

RELIGION RESEARCH

East Asian religions

- **Confucianism**
- **Shinto**
- **Taoism**
- **Korean**
- **Vietnamese**

Confucianism - Confucianism, also known as Ruism, is a system of thought and behaviour originating in ancient China. Various descriptions include tradition, a philosophy, a religion, a humanistic or rationalistic religion, a way of governing, or simply a way of life. Confucianism is a philosophy and belief system from ancient China, which laid the foundation for much of Chinese culture. Whether it is only a philosophy or also a religion is debated. Confucius was a philosopher and teacher who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E. His thoughts on ethics, good behaviour, and moral character were written down by his disciples in several books, the most important being the Lunyu. Confucianism believes in ancestor worship and human-centered virtues for living a peaceful life. The golden rule of Confucianism is "Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you."

Shinto - More than 100 million people follow a system of religious beliefs and practices known as Shinto. They are called Shintoists. Most of them live in Japan. The word Shinto means "the way of *kami*." *Kami* are superior powers that Shintoists honour. They may be natural objects and creatures (such as the spirits of mountains and animals), worthy human beings (such as emperors), or gods and goddesses. Shintoists believe that the *kami* are the source of human life. The *kami* reveal truth to people and guide them. Shinto does not have a central book to guide followers or regular weekly services. Many Shintoists also practice Buddhism. Some houses have both Shinto and Buddhist altars set up for prayer. Little is known about Shinto's origins. It was already strong by the time Buddhism came to Japan in the AD 500s. The two religions mixed for hundreds of years.

Taoism - Taoism (also spelled Daoism) is a religion and a philosophy from ancient China that has influenced folk and national belief. Taoism has been connected to the philosopher Lao Tzu, who around 500 B.C.E. wrote the main book of Taoism, the Tao Te Ching. Taoism holds that humans and animals should live in balance with the Tao, or the universe. Taoists believe in spiritual immortality, where the spirit of the body joins the universe after death. Taoism teaches that all living creatures ought to live in a state of harmony with the universe, and the energy found in it. Ch'i, or qi, is the energy present in and guiding everything in the universe. The Tao Te Ching and other Taoist books provide guides for behaviour and spiritual ways of living in harmony with this energy. However, Taoists do not believe in this energy as a god. Rather, there are gods as part of the Taoist beliefs, often introduced from the various cultures found in the region known now as China. One of the main ideas of Taoism is the belief in balancing forces, or yin and yang. These ideas represent matching pairs, such as light and dark, hot and cold, action and inaction, which work together toward a universal whole. Yin and yang show that everything in the universe is connected and that nothing makes sense by itself.

Korean - Unlike some cultures where a single religion is dominant, Korean culture includes a wide variety of religious elements that have shaped the people's way of thinking and behaviour. In the early stages of history in Korea, religious and political functions were combined but later became distinct. Historically, Koreans lived under the influences of

shamanism, Buddhism, Daoism or Confucianism and in modern times, the Christian faith has made strong inroads into the country, bringing forth yet another important factor that may change the spiritual landscape of the people. The rapid pace of industrialization which occurred within a couple of decades compared to a couple of centuries in the West, has brought about considerable anxiety and alienation while disrupting the peace of mind of Koreans, encouraging their pursuit of solace in religious activities. As a result, the population of religious believers has expanded markedly with religious institutions emerging as influential social organisations.

Vietnamese - The majority of Vietnamese do not follow any organized religion, instead participating in one or more practices of tam giáo and of folk religions, such as venerating ancestors, or praying to deities, especially during Tết and other festivals. Folk religions were founded on endemic cultural beliefs that were historically affected by various traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism from China. These three teachings or tam giáo were later joined by Christianity which has become a significant presence. Vietnam is also home of two indigenous religions: syncretic Caodaism and quasi-Buddhist Hoahaoism.

Indian religions

- **Buddhism**
- **Hinduism**
- **Jainism**
- **Sikhism**

Buddhism - Buddhism started in India over 2,500 years ago. Buddhists follow the teachings of a man called Siddhattha Gotama. He became known as the Buddha, which means 'enlightened'. Siddhattha Gotama was a prince who lived a life of luxury. When he was 29, Siddhattha went outside his palace and saw people suffering for the first time. He decided to leave his palace and live among holy men in search of truth. His search took him six years, but he became enlightened while meditating under a fig tree. Following this, Siddhattha became known as the Buddha, which means the 'awakened' or 'enlightened' one. From then on, he dedicated his life to spreading his teachings. The Buddha discovered that the answer lay in what have become known as the Four Noble Truths. Buddhists try to achieve enlightenment by understanding these important principles. Buddhists try to live a good life by following the Buddha's teachings, helping them to avoid suffering and bad feelings. They believe nothing in life is perfect and the way to avoid suffering is to follow a set of important guidelines known as the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddhist scriptures are known as the Tipitaka which means 'three baskets'. This is because the original writings were made on palm leaves and stored in baskets. The Tipitaka contains the teachings of the Buddha and his companions, comments on those teachings, as well as rules for monks. Buddhists call the teachings of the Buddha dharma which means 'truth'. In Buddhist countries there are many temples. People bring flowers and incense for the shrine and food for the monks. When entering a temple, Buddhists will take off their shoes, put their hands together and bow to the image of the Buddha. They may also use prayer beads called malas. Some Buddhists may also have a shrine within their home too.

Hinduism - Hinduism is over 4,000 years old, making it one of the world's oldest religions. It is made up of a variety of different religious beliefs and practices. It originated near the Indus River in India. The name 'Hindu' comes from the word Indus. Central to Hinduism is the belief in a supreme God Brahman. Brahman is present everywhere and there is a part of Brahman in everyone. Brahman takes many forms.

Especially three forms called the Trimurti. Brahma is the creator of the world and all creatures. He is usually shown with four heads. Vishnu is the preserver of the world. His role is to return to the earth in troubled times and restore the balance of good and evil. He has blue skin and four arms. Shiva is the destroyer of the universe. Shiva destroys the universe in order to re-create it. Shiva has blue skin, a third eye and carries a trident. Hindus believe that life is a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. They also believe that the next life depends on how the previous life was lived. Hinduism does not have a single holy book, but many ancient texts and scriptures.

The Vedas - a collection of hymns praising the Vedic gods. Veda means 'knowledge'.

The Ramayana - long epic poems about Rama and Sita.

The Mahabharata - which includes the Bhagavad Gita.

The Puranas - a collection of stories about the different incarnations and the lives of saints.

Hindus worship in a temple called a Mandir. Mandirs vary in size from small village shrines to large buildings, surrounded by walls. People can also visit the Mandir at any time to pray and participate in the bhajans (religious songs).

Hindus also worship at home and often have a special room with a shrine to particular gods.

Jainism - Along with Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism is one of the three major religions that started in ancient India. Its followers are called Jains. In the early 21st century there were more than 5 million Jains, most of them in India. Jains believe that after people die, they are reborn as other beings. By purifying their souls, they believe, they can eventually free themselves from repeated rebirth. Jains believe that 24 men, the Tirthankaras (saviours), have escaped rebirth, or reached nirvana. For Jains, purifying the soul involves practicing ahimsa, or nonviolence. This means that they should not harm any living thing, including humans and other animals. Also, no group of people is above or below any other group. To avoid harming living things, Jains do not eat any meat. In temples and at shrines they pay respect to the 24 Tirthankaras. At certain times they fast, or refuse to eat, to help purify the soul. Jain monks and nuns follow Jainism more strictly. They dedicate their lives to purifying their souls.

Sikhism - Sikhism is a religion of India that was started by a man named Nanak. He was the first of the 10 Gurus, or teachers, of the Sikhs. Most Sikhs live in the state of Punjab in north western India. Sikhs believe in one God who guides and protects them. They believe everyone is equal before God.

Sikhs believe that your actions are important and you should lead a good life. They believe the way to do this is:

Keep God in your heart and mind at all times

Live honestly and work hard

Treat everyone equally

Be generous to those less fortunate than you

Serve others

Guru Nanak is the founder of Sikhism. Guru means 'Teacher'. Sikhism is still based on his teachings and those of the nine Sikh Gurus who followed him. The Sikh community of men and women is known as the Khalsa which means the 'Community of the Pure'. In order to become a Sikh and join the Khalsa, people need to follow the Five Ks. The Sikh holy book is called the Guru Granth Sahib. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, said that after him there would be no other living gurus. Instead, Sikhs could look at their holy book for guidance. This is why Sikhs call their holy book a Guru. The Sikh place of worship is called a Gurdwara which means 'Gateway to the Guru'. A Gurdwara is any building where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept. In the UK, Sikhs usually go to the Gurdwara on Sundays. During the services they listen to teachings based on the Guru Granth Sahib. They also chant and say prayers from the gurus. These are called Keertan.

Middle Eastern religions

- **Zoroastrianism**
- **Judaism**
- **Islam**

Zoroastrianism - Zoroastrianism is a religion. Zoroaster, who lived in eastern ancient Iran around 1000 BC, created Zoroastrianism. Other names for Zoroastrianism are Mazdaism and Parsiism. Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion. The Zoroastrian god is called Ahura Mazda. The holy book of Zoroastrianism is the Zend Avesta. Zoroastrianism is also dualist. Zoroastrians believe Ahura Mazda created two spirits: a good one (Spenta Mainyu), and a bad one (Angra Mainyu). Zoroastrians believe people are free to choose between good and bad. Choosing good will lead to happiness, and choosing bad will lead to unhappiness. So it is the best to choose good. Therefore, the motto of the religion is "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds".

Zoroastrianism was the state religion of Persia starting in the 6th century BC, including the Sassanid dynasty. In the 7th century AD, Persia was conquered by Islamic Arabs, and most Persians became Muslims. Nowadays, there are about 2.6 million Zoroastrians in the world. Most of them live in Iran, Pakistan or India. In Pakistan and India, they are called Parsis. Many Zoroastrians now live in the United States.

Judaism - Judaism began nearly 4,000 years ago in the Middle East. Jews believe that there is only one God. They believe they have a special agreement with God called a covenant. Jews promise to obey God's laws to say thank you to him for looking after them. Jews believe a man called Abraham was the the first person to make a covenant with God. Abraham was a Hebrew. Jews believe God named Abraham's grandson Israel. After this, the Hebrews became known as the Israelites. Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish people and the Israelites are his descendants.

Later, a man named Moses saved the Jewish people from persecution in Egypt when he led them to safety across the Red Sea. After this, the Jews lived in the desert where God gave Moses a set of rules which they should live by, including the Ten Commandments. Moses is the most important Jewish prophet. The Jewish holy book is known as the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. The word Tanakh comes from the first letters of the three different parts of the book: The Torah (T) which is the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The Christian Bible also begins with these books, in the part which Christians call the Old Testament.

The Nevi'im (N) which are the books of the Jewish prophets such as Joshua and Isaiah. Ketuvim (K) which is a collection other important writings.

The Torah has 613 commandments which are called mitzvah. They are the rules that Jews try to follow. The most important ones are the Ten Commandments given to Moses.

Islam - The word 'Islam' in Arabic means submission to the will of God. Followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslims believe there is one true God Allah (the Arabic word for God). Muslims believe that Islam was revealed over 1,400 years ago in Mekkah, Arabia through a man called Muhammad. Muhammad is so respected that it is usual for Muslims to say 'peace be upon him' whenever they mention his name. Muhammad is believed by Muslims to be the last prophet sent by God (Allah). They believe God sent prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to His law. Jesus (Isa), Moses (Musa) and Abraham (Ibrahim) are other respected prophets. The Five Pillars of Islam are an important part of Muslim life. They are five things that a Muslim must do so they can live a good and responsible life.

They include:

The declaration of faith (Shahada)

Praying five times a day (Salat)

Giving money to charity (Zakah)

Fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm)

A pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in a lifetime (Hajj)

The Muslim holy book is called the Qur'an. Muslims believe this to be the word of Allah as dictated to Muhammad. They also have the Sunnah, which Muslims believe to be the practical example of Prophet Muhammad. Muslims worship in a building called a mosque. On Friday at noon, the most important of the weekly services is held. When Muslims pray, they must always face Makkah in Saudi Arabia. Many Muslim men will wear a small cap called a taqiyah when they pray.

Eastern Christianity

- **Eastern Orthodox**
- **Eastern Catholic**
- **Oriental Orthodox**
- **Nestorian**

Eastern Orthodox - The Eastern Orthodox Church, officially the Orthodox Catholic Church, or simply, the Orthodox Church, is a Christian church. Their type of Christianity is also called Orthodox Christianity or Orthodoxy. Their members are called Orthodox Christians, although there is another group of Churches called Oriental Orthodox that is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. There are about 300 million Orthodox Christians in the world. Most Orthodox Christians are found in Russia, Greece, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, but there are Orthodox Christians everywhere in the world. The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that it is the Church started by Jesus Christ in his instructions to the apostles. It practises what it understands to be the original Christian faith and maintains the sacred tradition passed down from the apostles. The worship service is known as the Divine Liturgy. The beliefs and rituals of the service are similar to the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church. The many churches of the Orthodox Church are distinct in terms of administration and local culture, but for the most part exist in full communion with one another. Most of these churches are led by patriarchs. Most patriarchs recognise the Patriarch of Constantinople as their spiritual leader

Oriental Orthodox - Oriental Orthodoxy means the group of Eastern Christian Churches that accept only the first three ecumenical councils — the First Council of Nicaea, the First Council of Constantinople and the Council of Ephesus — and do not accept the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon. These Churches are also called Old Oriental Churches. Oriental Orthodox churches are different from the churches that call themselves Eastern Orthodoxy. The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria is the spiritual leader of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. This is because the Pope of Alexandria is also Patriarch of all Africa on the Holy See of St. Mark the Apostle. The spiritual leadership is not understood in the same sense as among the Eastern Orthodox Churches to the Church of Constantinople. It is in the spirit of respect and honour for the Apostolic Throne of Alexandria. It does not give any special rights to the Church of Alexandria.

Nestorian - Nestorianism is a movement within Christianity. The idea behind the doctrine was that there were two different persons of Jesus. One of them was the man Jesus, the other was the aspect of son of God, or Logos. Perhaps the most prominent supporter of the idea was Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople. Nestorius lived from about 380 to about

450 AD. The Council of Ephesus condemned this view in 431. This led to a split of the church, into the Assyrian Church of the East and the Byzantine Church. For this reason, the Assyrian Church of the East is sometimes called Nestorian. The church holds the view that Christ has two essences (qnome) that are united in one person (parsopa). The only two churches that teach Nestorianism today are the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Church of the East & Abroad.

Western Christianity

- **Catholic**
- **Protestant**
- **Anglican**
- **Baptist**
- **Methodist**
- **Quaker**
- **Evangelical**
- **Lutherans**
- **Unitarianism**
- **Pentecostal**

Catholic - The Catholic Church is led by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who lives in Vatican City. According to Catholics, the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, who also guides the Pope. The Church teaches that when the Pope speaks officially on the subject of Catholic faith and morals ('ex cathedra') he cannot be wrong. The Popes have used this infallibility throughout history; some examples include the Tome of St. Leo, the declaration of the Immaculate Conception, and various anathemas (religious condemnations issued by the Popes against certain heresies). Like other Christians, Catholics believe Jesus Christ is a divine person, the Son of God. They believe that because of his love for all people, he died so that all of us will live forever in heaven. The Catholic Church also recognizes the Trinity, i.e. that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are together the only God. Catholics should follow the example of love Jesus Christ both teaches and gives: to love each other so much that one is even willing to die for another. Some of the traditional worship practices of Roman Catholics include making the sign of the cross, kneeling, bowing, and receiving the Eucharist during their worship ceremonies. Their main form of worship is called the Mass. It is celebrated every day. Catholics are required to attend on Sunday and on a few Holy Days of obligation. In the United States, the Holy Days of Obligation are: Mary, Mother of God (January 1), The Assumption of Mary (August 15), The Immaculate Conception (of Mary) (December 8), The Ascension of Jesus (40 days after Easter), Christmas (December 25) and All Saints Day (November 1). These can be remembered by the following phrase: 3 for Mary, 2 for Jesus and 1 for all the saints.

While these are all practices of Roman Catholics, other Christian churches also use many or all of these same practices. Catholics put more emphasis on the Virgin Mary (Jesus's mother) than many other Christians, calling her the "Mother of God," "The Queen of Heaven," and praying to her regularly, as "Mediatrice of graces" at a level higher than other saints.

Protestant - With more than 500 million followers, Protestantism is the second largest branch of Christianity. Protestantism is divided into many different churches. The first Protestant churches broke away from Roman Catholicism, the largest branch of Christianity. Although many Protestant churches have different beliefs, all Protestants reject Roman Catholicism and the power of its leader, the pope. They base their beliefs on the Christian Bible. Most believe that getting to heaven requires only faith in God, not any specific actions. They think that each believer, not just priests, can spread God's teachings.

Most Protestant churches hold worship services on Sundays. Protestants perform only two of the sacraments, or rituals, practiced by Roman Catholics: baptism and Communion.

Anglican - Anglicanism is a form of Christianity that is part of the Protestant branch of the religion. People throughout the world belong to Anglican churches. Some of those churches have different names, but they are all related. Together they are known as the Anglican Communion. Anglicanism developed in England, and the Church of England is still the main Anglican church. In the 1500s the leaders of the church came up with the Thirty-nine Articles. These state the beliefs of the church, though the individual churches are not required to follow them. There are certain basic ideas, however, that most Anglicans accept. They follow the Bible and they believe in two main sacraments, or special signs of faith—baptism and Holy Communion.

Baptist - Baptist churches make up a branch of Protestant Christianity. They share many beliefs with other Christians, but they place particular importance on the sacrament, or ritual, of baptism. Baptists believe in a very simple style of church and worship service. They feel that having candles, incense, rich altar cloths, and highly decorated vestments does not make one closer to God. In fact, these outward signs may detract from the individual's direct experiences of God. In this conviction Baptists hope that they are creating a church environment close to the form of early Christianity.

Methodist - Methodism is a branch of Protestant Christianity. It is based on the ideas of a man named John Wesley, who lived in the 1700s. At first Wesley only wanted to reform the Church of England, but his ideas soon led to the development of a new church. Like all Christians, Methodists believe in the Trinity (meaning the three). This is the idea that three figures are united in one God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. Methodists also believe that the Bible provides the only guide to belief and practice. Also like other Protestant churches, Methodism traces its roots to Roman Catholicism. Methodists still accept the traditional statements of faith of the ancient Roman Catholic Church. They also accept two of the sacraments, or rituals, of the church—baptism and Holy Communion. Methodists believe that people should have a very personal relationship with God that transforms their lives. They also have a concern for people in society who need help. They believe that faith in God should lead people into service for others.

Quaker - Members of the Christian group known as the Society of Friends are called Quakers. They are dedicated to experiencing God personally rather than through clergy, such as priests or ministers. Quakers call the presence of God inside each person the "Inner Light." They believe that the Inner Light guides them through life.

Evangelical - The word evangelicalism refers to a type of Christian belief and practice in conservative Protestant Christianity, although some Catholic Christians would also call themselves evangelicals. Evangelicals believe in spreading their faith, (evangelism), the need to be converted, also called being born again, believing what is in the Bible and the need to live a moral life both personally and in society. In the past 200 years, people, churches and social movements have often been called evangelical. This is different from Protestant liberalism although they may share some of the same goals.

Lutherans - Lutheranism is a branch of Protestant Christianity. It is based on the ideas of a man named Martin Luther, who lived in Germany in the 1500s. It was one of the first groups to break away from the Roman Catholic church during the period known as the Reformation. The official teaching of the Lutheran churches is contained in the Book of Concord. The book contains prayers and documents that explain the faith. A document called the Augsburg Confession states the basic beliefs of Lutherans. Like all Protestants, Lutherans believe that

the Bible is the written word of God and that it contains the only source of truth about how people should live their lives. Lutherans also believe that people will be saved because of their faith in God, not because of anything they do.

Unitarian - Unitarianism is a religion that embraces many different beliefs. It started as a branch of Protestant Christianity, but over the years it became broader in its views. In the United States most Unitarians combined with a group called the Universalists in 1961. They formed the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Some Unitarians, however, continue to call themselves Christian Unitarians. Unitarians do not believe in the Trinity. Most Christians believe that three figures are united in one God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. Unitarians, however, believe that God is one single being. Unitarians also do not have any specific creed, or statement of faith. They read the Bible, but they do not place as much emphasis on it as other Protestant Christians do. Instead, they encourage their followers to use their reason and experience to form their beliefs.

Pentecostal - Pentecostalism is a Christian religious movement that started in the early 1900s. Its followers seek to have the same experiences that the original followers of Jesus had on a day called Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish festival that the followers, or disciples, were celebrating when they first received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit allowed the disciples to speak in many different languages. It also inspired them to spread the new Christian religion throughout the world. The Holy Spirit is one part of the Trinity. This is the Christian idea that God exists in three parts—the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe that they must experience a “second baptism,” beyond water baptism, in which the Holy Spirit comes to them. Through the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals believe that they can speak in tongues, or languages that they do not recognize. They also believe that the Holy Spirit gives them the power to heal the sick and to tell the future.

Druze - Numbering about 834,000, the Druzes are a small religious sect whose adherents live primarily in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. More than half of them live in Syria, and about one third live in Lebanon. Because of their belief in Allah as the one God, the Druzes are often considered an Islamic group. But their teachings are sufficiently distinctive to set them apart from the Muslim majority of the Middle East. The God of Islam revealed himself to his Prophet, Muhammad, whose writings were compiled into the Koran. The Druzes believe that their founder, al-Hakim bi-Amrih Allah, which means “ruler by God’s command,” was actually an incarnation of God—the last and most significant of several such incarnations, or emanations. Hakim was the sixth caliph of the Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt, and he ruled from 996 until 1021. He had been a persecutor of Jews, Christians, and Muslims within his domain. But for some reason, in 1017, he began promoting toleration for all. In that year he was proclaimed by his followers to be an incarnation of Allah. In 1021 he disappeared. He was probably murdered, but his followers said that he had gone into hiding and would reappear after 1,000 years. The Druzes cloak their religion in secrecy. Not even all members of the faith are permitted to learn the secret doctrines. Believers are divided into two groups: the sages initiated into the teachings (called Hakimyah), and the uninitiated. The sages themselves are divided into grades, the highest being the ajawid, meaning “the generous,” who alone know the secrets of the Hakimyah. Druzes believe that the number of faithful has been determined from eternity. Hence they believe in transmigration of souls: when a believer dies, his soul enters the body of a newborn infant. All Druzes have the duty to accept the truth about Hakim, deny other religious beliefs, avoid unbelievers, and maintain solidarity and mutual aid with other Druzes.

Islam - Islam is one of the world's major religions. Its founder was Muhammad. The religion has about 1.6 billion followers worldwide. Most of the followers of Islam, called Muslims, live in North Africa, the Middle East, and southern and central Asia. At the core of Islam is this idea: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." Muslims believe that Allah created the universe and that humans must submit to his will. The content of the Koran, the holy book of Islam, is believed by Muslims to be the word of Allah as told to Muhammad. Five duties, called the five pillars of Islam, are expected of every Muslim. The first is the most important: to profess that there is one God and that Muhammad was his prophet. The second duty is prayer. Muslims pray five times a day. On Fridays communities gather at a place of worship, called a mosque, for special prayers. The third duty is charity. The fourth duty is to fast, or refuse to eat, from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan. The fifth duty is to make a pilgrimage, or journey, to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once. There are two major branches of Islam. Most Muslims belong to the Sunni branch. They are called Sunnis. Sunnis are known as traditional Muslims. They follow the sayings of Muhammad and emphasize community. Members of the smaller Shi'ite branch are called Shi'ites. They believe that the truths of the Koran are revealed only through a community leader called the imam. Interpretations by other people are not accepted. For this reason Shi'ites are not as open to other views as Sunnis are.

Iranian religions

- **Yazdânism**
- **Zoroastrianism**

Yazdânism - The Yazidi (also Yezidi) are a ethnoreligious group with Indo-Iranian roots. They are a separate branch of the Abrahamic religion tree. Their religion blends monotheism with Zoroastrianism and the religions of ancient Mesopotamia. They mostly live in the Nineveh Province of northern Iraq. More people are in Transcaucasia, Armenia, Turkey, and Syria. They have been fewer since the 1990s. Their religion is Yazidism. The Yazidis believe in a single god who created the world. They believe that he placed the world under the care of seven holy beings or angels. The main angel is Melek Taus, the peacock angel.

Zoroastrianism - Zoroastrianism is a religion. Zoroaster, who lived in eastern ancient Iran around 1000 BC, created Zoroastrianism. Other names for Zoroastrianism are Mazdaism and Parsiism. Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion. The Zoroastrian god is called Ahura Mazda. The holy book of Zoroastrianism is the Zend Avesta. Zoroastrianism is also dualist. Zoroastrians believe Ahura Mazda created two spirits: a good one (Spenta Mainyu), and a bad one (Angra Mainyu). Zoroastrians believe people are free to choose between good and bad. Choosing good will lead to happiness, and choosing bad will lead to unhappiness. So it is the best to choose good. Therefore, the motto of the religion is "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds".

Zoroastrianism was the state religion of Persia starting in the 6th century BC, including the Sassanid dynasty. In the 7th century AD, Persia was conquered by Islamic Arabs, and most Persians became Muslims. Nowadays, there are about 2.6 million Zoroastrians in the world. Most of them live in Iran, Pakistan or India. In Pakistan and India, they are called Parsis. Many Zoroastrians now live in the United States.

African

- **Traditional African**

Traditional African - Traditional African religions are the traditions of the religious groups in Africa. After Christianity and Islam, they are the third-biggest religious group in Africa. These religions still stick to their traditions. They are folk religions, and combine different beliefs. In general, people in the cities confess to either Christianity or Islam. The people outside the cities confess to the traditional religions. These religions are present in everyday life. All that happens has a supernatural cause, rooted in religion. People are born with a certain religion. Normally conversions from one belief system to another do not take place. There is a central belief in a life force which links everyday life with the metaphysical. Generally, such religions are full of life, and have a low esteem for an ascetic lifestyle. There is also the fear of spirits, the dead, and of magic, which influence everyday life. Practitioners of traditional religions in Sub-Saharan Africa are distributed among 43 countries, and were estimated to number over 100 million, although the largest religions in Africa are Christianity and Islam. There are more similarities than differences in all traditional African religions. The gods and spirits are honoured through libation, sacrifice (of animals, vegetables, cooked food, flowers, semi-precious stones, precious metals, etc). In many traditional African religions, there is a belief in a cyclical nature of reality. The living stand between their ancestors and the unborn. Traditional African religions embrace natural phenomena – ebb and tide, waxing and waning moon, rain and drought – and the rhythmic pattern of agriculture. Since Africa is a large continent with many ethnic groups and cultures, there is not one single technique of casting divination. The practice of casting may be done with small objects, such as bones, cowrie shells, stones, strips of leather, or flat pieces of wood. Some castings are done using sacred divination plates made of wood or performed on the ground, often within a circle. In traditional African societies, many people seek out diviners on a regular basis. There are generally no prohibitions against the practice. Those who divine for a living are also sought for their wisdom as counsellors in life and for their knowledge of herbal medicine.

New ethnic religions

- **Rastafari**
- **Black Hebrew Israelites**
- **Japanese new religions**
- **Modern Paganism**

Rastafari - The religious and socio-political movement known as Rastafarianism had its roots in the Back to Africa movement led by the black nationalist Marcus Garvey in the early 20th century. Garvey, a Jamaican, urged blacks throughout the world to recover their African identity by looking to their ancestral home. In a speech before the United Negro Improvement Association, an organization he had founded to promote black solidarity, Garvey told the audience to watch for a sign of deliverance—a black king would be crowned in Africa. Many thought Garvey's prophecy was fulfilled when Ras Tafari, taking the name Haile Selassie, was crowned emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. The emperor, who Rastafarians believe was a descendant of ancient Israel's King Solomon, soon came to be worshipped by some Jamaicans and other blacks as a divine being. He was thought to be an incarnation of Jah—the Rastafarian name for God—and the Messiah. Rastafarians have their own interpretation of the Christian Bible. According to their theology, blacks are akin to the Israelites and were sent by Jah into slavery under the white race as punishment for their sins. The social and political structures of whites, which are blamed for oppressing blacks for centuries, are referred to as Babylon. Rastafarians believe that they will one day be redeemed by an exodus to Africa, and more specifically Ethiopia, which is considered to be heaven on Earth. Rastafarians have a distinctive lifestyle that stems from their religious

beliefs. A central but controversial part of the movement's religious practice is the smoking of ganja, or marijuana, as a sacrament to achieve spiritual enlightenment. The physical appearance of Rastafarians is distinguished by uncombed, coiled hair known as dreadlocks, which symbolizes the mane of the Lion of Judah (one of Haile Selassie's titles), and the wearing of red, black, green, and gold. Most Rastafarians follow special diets and many are vegetarians. Closely associated with the movement is reggae music, which was introduced to international audiences by Bob Marley and became widely recognized as a means of Rastafarian self-expression. The popularity of reggae was largely responsible for the growth of Rastafarianism beginning in the mid-1970s. By the late 1990s, the movement was estimated to have more than 100,000 followers worldwide.

Black Hebrew Israelites - Black Hebrew Israelites, byname of the Original African Hebrew Israelite Nation of Jerusalem, African American religious community in Israel, the members of which consider themselves to be the descendants of a lost tribe of Israel. Black Hebrew Israelites hold religious beliefs that differ from those of modern Jewish communities in Israel. Black Hebrew Israelites permit polygamy and forbid birth control. Leaders decide who will marry and whether marriage annulments will be permitted, and they perform wedding ceremonies. Black Hebrew Israelites are vegans, avoiding the consumption of meat, dairy, eggs, and sugar. Members adopt Hebrew names to replace names they believe could be derived from slavery. Most Black Hebrew Israelites live in Dimona, Israel, with the first ones arriving in that country in 1969. The group began in Chicago in 1967 under the leadership of Ben Ammi Ben Israel, an African American whose birth name was Ben Carter. Ben Israel appointed 30 disciples and in 1967 moved the group to Liberia before embarking for their final destination in Israel. The Black Hebrew Israelites' claims of Jewish heritage provoked substantial debate in Israel. Israeli law offers citizenship for all Jews throughout the world, but the Black Hebrew Israelites could produce no evidence to substantiate their Jewish heritage. After much investigation, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel thus decided that the Black Hebrew Israelites were not really Jewish and were not entitled to citizenship.

Japanese new religions – Japanese new religions are new religious movements established in Japan. In Japanese, they are called shinshūkyō (新宗教) or shinkō shūkyō (新興宗教). Japanese scholars classify all religious organizations founded since the middle of the 19th century as "new religions"; thus, the term refers to a great diversity and number of organizations. Most came into being in the mid-to-late twentieth century and are influenced by much older traditional religions including Buddhism, Shinto and Hinduism. Western influences include Christianity, the Bible and the writings of Nostradamus.

Modern Paganism - Paganism is a term that covers a great number of spiritual and religious beliefs, and someone who follows one of these beliefs is known as a Pagan. Some of those in ancient times, who are called Pagans today, believed there was not just one god but a number of gods and goddesses. The stories from Greek mythology are famous examples from a pagan religion. Pagans usually focus on spirituality and nature, rather than on doctrines and dogma. Not all pagans are polytheists (belief in more than one god). Some of them are monotheists (belief in only one god). The word pagan (without a capital P) is often used to describe anyone who holds religious beliefs that differ from the main world religions. A similar term is heathen. Today Pagan, with a capital P, often refers to people who follow Neo-Pagan religions that honour the Earth. The best known Neo-Pagan religion is Wicca. Another well-known neo-pagan faith is Druidism, but there are many other Neo-Pagan religions with different beliefs.