

SCOP Religion

Baha'i Faith

Texts: Book of Certitude; Most Holy Book

Beliefs and Tenets: Abrahamic, monotheistic

Figures: Manifestations of God, including Abraham, Buddha, Mohammad, Jesus, Bahá'u'lláh, and the Báb. The latter two contributed to the founding of Baha'i in the nineteenth century.

Buddhism

Texts: Sutras (including Diamond, Lotus, Kama, Platform)

Beliefs and Tenets: Indian. Karma, positive or negative actions, influence path through samsara, the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Enlightenment brings a person to Nirvana, a state without suffering and the end of samsara. Bodhisattvas are motivated to become Buddhas by the desire to help others become enlightened. A Buddha has achieved enlightenment. Gautama Buddha's teachings included the Four Noble Truths (including the Eightfold Path), and the Middle Way.

Rituals: Meditation, accompanied by the recitation of mantras.

Tales and Figures: Siddhartha Gautama (Gautama Buddha), the first Buddha of the current Buddha cycle, and the recognized founder of Buddhism.

- At his birth, Asita, a seer, announced that he would become either a great king or a great religious figure.
- His father raised him in seclusion, away from human suffering, to ensure that he became a king. Eventually, however, he came in contact with age, poverty, and sickness, and departed to live an ascetic life.
- He later shifted from pure asceticism to the Middle Way, a more moderate way to avoid self-indulgence, and achieved enlightenment after extensive meditation under a Bhodi tree.

Denominations: Theravada; Mahayana (including Zen, Pure Land, and Tibetan)

Christianity

Texts: Bible, including Old and New Testaments

Beliefs and Tenets: Abrahamic, monotheistic. One god consisting of a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Jesus, a New Testament figure, is the Son, who adopted human form to die for the sins of the world.

Rituals: Communion, baptism, confirmation, confession (Catholicism)

Holidays: Christmas (birth of Jesus); Easter (resurrection of Jesus), the culmination of Lent

Tales and Figures:

- Adam and Eve: First man and woman, inhabitants of the perfect garden of Eden. Eve is tempted by Satan in the form of a snake to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and to give the fruit to Adam. Their resultant worldly knowledge leads to their expulsion from Eden.
- Cain and Abel: Two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain murders Abel in a jealous rage and is cast out to wander the earth, bearing the "mark of Cain."
- Abraham and Sarah: Originally named Abram and Sarai, they produce their son, Isaac, in their old age because of a promise from God.
- Abraham and Isaac: To test his faith, God sends Abraham into the desert to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham obeys, but God stops Abraham just before Isaac is killed.
- Hagar and Ishmael: Before Sarah gives birth to Isaac, she tells her maidservant, Hagar, to sleep with Abraham. The son born from this union is Ishmael. Sarah becomes jealous of Ishmael after Isaac's birth, and sends Hagar and Ishmael out into the desert to die. God provides a well to save their lives.
- Sodom and Gomorrah: Lot, the only righteous man in Sodom and Gomorrah, escapes while God destroys the cities with fire and brimstone. Lot's wife looks back at the burning cities and turns into a pillar of salt.
- Jacob: Son of Isaac, father of the twelve Hebrew tribes through his sons.
- Joseph: Second-youngest son of Jacob, much loved by his father. Brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt, where he eventually becomes royalty.
- Moses: Born to a Jewish slave in Egypt, Moses is put in a basket in the Nile as a baby to save him from the Pharaoh's slaughter of slave children. He is rescued by an Egyptian princess and raised as a prince. He realizes his true identity after God speaks to him through a burning bush, and he frees the slaves with the help of his brother, Aaron, and the Ten Plagues (see Passover under Judaism).

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Christianity: Tales (continued)

- Birth of Jesus: Jesus is immaculately conceived by the Virgin Mary, and is born in a stable in Nazareth during a census (see Christmas, above).
- Miracles of Jesus: Changes water into wine during the Wedding at Cana; multiplied fish and bread to feed five thousand families; raised Lazarus from the dead.
- Death and Resurrection of Jesus: After partaking of a last supper with his disciples, Jesus is betrayed by Judas and captured by the Romans. Shortly after, Pontius Pilate offers to release one criminal for Passover, but Barabbas is released instead of Jesus, who is eventually crucified and buried. Three days later, he returns from the dead.
- Saints: Augustine, Ignatius, Francis

Denominations and Variations: Catholicism, Protestantism

Hinduism

Texts: Vedas; Upanishads; Sutras; Ramayana; Mahabharata; Bhagavad Gita

Beliefs and Tenets: Indian. Brahman is the unifying reality. Adherents strive to attain moksha, liberation from reincarnation by living according to dharma, the duties of a person's place in life. Holy men are known as gurus.

Tales and Figures: The Trimurti consists of Vishnu (preservation), Shiva (destruction and regeneration), and Brahma (creation).

- Vishnu has blue or black skin and four arms. He has had nine avatars, including Rama and Krishna. His consort is Lakshmi
- Shiva has a dark blue throat, since his consort Parvati held poison he drank in his throat.
- Brahma is red-skinned, has four heads and four arms, and rides a goose. His consorts are Saraswati and Gayatri.
- Ganesh or Ganesha is the Remover of Obstacles. He has the head of an elephant, which Shiva gave him after beheading him. He rides a mouse.

Denominations: Vaishnavism; Shaivism; Shaktism; Smartism

Islam

Texts: Qur'an

Beliefs and Tenets: Abrahamic, monotheistic (Allah). Prophets include Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

Rituals: Five Pillars of Islam are acts of worship. They include Iman (faith in Allah); Salah (prayer five times a day in the direction of Mecca); Zakah (voluntary acts of charity); Sawm (fasting); and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca)

Tales and Figures: Muhammad was the last prophet of Allah, to whom was revealed the Qur'an (through the angel Gabriel). He traveled on a "night journey" to heaven.

Denominations: Sunni; Shi'a

Jainism

Beliefs and Tenets: Ahimsa, extreme non-violence against all living things; moksha, liberation from samsara; samsara, reincarnation; ratnatraya, the "three gems": right perception, right knowledge, right conduct

Rituals: Especially devout Jains wear masks to keep from accidentally inhaling living matter and breaking ahimsa

Tales and Figures: Mahavira, founder, the 24th tirthankara; tirthankaras, 24 humans who attain moksha and then show other humans how to do so as well

Denominations: Digamabara, Svetambara (disagree on whether monks should be nude; Digamabara favors nudity)

Judaism

Texts: Torah (tales corresponding to Christian Pentateuch); Talmud (rabbinical teachings)

Beliefs and Tenets: Abrahamic, monotheistic.

Rituals: Bar Mitzvah (coming-of-age); Kashrut (the eating of kosher food)

Holidays: Chanukah; Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur; Purim; Passover; Shabbat; Sukkot; Shavuot; Tisha B'av

Tales and Figures: See pre-Jesus Christianity.

Denominations: Orthodox; Reform; Conservative; Hasidic (Khasidic); Kabbalah (mystical)

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Shintoism

Beliefs and Tenets: Native Japanese animistic religion. Kami are spirits that inhabit and represent all things.

Tales and Figures: Amaterasu, sun and sky goddess; Susanoo, sea and storm god; Izanagi (brother) and Izanami (sister), creators of Japan and parents of Amaterasu and Susanoo. Susanoo terrorized Amaterasu until she hid in a cave, causing the sun to disappear. All the gods tried to convince her to come out, but Ame-no-Uzume finally coaxed her out of the cave with a mirror.

Voodoo

Beliefs and Tenets: Found in West Africa and Haiti. Loa are spirits who serve as intermediaries between Bondye (chief god) and humans. Priests are known as houngan (male) and mambos (female)

Denominations: Rada (predominant); Petro (black magic sect, includes use of voodoo dolls)

Zoroastrianism

Texts: The Avestas, including a commentary known as the Zends

Beliefs and Tenets: Iranian (where it was founded), also practiced in India.

Rituals: Dead are buried in "towers of silence," where vultures are allowed to eat the corpse so as not to pollute the earth.

Tales and Figures: Ahura Mazda, chief god; Angra Mainyu, destructive god; Amesha Spentas, divine beings; Daevas, evil gods; Zurvan, father of Ahura Mazda; Zoroaster, chief prophet

Denominations: Zurvanite; Mithraism (practiced in Rome) Marichaeism (offshoot practiced by St. Augustine before his conversion to Christianity)