



THE OM SYMBOL,
REPRESENTS BRAHMAN

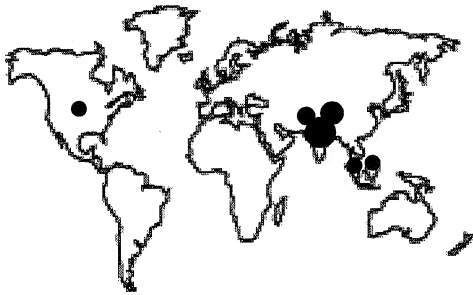
Meet Herdesh. He's a 12 year old Hindu student who lives in New Delhi, India. Herdesh's family is very proud of him. He is getting ready to participate in a ceremony called a samskara that marks a turning point in someone's life. In this samskara, Herdesh will receive sacred threads that mark his passage into the adult Hindu community. Not all Hindu children participate in this ceremony. It's more common in families of the highest caste or social class. Hindus have many different ways of participating in their religion.

Hinduism

HISTORY & SACRED WRITINGS

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It grew out of the ideas and customs of the Aryan people who settled in the Indus Valley in about 1500 BCE. Now that region is known as Pakistan, a nation created out of India in 1947. But today, most Hindus live in India, which is south-east of Pakistan. In ancient times, the Aryans did not have a written language, so they spread their ideas and customs orally through the Vedas (VAY duhs). The Vedas are poems and religious songs that were memorized by Hindu priests. Many centuries later they were written down. Other sacred writings include the Epics. They are stories about ancient heroes and gods that have important Hindu messages. For example: The Mahabharata (ma HAH bah ra TAH) is about duty and the Ramayana (RAM ah YAH nah) is about love and responsibility.

HINDUISM AROUND THE WORLD



Hinduism is the third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. It has about 900 million members. About 800 million Hindus live in India. That's about 80 percent of India's population. Hindus live in many other countries. Among them: Nepal (17 million), Bangladesh (13 million), Indonesia (4 million) Sri Lanka (3 million), Pakistan (2 million), Malaysia (1 million), and the USA (1 million).

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND COMMON IDEAS

Hindus have many choices in how they practice their religion. Most Hindus believe in the Ultimate God that is called Brahman. But there are many other gods and goddesses in the Hindu religion too. Since Hindus believe everything is a manifestation, or representation of God, they are free to pray to whatever god they want. Because of this acceptance of different expressions of Hinduism, various branches or sects have developed. The most common is Vaishnavism in which followers worship the Lord Vishnu. Another sect is Shaivism whose followers worship the Lord Shiva. Both are representations of Brahman, but have an emphasis on

(Continued on Reverse.)

Hinduism (Continued)

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND COMMON IDEAS (CONTINUED)

different aspects of Hindu beliefs. In addition to accepting a diversity of gods, Hindus are also free to practice their religion anywhere. Some people go to a temple, where a priest leads them; others have private ceremonies in their homes.

Despite differences in religious practices, Hindus share many ideas.

- **Law of Karma and Reincarnation.** Everyone is made up of more than just a physical body. A person's true self is their spirit and does not die when the body dies. Based on how they lived their lives (karma), they are reborn in to another life form. The cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation) continues until a person reaches moksha, or unity with God.

- **The Caste System.** Hindus believe that people are born into certain castes or social classes. Historically, the caste determined a person's job and place in society. In the past the highest caste was the Brahmins who traditionally were priests and teachers, then came the Kshatriyas who were warriors, Vysyas the traders and finally the Shudras or workers. Today there are hundreds of castes in India.

- **Dharma.** People have a duty to do the right thing to fulfill their role in life, whatever it is.

SACRED PLACES AND SYMBOLS



THE SACRED COW

- **Ganges River.** Hindus believe the Ganges River is a holy river that purifies everything. Many pilgrims visit sacred cities, such as Benares, along the Ganges River to pray in the temples and bathe in the water.

- **Sacred Cows.** Cows are considered sacred. One of the gods in Hinduism, Krishna, was a cow herder. Cows have become a symbol of Hinduism, representing simplicity, giving to others, and non-violence. Cows are free to roam in India.



THE GOD, BRAHMA



THE BUDDHA,
SITTING IN MEDITATION

Meet Benkai. He is 12 years old and lives with his mother and father in Japan. Before he goes to school each morning, he sits before the family altar, lights candles and incense and begins his morning prayers. Today he is praying before the image of the Buddha that he will have the self-control to get along better with others and try to have respect for those he doesn't like. He is also praying to do better in history.

Buddhism

HISTORY & SACRED WRITINGS

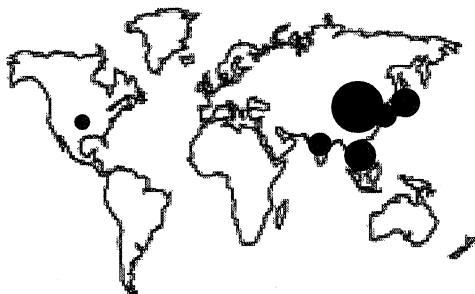
Buddhism began more than 2500 years ago in India, under a tree. A young prince named Siddhartha Gautama (sid DAHR tuh GOW tuh muh) founded Buddhism. Siddhartha lived in India from 563 to 483 BCE. He left his home and family to try to find a solution to all the pain and suffering in the world. He left his possessions behind, traveling in a simple yellow robe and carrying only a bowl for the rice he accepted from strangers.

According to Buddhist legend, it was beneath a fig tree that Siddhartha found his answers—after sitting in meditation (deep relaxed thought) for 49 days. Siddhartha realized that people's greed and ignorance cause pain and suffering. He believed people should try to awaken wisdom and love within themselves. Siddhartha came to be known as the Buddha, or "The Enlightened One." Buddha taught his followers what he had discovered about how to end suffering. Soon thousands of people accepted his teaching, and the religion of Buddhism began.

Over the years, Buddhism decreased in importance in India, but spread throughout Asia. Buddha had encouraged his followers to spread his ideas to other parts of the world. Buddhism became an important religion in China and Korea. From Korea, it spread to Japan. Many other regions in Asia like Thailand and Vietnam also adopted Buddhism. When Buddhism entered a new region, it often blended with the religious practices and beliefs of the people who lived there. In this way, various branches or forms of Buddhism began, such as Mahayana (MAH hah YAH nah) Buddhism (100 CE), Zen Buddhism (500 CE), and Pure Land Buddhism (1100 CE).

Buddhism's major teachings and beliefs can be found in the sacred text called the *Tripitaka* (TRIP e tah kah) or "Three Baskets."

BUDDHISM AROUND THE WORLD



Today Buddhism has over 300 million followers, most of whom live in Asia. Some countries with a large number of Buddhists: China (102 million), Japan (90 million), Thailand (55 million), Vietnam (50 million), South Korea (11 million), India (7 million), United States (1 million).

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Buddhism (Continued)

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND COMMON IDEAS

Despite differences in religious practices, Buddhists share many ideas. They believe people should find spiritual peace inside of themselves, through the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path. Their goal is to achieve nirvana.

- **Four Noble Truths.**

1. All life is suffering and pain.
2. Suffering and pain are caused by wants that can never be satisfied.
3. Suffering is ended by getting rid of wants.
4. Wants are ended by following the *Eight Fold Path*.

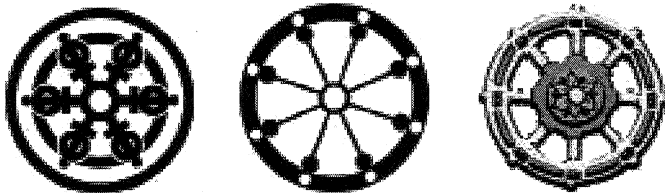
- **The Eight Fold Path.** These are the eight steps to happiness and peace. Many of them involve living in a way that does not harm any human or other living thing. For example, two steps are *right speech* (no lying or hurtful talk) and *right meditation* (being calm and thoughtful in order to develop understanding).

- **Nirvana.** Like Hindus, Buddhists believe in reincarnation or *samsara*. People die, but are continuously reborn until they reach nirvana, a state of complete peace and unity with the universe. Only upon achieving nirvana can a person escape the cycle of rebirth.

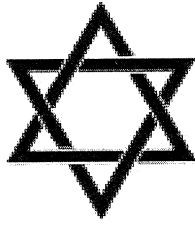
SACRED PLACES AND SYMBOLS

- **Buddha statues.** Found in many Buddhist temples, people focus on the statues during meditation (or deep relaxed thought), so they can concentrate on the Buddha's teachings without distractions.

- **Wheel.** The wheel is a powerful symbol for the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, as well as the interconnectedness of all things in the universe.



BUDDHIST WHEELS OF LIFE (MANDALAS)



THE STAR OF DAVID

Meet Jessica. She is 13 years old. Tomorrow is her Bat Mitzvah and she is very excited. This is one of major rites of passage in a young Jewish girl's life. It means she has become an adult in her religion. All of her friends and relatives are coming to the Sabbath service at which Jessica will participate fully for the first time. Afterward, there will be a big celebration. At the service, Jessica will lead the congregation in prayer and read from the Torah. The Torah is the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which tells the story of the Jewish people and explains their laws. Portions of it are read every week, along with passages from the rest of the bible.

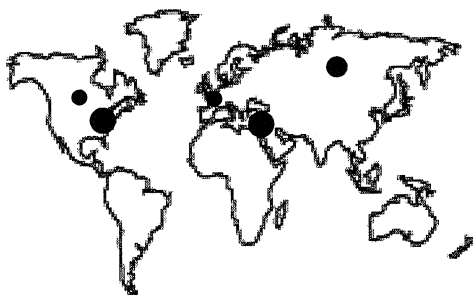
Judaism

HISTORY & SACRED WRITINGS

Judaism is one of the oldest religions still practiced today. It began in the Middle Eastern region of Canaan, today known as Israel. The Israelites were the first known ancient peoples to believe in *monotheism*--the idea that there is only one God. Ancient societies often worshipped many different gods, each responsible for controlling a different aspect of nature or the universe. According to Jewish legend and writings, in 1800 BCE a nomadic herder from Mesopotamia named Abraham made a contract or covenant with God. God promised to make Abraham the father of a large nation (later known as Israel) if Abraham would worship and obey only him. Abraham agreed and from his family the Jewish people developed their unique culture and religion. Later, two important religions, Christianity and Islam, would also believe in monotheism and would share a number of common prophets or spiritual leaders such as Abraham and Moses.

Much of what we know about Judaism is found in the *Torah*, the first five books of the Jewish Bible. The Torah is also known to Christians as part of the Old Testament. It contains books on the history, culture, traditions and laws of the Hebrews and Israelites, the ancient peoples who practiced Judaism. It also contains the Ten Commandments, the ten laws to live by that both Jews and Christians believe came from God.

JUDAISM AROUND THE WORLD



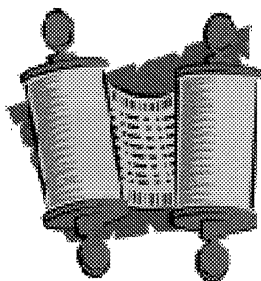
Jews eventually lost political control of ancient Israel and for the last 2000 years established communities in many places around the world. Over the years, and most recently, after more than 6 million Jews were killed during the Nazi Holocaust of World War II, many Jews wanted to reestablish and live in a Jewish homeland. The modern Jewish nation of Israel was finally established in 1948. However, Christian and Arab Palestinians who lived there along with Jews before 1948 also claim the land as their homeland. That bitter conflict continues today.

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Judaism (Continued)

There are approximately 13 million Jews in the world today. Among the countries with the largest Jewish populations: US (5 million), Israel (4.5 million), Russia (1.5 million), France (.5 million), Canada (.3 million).

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND COMMON IDEAS

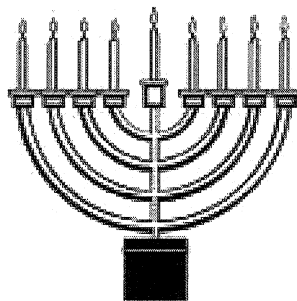


THE TORAH, JUDAISM'S SACRED TEXT IS HAND COPIED ON A SCROLL, A ROLLED MANUSCRIPT.

Judaism over time has developed several branches or sects with differing approaches to living out the Jewish faith and traditions. Three of the major divisions are between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism. Despite differences in how they worship or interpret Jewish religious texts, like the Torah, they share many of the same beliefs and practices.

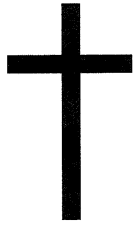
- ***Monotheism.*** Belief in one all powerful God.
- ***Social Justice/Ethics.*** Jews have a strong sense of obligation to respect and care for the world and all who live within it. Charity and acts of kindness are fundamental to living their faith everyday.
- ***Sabbath.*** From Friday night sundown to Saturday night at sundown traditional Jews refrain from doing any work. Instead, they spend time with family and attend synagogues for spiritual instruction and prayer.
- ***Yom Kippur.*** The holiest day of the Jewish calendar, also known as the Day of Atonement. On this day Jews repent or ask forgiveness for their sins of the past year, all the things they have done in disobedience to God's laws such as lying or being unkind.
- ***Passover.*** The events of Passover spread over eight days and include a dinner called the *Seder*. At this meal there are many symbolic items that help Jews remember when they were slaves in Egypt and how God used Moses to free them and lead them out of Egypt on their way to establishing their own nation, Israel.

SACRED PLACES AND SYMBOLS



A MENORAH

- ***Jerusalem.*** Ancient Israeli city that was the site of the Temple. The Temple was the center of Jewish worship in ancient times.
- ***Western Wall.*** In Jerusalem, the remains of the Temple destroyed by the Romans 2000 years ago. A site of prayer for many Jews.
- ***Menorah.*** A candle stand that holds seven candles and is used to symbolize the life giving force of God.
- ***Star of David.*** Modern symbol representing Judaism. It is on the flag of Israel.
- ***The Torah.*** The physical scroll of the Five Books of Moses and 3000 years of study and interpretation of God's word to Jews.



Meet Catherine. She is 13 years old. She is getting ready for her Confirmation, a Catholic ceremony that means she has become a full participant in her religion. Catholics are one of a number of different branches of Christianity. Catherine's extended family is in church with her and she is wearing a new dress bought for this special occasion. After Confirmation, there will be a family party at her home. Catherine has attended Mass every Sunday at her church for as long as she can remember and even took special classes to learn about her faith. Mass is the name of the Catholic religious service.

Christianity

HISTORY & SACRED WRITINGS

The death of a Jewish man by the name of Jesus was the birth of Christianity around 33 CE. This occurred in Jerusalem, a Jewish city in the Middle East located in Judea, a territory conquered and governed by the Roman Empire. Jesus was raised under the Jewish religion to believe in *monotheism*--that there is only one God. When he was about 30 years old, Jesus began teaching that he was the Son of God, although also a man. He taught that belief in him would forgive people's sins (disobedience to God) and enable them to go to heaven after they died. He also told people to love God and live a simple, honest life, full of love for everyone. Jesus developed a small, loyal following of believers. Therefore, some political leaders became worried that Jesus might be a threat to their power and influence.



JESUS

After nearly three years of teaching and caring for people, many of them the outcasts of society, Jesus was arrested and crucified (nailed to a cross of wood until he died). This was a major turning point for his followers, who became known as Christians. They believe that he rose from the dead after three days, visited his followers, and later returned to heaven. His followers continued to teach people about Jesus. They taught that anyone who believed in Jesus would be forgiven of their sins and given the strength to live like God desired, doing good to others and serving God. Eventually Christians spread Christianity all over the world, building both small local churches and great cathedrals.

Over time, Christians developed a powerful church organization that was centered in Rome. The bishop of Rome was called the Pope and was the head of the Christian church. That first formal Christian organization became known as the Roman Catholic Church and would have great influence on the development of Western Europe and Latin America. Eventually, some Christians disagreed with Rome and broke away to form new branches, or sects, of Christianity. This was known as the Protestant Reformation. These Christians became known as Protestants because they protested against some practices of the Catholic Church. They also believed the Bible should be available to all people, not just priests. This belief led to new translations of the Bible into languages spoken by the common people. Today there are many branches of Christianity such as Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and Mormons.

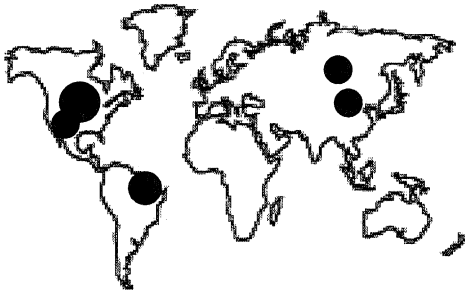
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Christianity (Continued)

HISTORY & SACRED WRITINGS (CONTINUED)

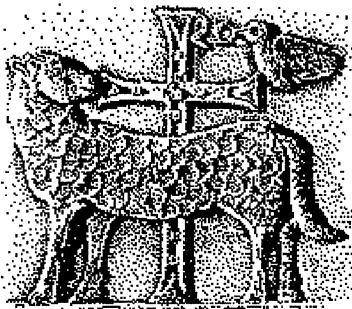
Despite some religious disagreements, Christians share the central belief that Jesus is the son of God. And they look to the *Bible* for guidance. The Christian *Bible* has two parts: the *Old Testament* made up of Jewish history and traditions, and the *New Testament* made up of stories about Jesus' life and teachings.

CHRISTIANITY AROUND THE WORLD



Christianity today is the largest religion in the world with nearly 2 billion followers. Among the countries with the highest number of Christians: US (225 million), Brazil (139 million), Mexico (86 million), Russia (80 million) and China (70 million).

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND COMMON IDEAS



THE LAMB, THE CROSS, AND
THE DOVE, ANCIENT SYMBOLS
OF CHRISTIANITY

- **Jesus Christ.** Christians believe that he was both a man and the Son of God and that he died and then rose from the dead to help his followers find peace both in life on earth and in heaven after death.
- **Communion.** During religious services, Christians sip wine or grape juice and eat a small piece of a piece of bread to remember Jesus's death and the forgiveness of their sins. This is also a symbol that Christians celebrate their faith as a community.
- **Holidays.** Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas and his resurrection from death on Easter.
- **Baptism.** A religious rite that signifies a person has become a Christian. Sometimes water is sprinkled on the person, other times they will be fully submerged into a pool or lake of water. In some churches infants are baptized to show they will be raised as Christians. In other churches adults are baptized to show their adult commitment to follow Christ's teachings.

SACRED PLACES AND SYMBOLS

- **Jerusalem.** Site of Christ's death and resurrection, as well as the first Christian churches.
- **Cross or crucifix.** Replicas of the wooden posts and beams used for Christ's crucifixion are often displayed in churches or homes or worn as jewelry. A crucifix is a cross that includes an image of Jesus.

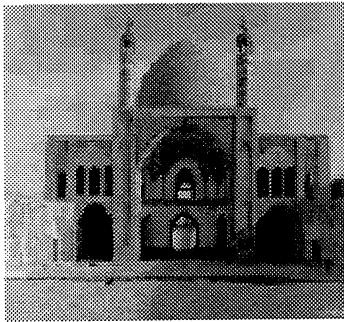


THE "STAR AND CRESENT"
IS A SYMBOL OF ISLAM

Meet Ibrahim. He is 12 years old. He has traveled all the way from Timbuktu, Mali to Mecca, Saudi Arabia with his father to perform the hajj, an important duty for all Muslims. Muslims are members of the Islamic religion. The hajj is a religious journey or pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca. Ibrahim will join millions of Muslim travelers from all over the world. All Muslims who visit Mecca wear a simple white garment which reflects religious purity and equality among followers. He is very excited about what lies ahead in the next five days. He is part of a worldwide Muslim community worshipping Allah. Allah is the Arabic word for God. Like Christians and Jews, Muslims believe in one God.

Islam

HISTORY & SACRED WRITINGS



A MOSQUE IN IRAN

In 610 CE the Arabian city of Mecca was a lively place full of traders and merchants because it was located along important trade routes to eastern Europe, northern Africa and Persia (today known as Iraq). Much of the area, however, was in a state of disunity with much tribal warfare. In this setting, a merchant named Muhammad met people from many different places and cultures. Some of them had new ideas that gave him much to think about. The Christians and Jews he met spoke of believing in one all powerful God. But like many other cultures, the Arabs of that region believed in many different gods. Often Muhammad would go off by himself to a desert cave to quietly meditate and think.

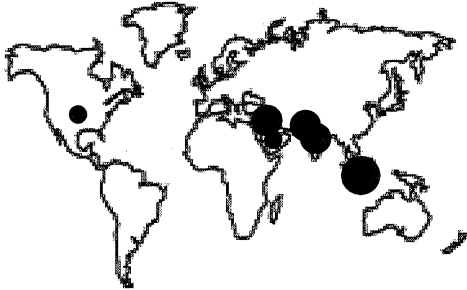
In 610 CE, Muslims believe, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad and revealed the word of God to him. He told Muhammad to become a messenger or prophet of God and to recite the words God had given him. Muhammad left the cave to spread these new words, which were written down in a book known as the *Qur'an* (*ku RAN*). The *Qur'an* is the foundation of the Islam religion, just as the *Bible* is the foundation of the Jewish and Christian religions. In fact, the three religions have many things in common: They are all monotheistic (believing in one God); and they believe in many of the same prophets or messengers from God. For example, Jews, Christians and Muslims all believe in Abraham, Moses and David. Muslims also believe that Jesus Christ was a great prophet, but not the son of God, as Christians believe. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet with the final word of God.

By following the *Qur'an* and careful obedience to God, Muhammad became both the spiritual and political leader of Muslims. Eventually, many Arabians and people from other Middle Eastern societies adopted the religion of Islam. Islam became a powerful unifying force in the Middle East and expanded its political and religious influence to Northern Africa, Southern Europe and Asia as well. Today, Islam is the second largest religion in the world.

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Islam (Continued)

ISLAM AROUND THE WORLD



Today Islam has over 1 billion followers worldwide. Some countries with the largest Muslim populations are: Indonesia (170 million), Pakistan (136 million), India (103 million), Iran (61 million), US (1 million).

CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, AND COMMON IDEAS

Islam is divided into two major branches—Sunnis and Shiites. The division occurred shortly after Muhammad's death in 632 CE and was a result of disagreements over who should lead the Islamic faith. Today Sunnis represent the majority of Muslims, yet some nations such as Iran and southern Iraq, have large Shiite populations. Despite some differences in practices and traditions, all Muslims share a belief in the central role of Allah (God) in their lives.

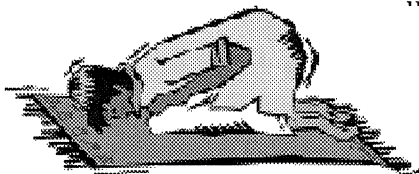
Muslims also are expected to follow the *Five Pillars of Islam*. A *pillar* is like a religious law that provides a foundation for Muslims. According to the Pillars, believers are to:

- repeat the words, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger".
- pray five times daily, facing the holy mosque of *Ka'bah* in Mecca.
- give alms, or charity, to the poor and other Muslims in need.
- fast from sun rise to sun down during the holy month of Ramadan.
- make a *hajj* or religious pilgrimage to Mecca at least once if they are able. The *hajj* is a symbol of unity and equality among Muslims.

SACRED PLACES AND SYMBOLS

• **Mecca.** City in Saudi Arabia where Mohammad expanded the influence of Islam. It is the spiritual center for Muslims everywhere and is the site of the Muslim *hajj*.

• **Ka'bah.** A large rectangular mosque in Mecca. When Muslims around the world pray, they must face in this direction as a point of unity for the entire Muslim community.



MUSLIMS PRAY 5 TIMES A DAY
WHILE FACING THE CITY OF MECCA.