

Quiz on World Religions

- 1) Which religion has no official god?
 - a) Buddhism
 - b) Hinduism
 - c) Islam
 - d) Judaism
 - e) Christianity
- 2) Which religion has an estimated 330 million gods?
 - a) Buddhism
 - b) Hinduism
 - c) Islam
 - d) Judaism
 - e) Christianity
- 3) Which religion has no clear founder?
 - a) Buddhism
 - b) Hinduism
 - c) Islam
 - d) Judaism
 - e) Christianity
- 4) Nirvana in Buddhism is
 - a) A place like the Christian Heaven
 - b) Escape from suffering and desire
 - c) A state of extreme bliss
 - d) Annihilation of self
- 5) In Islam, Jesus is considered to be
 - a) A great prophet
 - b) The Son of God
 - c) A heretic
 - d) A good teacher who taught some truth but also some falsehoods
- 6) What percent of American Christians believe that there is salvation in other religions?
 - a) 8%
 - b) 17%
 - c) 52%
 - d) 79%
- 7) Circle the religion(s) that believe that Jesus was born of a virgin.
 - a) Christianity
 - b) Islam
 - c) Hinduism
 - d) Buddhism

What does everyone believe – Comparative Religion

World Religions Overview

Rank	Religion	Adherents	Percent
1	Christianity	2.1 billion	33
2	Islam	1.5 billion	21
3	Hinduism	1 billion	15
4	Chinese Traditional Religion	394 million	6
5	Buddhism	375 million	6
6	Primal-indigenous	300 million	4
7	African Traditional	100 million	1.5

Judaism with 14 million adherents at 0.2% is ranked 12th.

Expected Growth

Here is expected growth of the world's religions from 2010 to 2050. Global population rate is predicted to be 35%.

Islam would be the only major religion that would exceed the overall population growth rate.

Religion	Growth Rate Percentage	Expected Adherents (billions)	Percent Global Population
Christianity	35%	2.92	31.4
Islam	73%	2.76	29.7
Hinduism	34%	1.38	14.9
Buddhism	-.03%	0.49	5.2
Primal-indigenous	11%	0.45	4.8

Why study other religions?

26% of Protestant churchgoers believe that there is salvation in other religions.

1 John 4:1, 4-6

Out in the world there is a spirit of truth (one spirit of truth) and a spirit of error (many spirits of error actually). God wants us to know and to be able to test both.

Some benefits/reasons to know other religions.

- 1) It allows us to better share the Gospel with them.

Acts 17:22-23

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

- 2) It will strengthen our own Christian faith.

- 3) God tells us in 2 Corinthians 2:11, “so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.” One is one of Satan’s greatest schemes? Probably to present a false alternative that looks appealing and will pull many over to it from the true Gospel. We should not be ignorant of these schemes.
- 4) Ephesians 5:11 says, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.” Expose them with the truth. But can you expose what you know nothing about?
- 5) When you show the person that you know something about their beliefs then it shows to them that you care about them and that you made an effort to understand them before trying to win them over to your side
- 6) It prepares you to explain why Christianity is more viable.

Do all Religions Ultimately lead to God?

A Pew Research Center survey in 2008 found that 52% of American Christians think that at least some non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life.

If you ask the all Americans who are affiliated with a religion (i.e. atheists, agnostics, and non-religious people are not included) who can achieve eternal life this is the results:

My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life: 29%
 Many religions can lead to eternal life: 65%
 Don’t know/refused: 6%

When asked what determines eternal life, here are the results:

One’s belief: 30%
 One’s actions: 29%
 Combination of actions/belief: 10%
 Don’t believe in eternal life: 7%
 Don’t know/refused: 14%

More Americans believe that at least some other religions than their own religion are true enough to obtain eternal life. Therefore, this is a serious issue.

There is an analogy that many use to demonstrate that all religions are valid. There are four blind men who discover an elephant. Since the men have never encountered an elephant, they grope about, seeking to understand and describe this new phenomenon. One grasps the trunk and concludes it is a snake. Another explores one of the elephant’s legs and describes it as a tree. A third finds the elephant’s tail and announces that it is a rope. And the fourth blind man, after discovering the elephant’s side, concludes that it is, after all, a wall. Each in his blindness is describing the same thing: an elephant. Yet each describes the same thing in a radically different way.

This illustrates how different religions are describing the same spiritual reality but in radically different ways. God is the elephant. Christianity may describe it as its legs, Islam may describe it as the trunk, Hinduism may describe it as the tail but ultimately they are all truthfully describing a part of the greater whole and so all of their viewpoints are correct even though they differ. Yet the truth is that all four men were wrong.

- 1) In comparing religions you cannot pick and choose what you want just to prove your point. You must consider all aspects of the religions that you are comparing.
- 2) When comparing any two religions, they will explicitly contradict each other in major areas.
- 3) When you try to make all religions valid you end up denying or contradicting major aspects of each religion that indeed does make it unique.

- 4) In order to make all religions valid you are making this goal the ultimate determining factor rather than truth or logic

Hinduism

Overview

There are around 1 billion Hindus in the world today which is 15% of the population. This makes it the third largest religion behind Christianity and Islam.

Of the top eleven classical world religions based on internal cohesiveness and unity Hinduism ranked as the most diverse. This makes it more difficult to study.

History

Hinduism is unique among the world's major religions in that it has no founder and no clear time of origin. It is also the most diverse in that it was formed from many different beliefs, traditions, and philosophies and even today holds many viewpoints that may appear contradictory. However, the Hindu insight claims that the Oneness simply expresses itself in many different forms and ways.

Hinduism has no governing, authoritative body and no one book that claims supreme truth.

Hinduism started in the Indus Valley which was located in the basin of the river Indus which flows through Pakistan. The religion in this area prior to Hinduism—around 2,000 BC--emphasized ritual bathing, sacrifice, and goddess worship.

The currently dominant theory is that around 1,500 BC the Aryans—whose name means “noble”—either migrated or invaded the Indus Basin from central Asia.

The Aryans developed the caste system which ranked society into four groups called varnas (pronounced var-nahs):

1. the Brahmins: priests, teachers and preachers -> Those engaged in scriptural knowledge, teaching, and knowledge.
2. the Kshatriyas (pronounced kah-shah-tree-ahs): kings, governors, warriors and soldiers -> Public service, maintenance, and defense.
3. the Vaishyas (pronounced vice-yahs): cattle herders, agriculturists, businessmen, artisans' and merchants -> Commercial and business activity.
4. the Shudras (pronounced shoo-drahs): laborers and service providers -> semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

Another group known as the “Dalits” were excluded from the varna system because they were ostracized as the untouchables.

Between 1,500 and 1,000 BC a collection of hymns and religious texts were composed. There are called The Vedas (pronounced Vay-dahs). These ritual hymns that were passed down orally for centuries were gathered in several collections with the most well-known of these being the Rigveda (pronounced Rig-vay-dah) which is the earliest of all Hindu texts. The Rigveda includes 1028 hymns with half of them devoted to their three main gods: Indri, Agni, and Soma.

In this period, known as the Vedic times, religion primarily focused on ritual sacrifice. It was believed that rituals and ceremonies maintained the order of the universe and keep it running smoothly. During this time (between 800 and 200 BC) some of the foundations of the Hindu faith were developed. These included reincarnation, karma, and "personal

enlightenment and transformation." There was a key change in the purpose of religion. It went from maintaining the cosmos to improving the self.

Is Hinduism monotheistic, polytheistic, or pantheistic?

Though it appears that Hinduism has around 330 million gods, most Hindus will actually claim to be monotheistic. This is because they believe that there is really only one supreme god who goes by different names but is usually known as Brahman. Here are some of the most well-known of the Hindu gods.

Vishnu's name means "all pervading" and is the protector of the world and the restorer of moral order which is the dharma. Vishnu has had many incarnations or avatars but the most popular of these is Krishna.

Shiva's name means "Auspicious One." Shiva is defined as "both the destroyer and the restorer, the great ascetic and the symbol of sensuality, the benevolent herdsman of souls and the wrathful avenger."

Ganesha (pronounced Guh-nay-shuh) is one of Hindu's most worshipped and well known of all of the deities. Ganesha is easily recognized because he has the head of an elephant and is usually riding a mouse. He is Lord or Remover of Obstacles both spiritual and material. He is also worshipped as the god of education, knowledge, wisdom and wealth.

Durga (pronounced Door-a-gah) is the mother of the universe and the power behind the work of creation, preservation, and destruction of the world.

Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds.

The *First World* is the physical universe

The *Second World* is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas (pronounced day-vahs), angels and spirits live

The *Third World* is the spiritual universe of the Mahadevas (pronounced muh-hah-day-vahs), "great shining beings," which is the Hindu Gods.

Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds and it is in the Hindu temple where these three worlds meet.

Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

Hindus are very diverse in their beliefs; however, the below are nine core beliefs that most Hindus would agree on.

1. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both indwelling and transcendent.
2. Hindus believe in the divinity of the four Vedas, which they consider to be the world's most ancient scripture.

The sacred texts of Hinduism consist of a vast array of written and oral scriptures which include poems, rituals, devotions, histories, myths, and philosophies. There are two basic categories of these texts: 1) Shruti (pronounced Shru-tee) which are the revealed texts and 2) Smriti (pronounced smrit-ee) which are the remembered texts.

The Shruti consist of four main texts:

- a) Vedas (pronounced Vay-dahs)
- b) Brahmanas (pronounced Brah-muh-nuh)
- c) Upanishads (pronounced Oo-pah-nuh-shahds)
- d) Bhagavadgita (pronounced buhg-uh-vuhd-gee-tah)

3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution or ending.
4. Hindus believe in karma which is the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

Karma means “deed or act.” The one who sows goodness will reap goodness and the one who sows evil will reap evil. It is karma that determines what we will be reborn as. Good karma means that we will be reborn in a better state. If we had bad karma then we will return in a worse state.

5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotionals create a communion with these devas (pronounced Day-Vahs) and gods.
7. Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and surrender in God.
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa (pronounced Ah-him-sah) which is noninjury in thought, word and deed.
9. Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Dharma

Dharma is God’s law. It instructs us in the behavior that is most conducive to spiritual development. It is what leads us on the righteous path.

Differences between Christianity and Hinduism

Doctrine	Christianity	Hinduism
Means of salvation	By the free gift of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ	By practicing Dharma and achieving moksha
Prophets	Many prophets in the Bible	No prophets
Humanity’s problem	Sin (rebellion against God)	Ignorance
The solution to humanity’s problem	Receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior	Practicing dharma to liberate oneself from suffering and bad karma
The result of the solution	Complete forgiveness, eternal life, justification, reconciliation, and much more	Moksha which is union with the eternal soul, Brahman
God	One God expresses by the Trinity	One overall god with 330 million deities
Scared books	The Bible	Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Bhagavadgita
Time related to a soul	Linear with one birth, life, and death	Cyclical with infinite rebirths, lives, and deaths
How destiny is determined	Being born-again (Salvation through Jesus Christ as Savior) or not being born-again (Eternal punishment in Hell)	Karma
View of Jesus	God	Jesus was one of the incarnations (avatars) of God

How to share the Gospel with a Hindu

- 1) Always show respect for their religious beliefs. In Acts 17:16-34 when Paul was at Areopagus and delivered what we call the “Sermon on Mars Hill” we see that while Paul commended their religious fervor, he pointed out the shortcomings in their beliefs. But in no way did he mock or belittle them or their beliefs. Two key words are used in verses 17 and 18: “reasoning” and “conversing.” This means that Paul listened to them and discussed Christianity with them. The result in verse 20 is that they wanted to know more. Paul did not stand there and preach AT them; rather, he discussed with them and presented Jesus. It takes more humility and confidence to discuss the Gospel than to simply preach it. We must respect that many Hindus are trying to do what is right according to their scriptures. We must show them that there is a better way.
- 2) Use stories. Many of the Hindu scriptures are stories. See the Bhagavadgita. They relate to the divine through story. Therefore, share many of the Bible’s stories to illustrate points. For example, the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). In this story we see selfishness, sin, and bad choices. This would equate to bad karma. But we also see a personal, caring Father who receives back his son and forgives him without any need for the son to make restitution or suffer punishment.

Another example is the paralytic in Luke 5:17-26. Here we see a man who is suffering but instead of dying in his pain and possibly being reincarnated into a lesser state, we see him being healed by Jesus and being set free, not by any works on his own but by the grace of God.

- 3) Emphasize forgiveness. In the Hindu system of Karma and Samsara there is no grace and forgiveness. Hindus are basically on their own to “get it right.” Yes, there are masters who can help them, but it is their own discipline, meditation, and adherence to Dharma that will bring them to Moksha. Discuss how God forgives us of all of our sins not because we are good but because He paid for all of our punishment on the cross.

You can share the Passion in Matthew 26:36 to Matthew 28:10. Maybe even meet several times and go over this section paragraph by paragraph explaining what went on and why.

Or you can use the story of the adulterous woman in John 8:1-12. Verse 12 is a key connection to the story because it shows that Jesus is the answer; Jesus is the light of the world. The woman was publically caught in adultery. This was obviously bad karma. Yet at the end she left without condemnation. She did nothing in the interim to reverse this. It was all Jesus. The release came from Jesus’ loving and forgiving heart.

- 4) The ultimate goal of a Hindu’s soul is to reunite with the one absolute god. Though the Hindu concept of this is different than Christianity’s you can still emphasize that we both have as our greatest desire a union with God. Then discuss how the Bible is primarily a story about God pursuing us so that we might be reconciled with Him.

There are stories such as Luke 15:3-7 about the man (God) searching diligently for his one lost sheep (each person) and then when he has found this sheep he embraces it and carries it home where everyone rejoices greatly. This is a wonderful picture of a personal, caring God.

1 John 3:2, this verse tells us that we can be God’s children. Ephesians 2:13, it is through Christ Jesus that we are brought near. 1 Corinthians 1:9, it is God’s perfect and absolute faithfulness that brings us into a relationship with Him and not our own efforts.

- 5) Share your testimony. Your own experience with God is crucial. It shows that God is personal and cares about each one of us. Show them Scriptures such as Jeremiah 29:11-12 or Jeremiah 23:23.

Buddhism

Overview

Buddhism has around 360,000,000 adherents which is 6 - 7% of the world's population.

The Buddha - Siddhārtha Gautama

Buddhism started with Siddhārtha Gautama (pronounced Si-dar-tah Gow-tah-mah) who was born in Lumbini, Nepal which is in the Himalayan foothills at around 624 BC. His father, the king, shielded him from seeing human suffering.

At 29 Siddhārtha insisted on going on a chariot ride to meet his subjects. He saw an old man that wandered onto the parade route. His charioteer explained that people do grow old and then die. This was a shock to Siddhārtha. He went out on more trips where he witnessed sickness and then death (as a corpse). Finally he saw an ascetic renouncer. These are referred to as "The Four Sights." These so distressed him that he left his family and went out into the woods to live as an ascetic.

Siddhārtha realized that these severe practices were not accomplishing anything. One night he sat under a Bodhi (pronounced Bow-dee) tree determined to meditate until he found the answers to suffering. He had great dreams and visions. As the morning sun rose Siddhārtha gained enlightenment and the answer to suffering. It was then that he became the Buddha. Buddha literally means the "Awakened" or "Enlightened One."

The Buddha's first sermon became known as "The Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma" in which he explained the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path which became the pillars of Buddhism. Instead of teaching doctrine, the Buddha taught a path of practice by which people can find enlightenment themselves.

For the remaining 45 years of his life the Buddha traveled throughout northern India teaching people about enlightenment. At 80 years old he ate some spoiled food and died. His last words are said to be the following: "Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation."

Spread of Buddhism

After Siddhārtha's death his followers established communities of monks throughout northern India. They would wander through villages with their begging bowls teaching others the way of enlightenment. However, sectarian fragmentations and schisms occurred due to differences in language and doctrine, loyalties to different teachers, and to the fact that there was no overall governing authority either as an individual or an organizational, unifying structure.

What do Buddhists believe?

The Buddha's primary focus was not to reach God but to end or at least minimize suffering. The Buddha himself said that he was only interested in suffering and the end of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths

1. The truth of suffering (*dukkha* (pronounced Duke-kah))

The Buddha taught that all people have one thing in common and that is suffering. Life is full of suffering. Suffering is a fact of life. There are four unavoidable physical sufferings; birth, old age, sickness and death. Any suffering must be borne alone

2. The truth of the cause of suffering (*samudaya*)

There are two causes to suffering: craving or desire and ignorance.

There are three types of craving.

- 1) Craving for sense pleasures. This could be anything that appeals to our senses: chocolate, sex, comfort, etc.
- 2) Craving to be. This is a desire to be something. That something can be dominance, popularity, famous, etc.
- 3) Craving not to be. This is a desire to be separated from that which causes pain.

The problem is not so much that we desire since desire is a natural function. The problem is that desire

There are also three types of ignorance or disturbing emotions. These are called the three poisons.

- 1) Ignorance itself. This is misunderstanding reality, not seeing the truth of the things that are around you.
- 2) Attachment. This is developing an attachment or addition to pleasure.
- 3) Aversion. This is a fear of not getting what we want or a fear of getting what we don't want.

When we do not see reality as it truly is then we live with illusions about life and our fears and our hopes.

3. The truth of the end of suffering (*nirhodha*)

The way to end suffering is to follow the "Noble Eightfold Path." The Eightfold Path is divided into three sections: Wisdom, Morality, and Concentration.

Wisdom has two paths:

- 1) Right Understanding
- 2) Right Aspiration

Morality has three paths:

- 3) Right Speech
- 4) Right Action
- 5) Right Livelihood

Concentration has three paths:

- 6) Right Effort

The four phases of right effort are:

1. Prevent the unwholesome that has not yet arisen in oneself.
2. Let go of the unwholesome that has arisen in oneself.
3. Bring up the wholesome that has not yet arisen in oneself.
4. Maintain the wholesome that has arisen in oneself.

- 7) Right Mindfulness
- 8) Right Concentration

4. The truth of the path that frees us from suffering (*magga*)

A Brief Explanation of Some Concepts

Buddhist Scriptures or bible

There is no authoritative Buddhist bible. Buddhism has a vast number of scriptures, but few texts are accepted as authentic and authoritative by every school of Buddhism. Also, though many religions consider their scriptures to be the revealed word of God or gods, in Buddhism it is understood that the scriptures are teachings of the historical Buddha who was not a god.

Dharma

Dharma is the teachings of the Buddha (recorded in collected writings) regarding the causes of suffering and also what needs to be done to undo these causes.

Samsara

Samsara (pronounced sam-sar-ah) means "continuous movement" and is commonly translated as "cyclic existence" or "cycle of existence."

Samsara is the process of cycling through one rebirth after another within the six realms of existence. A person is born in one of the realms, then dies, and then is reborn either in the same realm or in a different realm. It is likened to a fly in a jar. In some lives the fly is at the top of the jar and in some lives it is at the bottom of the jar, but ultimately it just flies around and around and never escapes from the jar.

The six realms are:

- 1) God Realm. The gods spend their lives in complete pleasure and when they die they are necessarily reborn in one of the lower realms.
- 2) Demi-god Realm. The demi-gods spend their lives warring on each other and on the gods.
- 3) Human Realm. This is the realm that we are most familiar with. It is the most suitable to practicing the Dharma since the beings are not distracted by the pleasures of the upper realms nor by the suffering of the lower realms.
- 4) Animal Realm. Animals suffer because of the constant fear of being eaten or abused.
- 5) Hungry Ghost Realm. Hungry ghosts suffer from constant hunger and thirst. They rarely find any satisfaction but when they are able to eat some food or drink some water it burns them and causes great agony.
- 6) Hell Realm. These beings endure unimaginable suffering. There are 18 different kinds of hell each with its own type of pain.

Nirvana

Nirvana means "to blow out" and is generally interpreted as blowing out the "three fires" or "three poisons" of passion, aversion, and ignorance. It is thought to culminate in the absence of the activity of the mind. By practicing the Noble Eightfold Path one comes to Nirvana which is release from samsara. Nirvana is liberation from the cycles of suffering.

Karma

Karma is the law that every cause has an effect. These effects can be good or bad. Our karma in our previous life determines what realm we will be born into in this life and the karma in this life determines what realm we will be born into in the next life.

Do Buddhists believe in God?

From BuddhaNet.net: "No, we do not."

From Urbandharma.org: "There is also nothing in the teachings of the Buddha that suggest how to find God or worship the god's of India, although the Buddha himself was a theist (believed in gods), his teachings are non-theistic. The What Does Everyone Believe? www.disciplescorner.com

Buddha was more concerned with the human condition: Birth, Sickness, Old age, and Death. The Buddhist path is about coming to a place of acceptance with these painful aspects of life, and not suffering through them. “

From letusreason.org: “Buddha did not claim to have a special relationship with God in fact Buddha did not consider the existence of God to be important.”

Differences between Christianity and Buddhism

Doctrine	Christianity	Buddhism
God	One God in the form of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	No god
Salvation	A free gift from God to all who believe and receive Jesus Christ as Savior. One’s own works are not a factor	A person has to work for their own salvation (freedom from samsara) and cannot rely on or blame anyone else
The world’s creation	God created the world from nothing as told in Genesis	Is silent on the creation of the world
Goal	To love, obey, and glorify God and to be born-again to eternal life	To attain enlightenment (Nirvana) and be released from samsara.
Primary human failing	Sin is anything against the will and nature of God; all people sin	People are ignorant and desirous
Founder	Jesus Christ who is God incarnate	Buddha who is the enlightened one
Other religions	Jesus is the only way	Does not condemn any other religions but believes that other teachings will never be true or perfect
Primary writings	Bible: Old and New Testament	Teachings of Buddha
Trajectory of life	Linear: we are born, live, die, and go to either Heaven or Hell	Circular: born, live, die, reborn, live, die, reborn, etc.
Hell	A permanent, eternal Hell	No permanent, eternal hell but the lower realms of samsara have great suffering
Main symbol	The cross	The wheel of the Eightfold Path

How to Share the Gospel with a Buddhist

Barriers to Buddhists’ Believing the Gospel

- 1) Buddhists’ entire philosophy is that we save ourselves. There is no grace, no divine intervention.
- 2) Jesus suffered in the Gospels and on the cross. Buddhists see this as indicating that Jesus had bad karma in His previous life.
- 3) Buddhists see Jesus as only a good man although some will see Him as another Buddha. But they will not identify Jesus as God.

Keys to Winning Buddhists

- 1) Lead a Christ-like life. Many Buddhists believe that they live more righteous lives than do Christians.
- 2) Reveal Jesus progressively if you have the time. Start with Jesus’ holy character, His miracles, and His teachings. Then show Jesus’ God-like attributes such as Creator, One who raises others from the dead, His eternity. Finally show how He voluntarily died on the cross for our sins and then rose again and so is alive in glory forevermore.
- 3) The theme of peace has a significant place in Buddhism. Show Jesus as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). John 14:27. John 14:1. John 16:33. Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41).

- 4) Buddhists are forced to find Nirvana through their own efforts. Show them that Jesus is the One who gives us the victory. Talk about God's grace and how it empowers us. God is the One who raises us up. Ephesians 2:1-9 is a good passage of Scripture.
- 5) Talk about forgiveness. Everyone knows that they have done wrong. Jesus is the only One who can free us from the bondage and guilt of sin.
- 6) Be careful about using the phrase "born-again" since, to a Buddhist, that simply points to their cycle of death and rebirth. You will have to explain that this new birth is a spiritual one and not a physical one. A better phrase that the Buddhist can relate to might be "an endless life in Heaven of freedom from guilt, pain, and suffering."
- 7) The Buddhist will see the Cross as a failure because it is the epitome of suffering which is what they are trying to avoid. If Jesus could not avoid suffering then how can He show us the way? Emphasize that Jesus resurrected, conquered death, and is alive forevermore. He is not a defeated god but, rather, is the King who reigns sovereign over the entire universe.
- 8) Tell stories. Buddhists relate better to stories than to doctrinal principles. Share your testimony of how Jesus saved you. Tell stories of what Jesus means to you.

Islam

Overview

Islam is the world's second largest religion behind only Christianity. Islam has 1.2 billion adherents which is 19.6% of the population. The great majority of Muslims live in western Asia and northern Africa.

The word "Islam" means "submission to God" and the peace that comes from following His will. It is closely related to the Arabic word for peace, salaam. "Muslim" means "one who submits" to God's will or ones who make peace. The common Islamic greeting "Assalamu Alaykum" means "peace be upon you."

History

Islam's start in the Bible

In a way, Islam starts in the Bible. In Genesis 15 God promises a son to Abram and Sarai. The problem was that Sarai was 75 years old and Abram was 85. Not believing God's promise, Sarai decided to take matters into her own hands and offered her Egyptian handmaiden Hagar to Abram, so that they could have a child by her. Abram consented and went into Hagar and she conceived. But while she was pregnant she despised Sarai and Sarai demanded that Abram judge between the two of them. Abram put Hagar under Sarai's power. So Sarai treated Hagar harshly and Hagar fled into the wilderness. Here we see the strife between these two peoples already having started with the matriarchs of the two tribes. But the angel of the Lord found her by a spring and told her to return and submit to her mistress.

In Genesis 16:11-12 the angel gives her a promise. She returned and gave birth to son who was named Ishmael. "Ishmael" means "God listens." In Genesis 25:9 Abraham died and Isaac and Ishmael buried him.

Muhammad

Muslims believe that Muhammad to be the last in a long line of prophets that included Moses and Jesus.

Muhammad was born around 570 AD into the most powerful tribe in Mecca, the Quraish who were merchants. Muhammad's father died before he was born. He went to live with his paternal grandfather who then sent him as a baby to live with a nomadic tribe. It was considered that in the desert one learned the qualities of self-discipline, nobility, and freedom. It was during this time in the desert that, according to tradition, two angels appeared to

Muhammad although they appeared to be men. It is from this incident that Muslims believe that God purified his prophet and protected him from sin.

When he was around 40 he began to have visions and to hear voices. According to tradition, Muhammad was on Mount Hira when the angel Gabriel told him to repeat the words of God. Muhammad fled the cave thinking that he had been possessed by demons. But then he heard the words, "Thou art the messenger of God and I am Gabriel" and when he looked up he saw the angel against a green sky. This was the start of Muhammad's revelation of the Quran and which lasted over the next 23 years. Three years after receiving the initial revelation, Muhammad began preaching his message publically.

In 619 when Muhammad was 49 years old his wife and uncle, Abu Talib, both died. It was during this extremely difficult time that he received the supreme spiritual experience of his life. He fell asleep in a sanctuary and experienced the Nocturnal Ascent (Isrā'). This is where Muhammad was taken by Gabriel on a winged steed to Jerusalem. He then ascended from the rock upon which Abraham offered to sacrifice his son Ishmael. This site is now the "Dome of the Rock" on which stands one of Islam's greatest mosques. With Gabriel, he ascended through all the higher states of being even up to the Divine Presence. While going through these states Muhammad met earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus. At one point Gabriel could ascend no more otherwise his wings would be burned. Therefore, Muhammad reached a state even higher than that of the archangels. He then received the supreme treasury of knowledge and Islamic daily prayers while he prostrated himself before God's throne. This is known as the Mi'rāj (pronounced Meer-ahj).

Islam continued to spread throughout Arabia. In 630-631 many embassies came from all over Arabia to accept Islam. By 631 all of Arabia followed Islam. In 632 Muhammad made the first pilgrimage to Mecca. He delivered his farewell sermon and revealed the final verse in the Quran: "This day have I perfected for you your religion and fulfilled My favour unto you, and it hath been My good pleasure to choose Islam for you as your religion" (5:3). This pilgrimage is called the hajj (pronounced Haa-j) and is imitated by millions of Muslims every year.

On June 8, 632 Muhammad died from a short illness and was buried in the mosque that he built in Medina. It is the second holiest place in Islam.

Islam after Muhammad

In its first thousand years, Islam spread to nearly every part of the globe. One reason is because Islam allowed an array of varying opinions and practices.

Another reason why it spread so quickly is because there was a power vacuum created by the long war between the Byzantine and Persian empires. Arab armies conquered huge areas of land including Syria, Egypt, north Africa, Afghanistan, Iran, and Spain. Their advance was stopped in France by King Charles "The Hammer" Martel.

Muslim traders, merchants, and missionaries brought Islam to many ports and distant cities including China, India, and south-east Asia. Today the country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia.

The Names of Muhammad

Muslims count 99 names for Muhammad. The most common is "the Messenger of God." When this name is spoken among Muslims it is always followed by the phrase "may God's blessings and peace be upon him."

Quran

The word "Quran" means "recitation." This is because it was most often heard in sermons and public readings. It is believed to be the divine, eternal, and literal word of God. The Quran contains a record of the revelations recited by the prophet Muhammad over a period of approximately twenty-two years in piecemeal, from 610 to 632. The Quran is

approximately the same length as the Christian New Testament. It has 114 chapters, called *surahs*, which range in length from 3 to 286 verses.

The second most important source of guidance for Muslims is the Sunna, the custom of the Prophet, which is recorded in the *hadith*. The hadith do not have the status of scripture, but they are deemed as canonical and are an important source for culture and guidance.

Six Articles of Belief (Faith)

1. Belief in God (Allah)

2. Belief in Mala-eka (Angels)

3. Belief in the Books of Allah

4. Belief in the Prophets of Allah

There are 25 prophets mentioned in the Quran.

5. Belief in Yawm al-Qiyama (Day of Judgement)

There will be a number of major signs that the day is near. Some of these are:

- a) Appearance of the Mahdi (pronounced Mah-dee). The Mahdi, or “guided one” will be a descendent of Muhammad through his daughter. The Mahdi will kill the false messiah. He will also prepare for the reign of Jesus who will rule for a time after. The Mahdi will similarly kill all enemies of the Prophet and fulfill the prophetic mission as a vision of justice and peace before following Jesus’ rule.
- b) The false messiah, Masih ad-Dajjal, shall appear with huge powers as a one eyed man with the other eye blind and deformed like a grape. He will claim to be God and to hold keys to heaven and hell and lead many astray, although believers will not be deceived.
- c) Medina will be deserted, with true believers going to follow Mahdi and sinners following the false prophet.
- d) The return of Jesus (Isa), from the second sky.
- e) Gog and Magog, two tribes of vicious beings which had been imprisoned will break out. They will ravage the earth, drink all the water of Lake Tiberias, and kill all believers in their way (or see). Allah will eventually send disease and worms to wipe them out.
- f) Mecca will be attacked and the Kaaba will be destroyed.
- g) A pleasant breeze will blow from the south that shall cause all believers to die peacefully.
- h) Quran will be forgotten and no one will recall its verses.
- i) All Islamic knowledge will be lost.
- j) The Beast that will come out of the ground to talk to people.
- k) A huge black smoke cloud will cover the earth.
- l) The sun will rise from the west.
- m) The first trumpet blow will be sounded, and all that is in heavens and earth will be stunned and die except what God wills, silence envelops everything for an undetermined period of time.
- n) The second trumpet blow will be sounded, the dead will return to life and a fire will start that shall gather all The Gathering for Judgment.

6. Qada wal-Qada (Destiny, Divine Decree)

The Five Pillars of Islam

The most important Muslim practices are the Five Pillars of Islam. These are the obligations that every Muslim is expected to fulfill.

- 1) Shahadah (pronounced Shah-hah-duh): sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith. It is the phrase "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger."
- 2) Salat (pronounced Suh-laht): performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times each day
- 3) Zakat (pronounced Zuh-kaht): paying an alms (or charity) tax to benefit the poor and the needy
- 4) Sawm (pronounced Saw-m): fasting during the month of Ramadan
- 5) Hajj: pilgrimage to Mecca

A Muslim who fulfills the Five Pillars of Islam, remains in the faith of Islam, and sincerely repents of his sins will make it to paradise.

Islamic Lifestyles

Prohibitions

In Islam, everything considered harmful either to the body, mind, soul or society is prohibited (haram), while whatever is beneficial is permissible (halal).

Some prohibitions are:

- Eating pork
- Drinking alcohol
- Gambling
- Taking interest
- Fortune-telling
- Killing
- Immorality
- Oppressing or abusing others

Additionally, Muslims are required to eat meat that is butchered and blessed in an Islamic way. This meat is called "halal."

Dress

For both males and females, Islam requires that they wear proper, decent, modest, and clean clothes. Muslim women are instructed by Allah in the Quran to wear as a minimum Hijab (head covering).

Clergy

There is no hierarchy of clergy in Islam, nor do Muslim religious leaders have the power to forgive people of their sins. No one has special access to sacraments. Every individual has a direct relationship with God without any intermediary.

Circumcision

Male circumcision is an important religious duty in Islam and required by believers to perform on their newborn sons.

Death

Death is the most important event in a person's path to God. The dying person is surrounded by family and friends who read prayers and other passages from the Quran. If possible, the dying person repents of sins and rituals of purification are performed.

Islam's View of Jesus

Muslims venerate Jesus and consider Him to be one of God's greatest prophets. Whenever Jesus' name is spoken it should be followed by the phrase, "peace be upon Him."

They believe in Jesus' miraculous birth and consider Mary to be one of the most pure and exalted of all women. Muslims believe that Jesus performed miracles. Muslims believe that Jesus will return on the Day of Judgment. Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified. It was the plan of Jesus' enemies to crucify him, but God saved him and raised him up to Him. The likeness of Jesus was put onto another man. Jesus' enemies then took this man and crucified him, thinking that he was Jesus.

God is not Jesus, and Jesus is not God. Jesus' name in Islam is Isa.

Islamic Sects

There are a number of sects within Islam but three of them are the most prominent. These are Sunni, Shai, and Sufism.

Sunni

The largest sect in Islam is the Sunnis which make up around 90%. The word "Sunni" means "tradition." They regard themselves as the ones who most closely follow the traditions of Muhammad and the first two generations of Muslims afterward. They believe that Abu Bakr was Muhammad's successor.

Shia or Sh'ite or Shiite

Around 10% of all Muslims are Shiites. They are the party of "Ali" and believe that Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, was the designated successor. Ali was Muhammad's closest relative.

Sufism

The Sufis are Islamic mystics. They place greater emphases on meditation and spiritual growth. Sufism has been defined as "mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God

Suffering and the Problem of Evil

Muslims see suffering as either the painful result of sin or it is a test.

Sin is the result of unbelief. When people fail to listen to Allah or to the prophets then they are in a state of unbelief. They become preoccupied with their own particular needs and passions which then enslave them. When enslaved by passions and lusts they crave for wealth and pleasure and do evil and destructive things. Once people realize their unbelief they can repent and be forgiven and return to a sinless state. However, unbelief is always lurking and anyone can fall into it. The great struggle of human life is the struggle to perfect one's heart and live in total submission to God.

Afterlife and Salvation

Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment. The world will end on some future unknown day. At this moment, Allah will resurrect the dead and each person will be judged according to their intentions and deed and as to how well they followed the instructions given by Allah in his revelations. The result will be either reward or punishment. Muslims believe in Heaven and Hell. Hell is a terrible inferno with roaring flames, scorching hot winds, and thick, black smoke.

The burning skin is continually regrown so that there will be constant pain with no relief or annihilation. Boiling water will be poured over their heads. If they try to get away then iron hooks will drag them back.

Heaven is a peaceful garden where everyone is content. Everyone is dressed in silk robes and relax on beautiful couches while servants attend to their every need. Food is abundant and yet no one gets full. Choirs of angels sing in Arabic. Every abundant thing is enjoyed endlessly.

Comparing Christianity to Islam

	Christianity	Islam
Date founded	30 AD	622 AD
Place founded	Palestine	Arabian Peninsula
Founders and early leaders	Jesus, Peter, Paul	Muhammad
Major branches/sects	Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox	Sunni, Shiite
Sacred texts	Bible (Old and New Testaments)	Quran
Additional traditions	The writings of the early church fathers although not inspired and authoritative are, nonetheless, considered very important	The Hadith which is a collection of traditions/sayings of the Prophet Mohammed and functions as a supplement to the Quran giving guidance to Muslims for daily living.
God	Monotheistic	Monotheistic
Belief in Trinity	Yes, one God, three persons	No
Supernatural beings	Angels and demons	Angels, demons, and jinn
Who is Jesus	Son of God and God the Son	A great prophet
Birth of Jesus	Virgin birth	Virgin birth
Jesus' death	Crucifixion	Did not die but was taken up into Heaven
Jesus' resurrection	Jesus rose from the dead	Jesus did not rise from the dead since He did not die
Jesus' Second Coming	Yes	Yes
Holy Spirit	Third person of the Trinity and is God	Identical with the angel Gabriel who appeared to Muhammad and gave him the Quran
Human nature	All are sinners	People have the equal ability to do good or evil
Original sin	We all inherited a sinful nature from Adam	There is no original sin and so we are all born sinless but because of human weakness become sinners
Salvation	Saved through faith and grace and not as a result of works	Correct belief and good deeds
Assurance of salvation	A person can know that they are saved and going to Heaven	There is no assurance
Destinations in afterlife	Heaven or Hell	Heaven or Hell
House of worship	Church	Mosque
Day of worship	Sunday	Friday
Religious leaders	Pastors, priests, ministers	Imams
Devil	A fallen angel who opposes God at every turn and who is	Iblis, a fallen jinn. Jinn are not angels nor men, but created

	destined for Hell	beings with free wills. Jinn were created from fire
View of Mary	Chosen mother of Jesus and blessed among women	Mary receives significant admiration from Muslims. She is said by the Prophet Muhammad to be the best woman God created. She is free of sin as the mother of Jesus.
View of the Bible	Is literally the authoritative word of God and is without error	The Bible has been corrupted because of human intervention. The Quran is the only uncorrupted spiritual authority.

How to Share the Gospel with a Muslim

- 1) We must realize that the great, great majority of Muslims are not terrorists nor do they want to see all non-Muslims killed. Many simply want to serve their God in the best way that they can and want to live happy, fulfilled lives.
- 2) Realize that both religions have many similar core beliefs: Heaven and Hell, leading a morally pure and holy life, God is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer, all people are sinners. Start with the similarities to build common ground.
- 3) Be willing to listen to them. Listening to them does not mean that you agree with them. But if you are not willing to listen to them then why should they be willing to listen to you? Be respectful. Do not demean their beliefs.
- 4) Show love. Invite them over. Perhaps invite them to participate in your Christian holidays at your house. For example, have them over to an Easter dinner.
- 5) Lead a holy life especially when they are around. Do not curse, drink, wear skimpy clothing, gossip, serve pork, etc. Try as much as possible to have men talk to men and women talk to women. Do not put your Bible on the floor as this appears to be disrespectful to it.
- 6) Know what you are talking about. Do not be fuzzy in your beliefs. Be confident and back up what you are telling them from the Bible. Do not apologize even if what you are sharing contradicts what they believe but do not be arrogant either.
- 7) Share the Gospel in simple, understandable terms. Muslims understand themes such as forgiveness, eternal life, Heaven, Hell, assurance. Avoid phrases such as “the new birth,” “being filled with the Holy Spirit,” “justification,” “regeneration” and other more theological phrases.
- 8) Throughout, emphasize Jesus. Muslims consider Jesus to be a great prophet and they love to hear what the prophets had to say. Talk about how the Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of Jesus. Discuss His birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming. Talk about how Jesus died to pay for our sins so that we can have total assurance of salvation.
- 9) Ask them key questions such as, “Do you expect to go to Heaven?” “What does the Quran teach about forgiveness?”
- 10) Use a verse such as Surah 57:27, “And thereupon we caused [other of] Our apostles to follow in their footsteps; and [in the course of time] We caused them to be followed by Jesus, the son of Mary, upon whom We bestowed the Gospel.” Use this to show them that Jesus was given the Gospel (good news).
- 11) Give them a Bible and maybe suggest that they start reading in Matthew. But do not pester them about reading it. Give them time. Perhaps even ask them if they would like to get together once a week and study a chapter together, preferably going through one of the Gospels.

- 12) If you use the name Mohammed, refer to him as “the prophet Mohammed” or just “the prophet”. No religious Muslim will say his name without a blessing on him. Otherwise, you might offend them and close the door.
- 13) Ask them if there is anything that you can pray for them.

How to Answer some Questions

Question: “What do you think of the prophet Mohammed?”

Answer: The prophet Mohammed had a great desire to know and worship the one true God in contrast to the multitude of pagan gods around him. I can respect that goal and have the same one myself.

Question: “What do you think of Muslims? Do you think that we are all terrorists or violent people?”

Answer: The very great majority of Muslims are peaceful people whose primary desire is to know and obey the one true God. As a Christian, I admire and respect that belief. We share many of the same core beliefs such as one God, Jesus’ virgin birth, that all people sin and need salvation.

Question: “What do you think of the Quran?”

Answer: The Quran affirms Jesus and many great sacred books such as the Christian Bible. It contains some great truths. Would you be interested in seeing some truths about the greatness of God and how to gain eternal life in Heaven in my Bible?

Question: “Why does the United States support Israel and allow them to kill Palestinians?”

Answer: I really can’t answer questions about diplomacy and politics because they are just too complex. But what interests me the most is glorifying God and what the prophets, such as Jesus, had to say. Can we talk about that instead? It is much more interesting.

Chart Comparing Religions

	Christianity	Islam	Judaism	Hinduism	Buddhism
Land of origin	Israel	Arabia	Israel	India	India
Time of origin	32 AD	622 AD	586 BC	1500 BC	500 BC
Founder	Jesus Christ	Mohammad	Abraham	None	Siddhartha Gotama
Prophets	Many prophets in the Bible	25 prophets mentioned in the Quran with Muhammad being the last one	48 male and 7 female prophets	No prophets	No prophets
God	Trinity	Allah	Yahweh	One overall god with 330 million deities	None
Humanity’s problem	Sin (rebellion against God)	People have the equal ability to do good or evil	Everyone is born innocent (no original sin); sin is going against our natural inclinations	Ignorance	People are ignorant and desirous
Redemption	Saved through	Correct belief	Prayer &	Practicing	Enlightenment; A person

	faith and grace and not as a result of works	and good deeds	study; true repentance brings forgiveness for that sin. Yom Kipper (Day of Atonement) is Judaism's most holy day.	dharma to liberate oneself from suffering and bad karma	has to work for their own salvation (freedom from samsara) and cannot rely on or blame anyone else
The result of redemption	Complete forgiveness, eternal life, justification, reconciliation, and much more	Heaven	Not clear; some believe in Heaven, some that there is nothing	Moksha which is union with the eternal soul, Brahman	To attain enlightenment (Nirvana) and be released from samsara.
Place of worship	Church	Mosque	Synagogue	Temple	Temple
Sacred texts	Bible	Quran	Tanakh	Bhagavad Gita	Tipitaka
Adherents	2,100,000,000	1,500,000,000	14,000,000	1,000,000,000	350,000,000
Sects	Protestant Catholic Orthodox	Sunni Shiite	Orthodox Reformed Conservative	Shaiva Vaishnava Shakta Smarta	Mahayana Hinayana Tantrayana
Symbolism	The cross	The crescent moon	Star of David	Om or Aum: Symbol of the Absolute	The wheel of the Eightfold Path
Trajectory of life	Linear with one birth, life, and death	Linear with one birth, life, and death	Linear with one birth, life, and death	Cyclical with infinite rebirths, lives, and deaths	Cyclical with infinite rebirths, lives, and deaths
View of Jesus	God	A great prophet	He was an ordinary Jewish man and preacher	Jesus was one of the incarnations (avatars) of Vishnu	He was influential but is not God
Birth of Jesus	Virgin birth	Virgin birth	Normal birth	Normal birth	Normal birth
Death of Jesus	Died to pay for our sins	Was not crucified; ascended to Heaven and a substitute took His place	Normal death	Normal death	Do not see it as important
Hell	A permanent, eternal Hell	A permanent, eternal Hell	Hell is temporary; a person is cleansed until they are then released to Heaven	The concept of heaven and hell as worlds of eternal glory or damnation do not exist	No permanent, eternal hell but the lower realms of samsara have great suffering