

Introduction to World Religions

Introduction to World Religions – Study Notes

1. What Is a “World Religion”?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A religious tradition that has a large number of adherents, a broad geographic spread, and a significant cultural, historical, or social impact.
Common Criteria	1. Global or trans?regional presence 2. Established scriptures or teachings 3. Institutional structures (places of worship, clergy, education) 4. Distinct theological worldview
Why Study Them?	• Understand cultural diversity • Recognize shared human concerns (meaning, morality, destiny) • Analyze how religion shapes politics, art, law, and everyday life

2. The Six Major World Religions

Religion	Approx. Followers*	Origin (Century/Region)	Core Text(s)	Key Beliefs
Christianity	2.3?billion	1st?C., Roman Judea	Bible (Old & New Testament)	One God in Trinity; salvation through Jesus Christ; love & forgiveness
Islam	1.9?billion	7th?C., Arabian Peninsula	Qur'an; Hadith	One God (Allah); Muhammad as final prophet; Five Pillars; afterlife
Hinduism	1.2?billion	?1500?BCE, Indian subcontinent	Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad?G?t?, etc.	Dharma, karma, samsara, moksha; many deities, diverse practices
Buddhism	520?million	5th?C. BCE, India/Nepal	Tripi?aka (P?li Canon), Mah?y?na sutras	Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path; liberation from suffering (nirv??a)

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Sikhism	30?million	15th?C., Punjab (India)	Guru Granth???hib	One God; equality; service (seva); the ten Gurus
Judaism	15?million	?2000?BCE, Levant	Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), Talmud	Covenant with God; Torah law; people?of?promise concept

*Numbers are rounded estimates (2020?2024 data).

3. Comparative Frameworks

A. Thematic Comparisons

Theme	Christianity	Islam	Hinduism	Buddhism	Sikhism	Judaism
Concept of God	Monotheistic (Trinity)	Strict monotheism	Varied: monotheistic? henotheistic? polytheistic	Non?theistic (focus on enlightenment)	Monotheistic	Monotheistic
Ultimate Goal	Eternal life with God	Paradise (Jannah)	Moksha (liberation)	Nirv???a (cessation of suffering)	Union with God (Waheguru)	Olam Ha?Ba (world to come)
Path to Goal	Faith + sacraments + good works	Faith + deeds (Five Pillars)	Dharma + yoga + devotion	Ethical conduct + meditation	Devotion (Naam), honest living	Covenant obedience, ethical living
Scripture Authority	Bible (inspired)	Qur'an (final revelation)	Vedas (shruti) + Sm ?ti	Tripi?aka (canonical)		