

CATHOLIC

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Q & A

Aren't all religions just different pathways to God?

All religions have various degrees of truth contained in their teachings. And we know that all truth comes from God. But along with truth, many religions also contain numerous errors. Let us examine the various Religions of the East.

Hinduism – Originated around 1500 BC and is the world's most ancient religion. It is the prominent religion of India. Hinduism believes in reincarnation and the caste system rooted in racial and color differences. Death brings either graduation to a higher state of existence in a new life, or failure and degradation to a lower state. The Untouchable is the lowest human caste, but one can descend to the animal or insect level.

Orthodox Hindus believe the Untouchables are only getting what they rightly deserve. Suffering is inevitable and trying to relieve it is futile. This is the law of Karma.

Hinduism's main theological belief centers on one divine and omnipotent being called Brahman, a god who is unknowable. All living reality one day dies and is then absorbed back into Brahman. Hinduism accepts the different gods as the many faces of Brahman. India is full of shrines and temples, which are inhabited by one or more of the Hindu gods.

The ultimate goal of life is the attainment of Nirvana, a state where man escapes surface preoccupations by attaining union with his god-self, like a drop of water returning to the ocean.

Buddhism – Is an outgrowth of Hinduism centered on its main teacher Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) born around 530 BC. The main tenant of Buddhism is that only by extinguishing all selfish desires can man ever hope to find happiness. Buddha rejected the Hindu caste system and that no one need be caught in the inevitable cycle of Karma. Each person could learn to extricate himself from suffering by conquering selfish

desires and could ascend the ladder of life through their own efforts without the many gods of Hinduism.

Buddha's way to freedom is expressed in the eightfold path, which is based on a strict moral code. The goal of this journey is Nirvana – union with ultimate reality.

Confucianism – Confucius was born in 551 BC in China. He became an expert in Chinese history and tradition. Confucius did not claim to establish a religion, his teachings were primarily ethical. The core of his ethical system is law and order and he set out to explain how man should act in all his private, family and public relationships.

Taoism – Originated in China in around the same time as Confucius. The master teacher was Lao Tze whose teaching was much more spiritual than ethical. The main tenant of Taoism is "let go", "let it happen" a respect for the natural way life works itself out. Similar to Buddhism, the way to happiness is self-denial.

Shintoism – Is the state religion of Japan. Shintoism holds that two gods created the world and gave birth to a sun goddess who is the ancestor of the Emperor. The Emperor therefore is divine. After World War II, the Emperor of Japan renounced the myth of his divinity and many Japanese regarded the loss of the war as the defeat of the Shinto gods. Shinto is a subdued religion, which makes very few demands of its adherents. There are no moral precepts, no commandments.

The Religions of the East view the entire world, all living and nonliving things to be eventually absorbed into one world-soul, thereby extinguishing all individuality. The world is bad and the source of evil and suffering for man. We know from Christian Revelation that God is present in Nature but distinct from nature. And that God created everything and called it good. All creation is for the service of man and man has an immortal soul, which is created by God for eternal happiness with God.