A world map where different regions are colored to represent various religions. Christianity is shown in shades of red, Islam in green, Buddhism in purple, Hinduism in yellow, Sikhism in orange, and 'No religion' in grey. Other colors like blue and brown represent smaller groups like Judaism and Folk religions. The map is centered on the Atlantic Ocean.

Religions of the World

Mark D. Harris,

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MD Harris Institute

Christianity:

Catholicism 
Protestantism 

Islam:

Sunni 
Shia 

Buddhism:

Theravada 
Vajrayana 

Hinduism:


Judaism: 

Sikhism:


Folk religions: 

No religion:



Mission

- To compare Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, smaller faiths (Sikh, Jain, Jewish, animism, Chinese religions, paganism, and others), and major secular belief systems with each other and with Christianity.
- To interest participants in religions of the world and other cultures.
- To help participants share the story of Christ with people in other cultures.

Class Specifics

- Location – Ukraine Baptist Theological Seminary, Lviv, UA.
- Duration – 5-day in-person intensive, 12-16 May 2025
- Instructor – Mark D. Harris, PhD in World Religions, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS)
- Textbooks
 - Required –
 - Optional
 - Religion and Art, Shaping the World for Christ
 - Echoes of War: Religious Militancy in Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, Online – Print or Online

Is Comparing Religions a Good Idea?

- Allows people to rapidly understand differences and similarities between faith groups.
- Useful to understand cultures and actions of peoples throughout the world.
- Religions can vary between regions, localities, and even individual practitioners. It is difficult, if not impossible, to account for all such differences.
 - Every Muslim is not a terrorist.
 - Every Hindu is not a pacifist
- Modern comparative religious study came from racist, colonial, imperial Europe
 - It was used as a way to prove the superiority of Christianity.
 - Therefore, it should not be used.

Sample Religion Comparison

	Buddhism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Judaism	Confucianism
Adherents)	362 million	2 billion	820 million	1.2 billion	14.5 million	6.3 million
Founders)	The Buddha did not teach a personal deity.	God	Three main gods: Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva	God (Allah)	God (Yahweh)	Confucius (viewed by many as a god)
Founder	The Buddha	Jesus Christ	No one founder	Muhammad	Abraham	Confucius
Holy Book	No one book—sacred texts, including the <i>Dhammapada</i>	Bible	No one book—sacred texts, including the Vedas, the Puranas	Qur'an	Hebrew Bible, including the Torah	the <i>Analects</i> , the Five Classics
Leadership	Buddhist monks and nuns	Priests, ministers, monks, and nuns	Guru, holy man, Brahmin priest	No clergy but a scholar class called the ulama and the imam, who may lead prayers	Rabbis	No clergy
Basic Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons achieve complete peace and happiness (nirvana) by eliminating their attachment to worldly things. Nirvana is reached by following the Noble Eightfold Path: Right views; Right resolve; Right speech; Right conduct; Right livelihood; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is only one God, who watches over and cares for his people. Jesus Christ was the son of God. He died to save humanity from sin. His death and resurrection made eternal life possible for others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The soul never dies, but is continually reborn. Persons achieve happiness and enlightenment after they free themselves from their earthly desires. Freedom from earthly desires comes from a lifetime of worship, knowledge, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons achieve salvation by following the Five Pillars of Islam and living a just life. These pillars are: faith; prayer; almsgiving, or charity to the poor; fasting, which Muslims perform during Ramadan; pilgrimage to Mecca. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is only one God, who watches over and cares for his people. God loves and protects his people, but also holds people accountable for their sins and shortcomings. Persons serve God by studying the Torah and living by its 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social order, harmony, and good government should be based on strong family relationships. Respect for parents and elders is important to a well-ordered society. Education is important both to the welfare of the individual and

Approach in this class

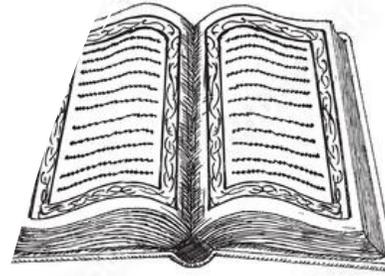
- Rather than looking at how each individual practices his or her faith, we will characterize each faith as it is taught in its original, **authoritative documents**. For example,
 - Buddhism – *Tipitaka (Sutta Pitaka, Angutara Pitaka, Nikaya Pitaka)*, a mention of some key sutras
 - Hindu – *Vedas*, Ten Principal Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita*
 - Islam – *Quran, Sahih al Bukhari*
 - Other (Sikh, Jain, and Jew) – Scriptures, Talmud
- Some faiths do not have authoritative documents. In these cases, we must use other documents as available.

What about other documents?

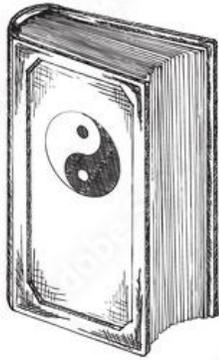
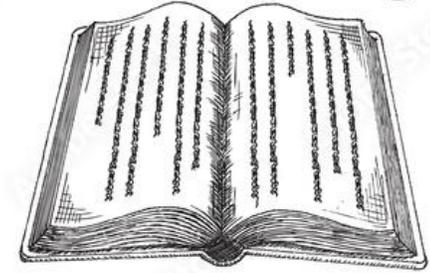
- Adherents and outsiders differ on which documents to consider foundational.
 - Islam – Quran is accepted by *Sunni*, *Shia*, and all branches, but what about Hadiths (*Sahih al Bukhari*, *Sahih al Islam*, and/or others), and the Life of Mohammad?
 - Buddhism – *Tipitaka* is accepted by *Theravada* and all branches, but what about *Mahayana* scriptures like the Diamond, Lotus, and Heart Sutras? What about Vajrayana texts?
 - Hinduism – *Vedas* and the ten principal *Upanishads* are accepted, but what about other *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, and Epics (Mahabharata and the Ramayana)
 - Judaism – Bible, but what about *Talmud*, *Mishna*, and *Kabalah*?
 - Christians – Bible, but should the Apocrypha be added?
- This class looks primarily at the texts accepted by most adherents

Holy Books

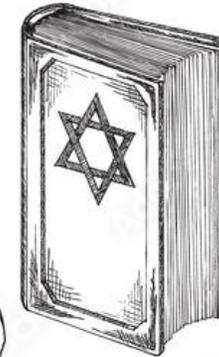
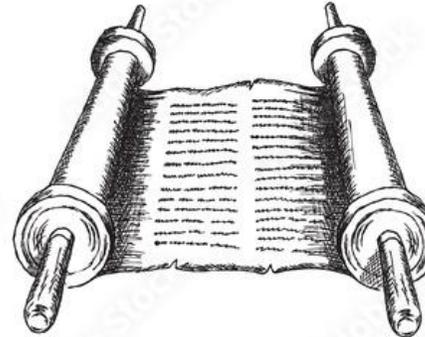
Vedas



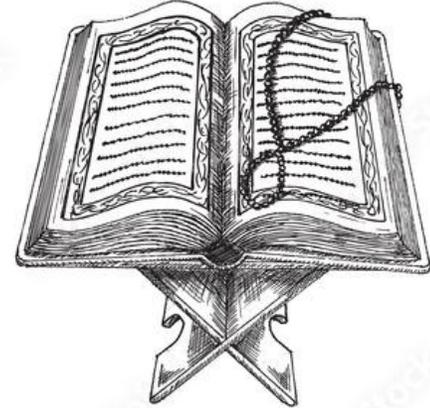
Tao Te Ching



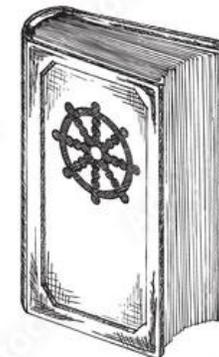
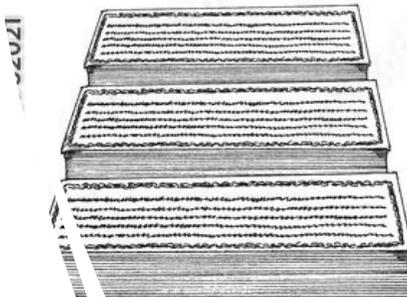
Torah



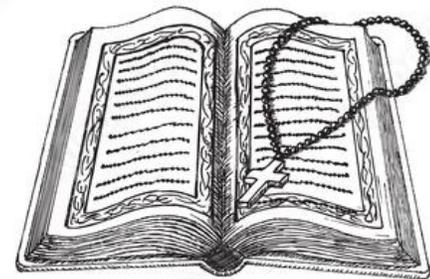
Quran



Tripitaka



Bible



Hermeneutic

- Authorial intent – The meaning of a text is what the author meant to say. The reader’s task is to decipher it.
- Reader response – The meaning of a text is whatever the reading community believes it to say. The author’s intent has no relevance.
- This class uses a hermeneutic of authorial intent.
- Some think that “authorial intent” means “literal.” This is false. In Revelation 1:13-16, the author clearly intends the reader to understand his description of Jesus figuratively. That is how we should interpret it.

Is authorial intent the same as “literal”?

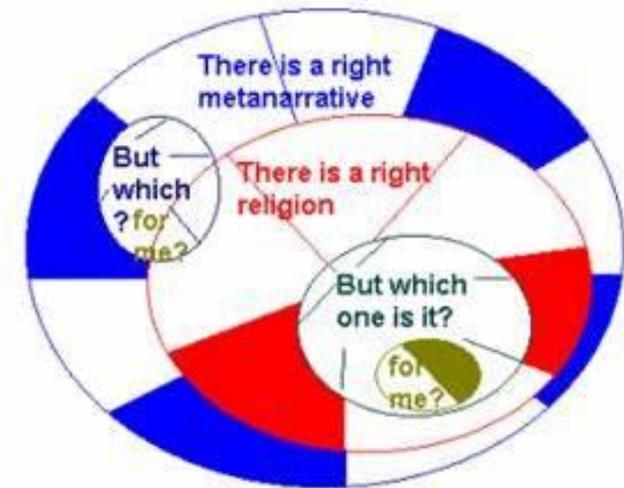
- *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And after turning I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and wrapped around the chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze when it has been heated to a glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*
- How many people believe that the Son of Man has a literal sword sticking out of His mouth?

Four Key Questions for each religion

- What do you picture when you think about each religion?
- What are the basic tenets of each religion?
- What is the historical record for each religion?
- What is the impact of each religion? Numbers, geographic scope, historical importance, modern issues
- Ask yourself each of these questions as we go through this class.
 - What preconceptions do you find?
 - What emotions do you feel?
 - What has been your experience with people of each faith?
 - As a Christian, what thoughts and feelings need to change?

Metanarratives

- Stories that attempt to explain reality. They are overarching explanations for existence, sin, redemption, meaning, and all the great questions in life. Every religion and philosophy promotes its own metanarrative, and rejects all others.
- Common modern metanarratives:
 - Islamic
 - Secular humanist/Communist
 - Hindu
 - Christian
- Describe your metanarrative

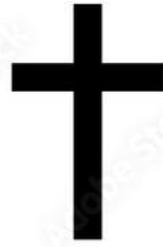


The Metanarrative of the Bible

Presented by



Religious Adherents Worldwide



CHRISTIANITY
2.4 billion



CHINESE TRADITIONAL
RELIGION
950 million



SIKHISM
30 million



ISLAM
1.6 billion



BUDDHISM
376 million



JUDAISM
14 million



HINDUISM
1.15 billion



TAOISM
173 million



SHINTO
4 million

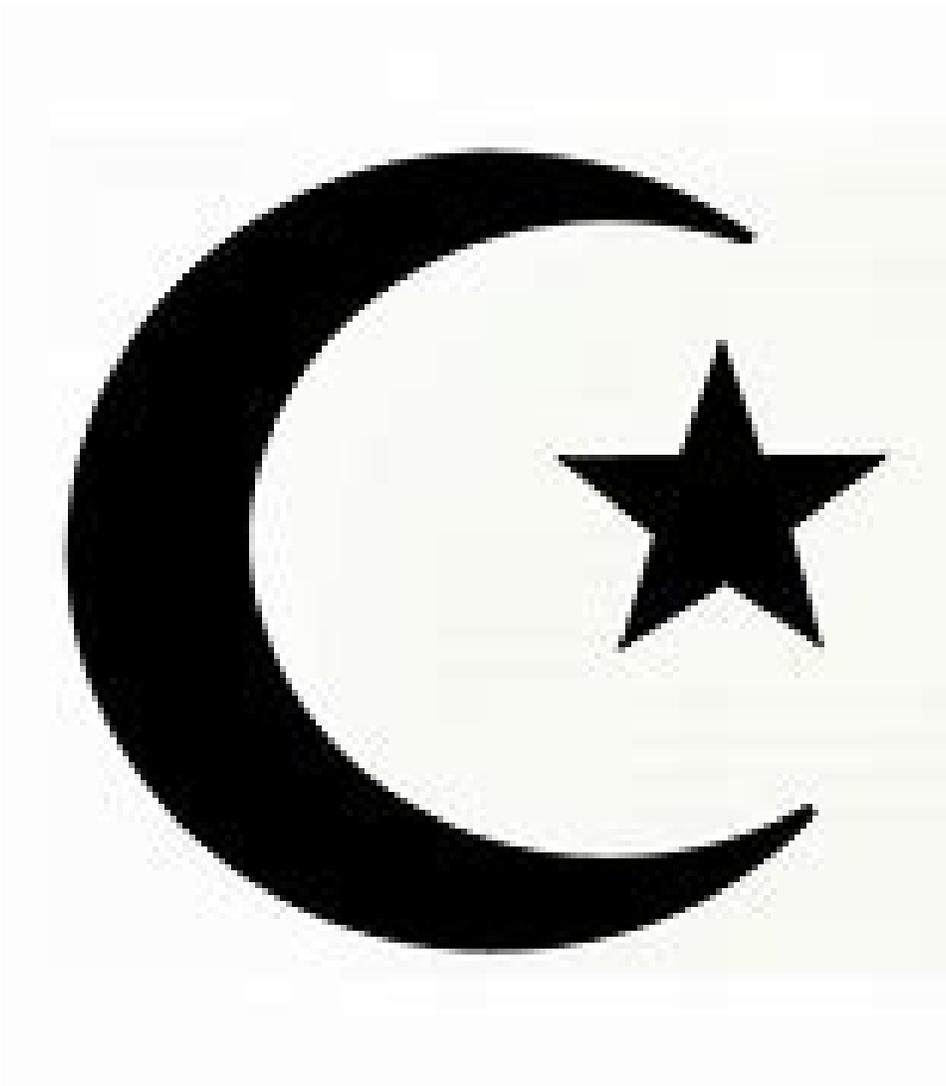
Islam

- Founding
- Life of Mohammad (AD 570-632) – without this book, we would know nothing about Mohammad’s earthly sojourn
- Hijra – Muslims’ flight to Medina (AD 522)
- Holy book – *Quran*
- Hadith – *Sahih al Bukhari, Sahih al Islam*, both are highly regarded
- Biography



Islam (1)

- Five pillars
 - *Shahada* – One God Allah and Mohammad is his prophet,
 - *Salah* – prayers (*Fajr*, *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Maghrib*, and *Isha*),
 - *Zakat* – taxes, alms,
 - *Sawm* – fasting (Ramadan),
 - *Hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca)
- Unified secular and religious governance – The Caliph is the military and religious leader. All sources of temporal and religious power belong to him. The Caliph leads the *Umma* in prayers/worship



Islam (2)

- Muslim religious leaders
 - *Imam* - leads prayers at the local mosque, but are not intercessors like priests
 - *Mufti* – clarifies Islamic law
- *Umma* – The community of Muslims in each country and throughout the world. Muslim promises of peace, equality, and freedom apply only within the *Umma*. They do not apply to non-Muslim nations (dar al harb) or non-Muslims living in Muslim nations.

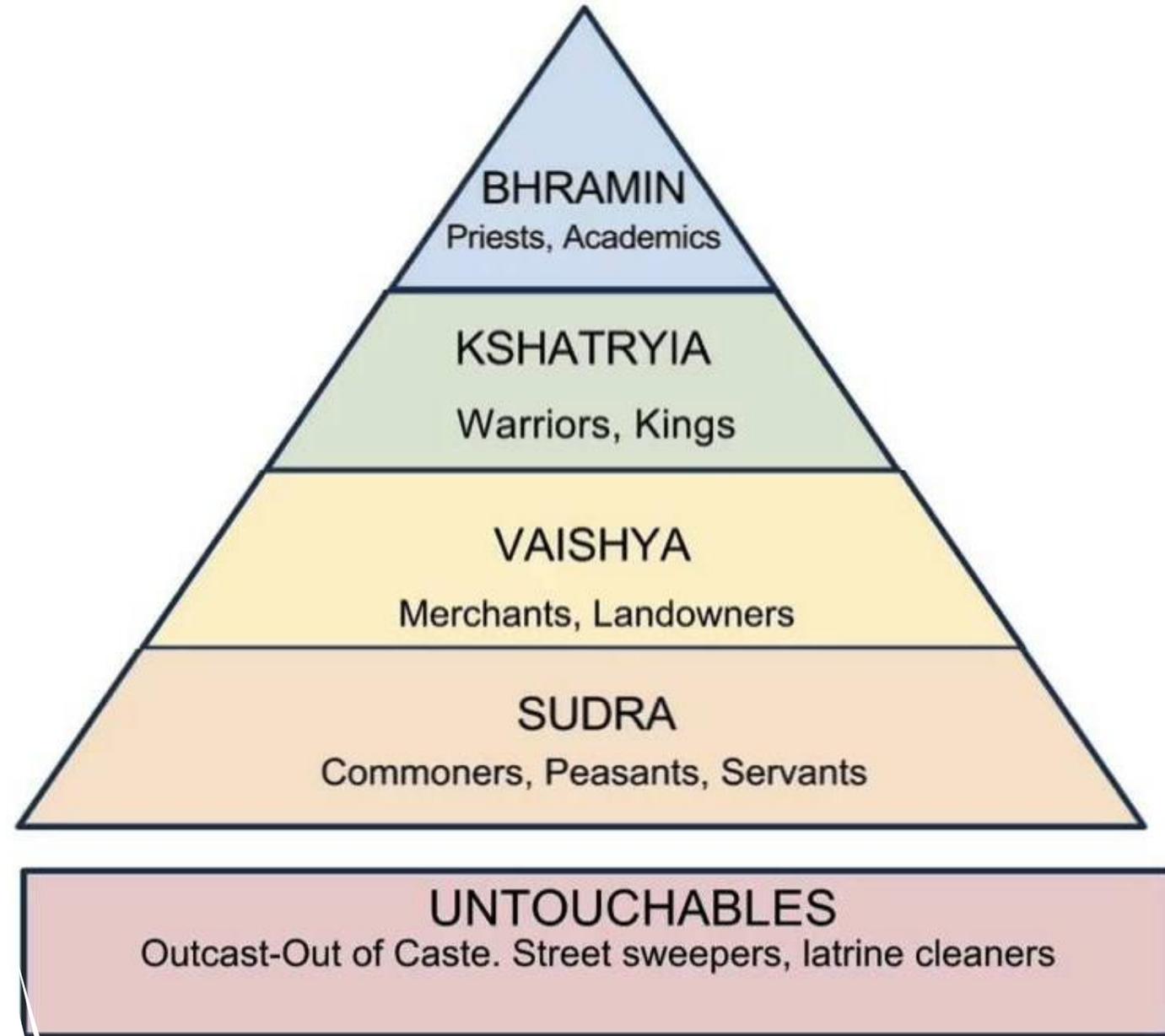
Islam (3)

- *Dhimmi* – Any non-Muslim in a Muslim-dominated society
- *Jizya* – Taxes paid by non-Muslims to their Muslim government.
- Leaders – *Rashidun* (“rightly guided” caliphs)
 - Abu Bakr (AD 573-634)
 - Umar (AD 582-644)
 - Uthman (AD 573-656)
 - Ali (AD 600 – 661)
- *Jihad* – greater (self-denial) and lesser (conflict, war)
 - *Quitab* when combined with Jihad – physical fighting and war

Hinduism

- Founding – Hinduism has no founders and is considered to have emerged out of the ancient teachings of the gods.
- Holy books - *sruti* (revealed) and *smrti* (remembered)
- *Vedas* (1500 BC) – Brahman rituals (transactional, *Agni*, *Indra*), *Upanishads* (300 BC) – philosophic
- *Bhagavat Gita* (100 BC) – *Bhakti* (personal devotion)
- Polytheism – as many gods as you want (cf. Acts 17)

Hindu Beliefs and Practices - The caste system



Hinduism (2)

- *Dharma* – truth and duty
- *Karma*
- *Samsara* and *moksha*
- Monks
- Laity
- Daily practices
- Idols



Buddhism (1)

- Founding
- Holy books (*Tipitaka*, *Sutras* in the *Mahayana* tradition)
- Four noble truths
 - *Dukkha* (Suffering) – Life is full of suffering, sickness, unhappiness, and death.
 - *Samudaya* (Cause of Suffering) – People suffering for one simple reason: they desire things (physical items, people, and even personal existence).
 - *Nirodha* (End of Suffering) – To extinguish desire.
 - *Magga* (The Path) – The way to extinguish desire.



Buddhism (2) - Noble eightfold path



- Right understanding (*Samma ditthi*),
- Right thought (*Samma sankappa*),
- Right speech (*Samma vaca*),
- Right action (*Samma kammanta*),
- Right livelihood (*Samma ajiva*),
- Right effort (*Samma vayama*),
- Right mindfulness (*Samma sati*),
- Right concentration (*Samma samadhi*)

Buddhism (3)

- *Dhamma* – truth, duty
- *Karma* – what you reap, you shall sow (primarily in subsequent lives)
- *Samsara* – the cycle of lives over the eons, including suffering (*dukkha*) and illusion (*maya*)
- *Moksha* – release from the cycle of samsara occasioned by good works.
- *Sangha* (monks (male – *bhikkhu*, female – *bhikkhuni*) – abstinence from sex, intoxicants, collects alms from lay Buddhists).
- Laity daily practices – vegetarian, no intoxicants, support monks, usually must be reborn as a *bhikkhu* before earning moksha.

Buddhism (4)

- Five precepts – don't injure living, don't steal, no sexual immorality, don't lie, no intoxicants
- Triple refuge – *Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha*
- Three cardinal virtues – non-attachment, benevolence, understanding
- Three poisons – ignorance, hatred, delusion
- Four heavenly abodes – compassion, kindness, joy, peace

Sikhism (1)



- Founding – Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1538) lived in Punjab. He was dissatisfied with Hinduism and Islam and combined elements of both in his teachings. A series of Sikh gurus followed him until the Sikh holy book, Adi Granth, became the final, permanent guru (1708).
- Holy books – Guru Granth Sahib compiled by Gobind Singh (1666-1708), Adi Granth,
- True Name (Karta Purukh) – One eternal, self-existent God.
- Beliefs
 - God has two nature, personal (saguna) and impersonal (Nirguna).
 - Mankind is intrinsically good, with each person possessing a spark of divine light.
 - Men and women are fully equal.
- Penetrating the wall of falsehood. Praising God and developing compassion through meditation. One's soul being absorbed into the divine essence (sach khand)

Sikhism (2) - Five principal vices



- Worldly attachment (moh)
 - Pride (ahankar)
 - Anger (krodh)
 - Lust (kam)
 - Greed (lobh).
-
- Process of liberation

Sikhism (3)

- Distinctive beliefs
 - Sikh army (Khalsa) – designated by the colonial British as a “martial race”
 - Uncut hair (kesh)
 - Wooden comb (kangha)
 - Steel bracelet (kara)
 - Short sword (kirpan)
 - Shorts (kachha).
- Men are given the surname Singh and women the surname Kaur.
- Khalsa initiation ritual
- Temple worship (gurdwara) – singing hymns (kirtan), meditation, readings from Granth Sahib.
- Diwali – festival of lights (like Hindu).
- Daily prayers (Nitnem).
- Five seats of authority (takhts).
- Battle of Muktsar (1705) – memory of 40 Sikhs killed when fighting Mughal Empire.

Judaism (1)

- Founding – Abraham (c 1800 BC)
- Holy books
 - Torah – first five books of the Bible, which were given in written and oral form by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.
 - Tanach – all written Hebrew scriptures, including the Torah (law),
 - Nevim (prophets)
 - Ketuvim (writings). Known as the Bible to Jews and the Old Testament to Christians.
 - Mishnah – written record of oral law which expanded into the Talmud.
 - Talmud – A commentary on the Mishnah. A record of rabbinic debates on the Torah from the destruction of the Temple (AD 70) and of Judea (AD 135) to the fifth century.
- Divisions of Judaism – orthodox, conservative, reformed
- God – YHWH is one, personal, eternal, and self-existent God.



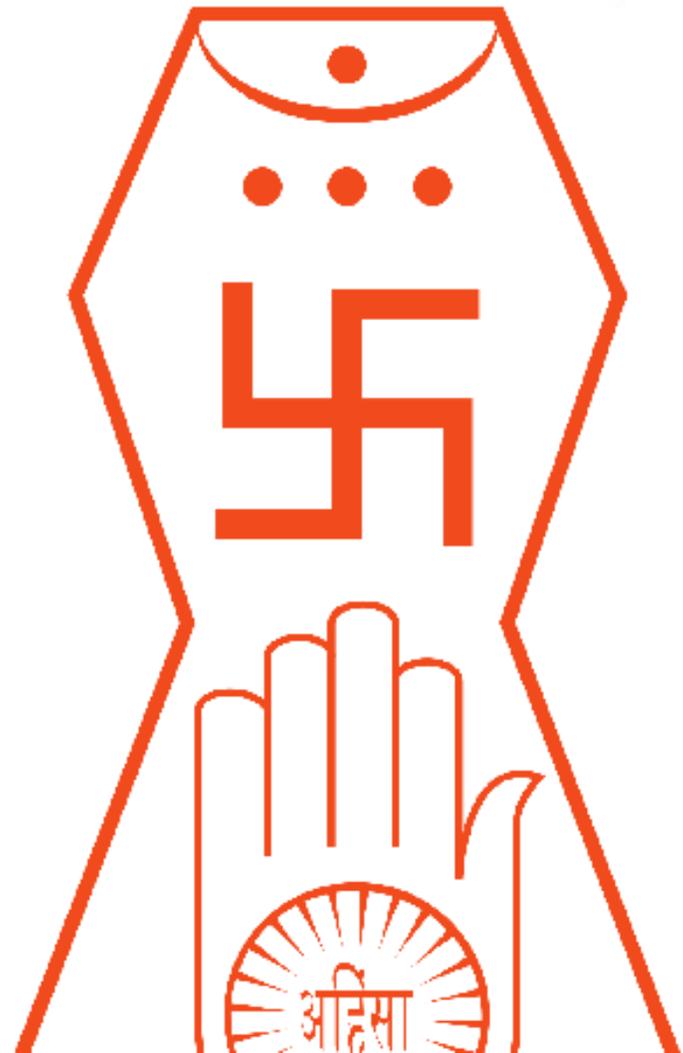
Judaism



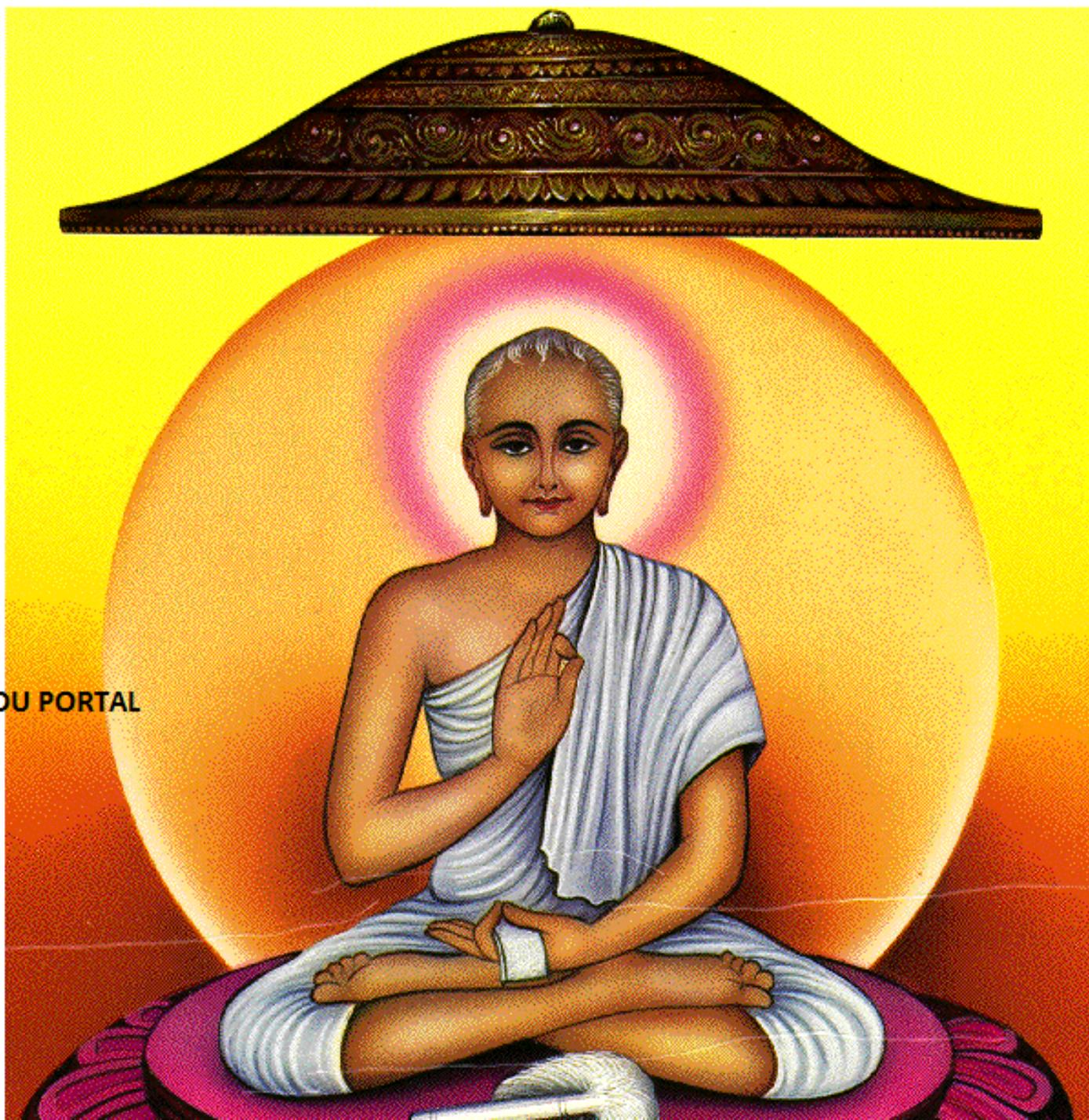
Judaism (2)

- Salvation
 - Reformed and Conservative traditions deny original sin.
 - Individual atonement comes from repenting, praying, and doing good works.
 - Simply being Jewish guarantees that each Jew goes to heaven in the next life. The sufferings of all Jews justify each individual Jew.
- Common thread – the desire to maintain Jewish identity to keep the Jewish race alive.
- Distinctive beliefs
 - Halakah (civil laws). Circumcision. Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Star of David.
 - Kabbalah – Jewish mysticism.
 - The Holocaust – a defining period for modern Judaism.
 - Zionism – the belief that Jews must have a homeland, and it must be in Palestine.
- Afterlife – heaven, reincarnation, torment, annihilation.

JAINISM



THE HINDU PORTAL



Jainism (1)

- Founding – Jains claim that Jainism was founded 8.4 million years ago. Vardhamana (Mahavira, 599-527 BC) was a prince who left his palace at age 30 to begin 12 years of rigorous asceticism. He achieved perfect enlightenment, attracted many followers, and starved himself to death at age 72.
- Some ancient rulers in India became Jains to escape their lower Hindu castes and take power.
- Holy books (45 in six groupings) – Angas, Upangas, Pakinnakas, Chedas, Mulasutras, and Sutras
- Polytheism or atheism
- Beliefs
 - All sentient beings are gods but are in spiritual bondage.
 - Right perception
 - Right knowledge
 - Right conduct

Jainism (2)

- Nonliving objects – space (akasa), time (kaal), matter (pudgala), motion (dharmastikay), and rest (adharmastikay).
- Three fundamental aspects of every entity in existence – origination (utpada), destruction (vyaya), permanence (dhrauvya).
- Cycle of time (kalchakra) – time has no beginning or end.
- Five kinds of benevolent beings (panch parameshthi)
- Supreme humans (arihantas)
 - Perfect souls (siddhas)
 - Master teachers (acharyas),
 - Scholarly monks (upadhyayas)
 - Ascetics (sadhus).
- Beliefs may be mistaken (anekantvada).

Jainism (3)

- Two main groups – Svetambara (white clad), digambara (sky clad, naked)
- Nature of existence
 - Supreme abode – dwelling place of liberated souls.
 - Upper world – abode of heavenly beings.
 - Middle world – earth and visible universe.
 - Netherworld – seven hells.
 - Nigoda – abode of the lowest forms of life.
 - Universe space – clouds that envelop the upper world.
 - Space beyond – an immeasurable realm without properties.



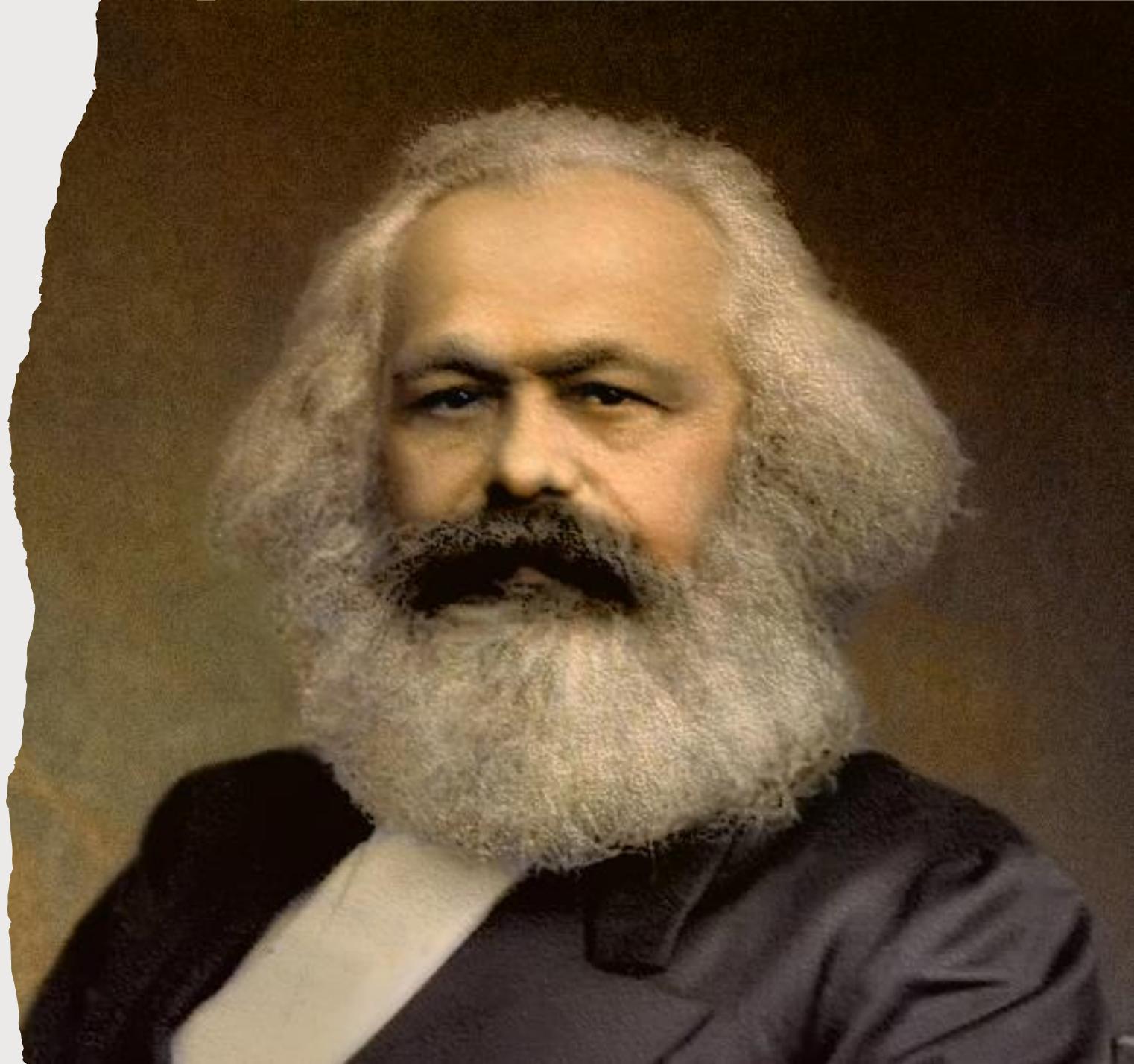
Jainism (4) - Lifestyle

- Abandon all material possessions.
- Strictly vegetarian
- Non-violent (even insects)
- Daily prayer (namaskar mantra) with nine elements – to Arihantas, Siddhas, acharyas, upadhyayas, holy men, five obeisances, eradicate defilements, happiness, praise.
- Afterlife – the person is never again trapped in a physical body.



Secular Humanism (1)

- Founding – Early 20th century under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophers, Marx, Nietzsche, etc.
- Holy books – technically none, though the Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital are influential.
- God – atheistic or agnostic
- Salvation – no eternal life but rather annihilation. The only meaning in life is what each individual puts into it on this earth.



Secular Humanism (2)

- Beliefs
 - Free inquiry – individuals can pursue and promote anything they wish without resistance.
 - Separation of Church and State – religious ideas (and often people) can have no part in governance.
 - Ideal of freedom – democratic decision making, rights of minorities, rule of law.
 - Ethics without resort to religion.
 - Moral education without religion.
 - Religious skepticism, since truth can only be known by scientific inquiry of the physical world.
 - Reason – rational modes of inquiry include only logic, evidence, and empirical testing.
 - Science and technology alone explore the world and lead to progress. Evolution.
 - Education – free and compulsory.
- Rejects all metanarratives. There is no meaning in creation or life and no afterlife. Only the physical exists.

Secular Humanism (3)

- Creation – none. The universe is self-existent, or an infinite number (multiverse) exists.
- Humanity – developed by chance with no external meaning. Cultural pluralism is objectively good. The belief in an afterlife is detrimental to achieving good in this life. “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” Marx
- The quest for social justice is foremost.
- Wokeism
 - Opposed to free inquiry, democracy, reason, and science since these are legacies of the white, European, and American oppressors.
 - Generally atheistic.
 - Replaces Marxist class conflict with race conflict. The powerful are morally evil and oppress all others. There is no repentance since oppressing is the unpardonable sin. The powerful should never be believed. The weak are morally good and are oppressed. There is no need for repentance since being oppressed is the ultimate virtue. The oppressed should never be doubted.



Conclusion (1) – How to Minister to Them

- Interpersonal relationships
- Know your own faith very, very well.
- Live like Jesus
- None of these beliefs espouse a sinful nature in mankind. In every one, man is good albeit flawed. Therefore, no one is really in need of a savior. Christianity alone deals with the awful truth that every part of man is morally corrupt. He is dead in his sins, not sick, and needs a savior.
- Because man is hopeless in himself, he will never escape his brokenness. God alone, through Christ, can heal the broken. The worst news precedes the best.

Conclusion (2) - How to Minister to Them

- Focus on the gospel. The earthly work of Jesus is our greatest power. It is the ultimate good news.
- People are generally loved, not argued, into heaven. However, actions alone are insufficient. We must use words.
- Don't get stuck on politics or on minutiae. Focus on what matters, which is Jesus Christ.
- Abraham religions emphasize holy texts while Indian religions emphasize experience.
- Be joyful. Cranky Christians are not convincing. They are also not obedient, and God promises us joy.