



*This brochure outlines in a summary form the beliefs and tenets of eight major world religions as stated in their religious writings and in the words of their key leaders.*

*Individuals reading through and discussing this chart may have their own perspectives that vary from the major tenets of their faith perspective. This may be interesting to explore as to how they came by their individual points of view.*

*To truly understand the diversity of beliefs in the world, however, the major tenets of each faith system must be understood as put forth by its sacred writings and teachings.*

*On this chart, New Age and Universalism are included because their beliefs "that each person can find or make their own truth" are very popular in Western culture.*

*Additionally, Humanism is included as a religion because it has a theology about God and has its own answers to the five key questions of life. Humanism is also increasingly being recognized as a nontheistic religion.*

*Finally, on the back panel are some points to ponder to help people understand the true diversity of these systems of belief and to explore related key questions for their own lives.*

*We hope you find this informative and helpful.*

## Points to Ponder

It seems to have become an urban legend that "all religions are basically the same." It seems that anyone who earnestly reviews this chart can see significant variations in these systems of belief as they answer five key questions about life and faith. What do you think?

~ DIVERSITY—What are the uniquenesses and differences that stand out to you? Are there similarities in some views? Are there views that are distinct and unique among all others? Is there one perspective that you are drawn to? Why?

~ HOPE—What gives you hope here on earth? How about after you die, do you have hope or confidence in what will happen to you? Are there elements of your answer that are left up to chance or to how good your efforts are? Is this OK with you?

~ TRUTH—Can truth be known? Is all truth relative, therefore all paths the same? Does sincerity of belief create truth? Modern science is based on order and absolute truth. The mathematician, engineer, physicist, scientist or doctor cannot do their work unless 2+2 always equals 4 or the law of gravity never changes. Do you think the moral or spiritual universe might similarly be ordered? Why or why not?

~ CITIZENSHIP—If each system of belief has uniquenesses that cannot be reconciled, would it be better to rally around common character attributes (like caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, etc.) or common needs in our community rather than trying to promote "Religious Syncretism" (that is, all faiths are basically the same and any path will get you to God)? Religious Syncretism seems like it is creating a new religion like Universalism. What do you think?

~ ACTION—Are you a person that would rather avoid the issues of the spiritual and hope for the best, or are you one who can courageously engage and pursue truth no matter where it might lead? Do you allow your pre-suppositions to be challenged? What have you done to grow in your faith lately? What are you going to do as a result of reviewing this brochure?

\* The American Humanist Association is classified by the IRS as a 501(c)3 religious nonprofit tax-exempt organization in the same category that a local church or other religious organization is classified. Additionally, the United States District Court (1983), Western District of Virginia, in the case of Crockett v. Sorenson, 568 F.Supp. 1422, 1425-1430 (W.D. Va. 1983), ruled that Secular Humanism is a form of religion.

For those who are jump-starting their faith or maybe beginning their faith exploration for the first time, you may find [The 21 Day Faith Experiment](#) to be a helpful resource for faith exploration. You can find this resource at [www.lifehelp.org](http://www.lifehelp.org) or you can get additional help at [www.ipriority.com](http://www.ipriority.com).

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# Diversity & Uniquenesses of Major World Religions



## A Summary of the Key Tenets of Eight Major World Religions

# COMPARISON CHART of the CORE BELIEFS of MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

An exploration of the diversity and uniquenesses of each faith perspective

Core Belief	Biblical Christianity	Judaism	Islam	Hinduism	Buddhism	New Age	Universalism	Humanism*
<b>Key Figure</b>	Jesus began in Israel 29 A.D.	Abraham and Moses began in Middle East 2000 B.C.	Muhammad began in Saudia Arabia 632 A.D.	No one founder. Many sects began in India 3000 B.C. - 2000 B.C.	The Buddha - Gautama Siddhata in India 483 B.C.	No key figure. - Shirley MacLaine popularized it in 1980s. Based on Hinduism / Eastern Religions.	No key figure. All religions and leaders have something to say. (popularized in early 1900s)	Many figures - Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Roy Wood Sellers, John Dewey - (early 1900s)
<b>Key Writings</b>	The Bible	The Tanakh (The Old Testament) and especially The Torah (first 5 books of The Old Testament) and The Talmud (the Jewish teachings about the Old Testament).	Koran – revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Some acceptance of Mosaic (Moses) Law and Jesus as a prophet, but Muslims believe that Jews and Christians have corrupted their teaching.	Many writings. Prominent ones include the Vedas, Upanishads, Ahabharatha, Bhagvad-Gita and Ramayana.	The Mahvatu – the Buddha's life story – The Jataka Tales – 550 stories of the former lives of the Buddha – the Tripitaka and the Tantras	No holy books. Uses own interpretation of Bible passages, Taoist writings, Christian Science writings, Native American beliefs, astrology, mysticism, and magic.	Any spiritual writing has value. Authority does not lie in a person or institution, but in ourselves. Not bound by any statement of belief. You can be of any faith perspective as long as you are tolerant of all other beliefs. All religions are basically the same, you just have to find truth that works for you.	Humanist Manifesto I - 1933 This manifesto "was concerned with expressing a general religious and philosophical outlook... that would provide meaning and direction, unity and purpose to human life." - Paul Kurtz, key drafter of the Humanist Manifesto II
<b>Who is God?</b>	A Holy, Personal and Triune God. He is three in one – Father, Son, Spirit. (the Trinity). He created the universe out of nothing. He is holy, just, merciful, perfect, and personal.	A Holy, Personal or Impersonal Spirit. For some Jews, He is all-powerful, personal and compassionate. For others, He is impersonal, unknowable. There is no Trinity.	Allah – One Impersonal God. Human attributes, like Father cannot be associated with Him. Many Muslims believe that Christians actually believe in three gods because of the Trinity.	God is a Universal Spirit or Mind that we are all part of like drops of water in the sea although most people are not aware. Hindus worship many gods and goddesses that are manifestations of the universal God.	No God or Buddha is a god. The Buddha himself did not believe in the existence of God. Others speak of the Buddha as a universal enlightened consciousness or as a god.	Everything and Everyone is God. God is an impersonal force or principle (i.e. The Force from Star Wars) People have unlimited power and simply need to discover it. This also ties into positive thinking and visualization movements.	Unknowable, Universal, Force. The best we can know of God is what we piece together and choose to believe. We can choose or create our own belief system.	Not Considered important. Most Humanists are atheists or agnostics and view belief in God as irrelevant or even detrimental. A few ascribe to some religious practice, but view God as irrelevant to life here on earth.
<b>Nature of Man</b>	Created in the image of God, fallen by choosing against God, but redeemable by God, and of incredible value	Created in the image of God, fallen by choosing against God, but redeemable by prayer, repentance, and obedience	Created basically good, but fallible and in need of guidance and obedience	Born basically good, but with bad thinking, needs good thinking, following births will be based on good or bad Karma	Born basically good, but with bad thinking, needs good thinking	A product of evolution, and basically good, evolving spiritually, but needs to become aware of his/her god-consciousness	Basically good and improving. Enlightenment is key. The search for truth is an end in itself.	A product of evolution and becoming better and better
<b>Salvation</b>	Grace – Salvation is by God's grace alone, not by an individual's good works. Salvation must be received by faith. Christians believe in their hearts that Jesus was the Son of God, who lived a perfect life, died for their sins and physically rose again. This provides for the forgiveness of sins as well as hope of resurrection and eternal life.	Earned by Works – Prayer, repentance, and obeying the teachings and law of the Tanakh (Old Testament) are necessary for salvation. Others believe that salvation is the improvement of society.	Earned by Works – Humans are basically good, but fallible. The balance between the amount of good deeds and bad deeds determines eternal destiny in paradise or hell. Allah, might tip the balance toward heaven if he shows mercy. The five pillars** of Islam are the religious duties that faithful Muslims must practice. <small>[**The Creed, daily 5xprayer, giving, annual fasting, and lifetime pilgrimage]</small>	Earned by Works – Through yoga and meditation, a person evolves through cycles of re-incarnation until finally being released into final salvation which is absorption into the Universal Spirit Mind.	Earned by Works – Believing in the four noble truths (reflections about the nature of suffering) and following the eight fold path** is the way to Nirvana. Nirvana is the goal in life to eliminate all desires or cravings and in this way escape suffering. <small>[**Having right: views, resolve, speech, behavior, occupation, effort, contemplation, and meditation]</small>	Earned by Works – A person needs to offset bad karma with good karma. A person can tap into supernatural power through meditation, self-awareness, and "spirit-guides." The term "reborn" is used to describe this new self-awareness.	Works or Not Applicable Salvation comes from simply being on a search for truth and being tolerant of all others no matter where their search leads them. No need for specific salvation because man is inherently good.	Works or Not Applicable No concept of afterlife or spiritual liberation, so salvation is not needed. Realizing one's personal potential and working for the betterment of humanity through ethical consciousness and social works are considered paramount, but from a naturalistic rather than supernatural standpoint.
<b>What Happens After Death?</b>	Accountability, Judgment and Reward. After death, all people await the final judgment. Believers and unbelievers will be resurrected. Believers go to be with Jesus in heaven. Unbelievers will be separated from a holy God because of their unforgiven sin.	Accountability, Judgment and Reward. There will be a physical resurrection. The obedient will live forever with God and the unrighteous will suffer. Some do not believe in a conscious life after death	Judgment, Reward - Resurrection of bodies. Fear of eternal torment is a major theme of the Koran. Paradise includes a garden populated by maidens to provide sexual pleasure for righteous men. Not as much is said of a woman's afterlife.	Reincarnation into the next cycle – a better status if a person behaved well (good karma) or a position of worse status and suffering to pay for past sins or bad karma. A person goes through many iterations until they are finally absorbed. Absorption.	Reincarnation – People do not have their own individual souls or spirits, but one's desires and feelings may be reincarnated into another person. When Nirvana is finally reached, personhood is extinguished. Extinguished.	Varied Beliefs but many believe reincarnation occurs until a person reaches oneness with God. No eternal life as a resurrected person. No literal heaven or hell. Absorption.	Varied Beliefs. Most believe heaven is only symbolic or is simply a state of consciousness either in life or continuing after death. Others believe in reincarnation; some believe that afterlife is nonexistent or not known or not important, as actions in life are all that matter.	No Afterlife. An afterlife or spiritual existence after death is not recognized.
<b>Who is Jesus?</b>  [This is a key question because Jesus is the only world religious leader that claimed to be the incarnate Son of God and claimed that He had authority to forgive sin.]	Jesus is the Son of God, who lived a perfect life here on earth. He made provision for a person's separateness from God through sacrificing His own life to forgive us of our sins. Jesus was resurrected from the dead and promises forgiveness and new life for those who believe in Him.	Jesus is either viewed as a martyred Jewish rabbi or as a false messiah. Jews do not believe Jesus was the Son of God or that He rose from the dead.	Jesus is a respected prophet, but not God. He is among the 124,000 prophets sent by Allah. Jesus was sinless, born of a virgin, but he was not crucified for people's sins. Jesus will return some day, perhaps to turn Christians to Islam.	Jesus Christ is a teacher or guru like so many others. He is a son of God, but just like others. His death does not atone for sins and he did not rise from the dead.	Jesus was an enlightened teacher, but not the Son of God.	Jesus is a spiritual model, but not the one true God. He is not a savior, but is like a guru who tapped into divine power in the same way that anyone can. He did not rise physically from the dead.	Jesus is just one of many teachers. Jesus did not need to forgive mankind's sins because people are inherently good.	Jesus was a moral teacher, but basically not important.