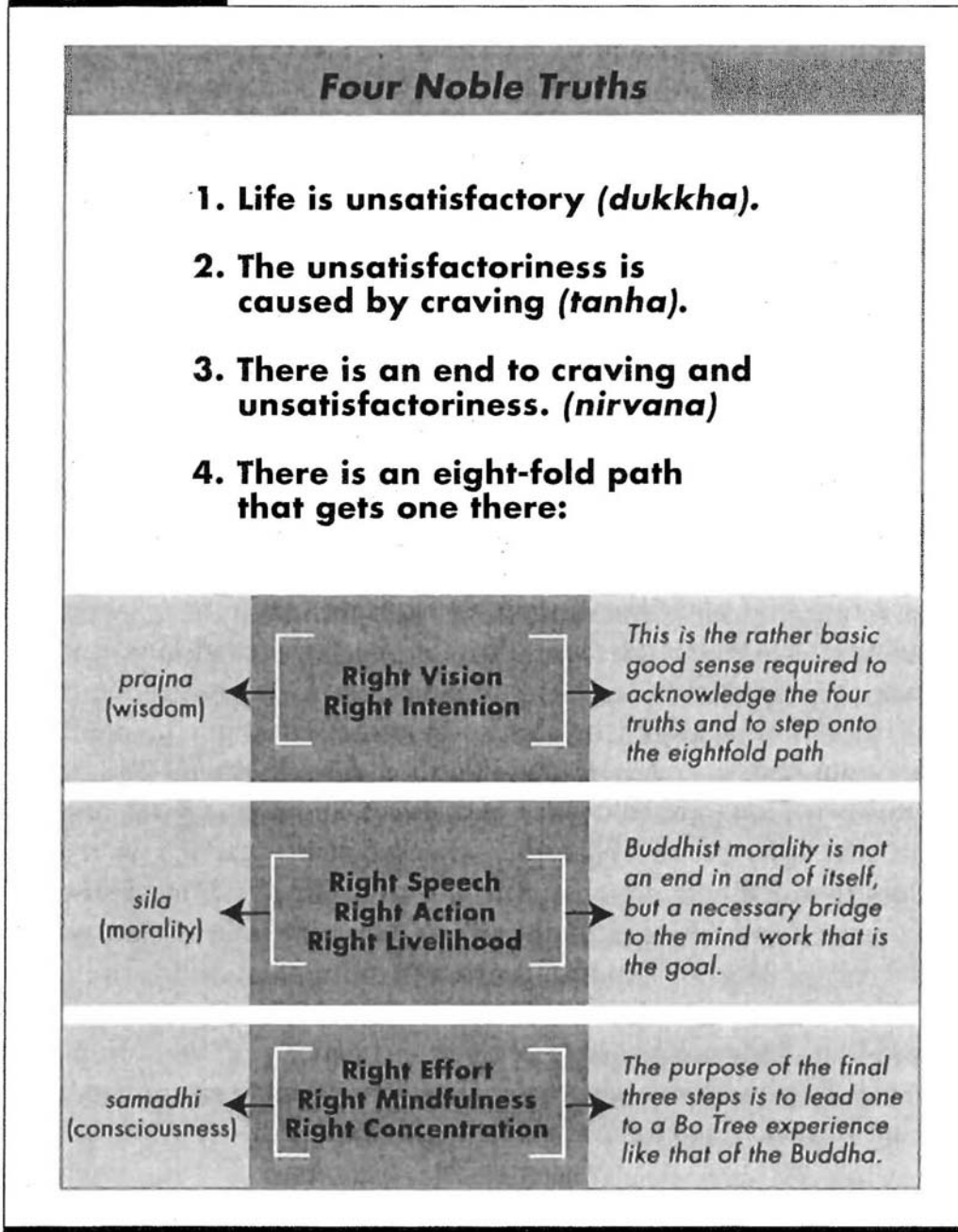


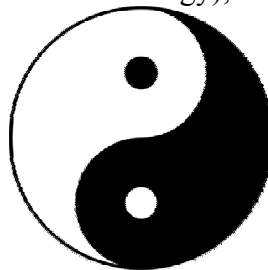
Figure 6: Buddhist Teachings (from Laughlin, 2005)

- iv. The way to this end is the Eightfold Path.
 - 1. right vision,
 - 2. right intention,
 - 3. right speech,
 - 4. right action,
 - 5. right livelihood,
 - 6. right effort,
 - 7. right mindfulness, and
 - 8. right meditation.
- v. A person will normally go through these steps in order.
 - 1. The first two have to do with getting wisdom
 - 2. The next three have to do with morality
 - 3. the last three with concentration, emptying the mind, and enlightenment
- b. Ultimate Reality = *Shunyata* – Nothingness, the Void, Emptiness
- c. Temporal Reality = *samsara* – all things as interconnected and impermanent
- d. Human spiritual essence: *anatman* – the no soul or not self
- e. Human spiritual goal: *nirvana* – bliss, the extinguishing of self
- 8. Buddhist branches/ sects/ schools
 - a. Theravada: more conservative. Buddha’s words and deeds should be followed to the letter. Mostly found in the southeast (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar). Only monks can achieve enlightenment. Laypersons job is to support the monks. If layperson does well, they may be reincarnated as a monk. Monks beg for food, live simply, meditate in small communities.
 - b. Mahayana: more liberal. Buddha’s words should be followed in principle but must develop new forms to meet the needs of different cultures. (China, Korea, Japan, Tibet). Pure Land, Tibetan, Nichirin, and Zen are branches of Mahayana Buddhism.
 - c. Pure Land: emphasis on devotionism. Exhibits much the same dynamic as evangelical Protestant Christianity, which emphasizes “loving the Lord” and trusting God’s mercy to secure a place in a heavenly paradise. There is a celestial Buddha named Amida with infinite compassion pictured as the warming rays of the sun. If you believe in Amida you will be reborn in the Pure Land, a paradise in the Western sky. Pure Land Buddhists are encouraged to utter the mantra “Namu Amida Butsu” (I revere the Amida Buddha) all day long – prayer should be ceaseless. There are also compassionate beings called *bodhisattvas* (*bosatsu* in Japan). Images of these appear in temples. Prayers are left with the images. Kannon (female bodhisattva) very popular in Japan. Kannon has a helper named Jiso (Jeez-OH) who takes care of the souls of dead babies.
 - d. Tibetan Buddhism: emphasis on ritualism, practicality, and activism. Priests with colorful vestments, sacraments, candles, symbolic gestures, chants, and striking visual art. Reminds one of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

- e. Nichirin Buddhism: emphasis on social and political ethics and personal success of a worldly sort.
- f. Zen Buddhism: emphasis on using the mind and intellect to pursue clarity and mental discipline. Work out your own spiritual liberation by engaging in regular and rigorous meditation. Try to empty your mind by focusing on a nonsensical Koan or on pain or on a sound. Reminds one of Shakers or Quakers emphasis on mystical spirituality.

Taoism

- 1. Grew out of the ancient Chinese religion.
- 2. Lao-tsu was the founder.
- 3. Tao Te Ching is the classic Taoist text
- 4. I Ching is the classic book of divination.
- 5. Originally not thought of as a religion – more a worldview.
- 6. Named after the Tao (always pronounced Dow) which means path or way.
- 7. In the beginning, everything was One, the great void, the great nothingness. All things were undifferentiated. Infinite energy moving infinitely fast in all directions. As lines of interference developed, the One became differentiated into the two, the Great Ultimate (*T'ai-Chi*): Yin and Yang. As the energy slowed down further (by running into other energy), everything else formed.



Yin	Yang
Moon	Sun
Night	Day
Dark	Light
Cool	Warm
Rest	Active
Feminine	Masculine
North	South
Winter	Summer
Right	Left
Introversion	Extroversion
Earth	Heaven
Even	Odd

- 8. Emphasis on going with the flow.
- 9. Be yourself
- 10. Live in harmony with nature
- 11. Religious Taoism (Tao-chaio) was founded by Chan Tao-ling about 150 CE. Involves belief in and worship of deities. This is very different from Lao-tzu's worldview. Religious Taoism involves a lot of shamanistic chants, spells, dances,

alchemy, talismans, magical techniques, for warding off evil or strengthening your chi. There is an order of priests, the head of the order is like the ruler of the religion. There are temples with incense and sacrifices, etc.

Confucianism

1. Not a religion in the usual sense.
2. Collection of wisdom writings encouraging moral behavior, self reliance, logic and common sense.
3. Emphases on how humans can, if they work at it, create a stable and healthy social structure in which to live and raise their families.
4. Emphasize discipline and hard work.

Judaism

1. The first of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).
2. Much confusion over what is a Jew. Is it a race, a nationality, or a religion?
3. There is no single accepted Jewish doctrine or catechism. Different sects interpret the scriptures differently.
4. Judaism was founded by Abraham who left his home town of Ur (a seaport town in what is now southern Iraq), rejected idolatry, and taught monotheism. Abraham went in search of a “promised land.”
5. Basic beliefs of Judaism
 - a. God is one - strict unitarian monotheism, in which the eternal creator of the universe is the source of morality. Judaism holds that God created, and cares about, humankind. In polytheistic religions, humankind is often created by accident, and the gods are primarily concerned with their relations with other gods, not with people.
 - b. God is all powerful (omnipotent), as well as all knowing (omniscient), and the different names of God are ways to express different aspects of God's presence in the world.
 - c. God is non-physical, non-corporeal, and eternal. All statements in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature which use anthropomorphism are held to be linguistic conceits or metaphors, as it would otherwise be impossible to talk about God.
 - d. One may offer prayer to God alone — any belief in an intermediary between man and God, either necessary or optional, has traditionally been considered heretical.
 - e. The Hebrew Bible, and much of the beliefs described in the Mishnah and Talmud, are held to be the product of divine revelation. How revelation works, and what precisely one means when one says that a book is "divine", has always been a matter of some dispute. Different understandings of this subject exist among Jews.
 - f. The words of the prophets are true.
 - g. Moses was the chief of all prophets.
 - h. The Torah (five books of Moses) is the primary text of Judaism.
 - i. God will reward those who observe His commandments, and punish those who violate them.

- j. God chose the Jewish people to be in a unique covenant with Him
 - k. There will be a moshiach (Jewish Messiah), or perhaps a messianic era.
 - l. The soul is pure at birth, and human beings have free will, with an innate *yetzer ha'tov* (a tendency to do good), and a *yetzer ha'ra* (a tendency to do bad).
 - m. People can atone for sins through words and deeds, without intermediaries, through prayer, repentance, and *tzedakah* (dutiful giving of charity), if accompanied by a sincere decision to cease unacceptable actions and if appropriate amends to others are honestly undertaken, always providing a "way back" to God.
 - n. As a matter of practical worship (in comparison to other religions) Judaism seeks to elevate everyday life to the level of the ancient Temple's worship by worshipping God through the spectrum of daily activities and actions. Judaism maintains that this is how the individual will merit rewards in the afterlife, called *gan eden* (Hebrew: "Garden of Eden") or *olam haba* ("World to Come"), though Judaism does not have a single concept of the afterlife, nor is the afterlife the focus of Jewish practice.
6. Judaism does not have a specific concept of salvation. Jews are in a covenant relationship with God and that is enough. The responsibility of the Jew is to be faithful to the covenant in both spirit and practice.

Christianity

1. Christianity started out as a Jewish sect around the followers of Jesus Christ, but was opened up early to gentiles and gradually parted from Judaism.
2. Christianity is characterized by a tremendous diversity in beliefs. Within Christianity, numerous distinct groups have developed, with diverse beliefs that vary widely by culture and place. Since the Reformation, Christianity is usually represented as being divided into three main branches:
 - a. Eastern Christianity, includes the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, all with a combined membership of more than 240 million baptized members;
 - b. Catholicism: With more than 1 billion baptized members, this category includes the Roman Catholic Church, the largest single body -- which includes several Eastern Catholic communities -- as well as certain smaller communities (e.g., the Old-Catholics);
 - c. Protestantism: The category includes numerous denominations and groups such as: Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, Evangelical, Charismatic, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Anabaptists, and Pentecostals. The oldest of these groups separated from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. The later groups typically formed as separations from the older ones. Some Protestants identify themselves simply as *Christian*, or *born-again Christian*. Others, particularly among Anglicans and in Neo-Lutheranism, identify themselves as being "*both Catholic and Protestant*." Worldwide total is just under 500 million.

3. Basic Beliefs.
 - a. **The Trinity:** The belief that God is a single eternal being who exists as three distinct, eternal, and indivisible persons: Father, Son (Divine Logos, incarnated as Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit (or *Holy Ghost*).
 - b. **Jesus Christ as God:** Jesus Christ is both fully God (divine) and fully human: two natures in one person.
 - c. **Jesus Christ as Salvation:** The belief that salvation from "sin and death" is available through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians have arrived at several explanations as to exactly how this salvation occurs. Many Christians interpret salvation to mean being able to enter heaven (and escape hell) after death, though some theologians have lamented this tendency. The question of "who is saved" has long been considered a dark mystery by many theologians, though some Protestants consider it a relatively simple issue of whether one has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior (salvation by affirming certain statements or beliefs).
 - d. **Crucifixion and Resurrection:** The belief that Jesus Christ died on the Cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven after appearing to his disciples, most notably the Apostles.
 - e. **The Second Coming:** The belief in the "General Resurrection," in which all people who have ever lived will rise from the dead at the end of time, to be judged by the returned Christ.
 - f. **The Afterlife:** Christian views of the afterlife generally involve heaven and (somewhat less frequently) hell, with Catholicism adding an intermediate realm of purgatory. Except for purgatory (whose denizens will ultimately enter heaven, after "purification"), these realms are usually assumed to be eternal. There is, however, some debate on this point, for example among the Orthodox. It is generally unclear how the afterlife fits together with the doctrine of the General Resurrection--i.e. whether eternal life begins immediately after death, or at the end of time; and whether this afterlife will involve the resurrection of one's physical body (perhaps in a glorified spiritual form). Most Christians hold that one's consciousness, the soul, survives the death of the physical body, although the Jehovah's Witnesses, among others, reject this, saying that those who practiced good things will be resurrected to life and those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgement.
4. Scriptures: Christians accept selected Hebrew scriptures as well as selected writings of the Jewish prophets as part of their scriptures. In addition, a collection of writings known as the New Testament which consists largely of writings attributed to Jesus apostles and early Christian writers is accepted as scripture. There is disagreement about how many and which of the jewish apocryphal writings should be included.
5. Substantial disagreement exists on the relative importance of the various scriptures. Most Christians give precedence to the New Testament writings.
6. Most Christians believe the Scriptures to be Divinely Inspired. There is much disagreement on the nature of that inspiration. Most Christians believe the Bible

is a collection of inspired writings. Others believe that God actually wrote the Bible.

Islam

1. Islam is a monotheistic faith, one of the Abrahamic religions and the world's second-largest religion. Followers of Islam are known as **Muslims**. Muslims believe that God revealed his divine word directly to mankind through many prophets and that Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam.
2. The basis of Islamic belief is found in the *shahādātān* ("two testimonies", Arabic: *شاهادتان*): *lā ilāhā illā-llāhu; muhammadur-rasūlu-llāhi*—"There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." In order to become a Muslim, one needs to recite and believe in these statements under witness. One who wishes to convert must be truly willing, and must have given thought to the meaning of the *shahāda* before reciting the words (in Arabic) and becoming a Muslim.
3. Muslims believe that God (or, in Arabic, *Allāh*; also in Aramaic *Alaha*) revealed his direct word for mankind to Muhammad (c. 570–632) and other prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Mainstream Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last or the *seal* of the prophets. Thus, his preachings for humankind will last until *qiyamah* (The Day of the Resurrection). Muslims assert that the main written record of revelation to humankind is the Qur'an, which they believe to be flawless, immutable, and the final revelation of God to humanity. Muslims believe that parts of the Gospels, Torah and Jewish prophetic books (though originally divine in their nature) have been forgotten, misinterpreted, incorrectly edited by humans, or distorted by their followers and thus their original message has been corrupted over time. With that perspective, Muslims view the Qur'an as a correction of Jewish and Christian scriptures, and a final revelation.
4. Muslims hold that Islam is essentially the same belief as that of all the messengers sent by God to mankind since Adam, with the Qur'an (the text agreed upon by all sects of the Muslim faith) codifying the final revelation of God. Islamic texts depict Judaism and Christianity as derivations of the teachings of the prophet Abraham and thus acknowledge common Abrahamic roots. The Qur'an calls Jews and Christians (and sometimes people of other faiths) "People of the Book."
5. *Islām* is described as a *dīn*, meaning "way of life" and/or "guidance".
6. **Six articles of belief:** There are six basic beliefs shared by all Muslims:
 - a. Belief in God (Allah), the one and only one worthy of all worship (*tawhid*).
 - b. Belief in all the prophets (*nabi*) and messengers (*rasul*) sent by God.
 - c. Belief in the books (*kutub*) sent by God:
 - i. The *Suhuf-i-Ibrahim* (Scrolls of Abraham)
 - ii. The *Tawrat* sent to Musa (Moses)
 - iii. The *Zabur* sent to Daud (David)
 - iv. The *Injil* sent to Isa (Jesus)
 - v. The Qur'an sent to Muhammad
 - d. Belief in the Angels (*mala'ika*).

- e. Belief in the Day of Judgement (*qiyama*) and in the life after death (heaven and hell). (Note: Sometimes these articles are listed separately, thus resulting in 7 articles of faith.)
 - f. Belief in Fate (predestination) (*qadar*)
7. The Muslim creed in English:
 - a. "I testify that there is no god but Allah Almighty; and I testify that Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is His Messenger."
 - b. "I believe in Allah; and in His Angels; and in His Scriptures; and in His Messengers; and in The Final Day; and in Fate, that All things are from Allah, and Resurrection after death be Truth.
 8. **Sunni:** The Sunni are the largest group in Islam (80%– 85% of all Muslims are Sunni). In Arabic, *as-Sunnah* literally means **principle** or **path**, while in terminology, Sunnah is the set of sayings or practice by Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis believe that Muhammad was, when he was acting as a prophet, a perfect human being, and that they must imitate the words and acts of Muhammad as accurately as possible. In fact, the Quran states that the character of the Prophet Muhammad was a good example to follow. Because of this reason, the Hadith in which those words and acts are described are the main pillar of Sunni doctrine.
 9. **Shi'a:** [Shi'a](#) Muslims, the second-largest sect, differ from the Sunni in rejecting the authority of the first three caliphs. They honor different traditions (hadith) and have their own legal traditions. Shi'a scholars have a larger authority than Sunni scholars and have greater room for *ijtihad* or interpretation. The Imams play a central role in Shi'a doctrine. The Shi'a consist of one major school of thought known as the Ithna 'ashariyah or the "Twelvers", and a few minor schools of thought, as the "Seveners" or the "Fivers" referring to the number of infallible leaders they recognize after the death of prophet Muhammad.
 10. **Sufism:** Sufism is a spiritual practice followed by both Sunni and Shi'a. Sufis generally feel that following Islamic law or jurisprudence (or *fiqh*) is only the first step on the path to perfect submission; they focus on the internal or more spiritual aspects of Islam, such as perfecting one's faith and fighting one's own ego (*nafs*). Most Sufi orders, or *tariqa*, can be classified as either Sunni or Shi'a. However, there are some that are not easily categorized as either Sunni or Shi'a, such as the Bektashi. Sufis are found throughout the Islamic world, from Senegal to Indonesia
 11. **The Qur'an** is the sacred book of Islam. It has also been called, in English, "the Koran" or (archaically) "the Alcoran". Qur'an is the currently preferred English transliteration of the Arabic original (نَارِق); it means "recitation". To understand the notion of "variants" within the received Qur'anic text, one must understand that Arabic had not yet fully developed as a written language. The Qur'an was first recorded in written form (date uncertain) in the Hijazi, Mashq, Ma'il, and Kufic scripts; these scripts write consonants only and do not supply vowels. (Imagine an English text that wrote the word 'bed' as "BD," and required the reader to infer, from context, that the reference was to "bed" - and not to 'bad' or "bide."). Most Muslims regard paper copies of the Qur'an with extreme veneration, wrapping them in a clean cloth, keeping them on a high shelf, and

- washing as for prayers before reading the Qur'an. Old Qur'ans are not destroyed as wastepaper, but burned or deposited in Qur'an graveyards.
12. Most Muslims memorize at least some portion of the Qur'an in the original language. Those who have memorized the entire Qur'an are known as hafiz. This is not a rare achievement; it is believed that there are about millions of huffaz (plural) alive today.
 13. From the beginning of the faith, most Muslims believed that the Qur'an was perfect only as revealed in Arabic. Translations were the result of human effort and human fallibility, as well as lacking the inspired poetry believers find in the Qur'an. Translations are therefore only commentaries on the Qur'an, or "translations of its meaning", not the Qur'an itself. Many modern, printed versions of the Qur'an feature the Arabic text on one page, and a vernacular translation on the facing page.
 14. **Islamic eschatology** is concerned with the *Qiyamah* (end of the world) and the final judgment of humanity. Like Christianity and some sects of modern Judaism, Islam teaches the bodily resurrection of the dead, the fulfilment of a divine plan for creation, and the immortality of the human soul. In Islamic belief, the righteous are rewarded with the pleasures of *Jannah* (Paradise), while the unrighteous are punished in *Jahannam* (a fiery Hell, from the Hebrew *ge-hinnom* or "valley of Hinnom"; usually rendered in English as Gehenna). A significant portion of the Qur'an deals with these beliefs, with many *hadith* elaborating on the themes and details.