

World Religions and Ethical Systems

A Global View

Thousands of religions are practiced in the world. A religion is an organized system of beliefs and practices, often centered on one or more gods. The following pages focus on five major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. This handbook also discusses Confucianism, an ethical system. Like a religion, an ethical system provides direction on how to live your life. Unlike religions, however, ethical systems do not center on the worship of gods.

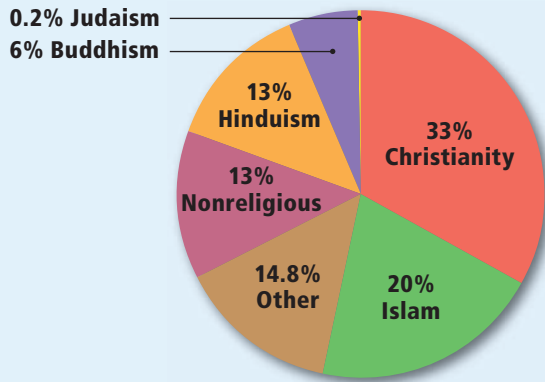
In this book, you have learned about many different religions. You have learned how religions have spread and brought people together. You have also learned how religions have divided people throughout history. Religions continue to be powerful forces today. They affect people all over the world. The chart on the opposite page shows what percentages of the world population practice the five major religions. The map shows where these religions are practiced.





World Population's Religious Affiliations

World population: 6.2 billion (estimated 2002 figure)



Source: World Almanac 2003



Buddhism

Buddhism is named for its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (sīhd•DAHR•tuh GOW•tuh•muh), who came to be known as the Buddha, or “enlightened one.” According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha was born into a noble Indian family. But he gave up his riches to seek enlightenment, or wisdom. After long study and meditation, the Buddha experienced his enlightenment. He believed he knew the true nature of suffering and how to put an end to it. He called this insight into the nature of suffering The Four Noble Truths. The Buddha believed that his followers could achieve enlightenment by following what he called the Noble Eightfold Path. This path involved observing the following: right opinions, right desires, right speech, right action, right job, right effort, right concentration, and right meditation.

Buddhism began in India in the sixth century B.C. After the Buddha’s death, missionaries and traders helped spread the religion to China, Japan, and Korea. Today, the religion has few followers in India. Most Buddhists live in Sri Lanka, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Japan.

▼ Stupa

After his death, the Buddha’s ashes were placed in a series of dome-shaped monuments called stupas. Each stupa was surrounded by a railing and topped with a square structure. The form of these early stupas became the model for Buddhist shrines, like this one in Sri Lanka.



▼ Buddha’s Day

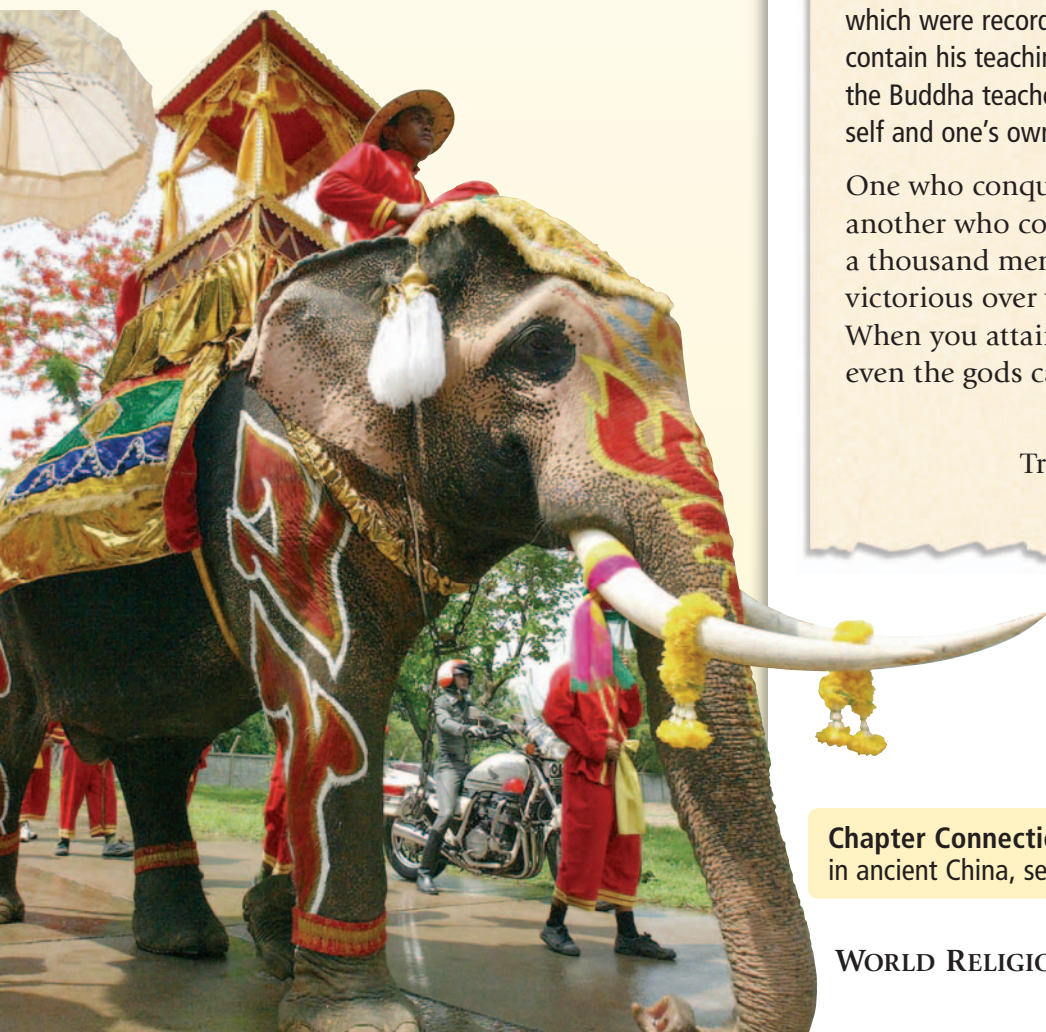
One of the most important festivals in the Buddhist world is Buddha’s Day, which falls in April or May. On this holiday, many Buddhists celebrate the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death. An elephant carries the Buddha’s remains in this Buddha’s Day procession in Thailand.





▲ Statue of the Buddha

Statues of the Buddha, like this one in India, often show the religion's founder in a thoughtful pose. The statues reflect the Buddha's inner peacefulness and wisdom.



Learn More About Buddhism

Symbol According to legend, the Buddha was born with images of wheels on his hands and feet. The Buddha's teaching, known as the dharma, was intended to end the cycle of births and deaths. As a result, his teaching came to be symbolized by a wheel. His followers claimed that the "wheel of the dharma" was set in motion when the Buddha gave his first sermon.



Primary Source

Buddhism has many sacred books. These writings, which were recorded after the Buddha's death, contain his teachings. In the following selection, the Buddha teaches the importance of controlling self and one's own desires.

One who conquers himself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield. Be victorious over yourself and not over others. When you attain victory over yourself, not even the gods can turn it into defeat.

from the *Dhammapada*
Translated by Eknath Easwaran

Chapter Connection For information on Buddhism in ancient China, see Chapter 7.

Christianity

Christianity is a monotheistic religion, which means that its followers believe in one God. The religion is based on the life and teachings of Jesus, as described in the Bible's New Testament. Christians regard Jesus as the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected, or raised to heavenly life. Early followers claimed that the resurrection proved that Jesus was the man who had come to save all of humankind. After Jesus' death around A.D. 29, his followers began to spread Christian beliefs. They preached about Jesus' life and teachings. For about 2,000 years, the religion continued to expand.

Today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world. Its nearly 2 billion followers are found all over the globe. Most Christians, however, live in North and South America, Europe, and Africa.



◀ Jesus

This mosaic in the Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, in Istanbul shows Jesus enthroned in heaven. Images of Jesus often show his head encircled by a halo and his hand raised in a blessing.

Christian Church ▶

Christians gather in churches for public worship. Church services often include a sermon, songs, and prayers. These worshipers have gathered for a Christmas service in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.





▲ Missionaries

Throughout the history of Christianity, missionaries have traveled all over the world in an effort to spread the religion. Today, missionary work often involves teaching or helping others in some way. This missionary is feeding orphans in India.



Learn More About Christianity

Symbol The cross is the primary symbol of Christianity. Jesus died on the cross, and this image appears in many Christian churches and in religious artwork. The cross reminds Christians that Jesus loved humanity and died to save it.



Primary Source

Before Jesus was put to death on the cross, he ate a last supper with his 12 main disciples, or followers. At the supper, Jesus compared the bread they were eating to his body. He compared the wine they drank to his blood. Today, words similar to the following are repeated in the Christian ritual of communion, in which bread and wine are consumed in remembrance of Jesus' death.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant [agreement], which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Matthew 26:26–29

Chapter Connection For information on the spread of Christianity in Europe during the Middle Ages, see Chapter 9.

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It developed in India thousands of years ago. The religion developed out of the rituals and philosophy set forth in many ancient sacred texts. Hindus believe that a supreme being, known as Brahman, is the soul of the universe. They also believe that Brahman can be found within every person. Many Hindus worship Brahman in the form of other gods and divine beings. They believe that these gods can grant followers wisdom and goodness and help them overcome obstacles. But, above all, Hindus believe that their faith can liberate their souls from the repeated cycle of life and death. Once free, their souls can achieve a heavenlike state of bliss—the ultimate goal of Hinduism.

Hindus can be found in every part of the world today, including Nepal, Africa, Europe, and North and South America. However, the largest concentration of followers can be found in India, where 82 percent of the population is Hindu.



▲ Guru

Hindu teachers are called gurus. Gurus, like the one shown here, help Hindus gain the wisdom they need to free themselves from suffering. Today, many gurus reach their followers through Internet sites that broadcast their sermons and songs.

▼ Ganges River

Hindus believe that the water of the Ganges River is holy. As shown in this photograph, many Hindus travel to the river to bathe and pray. They also keep jars of the river's water in their homes to bless the dead and the dying.





▼ Goddess

When Hindus worship a supreme being in female form, they often refer to the deity as the Goddess. The Goddess has many names and forms but is often called Lakshmi. Shown below, she is the goddess of wealth and good fortune.



Learn More About Hinduism

Symbol The syllable *Om* (or *Aum*) is spoken at the beginning and end of all Hindu prayers. *Om* is the most sacred sound in Hinduism because it is believed to contain all other sounds. The symbol shown here represents the sound.



Primary Source

Sacred Hindu texts known as the Upanishads (oo•PAN•uh•SHADZ) are among the oldest Hindu writings. The following story from one of these philosophical works deals with the nature of Brahman.

Uddalaka commanded Shveta-ketu: Bring me a fig from that tree.

He replied: Here it is, sir.

Split it open.

I have split it, sir.

What do you see in it?

These tiny seeds, sir.

Split one of them open, please.

I have split it, sir.

What do you see in it?

Nothing, sir.

Yet, my dear boy, from a subtle essence [unseen spirit] which one cannot see, this great fig tree has grown. Have faith, my dear, for that subtle essence is the Soul of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is the Soul. *You* are that.

from *The Wisdom of the Forest: Selections from the Hindu Upanishads*
Translated by Geoffrey Parrinder

Islam

Islam began to develop in A.D. 610. This is when Islamic tradition states that the angel Gabriel began to reveal the word of God to a merchant named Muhammad. These revelations were eventually written down in a book called the Qur'an—Islam's sacred book. They formed the basis for Islamic belief and practice. Islam teaches that there is only one God, called Allah in Arabic. This is the same God that is worshiped in Christianity and Judaism. The followers of Islam, called Muslims, show their devotion to God by performing five ritual duties, also known as the Five Pillars of Islam. These duties are faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Today, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world. Many of the more than 1 billion Muslims live in southwestern and central Asia and parts of Africa. Followers also live in Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas.



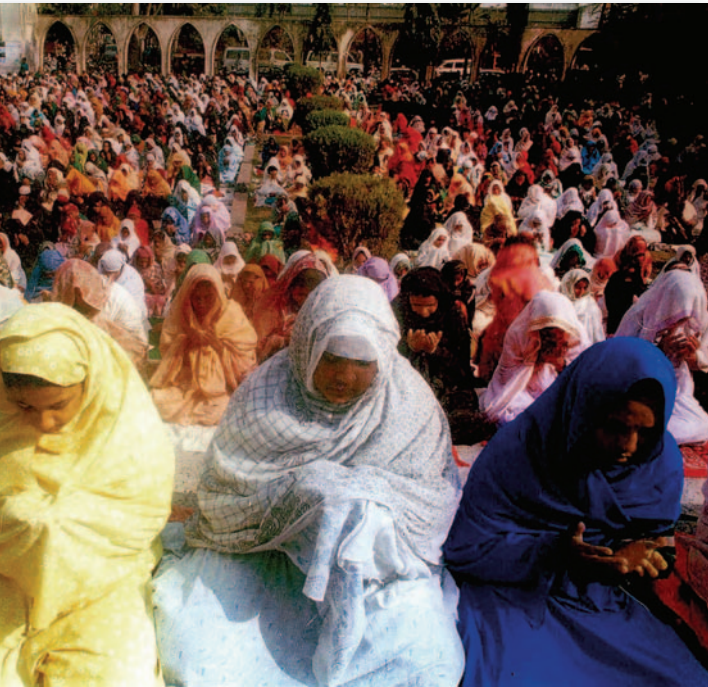
▲ Mosque

An Islamic house of worship is called a mosque. All mosques contain a prayer niche, which indicates the direction in which to pray—always toward Mecca. Many mosques also include the minarets, or towers, seen in this mosque in Turkey. The call to prayer is often made from these towers.

▼ Pilgrimage

The hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Believers who are financially and physically able are expected to make the journey at least once. Pilgrims carry out many rituals, including circling the Ka'aba, the small shrine shown to the left in this photograph.





▲ Muslim Women

The role of women in Islamic society is hotly debated today. In some traditional societies, women are not allowed to pursue an education or work outside of the home. Like the women in this photograph, they are also expected to wear a full veil in public.



Learn More About Islam

Symbol The crescent moon and star are often used to symbolize Islam. The symbols sometimes appear on the flags of Islamic countries or decorate the tops of mosques.



Primary Source

The Qur'an is the chief authority in all matters of Islamic life. Muslim children begin receiving instruction in the Qur'an at an early age. Muslim adults continue to read and consult the book throughout their lives. The following selection discusses the all-powerful nature of God. It appears in a chapter of the Qur'an titled Faith in God.

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate,
the Merciful*

All that is in the heavens and the earth gives glory to God. He is the Mighty, the Wise One.

It is He that has sovereignty [authority] over the heavens and the earth. He ordains life and death, and has power over all things.

He is the First and the Last, the Visible and the Unseen. He has knowledge of all things.

from the *Qur'an* 57:1–3

Chapter Connection For more on the beginnings and early history of Islam, see Chapters 3 and 4.

Judaism

Jews, the followers of Judaism, believe in one God. In fact, Judaism is probably the oldest monotheistic religion. The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, called the Torah, set down the basic laws and teachings of Judaism. According to the Torah, God chose a Hebrew shepherd named Abraham to be the “father” of the Hebrew people. Around 1800 B.C., Abraham led his people to a land that he believed God had promised them. This land would later be called Israel. In 1948, a Jewish state was created on the land.

Judaism is the smallest of the world’s major religions, with slightly more than 14 million Jews. But this small religion has greatly influenced the development of today’s two largest religions—Christianity and Islam.



▲ Hanukkah

According to legend, the mid-winter holiday of Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of an oil lamp that burned for eight days instead of one. For eight days, Jews observe the holiday with prayers and rituals. Jewish children, like those shown here, play a traditional game with a dreidel, a sort of spinning top.

▼ Jewish Ghetto

During the Middle Ages, Jews were forced to live in special areas of cities called ghettos. The areas were named after the section of Venice where Jews were forced to live in the 16th century. This synagogue, the Jewish house of worship, is located in the Jewish ghetto in Venice.





▼ Moses

According to the Torah, Moses led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. During the journey, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. The commandments set down many moral laws for all of humanity. This painting shows Moses holding the Ten Commandments.



Learn More About Judaism

Symbol A major symbol of Judaism is the Star of David. The six-pointed star honors King David, who ruled ancient Israel around 1000 B.C. and ushered in its golden age.



Primary Source

The Hebrew Bible contains writings about Jewish history and culture. However, it also contains many stories that are important to other people as well. The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible and of the Torah. It tells the history of the Jewish people. It also includes the story of the creation of the world.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Genesis 1:1–5

Chapter Connection For information on Jews in Medieval Europe, see Chapter 10.



Confucianism

Confucianism is an ethical system based on the teachings of an ancient Chinese scholar named Confucius. Confucius believed that society should be organized around five basic relationships. These are the relationships between (1) ruler and subject, (2) father and son, (3) husband and wife, (4) elder brother and junior brother, and (5) friend and friend. Confucius believed that the proper conduct of these relationships would create a harmonious society founded on goodness. His ideas became the foundation of Chinese thought for more than 2,000 years.

Confucianism was never a religion, but it has greatly influenced people's spiritual beliefs. Many Chinese and other people in East Asia combine the religious practice of Buddhism with the teachings of Confucianism.



▲ Confucius

Confucius was born in 551 B.C., during a time of crisis in China. He hoped his ideas and teachings would restore the order of earlier times to his society. This painting shows Confucius with some of his followers.

▼ Celebration for Confucius

Although no one knows exactly the day when Confucius was born, many people in East Asia celebrate his birthday on September 28. Here, performers in traditional dress take part in Confucius' birthday celebration.





▼ Golden Rule

Confucius taught that people should treat others with respect and live by the golden rule. The characters in this ink-stamp spell out the rule “Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you.”



Learn More About Confucianism

Symbol The harmony that Confucius hoped to achieve is represented by the yin-and-yang symbol. The symbol represents opposite forces in the world working together. Yin represents all that is cold, dark, soft, and mysterious. Yang is the opposite—warm, bright, hard, and clear.



Primary Source

During his lifetime, Confucius never had enough power to put his ideas into practice. But after his death, Confucius' students spread his teachings. In the 400s B.C., they collected his teachings in a book called the *Analects*. In the following selections from the *Analects*, Confucius is referred to as the Master.

The Master cut out four things. He never took anything for granted, he never insisted on certainty, he was never inflexible and never egotistical. (9.4)

The Master said: “Regard loyalty and good faith as your main concern. Do not make friends of those who are not up to your own standard. If you commit a fault, do not shrink from correcting it.” (9.25)

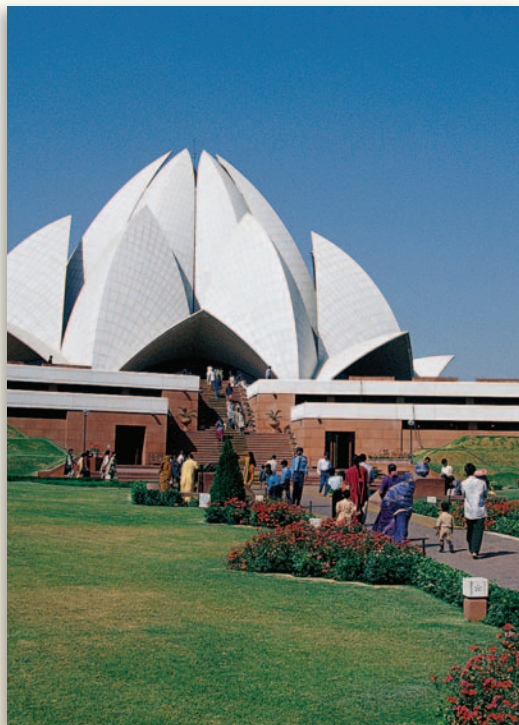
The Master said: “If one loves someone, can one avoid making him work hard? If one is loyal to someone, can one avoid instructing him?” (14.7)

from the *Analects*
Translated by Raymond Dawson

Chapter Connection For more about Confucianism, see Chapter 7.

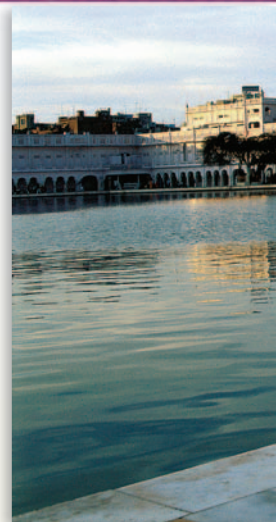
Other Important Religions

In addition to the five major world religions you have learned about, there are many other important religions. Among these are Bahaism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. Two of these religions—Shinto and Zoroastrianism—are especially important historically because they are ancient. All of the religions are significant today because they have many followers.



▲ Bahaism

Bahaism (buh•HAH•IHZ•uhm) was founded in Persia in 1863 by a man known as Baháullah, which means “splendor of God” in Arabic. The religion’s founder was believed to be the most recent in a line of messengers sent by God to teach people moral behavior. Above all, the founder taught that God wants all the different people of the world to form a single, united society. People’s differences and their unity are symbolized by the Baha’i (bah•HAH•ee) houses of worship, which have nine sides and a central dome. Worshipers here are entering the Baha’i house of worship in New Delhi, India.



▼ Shinto

Shinto is the oldest surviving religion of Japan. It is based on the worship of nature. Shintoists believe that spirits, called *kami*, are found throughout nature. They worship these spirits at shrines in their homes and in public shrines. The torii, or gate, shown here marks the entrance to a Shinto shrine. Most of the nearly 3 million Shintoists practicing today live in Japan. Many combine Shinto with Buddhism or Confucianism.





◀ Sikhism

Sikhism (SEEK•IHZ•uhm) is one of the religions of India and was founded over 500 years ago by Guru Nanak, a man raised in the Hindu tradition. The religion's followers are called Sikhs, which means "disciples." Sikhs believe in one God who created the universe and who is present everywhere. They believe that by living a good and simple life they can free themselves from the cycle of life and death. The Golden Temple in India, shown here, is the holiest Sikh shrine for the religion's nearly 24 million followers.









▲ Zoroastrianism

A prophet from Persia (present-day Iran) named Zoroaster founded Zoroastrianism (ZAWR•oh•AS•tree•uh•NIHZ•uhm) around 600 B.C. The religion teaches a belief in one god, Ahura Mazda (ah•HUR•uh MAZ•duh). Followers must obey this god, who will judge them when they die. Today, many of the world's nearly 2.5 million Zoroastrians make a pilgrimage and pray at this temple built in a mountain in southern Iran.





Comparing World Religions and Ethical Systems

	Buddhism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Judaism	Confucianism
						
Followers worldwide (estimated 2003 figures)	364 million	2 billion	828 million	1.2 billion	14.5 million	6.3 million
Name of god	no god	God	Brahman	Allah	God	no god
Founder	the Buddha	Jesus Christ	no one founder	no founder but spread by Muhammad	Abraham	Confucius
Holy book	many sacred books, including the Dhammapada	Bible, including Old Testament and New Testament	many sacred books, including the Upanishads	Qur'an	Hebrew Bible, including the Torah	<i>Analects</i>
Clergy	Buddhist monks	priests, ministers, monks, and nuns	Brahmin priests, monks, and gurus	no clergy but a scholar class, called the ulama, and imams, who may lead prayers	rabbis	no clergy
Basic beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Followers can achieve enlightenment by understanding The Four Noble Truths and by following The Noble Eightfold Path of right opinions, right desires, right speech, right action, right job, right effort, right concentration, and right meditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is only one God, who watches over and cares for his people. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He died to save humanity. His death and resurrection made eternal life possible for others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The soul never dies but is continually reborn until it becomes enlightened. Persons achieve happiness and enlightenment after they free themselves from their earthly desires. Freedom from earthly desires comes from many lifetimes of worship, knowledge, and virtuous acts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons achieve salvation by following the Five Pillars of Islam and living a just life. The pillars are faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and 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 teachings. 	<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 for the welfare of both the individual and society.

Source: *World Almanac 2004*



Review

MAIN IDEAS

Buddhism (pages R62–R63)

1. Who was the Buddha?
2. What is the Noble Eightfold Path?

Christianity (pages R64–R65)

3. Why was the resurrection important to early Christians?
4. How did Christian beliefs spread?

Hinduism (pages R66–R67)

5. Why is Brahman important to Hindus?
6. What is the ultimate goal of Hinduism?

Islam (pages R68–R69)

7. What does the Qur'an contain?
8. What is the hajj?

Judaism (pages R70–R71)

9. Who is Abraham?
10. What other religions has Judaism influenced?

Confucianism (pages R72–R73)

11. Why is Confucius an important figure in China?
12. What was Confucius' golden rule?

Other Important Religions (pages R74–R75)

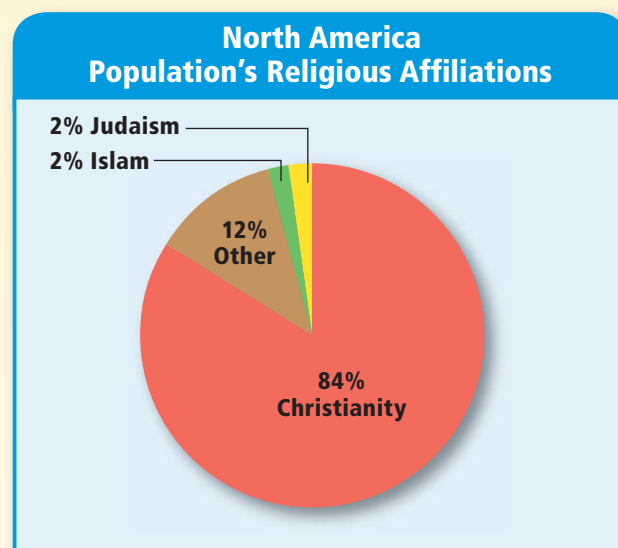
13. Of the four religions discussed on these pages, which are the oldest?
14. How do Sikhs believe they can free themselves from the cycle of life and death?

CRITICAL THINKING

15. **UNDERSTANDING CAUSE AND EFFECT** According to the Buddha, what happens when someone understands the true nature of suffering?
16. **COMPARING AND CONTRASTING** In what ways are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism similar?
17. **SUMMARIZING** What concept in monotheistic religions is most like Brahman in Hinduism?
18. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** How do you know that Confucius valued the family?

Standards-Based Assessment

Interpreting a Pie Chart The pie chart below shows what percentages of the population of North America practice the major religions. Use the pie chart to answer the following questions.



Source: *World Almanac 2003*

1. **Which religion is practiced by the most people in North America?**
 - A. Judaism
 - B. Hinduism
 - C. Christianity
 - D. Buddhism
2. **Which two religions are each practiced by 2 percent of the population in North America?**
 - A. Buddhism and Hinduism
 - B. Islam and Judaism
 - C. Christianity and Judaism
 - D. Buddhism and Islam



Test Practice
ClassZone.com

Additional Test Practice, pp. S1–S33