

EASTERN RELIGIONS

HINDUISM

- **Hinduism** – Originated around 1500 BC and is the prominent religion of India. It is comprised of several varied systems of philosophy, belief, and ritual.
- 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 a multiplicity of 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.
- 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.
- Suffering is inevitable and trying to relieve it is futile. This is the law of Karma.
- The ultimate goal of life is the attainment of Nirvana, a state where man escapes surface preoccupations by attaining union with his god-self.

BUDDHISM

- **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.

GOD AND THE WORLD

- Eastern Religions are essentially pantheistic in their view of God and the Universe.
- **Pantheism** is the belief that the universe or nature is the totality of everything. The world is identical with divinity. God is all and all is God.
- God therefore is one with nature. God is not only present in nature, God is nature.
- If God is the world and God is eternal, then the world is eternal and has no beginning or no end.

THE WORLD HAD A BEGINNING

- **Revelation** is understood to be knowledge of certain truths about God and the world that can be known only by God revealing them to us. These truths are above human reason and not accessible by human reason alone.
- The primordial first principle of Revelation is contained in the first verse in the first book of the Bible – Genesis; “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.”
- Faith in God’s Revelation tells us that God created the world out of nothing (ex nihilo) and therefore God is distinct from nature and the world is not eternal, it had a beginning.
- Contemporary science tells us that the Universe that we live in is expanding. If it is expanding then it must have a beginning (the big bang theory).

GOD IS A PERSON

- Monotheistic Religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) believe that God created the world “ex nihilo” from nothing; therefore God exists outside of creation.
- We as human beings are endowed with two spiritual powers that separate us from the animals; intellect and will. We can reason (intellect) and are moral beings (free will). Where did we receive these spiritual powers?
- We are created in the image and likeness of God. We receive the powers of intellect and will from God because God himself has Intellect and Will in the most perfected sense.
- Beings endowed with intellect and will are “persons”. God, Angels and Human Beings are endowed with intellect and will and therefore are persons.

GOD IS KNOWABLE

- If God is a person and he endowed us with intellect, then the purpose of the intellect is to know God. God desires us to know Him, so he speaks (Revelation) to us through the prophets over time (Salvation History).
- Eastern Religions view God as passive and unknowable. An indifferent God, one that you have to seek out for yourself. A God without any moral precepts to live by. An impersonal God without an intellect and a will.

NIRVANA AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

- Nirvana is the eastern religion teaching that ultimate bliss (Nirvana) occurs when the individual person is obliterated and absorbed into God. Like a drop of water that falls in to the ocean, our individual self is extinguished.
- The human soul because it endowed with the spiritual powers of intellect and will is a spiritual soul. Therefore it can exist outside the body.

- The human soul gives us our identity as individual persons. The human soul exists after physical death outside of the body. Therefore we continue as persons (disembodied souls) after physical death.

REINCARNATION

- Eastern religions believe that if union with the divine is not achieved in this life then the soul or spirit after biological death, begins a new life in a new body – Reincarnation.
- It is the belief that one has lived before and will live again in another body after death. The bodies one passes in and out of need not be human.
- Death brings either graduation to a higher state of existence in a new life, or failure and degradation to a lower state.

THE SOUL/REVELATION

- The human soul is spiritual and radically higher and different than the animal soul. The human soul cannot reincarnate in an animal body.
- God's revelation states that it is appointed for man to die once and after that judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

KARMA

- Karma in the Eastern Religious tradition is a law which maintains that every act done, no matter how insignificant, will eventually return to the doer with equal impact.
- Good will be returned with good; evil with evil. Karma knows no simple birth/death boundaries. If good or evil befall you, it is because of something you did in this or a previous lifetime.
- Karma is sometimes referred to as a "moral law of cause and effect." Karma is both an encouragement to do good and to avoid evil, as well as an explanation for whatever good or evil befalls a person.

- On one level, Karma serves to explain why good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. The injustices of the world, the seeming random distribution of good and evil, are only apparent. In reality, everybody is getting what he or she deserves.
- Based on the Law of Karma, even the child brutalized by drugged adults deserves the horror. The slave beaten to within a breath of death deserved it, if not for what he did today, then for what he did in some previous lifetime. All suffering is deserved, according to the law of Karma.
- The law of Karma is a philosophical system that tries to answer the age old question of the “Problem of Evil” -- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- The problem of evil is a mystery that only God can know fully. God can use the evil in the world to bring forth a greater good. The crucifixion of Jesus was the greatest evil perpetrated against God and yet it was the cause of our redemption and salvation.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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