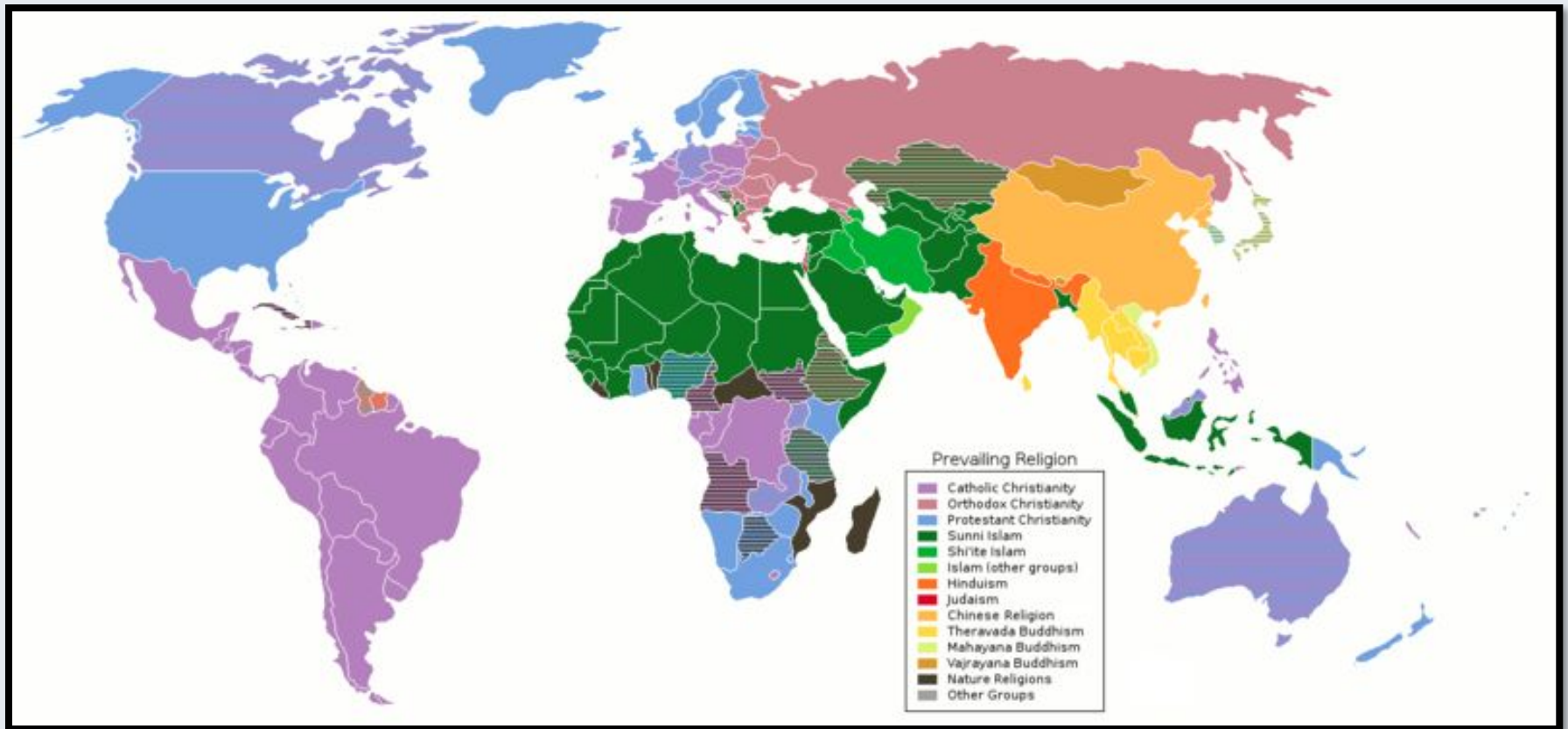


World Religions

A BRIEF OVERVIEW



I. Different Belief Systems.

A. What is a religion?

- o An organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practices, and worship that (typically) centers on one or more gods.
- o Usually a major aspect of a people's culture - their unique way of life.

• B. Three most common types of religions:

- Monotheistic – belief in a single god
- Polytheistic – belief in more than one god
- Nontheistic-belief in no god

• C. How many religions are practiced around the world?

- o There are around 20 major religions practiced around the globe (each with dozens, or even hundreds, of smaller sub-groups)

D. World Religions By the Numbers

Oldest to Youngest

- Hinduism
- Judaism
- Confucianism
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Islam
- Sikhism

Most to Least Popular

- Christianity
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Sikhism
- Judaism
- Confucianism

2. Christianity

- **Number of worldwide followers (all denominations):** about 2 billion
- **Type:** monotheistic
- **Founder:** Jesus (based on writings and teachings)
- **When:** 1st century C.E.
- **Where:** modern-day Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Syria, Iraq)
- **Basic background/beliefs:**
 - Began as a small sect (group) within Jewish religion
 - Jesus is the messiah and son of God
 - Bible is holy book – New Testament & Old Testament
 - Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension to heaven, return
 - Has been the dominant belief system in western civilization more than 1500 years



3. Islam

- **Number of worldwide followers (all denominations):** about 1.9 billion
- **Type:** monotheistic
- **Founder:** Muhammad
- **When:** 7th century C.E.
- **Where:** modern-day Saudi Arabia
- **Background/beliefs**
 - Muhammad is the last prophet of Allah (Arabic word for God)
 - Followers called Muslims, trace lineage to Abraham
 - Five Pillars: faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, [pilgrimage](#)
 - Holy book is called the Qur'an (Koran), considered the final word of God



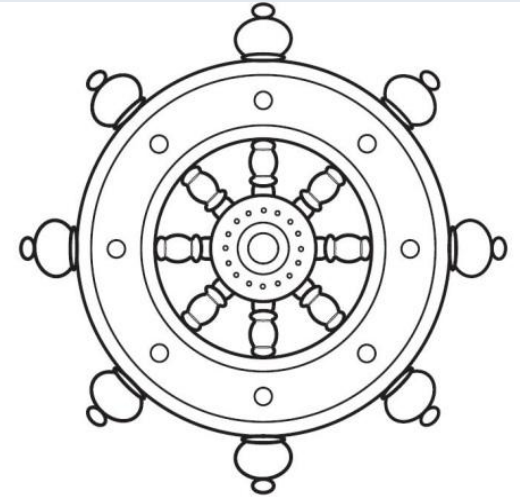
4. Hinduism

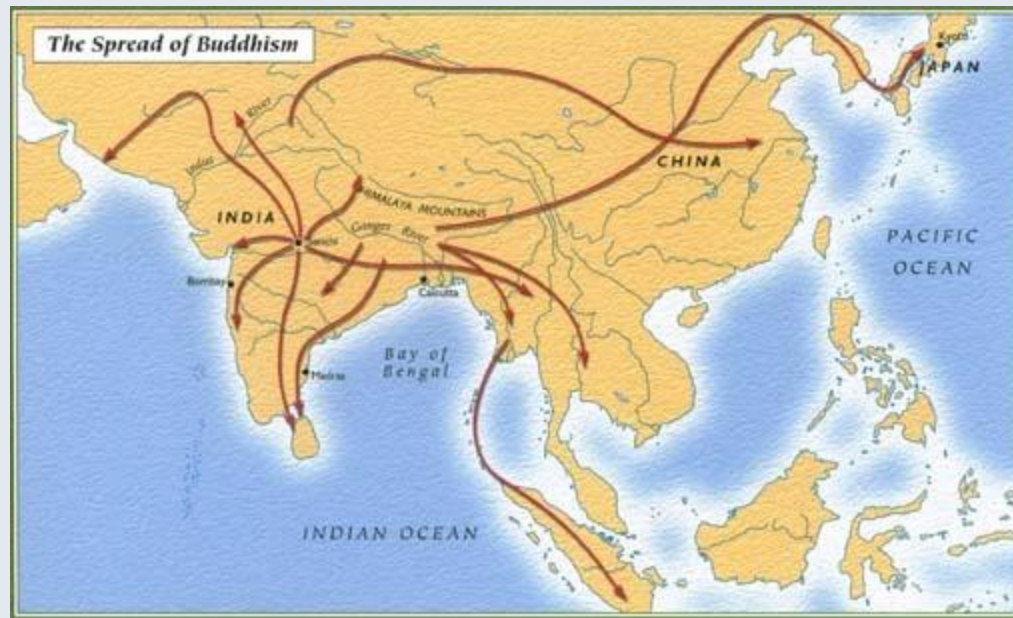


- **Number of followers worldwide:**
about 900 million
- **Type:** polytheistic
- **Founder:** no single founder; combination of beliefs from various ancient peoples
- **When:** earliest evidence dates to around 2500 B.C.E.
- **Where:** northern Indian sub-continent (modern-day India and Pakistan)
- **Background/beliefs:**
 - Brahman is overall god, with many lesser gods
 - Dharma (one's duties), Samsara (reincarnation), Karma (action/reaction), Moksha (liberation from reincarnation)

5. Buddhism

- **Number of followers worldwide:** between 350 and 400 million
- **Type:** nontheistic (traditional)
- **Founder:** Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)
- **When:** 5th century B.C.E.
- **Where:** northeastern Indian subcontinent (India/Nepal)
- **Background/beliefs:**
 - Karma, Dharma, Samsara
 - Ultimate goal is reach enlightenment
 - Follow Buddha's teachings
 - Four Noble Truths (recognize that life is full of misery/suffering)
 - Eight Fold Path (steps to rid life of misery, achieve enlightenment)





6. Sikhism



- **Number of followers worldwide:**
about 20 million
- **Type:** monotheistic
- **Founder:** Guru Nanak
- **When:** 16th century C.E.
- **Where:** northern India
- **Background/beliefs:**
 - Sacred scripture called Guru Granth Sahib
 - Stresses the importance of doing good work and actions
 - Live honestly, give to others/charity
 - Share some similar practices and rituals with Hinduism and Islam

7. Judaism

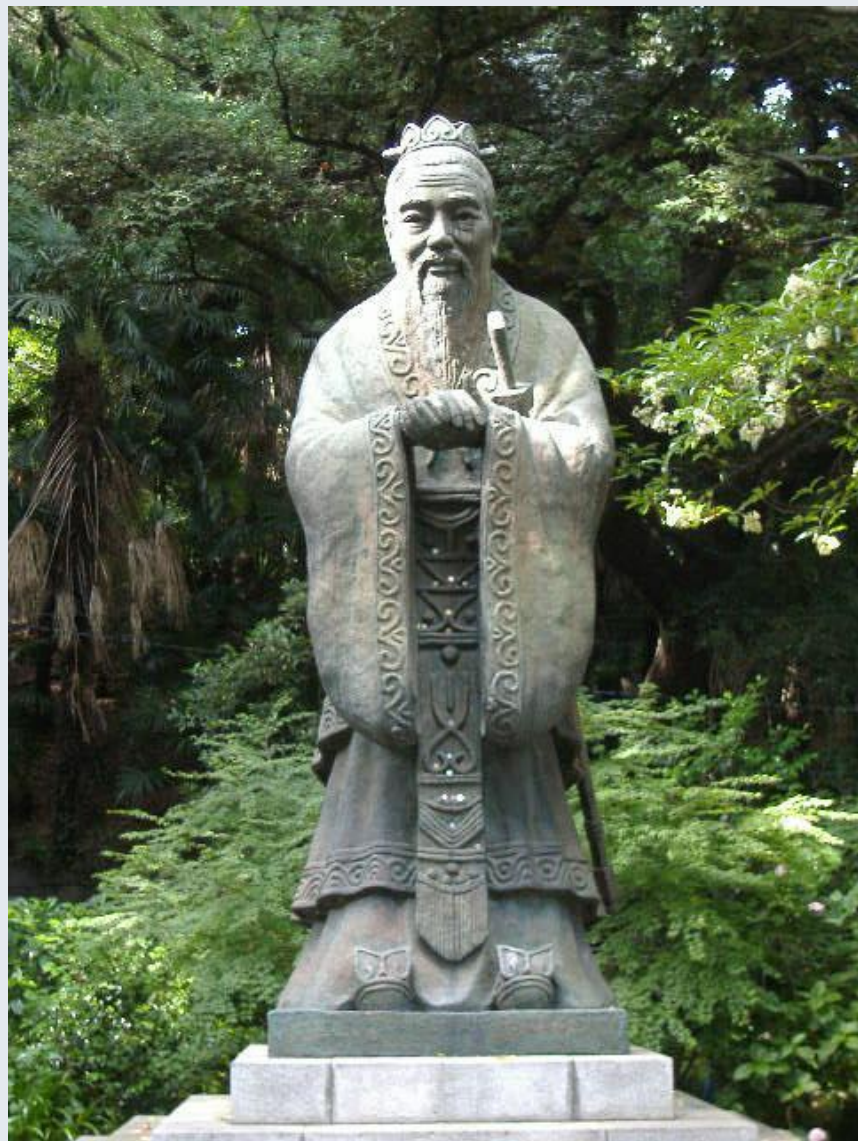


- **Number of followers worldwide:** about 14 million
- **Type:** monotheistic
- **Founder:** Abraham
- **When:** around 1500 B.C.E.
- **Where:** modern-day Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Syria, Iraq)
- **Background/beliefs:**
 - Holy book – Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)
 - Study and follow teachings of the Torah
 - Synagogue – place of worship
 - Dietary restrictions (Kosher)
 - Considered both an ethnicity and religion

8. Confucianism

- **Number of followers worldwide:**
about 6 million (probably much higher)
- **Type:** nontheistic (traditional)
- **Founder:** Confucius
- **When:** around 500 B.C.E.
- **Where:** China
- **Background/beliefs:**
 - Strong family relationships
 - Stresses social order, harmony
 - Good government (based on training/education)
 - Key texts: *Analects*, *Five Classics*
 - Like Buddhism, more of a way of life, but some view it as a religion





9? Animism



- **Number of followers worldwide:**
hard to trace, estimates around 200 million
- **Type:** depends on group
- **Founder:** unknown, term created by Sir Edward Taylor
- **When:** dates back to Paleolithic Age
- **Where:** all around globe – mostly Sub-Saharan Africa, South America
- **Background/beliefs:**
 - Ancestral worship, spirit worship
 - Attributes souls to inanimate objects, to nature, and to animals
 - Such spirits can either help or harm
 - Linked with many pagan groups, though not specifically pagan
 - Not considered one of AP's major world religions, but appears in many civilizations we will study: early Africa, Mayans, even the Greek