

# Diversity of World Religious Expression

## Western

**Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Bahai'i**

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# Essence of World Religions

## Unity in Diversity



# Religion - Origin

Judaism began about 3,700 years ago in Canaan which now contains the State of Israel, Palestine and Jordan.

Christianity began about 2,000 years ago in Canaan.

Islam began about 1,400 years ago in Arabia.

Bahá'í Faith began in 160 years ago in Persia (Iran).

# Founder

Abraham is the father of the Hebrew people (Jews) and God established His covenant with Moses who emancipated the enslaved Jewish tribes from Egypt.

Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ), believed to be the Son of God. He died in Jerusalem in 33 AD.

Islam began / restored by Prophet Mohammed (570 - 632 AD) who was God's final prophet – the “seal” of the prophets.

Bahä'i Faith began in 1844 in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran) and was founded by Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri (1817-1892) known as Bahäulläh, the “Glory of God.”

# Major Scriptures - Judaism:

- Hebrew Bible consists of 39 books (called the “Old Testament” by Christians).
- First five books are called the Torah or the Pentateuch of Moses. Torah means ‘Law and Teaching’.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

- Torah is the primary revelation of God and His Law to humanity to his spokesman Moses on Mount Sinai. It is considered eternal truth. Its laws were clarified and elaborated in the oral Torah, or the tradition of the elders, and were eventually written down in the Mishnah and Talmud.
- Jewish literature on legal, ethical, philosophic, mystical, and devotional is virtually endless.

# Major Scriptures - Christianity:

- Old Testament (39 Books of Hebrew Bible) which records God's covenant with the Jewish people. It is written in Hebrew.
- New Testament (27 Books) which records Christ's life and teachings as well as the development of early church. It is written in Greek and dates from 50 AD. Jesus himself left no writings. He chose 12 apostles to preach His doctrine.
- Some sects (Catholic and some Protestants) also recognize additional 7 Books of the Apocrypha. It is part of the old testament and describes people and events from late in pre-Christian era.

# Major Scriptures - Islam:

## Islam

- The Qur'an is God's Message revealed through Prophet Mohammed written in Arabic.
- The "Sunna" - the Hädith literature which contains the example and statements of Mohammed on many topics virtually covering every area of human life.
- The Muslims also recognize earlier Scriptures, namely,
  - Taurat (Torah) given to Moses
  - Zabur (Psalms) given to David
  - Injil (Gospel) given to Jesus

# Major Scriptures - Bahá'í:

## ■ Bahá'í

- Bahá'í writings include the works by
  - Baháulláh, the Prophet-Founder
  - Interpretations by his son, 'Abdul-Bahá, and great-grandson, Shoghi Effendi.
- The writings of Baháullah include 100 volumes of Arabic and Persian text is considered to be revelation from God:
  - Kitab-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book): which describes the details of a new World Order
  - Kitab-i-Iqan (The Book of Certitude): which describes the doctrinal writings
  - The Hidden Words: which describes the ethical teachings



# Major Scriptures:

## •Bahä'i (continue..)

- The Seven Valleys: poetic and mystical writings
- The writings of Abdul Bahä and Shoghi Effendi (who translated most of the Bahä'i scripture into English) also have special significance.
- Bahä'i literature can be read today in over 750 languages and dialects.
- In addition, Bahä'is acknowledge the sacredness of and make use of the scriptures of the world's other religions.

# Sects:

## Judaism

Jews are divided into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform groups with other regional and ethnic divisions

## Christianity

Christianity is divided into three main sects; Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant.

Among Protestants there are over 2,000 smaller sects, including Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and so on

## Islam

Sunnis (90%) are followers of the political successors of Mohammed.

Shiites (10%) are followers of Mohammed's family successors

The Sufis are those Muslims who seek a mystical experience of God, rather than a merely intellectual knowledge of Him, and who also perform some superstitious practices

## Baha'i

There are no formal sects within Bahä'i.

# Goals:

## Judaism

### Strict Obedience to God's Will

Which can alleviate the plight of the individual and of society

Bringing rewards in the future life when the Messiah will come to overthrow evil and reward the righteous in God's kingdom on earth, the Day of the Lord.

The soul thereafter will enjoy God's presence and love forever.

## Christianity

Eternal life with God in heaven, a perfect existence in which God's glory and bliss are shared.

# Goals:

## ■ Islam

- To enjoy eternal life, both physical and spiritual in heaven with Allah (means God in Arabic).
- Heaven is a paradise in which all joys and pleasures abound and in which one lives amid beautiful gardens enjoying all comforts.

## Baha'i

- The central principles are the Oneness of God, the Oneness of Religion, and the Oneness of Mankind.
- Bahä'is believe that humanity is one family created by God.
- The purpose of human life is to know and to worship God and to carry forward an ever advancing civilization. The Bahä'is strive to bring about the unity of mankind, world peace, and world order.

# Beliefs - Judaism:

- In the One God and Creator who is beyond the limitation of form and cares for the world and its creatures, rewarding the good and punishing the evil.
- In the Prophets of which Moses was God's foremost, and the Ten Commandments revealed to him by God as man's highest law.
- In the Torah as God's word and scripture, composed of the five Old Testament books. They are God's only immutable law.
- That God has established a unique spiritual covenant with the Hebrew people to uphold for mankind the highest standards of virtues and piety.

# Beliefs - Judaism:

- No priest should intervene in the relationship of man and God, nor should God be represented in any form, nor should any being be worshipped other than the One God, Yahweh.
- In man's spiritualization through adherence to the law, justice, charity, and honesty.
- Universe is not eternal. It was created by God and will be destroyed by Him.
- That upon death the soul goes to Heaven (or to Hell first if it has been sinful), that one day the Messiah will appear on earth and there will be a Day of Judgment, and the dead shall physically arise to Life Everlasting.
- In the duty of the family to make the home a House of God through devotion and rituals, prayers, sacred festivals, and observation of the Holy Days.

# Beliefs - Christianity:

- In God, the Creator of the universe, reigning forever distinct over man, his beloved creation.
- God exists as three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost and these three are one infinite, eternal, holy God (Holy Trinity).
- In the Messiah: that God sent his Son Jesus Christ to show people the way God wants them to live. And to offer his life as the way to forgiveness and salvation.
- Jesus Christ was born of Mary, a virgin. He was crucified on the cross then resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father as the final judge of the dead and that He will return again as prophesied.
- Jesus' resurrection from the dead is proof of God's power over sin, death, and proof that he can save in this way.
- That Salvation can be achieved through Jesus Christ, who died and rose to reveal God's love and plan for humanity.

# Beliefs - Christianity:

- Holy Bible is a sacred scripture of the highest authority and the only word of God.
- Satan exists and is the chief agent of evil, deception and darkness in this world.
- Man is born a sinner, and that he may know salvation only through the savior, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten son.
- That the soul is embodied for a single lifetime, but is immortal and accountable to God for all thoughts and actions.
- That upon death the soul enters Heaven, Purgatory (Roman Catholics belief) or Hell according to its earthly deeds and its acceptance of the Christian faith. There awaiting the Last Judgment when the dead shall rise again, the redeemed to enjoy life everlasting and the unsaved to suffer eternally.
- Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
- Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.



# Beliefs - Islam:

- Islam is a timeless religion because it proclaims eternal truth and it is a natural religion in which every person is born.
- Man is the noblest creation of God, ranking above the angels.
- Six Articles of Faith which includes
- Allah is the Supreme Creator and Sustainer, all knowing and transcendent and yet the arbiter of good and evil, the final judge of humans.
- The pure transcendence of God, great beyond imagination, no form or idol can be worshipped in His Name.
- The Qur'an is the Word of God and the sacred scripture mediated through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed.
- The direct communion of each man with God, all are equal in the eyes of God and therefore priests or other mediators are not needed.

# Beliefs - Islam:

- Six Articles of Faith which includes (continue...)
- The soul of a man is immortal, embodied once on earth then entering Heaven or Hell upon death according to his conduct and faith.
- In the Last Judgment and that man should stand in humble awe and fear of God's wrathful and vengeful power.
- Follow the Five Pillars or Principle Acts and the truthfulness should be observed in all circumstances, although it may bring injury or pain.
- That salvation is only obtained through God's Grace and not through man's efforts yet the man should do all good and avoid all sins, especially drunkenness, adulatory, usury, and gambling.

# Beliefs – Baha’i:

- The Bahä’i Faith strives unity.
- Oneness of God, Oneness of Religion, and Oneness of Mankind.
- God sent the prophets of all the world religions to further the continuing advancement of civilization. This means that all the world’s great religions are successive stages in God’s revelation.
- Bahä’i faith provides the divine guidance necessary for this Age.
- Believe in the equality of men and women. All humans have a common origin and hence all people deserve to be treated equally. Bahä’i’s purpose is to foster love, unity, and peace.

# Beliefs – Baha'i:

- The sacred writings of all world religions teach the same spiritual truth. Hence it encourages inter religious dialogue and marriage across racial, ethnic, or religious lines. Thus its membership represents every culture and ethnic group promoting unity while preserving cultural diversity.
- Bahä'i principles include the essential harmony of science and religion and independent investigation of truth.
- Bahä'i believe the number nine has special significance. It is the highest single digit, which symbolizes completeness.
- Bahä'is have faith in the covenant made by Bahäulläh that a Promised One will appear after one thousand years.

# Path of Attainment - Judaism

- Man has two impulses; good and evil. He can either follow God's law or rebel and be influenced by Satan.
- To follow God's law is the highest morality, possible through obedience to the Torah.
- One must follow justice, charity, ethics and honesty, being true to the one true God, Yahweh.
- Judaism teaches that all people are created in God's image and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

# Path of Attainment – Christianity

Man's plight is caused by disobedience to God's will as revealed in the law of God found in the Bible.

By this sacrificial act of Jesus Christ, God, out of sheer grace and love made it possible for all to have complete forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is proof of God's power over sin, death, and proof that he can save in this way.

Those who accept God's gift of salvation are empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin to live a life of increasing virtue and obedience to God and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

Jesus is to return again to judge the world and bring God's rule to earth.

Through following the law of God as found in the Holy Bible and through God's grace, man attains salvation.

# Path of Attainment – Islam

Total submission to Allah is the single path to salvation, and even that is no guarantee, for Allah may desire even a faithful soul to experience misery.

The good Muslim surrenders all pride, sins, and follows explicitly the will of Allah as revealed in the Qur'an. This and this alone brings a full and meaningful life and avoids the terrors of hell, which befalls sinners and infidels.

The virtues of truthfulness, temperance and humility before God are foremost for Islam, and the practices of fasting, pilgrimage, prayer and charity are most necessary to please Allah. Muslims believe in the Six Articles of Faith and observe the Five Pillars.

# Path of Attainment – Islam

Faith in Allah (Shahada): there is no God but God (Allah) and Mohammed is God's Prophet or Messenger (in Arabic – Ia – illalah il-lalah ud Muhammedun rdsulon).

Ritual Prayer (Salat): Praying five times (Sunnis) or three times (Shiites) daily facing Mecca the holy city of Saudi Arabia. All male Muslims are also enjoined to meet for community prayer each Friday at noon.

Alms Giving (Zakät): The Koran requires that 2.5% of one's income be given to the poor, mosque, and to the spread of Islam.

Fasting (Säwm): Fast throughout Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. The faithful fasts (abstaining from food and drink) from sunrise to sunset.

Pilgrimage (Hajj): At least once in a lifetime every believer must go to Mecca, the holy city. They go dressed in simple, seamless white garments. This is the binding force of the people who have embraced Islam.

A sixth pillar, called jihad, is often added. The term means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God. Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!



# Path of Attainment – Baha'i

Fostering of good character and the development of spiritual qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, and justice is the primary path.

Eradication of prejudice of race, creed, class, nationality, and sex is the primary motto of the faith.

Prayer, meditation, and work done in the spirit of service to humanity are important aspects.

Use of alcohol and drugs is prohibited

Practice chastity and monogamy; marriage requires consent of both parties and their parents.

Observe a fast between sunrise and sundown during the last month (March 2 - 20).