



Major World Religions

Name _____ Block _____


Judaism

Origins	God created a covenant , with Abraham, in which Abraham and his descendants would receive the land of Canaan as a sign of the relationship between Yahweh and the Hebrew people.
Founders	Abraham is the “Father of the Hebrews.” Moses was the law-giver and author of the first books of the Torah.
Principles 	Judaism is the first major monotheistic (one god) religion. It teaches there is only one God and he is all knowing, all powerful, merciful, and just. The Hebrews are a chosen people and possess a unique relationship with Yahweh (God) – that relationship is symbolized through the land of Israel. God’s law was revealed through Moses. The most famous of God’s laws are the Ten Commandments. The Torah contains the sacred writings of Judaism. It teaches that Yahweh rewards people according to their deeds. There will be a Messiah (savior) one day who will restore the nation of Israel. There is a belief in the afterlife but there is little emphasis on this.
Diffusion	Judaism mainly concentrated among the Hebrew people and their descendants. Because of the conquest of Jewish lands and the dispersal of the Jewish people by conquering empires there are adherents of Judaism throughout the world. It is not a religion that actively seeks to convert others.

Christianity


Origins	Grew from and is an extension of Judaism – with Jesus Christ as the Messiah.
Founder	Jesus Christ is the originator of Christianity. Early significant leaders were Paul, Peter, and John.
Principles 	Christianity teaches that Jesus is the incarnation of God (God in bodily form), that he died on the cross, and was resurrected that man could be forgiven of his sins. Men are separated from a relationship with God because of their sin. God, however, loves man and wants a relationship with him, so Jesus died on the cross to provide a way of forgiveness. He was resurrected to provide a way for man to enter a relationship with God. Salvation is a gift through grace and man can do nothing to earn it. A life of good works is a reflection of a relationship with God – it is not a way of earning merit. The Bible contains the sacred writings of Christianity.
Diffusion	First spread beyond Jerusalem as Christians were persecuted and moved to other areas. It spread through the preaching/teaching of the disciples and Paul throughout the Middle East and Mediterranean world. Eventually Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire and became entrenched in western civilization.


Islam


Origins	Originated in the Arabian Peninsula in the city of Mecca .
Founder	Mohammed (Muhammad)
Principles 	Islam is the world’s third great monotheistic religion and sees itself as fulfillment of God’s (Allah) revelation to man. Allah speaks through prophets – Mohammed is the last and greatest of the prophets. (Consider Abraham, Moses, Jesus to be prophets.) Mohammed is NOT a god and is not worshipped. Islam teaches that Allah is just and rewards man according to his deeds. The Qur’an (Koran) contains the sacred writings of Islam. The most important beliefs/acts are known as the Five Pillars of Islam . <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Faith - Recite the shahadah - There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet. Prayer – Pray 5 times a day while facing Mecca. Alms - Donate regularly to charity through the zakat, a 2.5% charity tax, and donations to the needy. Fasting - Fast during the month of Ramadan, the month that Mohammed received the Qur’an (Koran) from Allah. Pilgrimage - Make at least one pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca if economically and physically possible.
Diffusion	Muslims (followers of Islam) conquered the Middle East, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula, and northern Africa within 100 years of Mohammed’s death and installed Islam as the religion of the region. In later centuries Islam spread with trade, primarily across the Indian Ocean, Central Asia and West Africa.


Buddhism

Origins	Began in India and incorporated much of Hinduism in its practice.
Founder	Siddhartha Gautama was an Indian prince raised in a lifestyle of luxury and comfort who, upon encountering the misery and suffering of the poor in the streets, began to question the meaning of life. Gautama left his city and wandered through the land. He became known as Buddha , “ Enlightened One ” and concluded that the cause of suffering is desire.
Principles	Desire is the cause of suffering and the way to end suffering is to end desire. Buddhism does teach the concept of reincarnation, though this is not always seen as a “rebirth” and that nirvana can be reached. In its most basic form, Buddhism does not hold to a belief in a deity, therefore (along with other reasons) many hold that it’s not a religion but is instead a philosophy that places great emphasis on man’s actions, his ability to think properly, and his co-existence in harmony with the forces of the universe. The core of Buddhism is based on the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path though there are

	<p>tremendous variations and expansions of these in practice.</p> <p>Four Noble Truths 1. Life is full of pain and suffering. 2. Human desire causes this suffering. 3. By putting an end to desire, humans can end suffering. 4. Humans can end desire by following the Eightfold Path.</p> <p>The Eightfold Path consists of three parts – morality (Sila), control of one’s mind (Samadhi), and wisdom (Panna). These three parts have multiple means of application. (Examples: Sila - proper speech, actions, etc.; Samadhi - meditation, good thoughts, mental development, etc.; Panna- proper path of life, wisdom and understanding.)</p>
<p>Diffusion</p>	<p>Spread to Southeast Asia and to East Asia, especially during the Maurya Empire, under Ashoka, and the Gupta Empire where it became very prominent. It is a religion that actively seeks to convert others. It was never widely accepted in India where much of Buddhist teaching was incorporated into Islam.</p>

Hinduism	
<p>Origins</p>	<p>No definable point or person from which it can be traced. It developed in what is now India over the course of several centuries.</p>
<p>Founders</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Principles</p> 	<p>Hinduism is the world’s largest polytheistic religion with its pantheon of gods and goddesses seen as part of a universal soul/deity known as the Brahman. One major concept is reincarnation, a belief in a cycle of life, death, rebirth that is repeated by the soul many times until it (the soul) reaches the state of Nirvana and unites with the Brahman. Two other critical concepts are Karma, which relates to the cause/effect nature of what happens in life, and Dharma, the idea of a person’s duty and the need to fulfill that duty. Along with other social reasons, these ideas combined to help create the Caste System, one of the most distinctive manifestations of Hinduism. There are several holy books in Hinduism with the most important being the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and the Bhagavad-Gita. The goal is to eventually merge with the Brahmin after a series of reincarnations. This Moksha (salvation) can be obtained in one of three ways - works, knowledge, or devotion.</p>
<p>Diffusion</p>	<p>Spread throughout the Indian subcontinent and, eventually to SE Asia through trade, education, and the teaching of priests. In Southeast Asia it co-existed with Buddhism but ultimately lost its influence.</p>

Confucianism	
<p>Origins</p>	<p>China during the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty. After the end of feudalism crime was rampant and Confucius spoke of returning to the moral standards of the ancients.</p>
<p>Founder</p>	<p>Kung Fu-Tzu (Confucius) 551-479 BC</p>
<p>Principles</p> 	<p>It is not a religion but rather is an ethical code dealing with the moral character of individuals, society, and government. The primary goals are order, harmony, peace and happiness on earth. Man is capable of achieving this through education, self effort, and self-reflection. The most important principles deal with Li, Jen, and Chun-Tzu.</p> <p>Li is the ideal standard of conduct that controls social conduct. This is seen in the Five Relationships:</p> <p>Parent-child: Kindness in the father and obedient devotion in the son Husband-wife: Righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife Elder sibling-younger sibling: Gentility in the eldest brother and humility and respect in the younger Elder friend-younger friend: Humane consideration in elders and deference in juniors</p> <p>Ruler-subject: Benevolence in rulers and loyalty of ministers and subjects Jen: Applying virtue and goodness to the structure of Li. Chun-Tzu: The True Gentlemen who lives by the five virtues: self-respect, generosity, sincerity, persistence, and benevolence.</p>
<p>Diffusion</p>	<p>Spread by his followers after the death of Confucius as they obtained positions in government. These ideals eventually formed the basis for the civil service exam in China. Also the principles of Confucius became the foundation of Chinese education. These teachings spread to Korea and Japan</p>

Taoism	
<p>Origins</p>	<p>Grew from ancient Chinese philosophies that were merged into one basic teaching. In some ways it grew from a reaction to the spread of Confucianism and Buddhism.</p>
<p>Founder</p>	<p>Lao-Tse</p>
<p>Principles</p> 	<p>Tao (Dao) means “The Way” (or the Path) and it’s a series of philosophical teachings that focuses on achieving balance and harmony in the universe, and in one’s life. Taoism places a great emphasis on nature as an example of balance and demonstrates the way humans should live. A key concept related to this balance, as seen in nature, is wu wei, the idea of “effortless doing” that comes when the man’s efforts and actions are in harmony with the universe and not in conflict with the natural order. The symbol most associated with Taoism the Yin/Yang reflects the ideals of harmony and balance. Taoism also emphasizes the Three Jewels, compassion, moderation, and humility. The Tao Te Ching is the most significant text.</p>
<p>Diffusion</p>	<p>Taoism spread primarily to the areas immediately surrounding China and has been incorporated into the teachings and beliefs of several philosophies and religions – most notably Buddhism and Shintoism.</p>