

# **THEOLOGY OF OTHER RELIGIONS**



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# The Origins of Religion: How Do Supernatural Beliefs Evolve?

Humanity's closest living relatives are common chimpanzees and bonobos. These primates share a common ancestor with humans who lived between six and eight million years ago. It is for this reason that chimpanzees and bonobos are viewed as the best available surrogate for this common ancestor. Barbara King argues that while non-human primates are not religious, they do exhibit some traits that would have been necessary for the evolution of religion. These traits include high intelligence, a capacity for symbolic communication, a sense of social norms, realization of "self" and a concept of continuity. There is inconclusive evidence that *Homo neanderthalensis* may have buried their dead which is evidence of the use of ritual. The use of burial rituals is thought to be evidence of religious activity, and there is no other evidence that religion existed in human culture before humans reached behavioral modernity.

Elephants, however, actually demonstrate rituals around their deceased, which includes long periods of

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silence and mourning at the point of death and a process of returning to grave sites and caressing the remains. Marc Bekoff, Professor Emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, argues that many species grieve death and loss.

### **Setting the Stage for Human Religion**

#### **Increased Brain Size**

In this set of theories, the religious mind is one consequence of a brain that is large enough to formulate religious and philosophical ideas. During human evolution, the hominid brain tripled in size, peaking 500,000 years ago. Much of the brain's expansion took place in the neocortex. This part of the brain is involved in processing higher order cognitive functions that are connected with human religiosity. The neocortex is associated with self-consciousness, language and emotion. According to Dunbar's theory, the relative neocortex size of any species correlates with the level of social complexity of the particular species. The neocortex size correlates with a number of social variables that include social group size and complexity of mating behaviors. In chimpanzees the neocortex occupies 50% of the brain, whereas in modern humans it occupies 80% of the brain.

Robin Dunbar argues that the critical event in the evolution of the neocortex took place at the speciation of archaic homo sapiens about 500,000 years ago. His study indicates that only after the speciation event is the neocortex large enough to process complex social phenomena such as language and religion. The study is based on a regression analysis of neocortex size plotted against a number of social behaviors of living and extinct hominids.

Stephen Jay Gould suggests that religion may have grown out of evolutionary changes which favored larger brains as a means of cementing group coherence among savannah hunters, after that larger brain enabled reflection on the inevitability of personal mortality.

#### **Tool Use**

Lewis Wolpert argues that causal beliefs that emerged from tool use played a major role in the evolution of belief. The manufacture of complex tools requires creating a mental image of an object which does not exist naturally before actually making the artifact.

Furthermore, one must understand how the tool would be used, that requires an understanding of causality. Accordingly, the level of sophistication of stone tools is a useful indicator of causal beliefs. Wolpert contends use of tools composed of more than one component, such as hand axes, represents an ability to understand cause and effect. However, recent studies of other primates indicate that causality may not be a uniquely human trait. For example, chimpanzees have been known to escape from pens closed with multiple latches, which was previously thought could only have been figured out by humans who understood causality. Chimpanzees are also known to mourn the dead, and notice things that have only aesthetic value, like sunsets, both of which may be considered to be components of religion or spirituality. The difference between the comprehension of causality by humans and chimpanzees is one of degree. The degree of comprehension in an animal depends upon the size of the prefrontal cortex: the greater the size of the prefrontal cortex the deeper the comprehension.

### **Development of Language**

Religion requires a system of symbolic communication, such as language, to be transmitted from one individual to another. Philip Lieberman states “human religious thought and moral sense clearly rest on a cognitive-linguistic base”. From this premise science writer Nicholas Wade states:

“Like most behaviors that are found in societies throughout the world, religion must have been present in the ancestral human population before the dispersal from Africa 50,000 years ago. Although religious rituals usually involve dance and music, they are also very verbal, since the sacred truths have to be stated. If so, religion, at least in its modern form, cannot pre-date the emergence of language. It has been argued earlier that language attained its modern state shortly before the exodus from Africa. If religion had to await the evolution of modern, articulate language, then it too would have emerged shortly before 50,000 years ago.”

Another view distinguishes individual religious belief from collective religious belief. While the former does not require prior development of language, the latter does. The individual human brain has to explain a phenomenon in order to comprehend and relate to it. This activity

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predates by far the emergence of language and may have caused it. The theory is, belief in the supernatural emerges from hypotheses arbitrarily assumed by individuals to explain natural phenomena that cannot be explained otherwise. The resulting need to share individual hypotheses with others leads eventually to collective religious belief. A socially accepted hypothesis becomes dogmatic backed by social sanction.

### **Morality and Group Living**

Frans de Waal and Barbara King both view human morality as having grown out of primate sociality. Though morality awareness may be a unique human trait, many social animals, such as primates, dolphins and whales, have been known to exhibit pre-moral sentiments. According to Michael Shermer, the following characteristics are shared by humans and other social animals, particularly the great apes:

“attachment and bonding, cooperation and mutual aid, sympathy and empathy, direct and indirect reciprocity, altruism and reciprocal altruism, conflict resolution and peacemaking, deception and deception detection, community concern and caring about what others think about you, and awareness of and response to the social rules of the group”.

De Waal contends that all social animals have had to restrain or alter their behavior for group living to be worthwhile. Pre-moral sentiments evolved in primate societies as a method of restraining individual selfishness and building more cooperative groups. For any social species, the benefits of being part of an altruistic group should outweigh the benefits of individualism. For example, lack of group cohesion could make individuals more vulnerable to attack from outsiders. Being part of a group may also improve the chances of finding food. This is evident among animals that hunt in packs to take down large or dangerous prey.

All social animals have hierarchical societies in which each member knows its own place. Social order is maintained by certain rules of expected behavior and dominant group members enforce order through punishment. However, higher order primates also have a sense of reciprocity and fairness. Chimpanzees remember who did them favors and who did them wrong. For example, chimpanzees are more likely to share food with individuals who have previously groomed them.



Chimpanzees live in fission-fusion groups that average 50 individuals. It is likely that early ancestors of humans lived in groups of similar size. Based on the size of extant hunter-gatherer societies, recent Paleolithic hominids lived in bands of a few hundred individuals. As community size increased over the course of human evolution, greater enforcement to achieve group cohesion would have been required. Morality may have evolved in these bands of 100 to 200 people as a means of social control, conflict resolution and group solidarity. According to Dr. de Waal, human morality has two extra levels of sophistication that are not found in primate societies. Humans enforce their society's moral codes much more rigorously with rewards, punishments and reputation building. Humans also apply a degree of judgment and reason not otherwise seen in the animal kingdom.

Psychologist Matt J. Rossano argues that religion emerged after morality and built upon morality by expanding the social scrutiny of individual behavior to include supernatural agents. By including ever-watchful ancestors, spirits and gods in the social realm, humans discovered an effective strategy for restraining selfishness and building more cooperative groups. The adaptive value of religion would have enhanced group survival. Rossano is referring here to collective religious belief and the social sanction that institutionalized morality. According to Rossano's teaching, individual religious belief is thus initially epistemological, not ethical, in nature.

### **Evolutionary Psychology of Religion**

There is general agreement among cognitive scientists that religion is an outgrowth of brain architecture that evolved early in human history. However, there is disagreement on the exact mechanisms that drove the evolution of the religious mind. The two main schools of thought hold that either religion evolved due to natural selection and has selective advantage, or that religion is an evolutionary byproduct of other mental adaptations. Stephen Jay Gould, for example, believed that religion was an exaptation or a spandrel, in other words that religion evolved as byproduct of psychological mechanisms that evolved for other reasons.

Such mechanisms may include the ability to infer the presence of organisms that might do harm (agent detection), the ability to come up with causal narratives for natural events (etiology), and the ability

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to recognize that other people have minds of their own with their own beliefs, desires and intentions (theory of mind). These three adaptations (among others) allow human beings to imagine purposeful agents behind many observations that could not readily be explained otherwise, e.g. thunder, lightning, movement of planets, complexity of life, etc. The emergence of collective religious belief identified the agents as deities that standardized the explanation.

Some scholars have suggested that religion is genetically “hardwired” into the human condition. One controversial proposal, the God gene hypothesis, states that some variants of a specific gene, the VMAT2 gene, predispose to spirituality.

Another view is based on the concept of the triune brain: the reptilian brain, the limbic system, and the neocortex, proposed by Paul D. MacLean. Collective religious belief draws upon the emotions of love, fear, and gregariousness and is deeply embedded in the limbic system through sociobiological conditioning and social sanction. Individual religious belief utilizes reason based in the neocortex and often varies from collective religion. The limbic system is much older in evolutionary terms than the neocortex and is, therefore, stronger than it much in the same way as the reptilian is stronger than both the limbic system and the neocortex. Reason is pre-empted by emotional drives. The religious feeling in a congregation is emotionally different from individual spirituality even though the congregation is composed of individuals. Belonging to a collective religion is culturally more important than individual spirituality though the two often go hand in hand. This is one of the reasons why religious debates are likely to be inconclusive.

Yet another view is that the behaviour of people who participate in a religion makes them feel better and this improves their fitness, so that there is a genetic selection in favor of people who are willing to believe in religion. Specifically, rituals, beliefs, and the social contact typical of religious groups may serve to calm the mind (for example by reducing ambiguity and the uncertainty due to complexity) and allow it to function better when under stress. This would allow religion to be used as a powerful survival mechanism, particularly in facilitating the evolution of hierarchies of warriors, which if true, may be why many modern religions tend to promote fertility and kinship.

Still another view, proposed by F.H. Previc, is that human religion was a product of an increase in dopaminergic functions in the human brain and a general intellectual expansion beginning around 80 kya. Dopamine promotes an emphasis on distant space and time, which is critical for the establishment of religious experience. While the earliest shamanic cave paintings date back around 40 kya, the use of ochre for rock art predates this and there is clear evidence for abstract thinking along the coast of South Africa by 80 kya.

### **Paleolithic Burials**

The earliest evidence of religious thought is based on the ritual treatment of the dead. Most animals display only a casual interest in the dead of their own species. Ritual burial thus represents a significant change in human behavior. Ritual burials represent an awareness of life and death and a possible belief in the afterlife. Philip Lieberman states “burials with grave goods clearly signify religious practices and concern for the dead that transcends daily life.”

The earliest evidence for treatment of the dead comes from Atapuerca in Spain. At this location the bones of 30 individuals believed to be *Homo heidelbergensis* have been found in a pit. Neanderthals are also contenders for the first hominids to intentionally bury the dead. They may have placed corpses into shallow graves along with stone tools and animal bones. The presence of these grave goods may indicate an emotional connection with the deceased and possibly a belief in the afterlife. Neanderthal burial sites include Shanidar in Iraq and Krapina in Croatia and Kebara Cave in Israel.

The earliest known burial of modern humans is from a cave in Israel located at Qafzeh. Human remains have been dated to 100,000 years ago. Human skeletons were found stained with red ochre. A variety of grave goods were found at the burial site. The mandible of a wild boar was found placed in the arms of one of the skeletons. Philip Lieberman states: “Burial rituals incorporating grave goods may have been invented by the anatomically modern hominids who emigrated from Africa to the Middle East roughly 100,000 years ago”.

Matt Rossano suggests that the period between 80,000–60,000 years before present, following the retreat of humans from the Levant to Africa, was a crucial period in the evolution of religion.

### **The Use of Symbolism**

The use of symbolism in religion is a universal established phenomenon. Archeologist Steven Mithen contends that it is common for religious practices to involve the creation of images and symbols to represent supernatural beings and ideas. Because supernatural beings violate the principles of the natural world, there will always be difficulty in communicating and sharing supernatural concepts with others. This problem can be overcome by anchoring these supernatural beings in material form through representational art. When translated into material form, supernatural concepts become easier to communicate and understand. Due to the association of art and religion, evidence of symbolism in the fossil record is indicative of a mind capable of religious thoughts. Art and symbolism demonstrates a capacity for abstract thought and imagination necessary to construct religious ideas. Wentzel van Huyssteen states that the translation of the non-visible through symbolism enabled early human ancestors to hold beliefs in abstract terms.

Some of the earliest evidence of symbolic behavior is associated with Middle Stone Age sites in Africa. From at least 100,000 years ago, there is evidence of the use of pigments such as red ochre. Pigments are of little practical use to hunter gatherers, thus evidence of their use is interpreted as symbolic or for ritual purposes. Among extant hunter gatherer populations around the world, red ochre is still used extensively for ritual purposes. It has been argued that it is universal among human cultures for the color red to represent blood, sex, life and death.

The use of red ochre as a proxy for symbolism is often criticized as being too indirect. Some scientists, such as Richard Klein and Steven Mithen, only recognize unambiguous forms of art as representative of abstract ideas. Upper paleolithic cave art provides some of the most unambiguous evidence of religious thought from the paleolithic. Cave paintings at Chauvet depict creatures that are half human and half animal.

### **Origins of Organized Religion**

Organized religion traces its roots to the neolithic revolution that began 11,000 years ago in the Near East but may have occurred independently in several other locations around the world. The invention

of agriculture transformed many human societies from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a sedentary lifestyle. The consequences of the neolithic revolution included a population explosion and an acceleration in the pace of technological development. The transition from foraging bands to states and empires precipitated more specialized and developed forms of religion that reflected the new social and political environment. While bands and small tribes possess supernatural beliefs, these beliefs do not serve to justify a central authority, justify transfer of wealth or maintain peace between unrelated individuals. Organized religion emerged as a means of providing social and economic stability through the following ways:

<b>Social evolution of humans</b>		
<b>Period years ago</b>	<b>Society type</b>	<b>Number of individuals</b>
100,000–10,000	Bands	10s–100s
10,000–5,000	Tribes	100s–1,000s
5,000–3,000	Chiefdoms	1,000s–10,000s
3,000–1,000	States	10,000s–100,000s
2,000*–present	Empires	100,000–1,000,000s

- ❖ Justifying the central authority, which in turn possessed the right to collect taxes in return for providing social and security services.
- ❖ Bands and tribes consist of small number of related individuals. However, states and nations are composed of many thousands of unrelated individuals. Jared Diamond argues that organized religion served to provide a bond between unrelated individuals who would otherwise be more prone to enmity. In his book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* he argues that the leading cause of death among hunter-gatherer societies is murder.
- ❖ Religions that revolved around moralizing gods may have facilitated the rise of large, cooperative groups of unrelated individuals.

The states born out of the Neolithic revolution, such as those of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, were theocracies with chiefs, kings and emperors playing dual roles of political and spiritual leaders. Anthropologists have found that virtually all state societies and

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chiefdoms from around the world have been found to justify political power through divine authority. This suggests that political authority co-opts collective religious belief to bolster itself.

### **Invention of Writing**

Following the neolithic revolution, the pace of technological development (cultural evolution) intensified due to the invention of writing 5000 years ago. Symbols that became words later on made effective communication of ideas possible. Printing invented only over a thousand years ago increased the speed of communication exponentially and became the main spring of cultural evolution. Writing is thought to have been first invented in either Sumeria or Ancient Egypt and was initially used for accounting. Soon after, writing was used to record myth. The first religious texts mark the beginning of religious history. The Pyramid Texts from ancient Egypt are one of the oldest known religious texts in the world, dating to between 2400–2300 BCE. Writing played a major role in sustaining and spreading organized religion. In pre-literate societies, religious ideas were based on an oral tradition, the contents of which were articulated by shamans and remained limited to the collective memories of the society's inhabitants. With the advent of writing, information that was not easy to remember could easily be stored in sacred texts that were maintained by a select group (clergy). Humans could store and process large amounts of information with writing that otherwise would have been forgotten. Writing therefore enabled religions to develop coherent and comprehensive doctrinal systems that remained independent of time and place. Writing also brought a measure of objectivity to human knowledge. Formulation of thoughts in words and the requirement for validation made mutual exchange of ideas and the sifting of generally acceptable from not acceptable ideas possible. The generally acceptable ideas became objective knowledge reflecting the continuously evolving framework of human awareness of reality that Karl Popper calls 'verisimilitude' - a stage on the human journey to truth.

### **Various Foundations**

**Origin of Religion - Ancient Foundations:** The origin of religion can generally be traced to the ancient Near East and classified in three basic categories: polytheistic, pantheistic and monotheistic.

Atheism is really a modern belief that resulted from the “Enlightenment” period of the 18th century.

**Origin of Religion - Polytheism:** *The origin of religion and polytheistic systems:* Polytheism (a belief in many gods) is thought to have originated with Hinduism in about 2500 BC. Hindu beliefs were recorded in the Bhagavad Gita, which revealed that many gods were subject to a supreme Brahman god. Polytheism was also the religion of many other ancient cultures, including Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. The ancient polytheistic belief systems viewed gods as being in control of all natural events such as rainfall, harvests and fertility. Generally, polytheistic cultures believed in sacrifices to appease their gods. For instance, the Canaanites sacrificed to the male god, Baal, and his female counterpart, Ashteroth. Baal controlled the rain and the harvest, while Ashteroth controlled fertility and reproduction. The Greeks and Romans developed polytheism to a highly structured pantheon of gods and goddesses.

**Origin of Religion - Pantheism:** *The origin of religions and pantheistic systems:* Pantheism (a belief that all is God) prevailed in numerous ancient cultures. The belief that the universe itself was divine was typified in the Animism beliefs of the African and American Indian cultures, the later Egyptian religion under the Pharaohs, and Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism in the cultures of the Far East. Pantheistic beliefs are also finding resurgence among various New Age movements. Generally, pantheism is the principle that god is everything, and everything is god. Therefore, nature is also part of god. We must be in harmony with nature. We must nurture it and be nurtured by it. Mankind is no different than any other animal. We must live in harmony with them, understand them, and learn from them, focusing on the relationship between mankind and the elements of nature.

**Origin of Religion - Monotheism:** *The origin of religion and monotheistic systems:* Monotheism (a belief in one God) is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim line of religions, which began with a man named Abraham in about 2000 BC. From this point in history, God began revealing Himself to the world through the nation of Israel. The Jewish Scriptures record the journey of the Israelites from slaves in Egypt to the “promised land” in Canaan under the

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leadership of Moses. During a period of about 1500 years, God revealed what became the Old Testament of the Bible, relating the history of Israel with the character and laws of God. During the period of the Roman Empire, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as the long-awaited Messiah. The ministry of Jesus ended in about 32 AD with His crucifixion and resurrection. After Christ's ascension into heaven, the Christian church grew in His name and the New Testament was written. About 600 years later, Muhammad began preaching in Mecca. Muhammad believed he was the ultimate prophet of God, and his teachings became the precepts of Islam as recorded in the Qur'an.

### **Origin of Religion - Important Dates in History**

- ◆ c. 2000 BC: Time of Abraham, the patriarch of Israel.
- ◆ c. 1200 BC: Time of Moses, the Hebrew leader of the Exodus.
- ◆ c. 1100 - 500 BC: Hindus compile their holy texts, the Vedas.
- ◆ c. 563 - 483 BC: Time of Buddha, founder of Buddhism.
- ◆ c. 551 - 479 BC: Time of Confucius, founder of Confucianism.
- ◆ c. 200 BC: The Hindu book, *Bhagavad Gita*, is written.
- ◆ c. 2 to 4 BC - 32 AD: Time of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and founder of Christianity.
- ◆ c. 32 AD: The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ c. 40 - 90 AD: The New Testament is written by the followers of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ c. 570 - 632 AD: Time of Muhammad, who records the Qur'an as the basis of Islam.



## Chapter 2

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### Shintoism

Shintoism was the primitive religion of Japan before the coming of Buddhism, which is currently the main religion of Japan. Shintoism is a very simple religion. It gives only one command, the necessity of being loyal to one's ancestors. Its early aspects were naturalistic, which included spiritism, totemism, nature worship, and a crude sort of monotheism. Early Japanese worshipped the sun, thunder, earth, volcanoes, tigers, serpents, trees, shrubs, vines, etc. and even stones. A later stage is more intellectual and ethically oriented. The only deity actually recognized in higher Shintoism is the spiritualized human mind.

For the masses, Shintoism has about 800,000 gods, mostly the deified heroes of the Japanese. The chief god is Amaterasu, the Sun God, from whom the Imperial Family of Japan traces its roots. A linguistic definition of Shinto is somewhat anathema to Shinto.

But anyway, Shinto is awash with idols. There is (almost) no god that you cannot point to. Shinto approves of the representation of God in the material. Having said that, in Shinto thought too there is an insistence that God

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is spiritual: the kami is the power in the mountain, the tree, the sun and not these objects themselves. But Shinto is extremely “idol tolerant”. Conversely, Shinto is I believe, very logo-clastic, it believes that God can not and should not be expressed in words.

Shinto is a loose collection of faiths without any written commandments or creed. It is conveyed by ritual, practice, and behaviour rather than by word. The following linguistic description of Shinto is, therefore, at best an external analysis rather than “Shinto doctrine” since Shinto avoids linguistic definition to the extent that other religions avoid idolatry. An infinite number of gods or spirits are revered in Shinto, but at the supreme level in the Shinto cosmology is the unity of Nature from which all things are born. Humans depend upon the spirits, which are features of nature (such as mountains, waterfalls, trees and the sun) and our human ancestors. The spirits depend upon humans and by being enshrined and how revered they come to be.

While born pure and at one with nature, humans become defiled through their participation in society. In order to purify themselves they must worship the spirits. Shintoists perform simple and often silent prayers, rituals and offerings to the spirits at Shrines and at altars within the home. They try to maintain an attitude of gratitude and humility. Shintoists believe that when they die they eventually become one with the spirits and in turn, with nature to which all things return. The number 13 (of sects) came from the number that were approved by the Meiji (late nineteenth, early 20th century) Japanese government. Shinto was reorganised by the government. This had the effect of

1. Removing the “foreign” Buddhist elements
2. Reducing the amount of lay spirituality and “superstition”
3. Reorganising the remainder around the pantheon as described in the Kojiki myth.

As part of (2) the government had religions practitioners register and they only recognised 13 religions sects outside of their new State/Shrine Shinto framework.

### **Advanced Information**

Shinto is the indigenous religious tradition of Japan. Unlike some religions, Shinto has no historical founder; its roots lie deep in the

prehistoric religious practices of the Japanese people. Nor does Shinto have any canon of sacred scriptures, although important elements of its mythology and cosmology may be found in ancient Japanese chronicles (the Kojiki and the Nihonshoki), and ritual prayers called norito were compiled into written collections at an early date.

The name Shinto is actually the Sino Japanese reading for the more purely Japanese *kami no michi*, which means the “way of the kami.” The kami are innumerable Japanese deities that may be thought of as full fledged gods (such as the sun - goddess Amaterasu, from whom the imperial family is said to descend); the divinized souls of great persons (warriors, leaders, poets, scholars); the ancestral divinities of clans (*uji*); the spirits of specific places, often of natural beauty (woods, trees, springs, rocks, mountains); or, more abstractly, the forces of nature (fertility, growth, production).

Kami are generally worshiped at shrines (*jinja*), which are established in their honor and house the *go -shintai* (sacred objects) in which the kami are said to reside. Worshipers will pass under a sacred arch (*torii*), which helps demarcate the sacred area of the shrine. They will then purify themselves by washing their hands and rinsing their mouths, approach the shrine itself, make an offering, call on the deity, and utter a silent prayer.

Special times for worship include important moments in the life cycle of individuals (birth, youth, marriage, and, more recently, school entrance examinations) and festival dates (*matsuris*) that reflect the rhythm of the year: the New Year, the advent of spring, rice planting, midsummer, harvesting, and so on. In addition, each shrine will usually have its own special *matsuri* particular to its own history or foundation. On any of these occasions the shrine will be crowded with worshipers, many of whom may wish to have their fortunes told or to receive special blessings or purifications from the Shinto priests. Certain shrines have also taken on national importance. The Grand Shrine of Ise, for example, is sacred to Amaterasu. Because she is associated with the imperial family, her shrine is a national center of pilgrimage - the focal point for paying respect to the emperor and, through him, to Japan.

With the establishment of Buddhism in Japan during the Nara and Heian periods (710 - 1185 AD), Shinto quickly came under its influence

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as well as that of Confucianism and Chinese culture as a whole. On the one hand, it became more highly structured, following the Buddhist lead. On the other hand, certain kami came to be thought of as manifestations of particular Buddhas or bodhisattvas. (Amaterasu, for example, was identified with the cosmic Buddha Vairocana.) Thus the two religions both mixed and coexisted at the same time.

During the Tokugawa period (1603 - 1868), the Buddhist sects became tools of the feudal regime and neo Confucianism served as the guiding ideology. Shinto was overshadowed in the process. Gradually, however, certain nationalist scholars, reacting against what they considered foreign ideologies, turned more and more to Shinto as the source of a uniquely Japanese identity.

With the Meiji Restoration in 1868 - and the disestablishment of both the Tokugawa regime and the Buddhism that had accompanied it - Shinto naturally came to the fore. In the 1880s the government guaranteed freedom of religion to practitioners of all faiths but also drew a distinction between shrine Shinto (sometimes called state Shinto) and sect Shinto. The former was a nominally secular organization by means of which the state transformed shrines into centers of a patriotic and nationalistic “cult” applicable to followers of all faiths.

In the 1930s shrine Shinto was used by the ultranationalists and militarists as one of several vehicles for their views. Sect Shinto, on the other hand, was a separate category for various popular religious groups (a total of 13 Shinto “denominations” were distinguished), which were thereby separated from the state sponsored shrines and had, like the Buddhist sects and Christian denominations, to rely on private, nongovernmental support. These sect Shinto groups were, in many instances, the prototypes of various new religions that have emerged in Japan during the 20th century, especially since World War II.

With the end of World War II and the American occupation of Japan, the shrine Shinto system was dismantled and Shinto as a whole was disassociated from the state. Following that period, however, the shrines were revitalized and today remain one of the sacred focuses of Japanese religious sentiment.

Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion. Beginning about 500 BC (or earlier) it was originally an amorphous mix of nature worship,

fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism. Its name was derived from the Chinese words “shin tao” (The Way of the Gods) in the 8th Century AD. At that time, the Yamato dynasty consolidated its rule over most of Japan, divine origins were ascribed to the imperial family, and Shinto established itself as the official religion of Japan, along with Buddhism.

The complete separation of Japanese religion from politics did not occur until just after World War II. The Emperor renounced his divinity at that time.

Shinto has no real founder, no written scriptures, no body of religious law, and only a very loosely-organized priesthood.

### **Beliefs of Shintoism**

Shinto does not have as fully developed a theology as do most other religions. Their religious texts discuss the High Plain of Heaven and the Dark Land which is an unclean land of the dead, but give few details. Shinto creation stories tell of the history and lives of the Kami. Among them was a divine couple, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto, who gave birth to the Japanese islands. Their children became the deities of the various Japanese clans. Amaterasu (Sun Goddess) was one of their daughters. She is the ancestress of the Imperial Family. Her descendants unified the country. Her brother, Susano came down from heaven and roamed throughout the earth. He is famous for killing a great evil serpent. The Sun Goddess is regarded as the chief deity. There are numerous other deities who are conceptualized in many forms.

Some are related to natural objects and creatures, from food to rivers to rocks. There are Guardian Kami of particular areas and clans. Some are exceptional past people, including all but the last of the emperors. Some are abstract creative forces. They are seen as benign; they sustain and protect. There are no concepts which compare to the Christian beliefs in the wrath of God, His omnipotence and omni-presence, or the separation of God from humanity due to sin.

Ancestors are deeply revered and worshipped. All of humanity is regarded as Kami's child. Thus all human life and human nature is sacred. Believers revere musuhi, the Kamis' creative and harmonizing

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powers. They aspire to have makoto, sincerity or true heart. This is regarded as the way or will of Kami. Morality is based upon that which is of benefit to the group. Shinto emphasizes right practice, sensibility, and attitude.

There are Four Affirmations in Shinto:

- ❖ **Tradition and the family:** The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.
- ❖ **Love of nature:** Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the Gods. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.
- ❖ **Physical cleanliness:** They take baths, wash their hands, and rinse out their mouth often.
- ❖ **Matsuri:** To worship and honor gods and ancestral spirits.

## Theology and cosmology

### *Kami*

*Kami* or *shin* is defined in English as “god”, “spirit”, “spiritual essence”, all these terms meaning the energy generating a thing. Since the Japanese language does not distinguish between singular and plural, *kami* refers to the divinity, or sacred essence, that manifests in multiple forms. Rocks, trees, rivers, animals, places, and even people can be said to possess the nature of *kami*. Kami and people exist within the same world and share its interrelated complexity.

Early anthropologists called Shinto “animistic” in which animate and inanimate things have spirits or souls that are worshiped. The concept of animism in Shinto is no longer argued. Shinto gods are collectively called *yaoyorozu no kami*, an expression literally meaning “eight million kami”, but interpreted as meaning “myriad”, although it can be translated as “many Kami”. There is a phonetic variation, *kamu*, and a similar word in the Ainu language, *kamui*. An analogous word is *mi-koto*.

*Kami* refers particularly to the power of phenomena that inspire a sense of wonder and awe in the beholder (the sacred), testifying to the divinity of such a phenomenon.<sup>[8]</sup> It is comparable to what Rudolf Otto described as the *mysterium tremendum and fascinans*.

The *kami* reside in all things, but certain objects and places are designated for the interface of people and *kami*: *yorishiro*, *shintai*, shrines, and *kamidana*. There are natural places considered to have an unusually sacred spirit about them, and are objects of worship. They are frequently mountains, trees, unusual rocks, rivers, waterfalls, and other natural things. In most cases they are on or near a shrine grounds. The shrine is a building in which the *kami* is enshrined (housed). It is a sacred space, creating a separation from the “ordinary” world. The *kamidana* is a household shrine that acts as a substitute for a large shrine on a daily basis. In each case the object of worship is considered a sacred space inside which the *kami* spirit actually dwells, being treated with the utmost respect.

### ***Kannagara***

In Shinto *kannagara*, meaning “way [path] of [expression] of the *kami*”, refers to the law of the natural order.<sup>[19]</sup> It is the sense of the terms *michi* or *to*, “way”, in the terms “*kami-no-michi*” or “Shinto”. Those who understand *kannagara* know the divine, the human, and how people should live. From this knowledge stems the ethical dimension of Shinto, focusing on sincerity (*makoto*), honesty (*tadashii*) and purity.

### ***Amenominakanushi***

According to the *Kojiki*, *Amenominakanushi* All-Father of the Originating Hub”, or “Heavenly Ancestral God of the Originating Heart of the Universe”) is the first *kami*, and the concept of the source of the universe according to theologies. In mythology he is described as a “god who came into being alone” (*hitorigami*), the first of the *zōka sanshin* (“three *kami* of creation”), and one of the five *kotoamatsukami* (“distinguished heavenly gods”).

*Amenominakanushi* has been considered a concept developed under the influence of Chinese thought.<sup>[21]</sup> With the flourishing of *kokugaku* the concept was studied by scholars. The theologian Hirata Atsutane identified *Amenominakanushi* as the spirit of the North Star, master of the seven stars of the Big Dipper. The god was emphasised by the *Daikyōin* in the Meiji period, and worshiped by some Shinto sects.

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The god manifests in a duality, a male and a female function, respectively *Takamimusubi* and *Kamimusubi*. In other mythical accounts the originating *kami* is called *Umashiashikabihikoji* ” God of the *Ashi* [Reed]”) or *Kuninotokotachi* in *Kojiki*, in *Nihonshoki*; *Kunitokotachi-no-Kami* or *Kuninotokotachi-no-Kami?*; the “God Founder of the Nation”), the latter used in the *Nihon Shoki*.

### Practices

Seasonal celebrations are held at spring planting, fall harvest, and special anniversaries of the history of a shrine or of a local patron spirit. Followers are expected to visit Shinto shrines at the times of various life passages. For example, the annual Shichigosan Matsuri involves a blessing by the shrine Priest of girls aged 3 and 7 and boys aged 5. Any person may visit a shrine and one need not be Shinto to do this. Doing so is called *Omairi*. Typically there are a few basic steps to visiting a shrine.

- ❖ At any entrance gate, bow respectfully before passing through.
- ❖ If there is a hand washing basin provided, perform *Temizu*: take the dipper in your right hand and scoop up water. Pour some onto your left hand, then transfer the dipper to your left hand and pour some onto your right hand. Transfer the dipper to your right hand again, cup your left palm, and pour water into it, from which you will take the water into your mouth (never drink directly from the dipper), silently swish it around in your mouth (do not drink), then quietly spit it out into your cupped left hand (not into the reservoir). Then, holding the handle of the dipper in both hands, turn it vertically so that the remaining water washes over the handle. Then replace it where you found it.
- ❖ Approach the shrine; if there is a bell, you may ring the bell first (or after depositing a donation); if there is a box for donations, leave a modest one in relation to your means; then bow twice, clap twice, and hold the second clap with your hands held together in front of your heart for a closing bow after your prayers.
- ❖ There is variation in how this basic visitation may go, and depending on the time of year and holidays there may also be other rituals attached to visitations.



- ❖ Be sincere and respectful to the staff and other visitors, and if at all possible, be quiet. Do be aware that there are places one should not go on the shrine grounds. Do not wear shoes inside any buildings.

The rite of ritual purification usually done daily at a shrine is a ceremony of offerings and prayers of several forms. Shinsen (food offerings of fruit, fish, and vegetables), Tamagushi (sakakitree branches), Shio (salt), Gohan (rice), Mochi (rice cake), and Sake (rice wine) are all typical offerings. On holidays and other special occasions the inner shrine doors may be opened and special offerings made.

Around 1900 AD Shinto was divided into two:

- ❖ **Jinja** (Shrine) Shinto: This is the largest Shinto group. It was the original form of the religion; its roots date back into pre-history. Until the end of World War II, it was closely aligned with State Shinto. The Emperor of Japan was worshipped as a living God. Almost all shrines are members of Jinja Honcho, the Association of Shinto Shrines.
- ❖ **Kyoha** (Sectarian) Shinto: This consists of 13 sects which were founded by individuals since the start of the 19th century.
- ❖ **Folk Shinto** This is not actually a Shinto sect; it has no formal central organization or creed. It is seen in local practices and rituals.

### Shinto Texts

- ❖ The **Kojiki** (Record of Ancient Matters)
- ❖ The **Rokkokushi** (Six National Histories)
- ❖ The **Shoku Nihongi** and its **Nihon Shoki** (Continuing Chronicles of Japan)
- ❖ The **Jinno Shotoki** (a study of Shinto and Japanese politics and history) was written in the 14th century

Estimates of the number of Shintoists vary a lot. Some sources give numbers in the range of 2.8 to 3.2 million. One states that 40% of Japanese adults follow Shinto; that would account for about 50 million Shintoists. Others state that about 86% of Japanese adults follow a combination of Shinto and Buddhism; that would put the number of followers of Shinto at 107 million.

## Chapter 3

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# Confucianism

Some say Confucianism is not a religion, since there are no Confucian deities and no teachings about the afterlife. Confucius himself was a staunch supporter of ritual, however, and for many centuries there were state rituals associated with Confucianism. Most importantly, the Confucian tradition was instrumental in shaping Chinese social relationships and moral thought. Thus even without deities and a vision of salvation, Confucianism plays much the same role as religion does in other cultural contexts. The founder of Confucianism was Kong Qiu (K'ung Ch'iu), who was born around 552 B.C.E. in the small state of Lu and died in 479 B.C.E. The Latinized name Confucius, based on the honorific title Kong Fuzi (K'ung Fu-tzu), was created by 16th-century Jesuit missionaries in China. Confucius was a teacher to sons of the nobility at a time when formal education was just beginning in China. He traveled from region to region with a small group of disciples, a number of whom would become important government officials. Confucius was not particularly famous during his lifetime, and even considered himself to be a failure. He longed to be the advisor to a powerful ruler, and he believed

that such a ruler, with the right advice, could bring about an ideal world. Confucius said heaven and the afterlife were beyond human capacity to understand, and one should therefore concentrate instead on doing the right thing in this life. The earliest records from his students indicate that he did not provide many moral precepts; rather he taught an attitude toward one's fellow humans of respect, particularly respect for one's parents, teachers, and elders. He also encouraged his students to learn from everyone they encountered and to honor others' cultural norms. Later, his teachings would be translated by authoritarian political philosophers into strict guidelines, and for much of Chinese history Confucianism would be associated with an immutable hierarchy of authority and unquestioning obedience.

Confucianism, a Western term that has no counterpart in Chinese, is a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life. Sometimes viewed as a philosophy and sometimes as a religion, Confucianism may be understood as an all-encompassing way of thinking and living that entails ancestor reverence and a profound human-centred religiousness. East Asians may profess themselves to be Shintôists, Daoists, Buddhists, Muslims, or Christians, but, by announcing their religious affiliations, seldom do they cease to be Confucians. Although often grouped with the major historical religions, Confucianism differs from them by not being an organized religion. Nonetheless, it spread to other East Asian countries under the influence of Chinese literate culture and has exerted a profound influence on spiritual and political life. Both the theory and practice of Confucianism have indelibly marked the patterns of government, society, education, and family of East Asia. Although it is an exaggeration to characterize traditional Chinese life and culture as Confucian, Confucian ethical values have for well over 2,000 years served as the source of inspiration as well as the court of appeal for human interaction between individuals, communities, and nations in the Sinitic world.

### **The Thought of Confucius**

The story of Confucianism does not begin with Confucius. Nor was Confucius the founder of Confucianism in the sense that the Buddha was the founder of Buddhism and Jesus Christ the founder of Christianity. Rather, Confucius considered himself a transmitter who

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consciously tried to reanimate the old in order to attain the new. He proposed revitalizing the meaning of the past by advocating a ritualized life. Confucius's love of antiquity was motivated by his strong desire to understand why certain life forms and institutions, such as reverence for ancestors, human-centred religious practices, and mourning ceremonies, had survived for centuries. His journey into the past was a search for roots, which he perceived as grounded in humanity's deepest needs for belonging and communicating. He had faith in the cumulative power of culture. The fact that traditional ways had lost vitality did not, for him, diminish their potential for regeneration in the future. In fact, Confucius's sense of history was so strong that he saw himself as a conservationist responsible for the continuity of the cultural values and the social norms that had worked so well for the idealized civilization of the Western Zhou dynasty.

### The Historical Context

The scholarly tradition envisioned by Confucius can be traced to the sage-kings of antiquity. Although the earliest dynasty confirmed by archaeology is the Shang dynasty (18th–12th century BCE), the historical period that Confucius claimed as relevant was much earlier. Confucius may have initiated a cultural process known in the West as Confucianism, but he and those who followed him considered themselves part of a tradition, later identified by Chinese historians as the *rujia*, “scholarly tradition,” that had its origins two millennia previously, when the legendary sages Yao and Shun created a civilized world through moral persuasion.

Confucius's hero was Zhougong, or the duke of Zhou (fl. 11th century BCE), who was said to have helped consolidate, expand, and refine the “feudal” ritual system. This elaborate system of mutual dependence was based on blood ties, marriage alliances, and old covenants as well as on newly negotiated contracts. The appeal to cultural values and social norms for the maintenance of interstate as well as domestic order was predicated on a shared political vision, namely, that authority lies in universal kingship, heavily invested with ethical and religious power by the “mandate of heaven” (*tianming*), and that social solidarity is achieved not by legal constraint but by ritual observance. Its implementation enabled the Western Zhou dynasty to survive in relative peace and prosperity for more than five centuries.

Inspired by the statesmanship of Zhougong, Confucius harboured a lifelong dream to be in a position to emulate the duke by putting into practice the political ideas that he had learned from the ancient sages and worthies. Although Confucius never realized his political dream, his conception of politics as moral persuasion became more and more influential.

The concept of “heaven” (*tian*), unique in Zhou cosmology, was compatible with that of the Lord on High (Shangdi) in the Shang dynasty. Lord on High may have referred to the ancestral progenitor of the Shang royal lineage, but heaven to the Zhou kings, although also ancestral, was a more-generalized anthropomorphic god. The Zhou belief in the mandate of heaven (the functional equivalent of the will of the Lord on High) differed from the divine right of kings in that there was no guarantee that the descendants of the Zhou royal house would be entrusted with kingship, for, as written in the *Shujing* (“Classic of History”), “heaven sees as the people see [and] hears as the people hear”; thus, the virtues of the kings were essential for the maintenance of their power and authority. This emphasis on benevolent rulership, expressed in numerous bronze inscriptions, was both a reaction to the collapse of the Shang dynasty and an affirmation of a deep-rooted worldview.

Partly because of the vitality of the feudal ritual system and partly because of the strength of the royal household itself, the Zhou kings were able to control their kingdom for several centuries. In 771 BCE, however, they were forced to move their capital eastward to present-day Luoyang to avoid barbarian attacks from Central Asia. Real power thereafter passed into the hands of feudal lords. Since the surviving line of the Zhou kings continued to be recognized in name, they still managed to exercise some measure of symbolic control. By Confucius’s time, however, the feudal ritual system had been so fundamentally undermined that the political crises also precipitated a profound sense of moral decline: the centre of symbolic control could no longer hold the kingdom, which had devolved from centuries of civil war into 14 feudal states.

Confucius’s response was to address himself to the issue of learning to be human. In so doing he attempted to redefine and revitalize the institutions that for centuries had been vital to political stability and social order: the family, the school, the local community, the state, and

the kingdom. Confucius did not accept the status quo, which held that wealth and power spoke the loudest. He felt that virtue (*de*), both as a personal quality and as a requirement for leadership, was essential for individual dignity, communal solidarity, and political order.

### **The Analects as the Embodiment of Confucian Ideas**

The *Lunyu* (*Analects*), the most-revered sacred scripture in the Confucian tradition, was probably compiled by the succeeding generations of Confucius's disciples. Based primarily on the Master's sayings, preserved in both oral and written transmissions, it captures the Confucian spirit in form and content in the same way that the Platonic dialogues embody Socratic pedagogy.

The *Analects* has often been viewed by the critical modern reader as a collection of unrelated reflections randomly put together. That impression may have resulted from the unfortunate perception of Confucius as a mere commonsense moralizer who gave practical advice to students in everyday situations. If readers approach the *Analects* as a communal memory, a literary device on the part of those who considered themselves beneficiaries of the Confucian Way to continue the Master's memory and to transmit his form of life as a living tradition, they come close to why it has been so revered in China for centuries. Interchanges with various historical figures and his disciples are used to show Confucius in thought and action, not as an isolated individual but as the centre of relationships. Actually the sayings of the *Analects* reveal Confucius's personality- his ambitions, his fears, his joys, his commitments, and above all his self-knowledge.

The purpose, then, in compiling the distilled statements centring on Confucius seems not to have been to present an argument or to record an event but to offer an invitation to readers to take part in an ongoing conversation. Through the *Analects* Confucians for centuries learned to reenact the awe-inspiring ritual of participating in a conversation with Confucius.

- ❖ One of Confucius's most-significant personal descriptions is the short autobiographical account of his spiritual development found in the *Analects*: *At 15 I set my heart on learning; at 30 I firmly took my stand; at 40 I had no delusions; at 50 I knew the*

*mandate of heaven; at 60 my ear was attuned; at 70 I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the boundaries. (2:4)*

- ❖ Confucius's life as a student and teacher exemplified his idea that education was a ceaseless process of self-realization. When one of his students reportedly had difficulty describing him, Confucius came to his aid: *Why did you not simply say something to this effect: he is the sort of man who forgets to eat when he engages himself in vigorous pursuit of learning, who is so full of joy that he forgets his worries, and who does not notice that old age is coming on? (7:18).*
- ❖ Confucius was deeply concerned that the culture (*wen*) he cherished was not being transmitted and that the learning (*xue*) he propounded was not being taught. His strong sense of mission, however, never interfered with his ability to remember what had been imparted to him, to learn without flagging, and to teach without growing weary. What he demanded of himself was strenuous: *It is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go deeply into what I have learned, inability to move up to what I have heard to be right, and inability to reform myself when I have defects. (7:3).*
- ❖ What he demanded of his students was the willingness to learn: "I do not enlighten anyone who is not eager to learn, nor encourage anyone who is not anxious to put his ideas into words" (7:8).

The community that Confucius created was a scholarly fellowship of like-minded men of different ages and different backgrounds from different states. They were attracted to Confucius because they shared his vision and to varying degrees took part in his mission to bring moral order to an increasingly fragmented world. That mission was difficult and even dangerous. Confucius himself suffered from joblessness, homelessness, starvation, and occasionally life-threatening violence. Yet his faith in the survivability of the culture that he cherished and the workability of the approach to teaching that he propounded was so steadfast that he convinced his followers as well as himself that heaven was on their side. When Confucius's life was threatened in Kuang, he said: Since the death of King Wen [founder of the Zhou dynasty] does not the mission of culture (*wen*) rest here in me? If heaven intends this culture to be destroyed, those

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who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me? (9:5).

That expression of self-confidence informed by a powerful sense of mission may give the impression that there was presumptuousness in Confucius's self-image. Confucius, however, made it explicit that he was far from attaining sagehood and that all he really excelled in was "love of learning" (5:27). To him, learning not only broadened his knowledge and deepened his self-awareness but also defined who he was. He frankly admitted that he was not born endowed with knowledge, nor did he belong to the class of men who could transform society without knowledge. Rather, he reported that he used his ears widely and followed what was good in what he had heard and used his eyes widely and retained in his mind what he had seen. His learning constituted "a lower level of knowledge" (7:27), a practical level that was presumably accessible to the majority of human beings. In that sense Confucius was neither a prophet with privileged access to the divine nor a philosopher who had already seen the truth but a teacher of humanity who was also an advanced fellow traveler on the way to self-realization.

As a teacher of humanity, Confucius stated his ambition in terms of concern for human beings: "To bring comfort to the old, to have trust in friends, and to cherish the young" (5:25). Confucius's vision of the way to develop a moral community began with a holistic reflection on the human condition. Instead of dwelling on abstract speculations such as humanity's condition in the state of nature, Confucius sought to understand the actual situation of a given time and to use that as his point of departure. His aim was to restore trust in government and to transform society into a flourishing moral community by cultivating a sense of humanity in politics and society. To achieve that aim, the creation of a scholarly community, the fellowship of *junzi* (exemplary persons), was essential. In the words of Confucius's disciple Zengzi, exemplary persons "must be broad-minded and resolute, for their burden is heavy and their road is long. They take humanity as their burden. Is that not heavy? Only with death does their road come to an end. Is that not long?" (8:7)

The fellowship of *junzi* as moral vanguards of society, however, did not seek to establish a radically different order. Its mission was to



redefine and revitalize those institutions that for centuries were believed to have maintained social solidarity and enabled people to live in harmony and prosperity. An obvious example of such an institution was the family.

It is related in the *Analects* that Confucius, when asked why he did not take part in government, responded by citing a passage from the ancient *Shujing* (“Classic of History”), “Simply by being a good son and friendly to his brothers a man can exert an influence upon government!” to show that what a person does in the confines of his home is politically significant (2:21). That maxim is based on the Confucian conviction that cultivation of the self is the root of social order and that social order is the basis for political stability and enduring peace.

The assertion that family ethics is politically efficacious must be seen in the context of the Confucian conception of politics as “rectification” (*zheng*). Rulers should begin by rectifying their own conduct; that is, they are to be examples who govern by moral leadership and exemplary teaching rather than by force. Government’s responsibility is not only to provide food and security but also to educate the people. Law and punishment are the minimum requirements for order; the higher goal of social harmony, however, can be attained only by virtue expressed through ritual performance. To perform rituals, then, is to take part in a communal act to promote mutual understanding.

One of the fundamental Confucian values that ensures the integrity of ritual performance is *xiao* (filial piety). Indeed, Confucius saw filial piety as the first step toward moral excellence, which he believed lay in the attainment of the cardinal virtue, *ren* (humanity). To learn to embody the family in the mind and the heart is to become able to move beyond self-centredness or, to borrow from modern psychology, to transform the enclosed private ego into an open self. Filial piety, however, does not demand unconditional submissiveness to parental authority but recognition of and reverence for the source of life. The purpose of filial piety, as the ancient Greeks expressed it, is to enable both parent and child to flourish. Confucians see it as an essential way of learning to be human.

Confucians, moreover, are fond of applying the family metaphor to the community, the country, and the cosmos. They prefer to address

the emperor as the son of heaven (*tianzi*), the king as ruler-father, and the magistrate as the “father-mother official,” because to them the family-centred nomenclature implies a political vision. When Confucius said that taking care of family affairs is itself active participation in politics, he had already made it clear that family ethics is not merely a private concern; the public good is realized by and through it.

Confucius defined the process of becoming human as being able to “discipline yourself and return to ritual” (12:1). The dual focus on the transformation of the self (Confucius is said to have freed himself from four things: “opinionatedness, dogmatism, obstinacy, and egoism” [9:4]) and on social participation enabled Confucius to be loyal (*zhong*) to himself and considerate (*shu*) of others (4:15). It is easy to understand why the Confucian “golden rule” is “Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you!” (15:23). Confucius’s legacy, laden with profound ethical implications, is captured by his “plain and real” appreciation that learning to be human is a communal enterprise: Persons of humanity, in wishing to establish themselves, also establish others, and in wishing to enlarge themselves, also enlarge others. The ability to take as analogy what is near at hand can be called the method of humanity (6:30).

### **Formation of the Classical Confucian Tradition**

According to Han Feizi (died 233 BCE), shortly after Confucius’s death his followers split into eight distinct schools, all claiming to be the legitimate heir to the Confucian legacy. Presumably each school was associated with or inspired by one or more of Confucius’s disciples. Yet the Confucians did not exert much influence in the 5th century BCE. Although the reverent Yan Yuan (or Yan Hui), the faithful Zengzi, the talented Zigong, the erudite Zixia, and others may have generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the second generation of Confucius’s students, it was not at all clear at the time that the Confucian tradition was to emerge as the most-powerful one in Chinese history.

Mencius (c. 371-c. 289 BCE) complained that the world of thought in the early Warring States period (475-221 BCE) was dominated by the collectivism of Mozi and the individualism of Yang Zhu (440-c. 360 BCE). The historical situation a century after Confucius’s death clearly shows that the Confucian attempt to moralize politics was not working; the disintegration of the Zhou feudal ritual system and the

rise of powerful hegemonic states reveal that wealth and power spoke the loudest. The hermits (the early Daoists), who left the world to create a sanctuary in nature in order to lead a contemplative life, and the realists (proto-Legalists), who played the dangerous game of assisting ambitious kings to gain wealth and power so that they could influence the political process, were actually determining the intellectual agenda. The Confucians refused to be identified with the interests of the ruling minority, because their social consciousness impelled them to serve as the conscience of the people. They were in a dilemma. Although they wanted to be actively involved in politics, they could not accept the status quo as the legitimate arena in which to exercise authority and power. In short, they were in the world but not of it; they could not leave the world, nor could they effectively change it.

### **Mencius: The Paradigmatic Confucian Intellectual**

Mencius is known as the self-styled transmitter of the Confucian Way. Educated first by his mother and then allegedly by a student of Confucius's grandson, Mencius brilliantly performed his role as a social critic, a moral philosopher, and a political activist. He argued that cultivating a class of scholar-officials who would not be directly involved in agriculture, industry, and commerce was vital to the well-being of the state. In his sophisticated argument against the physiocrats (those who advocated the supremacy of agriculture), he intelligently employed the idea of the division of labour to defend those who labour with their minds, observing that service is as important as productivity. To him Confucians served the vital interests of the state as scholars not by becoming bureaucratic functionaries but by assuming the responsibility of teaching the ruling minority humane government (*renzheng*) and the kingly way (*wangdao*). In dealing with feudal lords, Mencius conducted himself not merely as a political adviser but also as a teacher of kings. Mencius made it explicit that a true person cannot be corrupted by wealth, subdued by power, or affected by poverty.

To articulate the relationship between Confucian moral idealism and the concrete social and political realities of his time, Mencius began by exposing as impractical the prevailing ideologies of Mozi's collectivism and Yang Zhu's individualism. Mozi, a former Confucian who had become disaffected with rituals that he viewed as too time-

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consuming to be practical, promoted a mode of collectivism that rested on the principle of loving everyone (*jianai*) without respect to social status or personal relationship. Mencius contended, however, that the result of the Mohist admonition to treat a stranger as intimately as one's own father would be to treat one's own father as indifferently as one would treat a stranger. Yang Zhu, on the other hand, advocated the primacy of the self and the nourishment (*yang*) of one's nature (*xing*) rather than investing one's time and energy in social concerns and institutions that (Yang suggested) violated that nature. Yang Zhu gained infamy among Confucians for declaring that he would not sacrifice one eyelash to save the world. His point was arguably that people all too often waste their own lives in the service of social arrangements that actually undermine their best interests. Mencius, however, who as a good Confucian viewed the family as the natural paradigm of social organization, contended that excessive attention to self-interest would lead to political disorder. Indeed, Mencius argued, in Mohist collectivism fatherhood becomes a meaningless concept, and so does kingship in Yang Zhu's individualism.

Mencius's strategy for social reform was to change the language of profit, self-interest, wealth, and power by making it part of a moral discourse, with emphasis on rightness, public-spiritedness, welfare, and influence. Mencius, however, was not arguing against profit. Rather, he instructed the feudal lords to look beyond the narrow horizon of their palaces and to cultivate a common bond with their ministers, officers, clerks, and the seemingly undifferentiated masses. Only then, Mencius contended, would they be able to preserve their profit, self-interest, wealth, and power. He encouraged them to extend their benevolence (his interpretation of *ren*) and warned them that this was crucial for the protection of their families.

Mencius's appeal to the common bond among all people as a mechanism of government was predicated on his strong populist sense that the people are more important than the state and the state is more important than the king and that the ruler who does not act in accordance with the kingly way is unfit to rule. Mencius insisted that an unfit ruler should be criticized, rehabilitated, or, as the last resort, deposed. Since "heaven sees as the people see; heaven hears as the people hear," revolution, or literally the change of the mandate

(*geming*), in severe cases is not only justifiable but is a moral imperative.

Mencius's populist conception of politics was predicated on his philosophical vision that human beings can perfect themselves through effort and that human nature (*xing*) is good. While he acknowledged the role of biological and environmental factors in shaping the human condition, he insisted that human beings become moral by willing to be so. According to Mencius, willing entails the transformative moral act insofar as the propensity of humans to be good is activated whenever they decide to bring it to their conscious attention.

Mencius taught that all people have the spiritual resources to deepen their self-awareness and strengthen their bonds with others. Biologic and environmental constraints notwithstanding, people always have the freedom and the ability to refine and enlarge their heaven-endowed nobility (their "great body"). The possibility of continuously refining and enlarging the self is vividly illustrated in Mencius's description of degrees of excellence: Those who are admirable are called good (*shan*). Those who are sincere are called true (*xin*). Those who are totally genuine are called beautiful (*mei*). Those who radiate this genuineness are called great (*da*). Those whose greatness transforms are called sagely (*sheng*). Those whose sageliness is unfathomable are called spiritual. (*VIIB:25*)

Furthermore, Mencius asserted that if people fully realize the potential of their hearts, they will understand their nature; by understanding their nature, they will know heaven. Learning to be fully human, in this Mencian perspective, entails the cultivation of human sensitivity to embody the whole cosmos as one's lived experience: All myriad things are here in me. There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself. Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to humanity. (*VIIA:4*)

### **Xunzi: The Transmitter of Confucian Scholarship**

If Mencius brought Confucian moral idealism to fruition, Xunzi (c. 300-c. 230 BCE) conscientiously transformed Confucianism into a realistic and systematic inquiry on the human condition, with special reference to ritual (*li*) and authority. Widely acknowledged as

the most eminent of the notable scholars who congregated in Jixia, the capital of the wealthy and powerful Qi state in the mid-3rd century BCE, Xunzi distinguished himself in erudition and by the quality of his argumentation. His critique of the so-called 12 philosophers gave an overview of the intellectual life of his time. His penetrating insight into the limitations of virtually all the major currents of thought propounded by his fellow thinkers helped to establish the Confucian school as a dominant political and social force. His principal adversary, however, was Mencius, and he vigorously attacked Mencius's view that human nature is good as naive moral optimism.

True to the Confucian and, for that matter, Mencian spirit, Xunzi underscored the centrality of self-cultivation. He defined the process of Confucian education, from exemplary person (*junzi*) to sage, as a ceaseless endeavour to accumulate knowledge, skills, insight, and wisdom. In contrast to Mencius, Xunzi stressed that human nature is evil. Because he saw human beings as prone by nature to pursue the gratification of their passions, he firmly believed in the need for clearly articulated social constraints. Without constraints, social solidarity—the precondition for human well-being—would be undermined. The most-serious flaw he perceived in the Mencian commitment to the goodness of human nature was the practical consequence of neglecting the necessity of ritual and authority for the well-being of society. For Xunzi, as for Confucius before him, becoming moral is hard work.

Xunzi singled out the cognitive function of the heart-and-mind (*xin*), or human rationality, as the basis for morality. People become moral by voluntarily harnessing their desires and passions to act in accordance with society's norms. Although that is alien to human nature, it is perceived by the heart-and-mind as necessary for both survival and well-being. It is the construction of the moral mind as a human artifact, as a "second nature." Like Mencius, Xunzi believed in the perfectibility of all human beings through self-cultivation, in humanity and rightness as cardinal virtues, in humane government as the kingly way, in social harmony, and in education. But his view of how those could actually be achieved was diametrically opposed to that of Mencius. The Confucian project, as shaped by Xunzi, defines learning as socialization. The authority of ancient sages and worthies, the classical tradition, conventional norms, teachers, governmental

rules and regulations, and political officers are all important for that process. A cultured person is by definition a fully socialized member of the human community who has successfully sublimated his instinctual demands for the public good.

Xunzi's tough-minded stance on law, order, authority, and ritual seems precariously close to that of the Legalists, whose policy of social conformism was designed exclusively for the benefit of the ruler. His insistence on objective standards of behaviour may have ideologically contributed to the rise of authoritarianism, which resulted in the dictatorship of the Qin (221–207 BCE). As a matter of fact, two of the most-influential Legalists, the theoretician Hanfeizi from the state of Han and the Qin minister Li Si (c. 280–208 BCE), were his pupils. Yet Xunzi was instrumental in the continuation of Confucianism as a scholarly enterprise. His naturalistic interpretation of *tian*, his sophisticated understanding of culture, his insightful observations on the epistemological aspect of the mind and social function of language, his emphasis on moral reasoning and the art of argumentation, his belief in progress, and his interest in political institutions so significantly enriched the Confucian heritage that he was revered by the Confucians as the paradigmatic scholar for more than three centuries.

### **The Confucianization of Politics**

The short-lived dictatorship of the Qin marked a brief triumph of Legalism. In the early years of the Western Han (206 BCE–25 CE), however, the Legalist practice of absolute power of the emperor, complete subjugation of the peripheral states to the central government, total uniformity of thought, and ruthless enforcement of law were replaced by the Daoist practice of reconciliation and noninterference. That practice is commonly known in history as the Huang-Lao method, referring to the art of rulership attributed to the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) and the mysterious founder of Daoism, Laozi. Although a few Confucian thinkers, such as Lu Jia and Jia Yi, made important policy recommendations, Confucianism before the emergence of Dong Zhongshu (c. 179–c. 104 BCE) was not particularly influential. Nonetheless, the gradual Confucianization of Han politics began soon after the founding of the dynasty.

By the reign of Wudi (the “Martial Emperor”; 141–87 BCE), who inherited the task of consolidating power in the central Han court,

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Confucianism was deeply entrenched in the central bureaucracy. It was manifest in such practices as the clear separation of the court and the government, often under the leadership of a scholarly prime minister, the process of recruiting officials through the dual mechanism of recommendation and selection, the family-centred social structure, the agriculture-based economy, and the educational network. Confucian ideas were also firmly established in the legal system as ritual became increasingly important in governing behaviour, defining social relationships, and adjudicating civil disputes. Yet it was not until the prime minister Gongsun Hong (died 121 BCE) had persuaded Wudi to announce formally that the *ru* school alone would receive state sponsorship that Confucianism became an officially recognized imperial ideology and state cult.

As a result, Confucian Classics became the core curriculum for all levels of education. In 136 BCE Wudi set up at court five Erudites of the Five Classics and in 124 BCE assigned 50 official students to study with them, thus creating a de facto imperial university. By 50 BCE enrollment at the university had grown to an impressive 3,000, and by 1 CE a hundred students a year were entering government service through the examinations administered by the state. In short, those with a Confucian education began to staff the bureaucracy. In the year 58 all government schools were required to make sacrifices to Confucius, and in 175 the court had the approved version of the Classics, which had been determined by scholarly conferences and research groups under imperial auspices for several decades, carved on large stone tablets. (Those stelae, which were erected at the capital, are today well preserved in the museum of Xi'an.) That act of committing to permanence and to public display the content of the sacred scriptures symbolized the completion of the formation of the classical Confucian tradition.

### The Five Classics

The compilation of the *Wujing* (Five Classics) was a concrete manifestation of the coming of age of the Confucian tradition. The inclusion of both pre-Confucian texts, the *Shujing* ("Classic of History") and the *Shijing* ("Classic of Poetry"), and contemporary Qin-Han material, such as certain portions of the *Liji* ("Record of Rites"), suggests that the spirit behind the establishment of the core



curriculum for Confucian education was ecumenical. The Five Classics can be described in terms of five visions: metaphysical, political, poetic, social, and historical.

The metaphysical vision, expressed in the *Yijing* (“Classic of Changes”), combines divinatory art with numerological technique and ethical insight. According to the philosophy of change, the cosmos is a great transformation occasioned by the constant interaction of yin and yang, the two complementary as well as conflicting vital energies (*qi*). The world, which emerges out of that ongoing transformation, exhibits both organismic unity and dynamism. The exemplary person, inspired by the harmony and creativity of the cosmos, must emulate that pattern by aiming to realize the highest ideal of “unity of man and heaven” (*tianrenheyi*) through ceaseless self-exertion.

The political vision, contained in the *Shujing*, presents kingship in terms of the ethical foundation for a humane government. The legendary Three Emperors (Yao, Shun, and Yu) all ruled by virtue. Their sagacity, *xiao* (filial piety), and dedication to work enabled them to create a political culture based on responsibility and trust. Their exemplary lives taught and encouraged the people to enter into a covenant with them so that social harmony could be achieved without punishment or coercion. Even in the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) moral authority, as expressed through ritual, was sufficient to maintain political order. The human continuum, from the undifferentiated masses to the enlightened people, the nobility, and the sage-king, formed an organic unity as an integral part of the great cosmic transformation. Politics means moral persuasion, and the purpose of the government is not only to provide food and maintain order but also to educate.

The poetic vision, contained in the *Shijing*, underscores the Confucian valuation of common human feelings. The majority of verses give voice to emotions and sentiments of communities and persons from all levels of society expressed on a variety of occasions. The basic theme of that poetic world is mutual responsiveness. The tone as a whole is honest rather than earnest and evocative rather than expressive.

The social vision, contained in the *Liji*, shows society not as an adversarial system based on contractual relationships but as a

community of trust with emphasis on communication. Society organized by the four functional occupations - the scholar, the farmer, the artisan, and the merchant - is, in the true sense of the word, a cooperation. As a contributing member of the cooperation, each person is obligated to recognize the existence of others and to serve the public good. It is the king's duty to act kingly and the father's duty to act fatherly. If kings or fathers fail to behave properly, they cannot expect their ministers or children to act in accordance with ritual. It is in that sense that a chapter in the *Liji* entitled the "Great Learning" (*Daxue*) specifies, "From the son of heaven to the commoner, all must regard self-cultivation as the root." That pervasive consciousness of duty features prominently in all Confucian literature on ritual.

The historical vision, presented in the *Chunqiu* ("Spring and Autumn [Annals]"), emphasizes the significance of collective memory for communal self-identification. Historical consciousness is a defining characteristic of Confucian thought. By defining himself as a lover of antiquity and a transmitter of its values, Confucius made it explicit that a sense of history is not only desirable but necessary for self-knowledge. Confucius's emphasis on the importance of history was in a way his reappropriation of the ancient Sinitic wisdom that reanimating the old is the best way to attain the new. Confucius may not have been the author of the *Chunqiu*, but it seems likely that he applied moral judgment to political events in China proper from the 8th to the 5th century BCE. In that unprecedented procedure he assumed a godlike role in evaluating politics by assigning ultimate historical praise and blame to the most powerful and influential political actors of the period. Not only did that practice inspire the innovative style of the grand historian Sima Qian (c. 145-c. 87BCE), but it was also widely employed by others writing dynastic histories in imperial China.

### **Dong Zhongshu: The Confucian Visionary**

Like Sima Qian, Dong Zhongshu (c. 179-c. 104 BCE) took the *Chunqiu* absolutely seriously. His own work, *Chunqiu fanlu* ("Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals"), however, is far from being a book of historical judgment. It is a metaphysical treatise in the spirit of the *Yijing*. A man extraordinarily dedicated to learning (he is said to have been so absorbed in his studies that for

three years he did not even glance at the garden in front of him) and strongly committed to moral idealism (one of his often-quoted dicta is “rectifying rightness without scheming for profit; enlightening his Way without calculating efficaciousness”), Dong was instrumental in developing a characteristically Han interpretation of Confucianism.

Despite Wudi’s pronouncement that Confucianism alone would receive imperial sponsorship, Daoists, yinyang cosmologists, Legalists, shamanists, practitioners of seances, healers, magicians, geomancers, and others all contributed to the cosmological thinking of the Han cultural elite. Indeed, Dong himself was a beneficiary of that intellectual syncretism, for he freely tapped the spiritual resources of his time in formulating his own worldview: that human actions have cosmic consequences.

Dong’s inquiries on the meaning of the *wuxing*, or five phases (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), the correspondence of human beings and the numerical categories of heaven, and the sympathetic activation of things of the same kind, as well as his studies of cardinal Confucian values such as humanity, rightness, ritual, wisdom, and trustworthiness, enabled him to develop an elaborate worldview integrating Confucian ethics with naturalistic cosmology. What Dong accomplished was not merely a theological justification for the emperor as the “son of heaven” (*tianzi*); rather, his theory of mutual responsiveness between heaven and humanity provided the Confucian scholars with a higher law by which to judge the conduct of the ruler.

Despite Dong’s immense popularity, his worldview was not universally accepted by Han Confucian scholars. A reaction in favour of a more rational and moralistic approach to the Confucian Classics, known as the Old Text school, had already set in before the fall of the Western Han. Yang Xiong (c. 53 BCE–18 CE) in the *Fayan* (“Model Sayings”), a collection of moralistic aphorisms in the style of the *Analects*, and the *Taixuan jing* (“Classic of the Supremely Profound Principle”), a cosmological speculation in the style of the *Yijing*, presented an alternative worldview. That school, claiming its own recensions of authentic classical texts allegedly rediscovered during the Han period and written in an “old” script before the Qin unification, was widely accepted in the Eastern Han (25–220 CE). As

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the institutions of the Erudites and the Imperial University expanded in the Eastern Han, the study of the Classics became more refined and elaborate. Confucian scholasticism, however, like its counterparts in Talmudic and biblical studies, became too professionalized to remain a vital intellectual force.

Yet Confucian ethics exerted great influence on government, schools, and society at large. Toward the end of the Han as many as 30,000 students attended the Imperial University. All public schools throughout the land offered regular sacrifices to Confucius, and he virtually became the patron saint of education. Many Confucian temples were also built. The imperial courts continued to honour Confucius from age to age; a Confucian temple eventually stood in every one of the 2,000 counties. As a result, the teacher-together with heaven, earth, the emperor, and parents-became one of the most-respected authorities in traditional China.

### **Confucian Ethics in the Daoist and Buddhist Context**

Incompetent rulership, faction-ridden bureaucracy, a mismanaged tax structure, and domination by eunuchs toward the end of the Eastern Han first prompted widespread protests by the Imperial University students. The high-handed policy of the court to imprison and kill thousands of them and their official sympathizers in 169 CE may have put a temporary stop to the intellectual revolt, but the downward economic spiral made the life of the peasantry unbearable. The peasant rebellion led by Confucian scholars as well as Daoist religious leaders of faith-healing groups, combined with open insurrections of the military, brought down the Han dynasty and thus put an end to the first Chinese empire. As the imperial Han system disintegrated, barbarians invaded from the north. The plains of northern China were fought over, despoiled, and controlled by rival groups, and a succession of states were established in the south. That period of disunity, from the early 3rd to the late 6th century, marked the decline of Confucianism, the upsurge of *xuanxue* (“Obscure Learning”; sometimes called neo-Daoism), and the spread of Buddhism.

The prominence of Daoism and Buddhism among the cultural elite and the populace in general, however, did not mean that the Confucian tradition had disappeared. In fact, Confucian ethics was by then

virtually inseparable from the moral fabric of Chinese society. Confucius continued to be universally honoured as the paradigmatic sage. The outstanding Daoist thinker Wang Bi (226-249) argued that Confucius, by not speculating on the nature of the *dao*, had an experiential understanding of it superior to Laozi's. The Confucian Classics remained the foundation of all literate culture, and sophisticated commentaries were produced throughout the age. Confucian values continued to dominate in such political institutions as the central bureaucracy, the recruitment of officials, and local governance. The political forms of life also were distinctively Confucian. When a barbarian state adopted a sinicization policy, notably the case of the Northern Wei (386-534/535), it was by and large Confucian in character. In the south systematic attempts were made to strengthen family ties by establishing clan rules, genealogical trees, and ancestral rituals based on Confucian ethics.

The reunification of China by the Sui (581-618) and the restoration of lasting peace and prosperity by the Tang (618-907) gave a powerful stimulus to the revival of Confucian learning. The publication of a definitive official edition of the *Wujing* with elaborate commentaries and subcommentaries and the implementation of Confucian rituals at all levels of governmental practice, including the compilation of the famous Tang legal code, were two outstanding examples of Confucianism in practice. An examination system based on literary competence was established. That system made the mastery of Confucian Classics a prerequisite for political success and was therefore perhaps the single-most-important institutional innovation in defining elite culture in Confucian terms.

The Tang dynasty, nevertheless, was dominated by Buddhism and, to a lesser degree, by Daoism. The philosophical originality of the dynasty was mainly represented by monk-scholars such as Jizang (549-623), Xuanzang (602-664), and Zhiyi (538-597). An unintended consequence in the development of Confucian thought in that context was the prominent rise of the metaphysically significant Confucian texts, notably *Zhongyong* ("Doctrine of the Mean") and *Yizhuan* ("The Great Commentary of the Classic of Changes"), which appealed to some Buddhist and Daoist thinkers. A sign of a possible Confucian turn in the Tang was Li Ao's (died c. 844) essay "Returning

to Nature” that foreshadowed features of Song (960-1279) Confucian thought. The most-influential precursor of a Confucian revival, however, was Han Yu (768-824). He attacked Buddhism from the perspectives of social ethics and cultural identity and provoked interest in the question of what actually constitutes the Confucian Way. The issue of *Daotong*, the transmission of the Way or the authentic method to repossess the Way, has stimulated much discussion in the Confucian tradition since the 11th century.

### **What is Taoism?**

To many people, a confusing aspect of Taoism is its very definition. Many religions will happily teach a Philosophy/Dogma which in reflection defines a person. Taoism flips this around. It starts by teaching a truth; “The Tao” is indefinable. It then follows up by teaching that each person can discover the Tao in their own terms. A teaching like this can be very hard to grasp when most people desire very concrete definitions in their own life.

A simply way to start learning the definition of Taoism is to start within yourself. Here are three easy starting steps to learning Taoism: Don’t concentrate on the definition of the Tao (this will come later naturally). Understand what Taoism really is. Taoism is more than just a “philosophy” or a “religion”. Taoism should be understood as being: A system of belief, attitudes and practices set towards the service and living to a person’s own nature.

The path of understanding Taoism is simply accepting yourself. Live life and discover who you are. Your nature is ever changing and is always the same. Don’t try to resolve the various contradictions in life, instead learn acceptance of your nature.

### **Practicing Taoism**

Taoism teaches a person to flow with life. Over the years Taoism has become many things to many people. Hundreds of variations in Taoist practice exist. Some of these practices are philosophical in nature, others are religious. Taoism makes no distinction in applying labels to its own nature. This is important since as a person, we are each a blend of many truths. The truth taught in Taoism is to embrace life in actions that support you as a person.

Here are some simple starting tips to help a person live as a Taoist.

❖ Having a set of basic guidelines can be helpful. However realistically, guidelines don't determine how to live; Instead Taoism teaches by living you will express your nature. My personal guidelines are the following:

- ▶ With care, I aid those who are extended expressions of my nature.
- ▶ Be true to myself
- ▶ Connect to the world as I want to be treated.
- ▶ Connect to those outside my nature with decisive action.
- ▶ To those unwilling to accept me for my true nature, no action is required:

Just silently let them be themselves as I remain myself.

- ▶ I own nothing; I am merely a passing custodian of items outside of my nature.

❖ Discover a set of practices to aid keeping the mind, body and spirit engaged and strong. Remember practices should support your essence with the activities fitting the needs of the moment. Which means this is a shifting balance of activities relative to your needs. For example I practice martial arts to keep my body strong, yoga to make my body subtle, meditation to clear my mind, bike around simply to fly and lift my spirit. Poetry as a lens of examination. All these and more are my shifting practices to support my essence and in doing each, each helps me learn more about myself and the world.

❖ Take time, relax and just explore and poke around. Taoism has no plans. Taoism is based upon following your gut feelings and trusting your instincts.

❖ It's within the pause of a breath... that each step of living becomes visible for your larger life to improve and follow upon. Smile, when needing to pick a possible next step. To smile is to open possibilities. Breathe when needing a break. Since to breathe is to be at one with yourself. Alternate the two and your path will become free and clear for an entire lifetime of wonder to explore. This may

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sound simple, but you would be surprised how many people cannot embrace this most basic aspect of Taoist practice! People think it cannot be that simple! Taoism truly is this simple. If you follow and practice step four, not only is that all one needs to fully embrace Taoism, but also anything becomes possible within this simple practice. However, most people need time letting go of expectations. So it's also ok to dig deeper into Taoism. Taoism has many many levels of teachings on purpose to help people from all perspectives move smoothly in life.

We can summarize Taoism as simply as

Taoism is acceptance of your life.

Taoism is following your breath to find peace.

Taoism is opening up a smile to enable possibility.

If you embrace these three ideas, everything else follows in Taoism. Some people do start here. Others take a longer more colorful path. That's fine also, since you get to experience more color in your life. No wrong path exists at the end, since it's about experiencing life.

### **Practical Taoist Advice**

1. At times the process of learning Taoism is also a process of healing. Take time to heal (don't rush and hurt yourself more in the rushing). Taoism teaches to embrace your body with patience.
2. There are 6.5 billion people in the world, and so 6.5 billion paths to Taoism, every person can teach us something.
3. Sometimes you need quietness; it's ok to take time off to only hear yourself and not the noise of civilization at times.
4. People expect and think that the goal of life is perfection... it's not... you should desire for being good at something and to embrace the various little imperfections... that end up actually being defining characteristics of each of us. The little bits of imperfection we each have are elements of chaos that give each person individuality and distinction! Without our little flaws we wouldn't be individuals at all! Taoism teaches us how to accept both the best and worse parts of our life.



5. Taoism teaches a person to drop expectations. The more expectations you have for your life, the less you will become. A Taoist lives life without expectations, living in the here and now fully. Since most people need a few expectations especially when dealing with important future experiences. Here is a trick. Create only a single expectation at a time for that future experience. For example: An expectation you will smile or have some fun. That's it! Don't place any learning or changing into your expectation. If you do, this actually plants the seed for the opposite to occur. By creating a single simple expectation such as smiling, this then becomes something you can always fulfill since you can empower that action to happen. Any expectation more complicated or relying on something outside of yourself, just sets up the future to not meeting your needs. Dropping expectation is very very important within Taoism.
6. Lather, Rinse and Repeat, and then toss the instructions away to do what is right for yourself... This is Taoism at the very elemental level, so be open, experiment and embrace what works for you. Taoism as a tradition has teachers who work with students on an individual basis. In the end no guide or Master can be right for everyone. For this reason, we are always our own best teacher. Give yourself credit and patience to be such a teacher to your own life.

## Chapter 4

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### Islam

The word Islam means ‘submission to the will of God’. Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1 billion followers. Islam is the second most popular religion in the world. There were about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world in 2010, according to *Pew Research*. Muslims constituted about 23% of all people on Earth. The religion is currently in a period of rapid growth, and is expected to reach 2.8 billion by 2050, when it will probably approximately equal the number of Christians. Muslims believe that Islam was revealed over 1400 years ago in Mecca, Arabia.

- ❖ Followers of Islam are called Muslims.
- ❖ Muslims believe that there is only One God.
- ❖ The Arabic word for God is Allah.
- ❖ According to Muslims, God sent a number of prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to His law.
- ❖ Jesus, Moses and Abraham are respected as prophets of God.

- ❖ They believe that the final Prophet was Muhammad.
- ❖ Muslims believe that Islam has always existed, but for practical purposes, date their religion from the time of the migration of Muhammad.
- ❖ Muslims base their laws on their holy book the Qur'an, and the Sunnah.
- ❖ Muslims believe the Sunnah is the practical example of Prophet Muhammad and that there are five basic Pillars of Islam.
- ❖ These pillars are the declaration of faith, praying five times a day, giving money to charity, fasting and a pilgrimage to Mecca (atleast once).

### **The Foundations of Islam**

From the very beginning of Islam, Muhammad had inculcated a sense of brotherhood and a bond of faith among his followers, both of which helped to develop among them a feeling of close relationship that was accentuated by their experiences of persecution as a nascent community in Mecca. The strong attachment to the tenets of the Quranic revelation and the conspicuous socioeconomic content of Islamic religious practices cemented this bond of faith. In 622 CE, when the Prophet migrated to Medina, his preaching was soon accepted, and the community-state of Islam emerged. During this early period, Islam acquired its characteristic ethos as a religion uniting in itself both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life and seeking to regulate not only the individual's relationship to God (through conscience) but human relationships in a social setting as well. Thus, there is not only an Islamic religious institution but also an Islamic law, state, and other institutions governing society. Not until the 20th century were the religious (private) and the secular (public) distinguished by some Muslim thinkers and separated formally in certain places such as Turkey.

This dual religious and social character of Islam, expressing itself in one way as areligious community commissioned by God to bring its own value system to the world through the *jihād* ("exertion," commonly translated as "holy war" or "holy struggle"), explains the astonishing success of the early generations of Muslims. Within a

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century after the Prophet's death in 632 CE, they had brought a large part of the globe—from Spain across Central Asia to India—under a new Arab Muslim empire.

The period of Islamic conquests and empire building marks the first phase of the expansion of Islam as a religion. Islam's essential egalitarianism within the community of the faithful and its official discrimination against the followers of other religions won rapid converts. Jews and Christians were assigned a special status as communities possessing scriptures and were called the "people of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) and, therefore, were allowed religious autonomy. They were, however, required to pay a per capita tax called *jizyah*, as opposed to pagans, who were required to either accept Islam or die. The same status of the "people of the Book" was later extended in particular times and places to Zoroastrians and Hindus, but many "people of the Book" joined Islam in order to escape the disability of the *jizyah*. A much more massive expansion of Islam after the 12th century was inaugurated by the Sufis (Muslim mystics), who were mainly responsible for the spread of Islam in India, Central Asia, Turkey, and sub-Saharan Africa (*see below*).

Beside the jihad and Sufi missionary activity, another factor in the spread of Islam was the far-ranging influence of Muslim traders, who not only introduced Islam quite early to the Indian east coast and South India but also proved to be the main catalytic agents (beside the Sufis) in converting people to Islam in Indonesia, Malaya, and China. Islam was introduced to Indonesia in the 14th century, hardly having time to consolidate itself there politically before the region came under Dutch hegemony.

The vast variety of races and cultures embraced by Islam (an estimated total of more than 1.5 billion persons worldwide in the early 21st century) has produced important internal differences. All segments of Muslim society, however, are bound by a common faith and a sense of belonging to a single community. With the loss of political power during the period of Western colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, the concept of the Islamic community (*ummah*), instead of weakening, became stronger. The faith of Islam helped various Muslim peoples in their struggle to gain political freedom in the mid-20th century, and the unity of Islam contributed to later political solidarity.

## Sources of Islamic Doctrinal and Social Views

Islamic doctrine, law, and thinking in general are based upon four sources, or fundamental principles (*ucûl*):

- (1) the Qur'ân,
- (2) the Sunnah (“Traditions”),
- (3) *ijmâ* (“consensus”), and
- (4) *ijtihad* (“individual thought”).

The Qur'ân (literally, “reading” or “recitation”) is regarded as the verbatim word, or speech, of God delivered to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel. Divided into 114 suras (chapters) of unequal length, it is the fundamental source of Islamic teaching. The suras revealed at Mecca during the earliest part of Muhammad’s career are concerned mostly with ethical and spiritual teachings and the Day of Judgment. The suras revealed at Medina at a later period in the career of the Prophet are concerned for the most part with social legislation and the politico-moral principles for constituting and ordering the community.

*Sunnah* (“a well-trodden path”) was used by pre-Islamic Arabs to denote their tribal or common law. In Islam it came to mean the example of the Prophet - i.e., his words and deeds as recorded in compilations known as Hadith (in Arabic, Hadîth: literally, “report”; a collection of sayings attributed to the Prophet). Hadith provide the written documentation of the Prophet’s words and deeds. Six of these collections, compiled in the 3rd century AH (9th century CE), came to be regarded as especially authoritative by the largest group in Islam, the Sunnis. Another large group, the Shîaites, has its own Hadith contained in four canonical collections.

The doctrine of *ijmâ*, or consensus, was introduced in the 2nd century AH (8th century CE) in order to standardize legal theory and practice and to overcome individual and regional differences of opinion. Though conceived as a “consensus of scholars,” *ijmâ* was in actual practice a more fundamental operative factor. From the 3rd century AH *ijmâ* has amounted to a principle of stability in thinking; points on which consensus was reached in practice were considered closed and further substantial questioning of them prohibited. Accepted

interpretations of the Qur'ân and the actual content of the Sunnah (i.e., Hadith and theology) all rest finally on the *ijmâ* in the sense of the acceptance of the authority of their community.

*Ijtihâd*, meaning “to endeavour” or “to exert effort,” was required to find the legal or doctrinal solution to a new problem. In the early period of Islam, because *ijtihad* took the form of individual opinion (*ra'y*), there was a wealth of conflicting and chaotic opinions. In the 2nd century AH *ijtihad* was replaced by *qiyâs* (reasoning by strict analogy), a formal procedure of deduction based on the texts of the Qur'ân and the Hadith. The transformation of *ijmâ* into a conservative mechanism and the acceptance of a definitive body of Hadith virtually closed the “gate of *ijtihad*” in Sunni Islam while *ijtihad* continued in Shi'ism. Nevertheless, certain outstanding Muslim thinkers (e.g., al-Ghazâlî in the 11th -12th century) continued to claim the right of new *ijtihad* for themselves, and reformers in the 18th - 20th centuries, because of modern influences, caused this principle once more to receive wider acceptance.

The Qur'ân and Hadith are discussed below. The significance of *ijmâ* and *ijtihad* are discussed below in the contexts of Islamic theology, philosophy, and law.

### **Doctrines of the Qur'ân**

#### **God**

The doctrine about God in the Qur'ân is rigorously monotheistic: God is one and unique; he has no partner and no equal. Trinitarianism, the Christian belief that God is three persons in one substance, is vigorously repudiated. Muslims believe that there are no intermediaries between God and the creation that he brought into being by his sheer command, “Be.” Although his presence is believed to be everywhere, he is not incarnated in anything. He is the sole creator and sustainer of the universe, wherein every creature bears witness to his unity and lordship. But he is also just and merciful: his justice ensures order in his creation, in which nothing is believed to be out of place, and his mercy is unbounded and encompasses everything. His creating and ordering the universe is viewed as the act of prime mercy for which all things sing his glories. The God of the Qur'ân, described as majestic and sovereign, is also a personal God; he is viewed as being nearer to

one than one's own jugular vein, and, whenever a person in need or distress calls him, he responds. Above all, he is the God of guidance and shows everything, particularly humanity, the right way, "the straight path."

This picture of God-wherein the attributes of power, justice, and mercy interpenetrate-is related to the concept of God shared by Judaism and Christianity and also differs radically from the concepts of pagan Arabia, to which it provided an effective answer. The pagan Arabs believed in a blind and inexorable fate over which humans had no control. For this powerful but insensible fate the Qur'ân substituted a powerful but provident and merciful God. The Qur'ân carried through its uncompromising monotheism by rejecting all forms of idolatry and eliminating all gods and divinities that the Arabs worshipped in their sanctuaries (*harams*), the most prominent of which was the Ka'bah sanctuary in Mecca itself.

### **The Universe**

In order to prove the unity of God, the Qur'ân lays frequent stress on the design and order in the universe. There are no gaps or dislocations in nature. Order is explained by the fact that every created thing is endowed with a definite and defined nature whereby it falls into a pattern. This nature, though it allows every created thing to function in a whole, sets limits; and this idea of the limitedness of everything is one of the most fixed points in both the cosmology and theology of the Qur'ân. The universe is viewed, therefore, as autonomous, in the sense that everything has its own inherent laws of behaviour, but not as autocratic, because the patterns of behaviour have been endowed by God and are strictly limited. "Everything has been created by us according to a measure." Though every creature is thus limited and "measured out" and hence depends upon God, God alone, who reigns unchallenged in the heavens and the earth, is unlimited, independent, and self-sufficient.

### **Humanity**

According to the Qur'ân, God created two apparently parallel species of creatures, human beings and *jinn*, the one from clay and the other from fire. About the *jinn*, however, the Qur'ân says little, although it is implied that the *jinn* are endowed with reason and

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responsibility but are more prone to evil than human beings are. It is with humanity that the Qur'ân, which describes itself as a guide for the human race, is centrally concerned. The story of the Fall of Adam (the first man) promoted in Judaism and Christianity is accepted, but the Qur'ân states that God forgave Adam his act of disobedience, which is not viewed in the Qur'ân as original sin in the Christian sense of the term.

In the story of the creation of humanity, the angel Iblis, or Satan, who protested to God against the creation of human beings, because they “would sow mischief on earth,” lost in the competition of knowledge against Adam. The Qur'ân, therefore, declares humanity to be the noblest of all creation, the created being who bore the trust (of responsibility) that the rest of creation refused to accept. The Qur'ân thus reiterates that all nature has been made subservient to humans, who are seen as God's vice-regent on earth; nothing in all creation has been made without a purpose, and humanity itself has not been created “in sport” but rather has been created with the purpose of serving and obeying God's will.

Despite this lofty station, however, the Qur'ân describes human nature as frail and faltering. Whereas everything in the universe has a limited nature and every creature recognizes its limitation and insufficiency, human beings are viewed as having been given freedom and therefore are prone to rebelliousness and pride, with the tendency to arrogate to themselves the attributes of self-sufficiency. Pride, thus, is viewed as the cardinal sin of human beings, because, by not recognizing in themselves their essential creaturely limitations, they become guilty of ascribing to themselves partnership with God (*shirk*: associating a creature with the Creator) and of violating the unity of God. True faith (*îmân*), thus, consists of belief in the immaculate Divine Unity and *islâm* (surrender) in one's submission to the Divine Will.

### **Satan, Sin, and Repentance**

In order to communicate the truth of Divine Unity, God has sent messengers or prophets to human beings, whose weakness of nature makes them ever prone to forget or even willfully to reject Divine Unity under the promptings of Satan. According to the Qur'ânic teaching, the being who became Satan (Shaymân or Iblis) had



previously occupied a high station but fell from divine grace by his act of disobedience in refusing to honour Adam when he, along with other angels, was ordered to do so. Since then his work has been to beguile human beings into error and sin. Satan is, therefore, the contemporary of humanity, and Satan's own act of disobedience is construed by the Qur'ân as the sin of pride. Satan's machinations will cease only on the Last Day.

Judging from the accounts of the Qur'ân, the record of humanity's acceptance of the prophets' messages has been far from perfect. The whole universe is replete with signs of God. The human soul itself is viewed as a witness of the unity and grace of God. The messengers of God have, throughout history, been calling humanity back to God. Yet not all people have accepted the truth; many of them have rejected it and become disbelievers (*kâfir*, plural *kuffâr*; literally, "concealing" - i.e., the blessings of God), and, when a person becomes so obdurate, his heart is sealed by God. Nevertheless, it is always possible for a sinner to repent (*tawbah*) and redeem himself by a genuine conversion to the truth. There is no point of no return, and God is forever merciful and always willing and ready to pardon. Genuine repentance has the effect of removing all sins and restoring a person to the state of sinlessness with which he started his life.

### **Prophecy**

Prophets are men specially elected by God to be his messengers. Prophethood is indivisible, and the Qur'ân requires recognition of all prophets as such without discrimination. Yet they are not all equal, some of them being particularly outstanding in qualities of steadfastness and patience under trial. Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus were such great prophets. As vindication of the truth of their mission, God often vests them with miracles: Abraham was saved from fire, Noah from the Deluge, and Moses from the pharaoh. Not only was Jesus born from the Virgin Mary, but God also saved him from crucifixion at the hands of the Jews. The conviction that God's messengers are ultimately vindicated and saved is an integral part of the Qur'ânic doctrine.

All prophets are human and never part of divinity: they are the most perfect of humans who are recipients of revelation from God. When God wishes to speak to a human, he sends an angel messenger

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to him or makes him hear a voice or inspires him. Muhammad is accepted as the last prophet in this series and its greatest member, for in him all the messages of earlier prophets were consummated. The archangel Gabriel brought the Qur'ân down to the Prophet's "heart." Gabriel is represented by the Qur'ân as a spirit whom the Prophet could sometimes see and hear. According to early traditions, the Prophet's revelations occurred in a state of trance when his normal consciousness was transformed. This state was accompanied by heavy sweating. The Qur'ân itself makes it clear that the revelations brought with them a sense of extraordinary weight: "If we were to send this Qur'ân down on a mountain, you would see it split asunder out of fear of God."

This phenomenon at the same time was accompanied by an unshakable conviction that the message was from God, and the Qur'ân describes itself as the transcript of a heavenly "Mother Book" written on a "Preserved Tablet." The conviction was of such an intensity that the Qur'ân categorically denies that it is from any earthly source, for in that case it would be liable to "manifold doubts and oscillations."

### **Eschatology**

In Islamic doctrine, on the Last Day, when the world will come to an end, the dead will be resurrected and a judgment will be pronounced on every person in accordance with his deeds. Although the Qur'ân in the main speaks of a personal judgment, there are several verses that speak of the resurrection of distinct communities that will be judged according to "their own book." In conformity with this, the Qur'ân also speaks in several passages of the "death of communities," each one of which has a definite term of life. The actual evaluation, however, will be for every individual, whatever the terms of reference of his performance. In order to prove that the resurrection will occur, the Qur'ân uses a moral and a physical argument. Because not all requital is meted out in this life, a final judgment is necessary to bring it to completion. Physically, God, who is all-powerful, has the ability to destroy and bring back to life all creatures, who are limited and are, therefore, subject to God's limitless power.

Some Islamic schools deny the possibility of human intercession but most accept it, and in any case God himself, in his mercy, may forgive certain sinners. Those condemned will burn in hellfire, and those who

are saved will enjoy the abiding joys of paradise. Hell and heaven are both spiritual and corporeal. Beside suffering in physical fire, the damned will also experience fire “in their hearts.” Similarly, the blessed will experience, besides corporeal enjoyment, the greatest happiness of divine pleasure.

### **Social Service**

Because the purpose of human existence is submission to the Divine Will, as is the purpose of every other creature, God’s role in relation to human beings is that of the commander. Whereas the rest of nature obeys God automatically, humans are the only creatures that possess the choice to obey or disobey. With the deep-seated belief in Satan’s existence, humanity’s fundamental role becomes one of moral struggle, which constitutes the essence of human endeavour. Recognition of the unity of God does not simply rest in the intellect but entails consequences in terms of the moral struggle, which consists primarily in freeing oneself of narrowness of mind and smallness of heart. One must go out of oneself and expend one’s possessions for the sake of others.

The doctrine of social service, in terms of alleviating suffering and helping the needy, constitutes an integral part of Islamic teaching. Praying to God and other religious acts are deemed to be incomplete in the absence of active service to the needy. In regard to this matter, the Qur’anic criticisms of human nature become very sharp: “Man is by nature timid; when evil befalls him, he panics, but when good things come to him he prevents them from reaching others.” It is Satan who whispers into a person’s ears that by spending for others he will become poor. God, on the contrary, promises prosperity in exchange for such expenditure, which constitutes a credit with God and grows much more than the money people invest in usury. Hoarding of wealth without recognizing the rights of the poor is threatened with the direst punishment in the hereafter and is declared to be one of the main causes of the decay of societies in this world. The practice of usury is forbidden.

With this socioeconomic doctrine cementing the bond of faith, there emerges the idea of a closely knit community of the faithful who are declared to be “brothers unto each other.” Muslims are described as “the middle community bearing witness on humankind,” “the best

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community produced for humankind,” whose function it is “to enjoin good and forbid evil” (Qur’ân). Cooperation and “good advice” within the community are emphasized, and a person who deliberately tries to harm the interests of the community is to be given exemplary punishment. Opponents from within the community are to be fought and reduced with armed force, if issues cannot be settled by persuasion and arbitration.

Because the mission of the community is to “enjoin good and forbid evil” so that “there is no mischief and corruption” on earth, the doctrine of jihad is the logical outcome. For the early community it was a basic religious concept. The lesser jihad, or holy striving, means an active struggle using armed force whenever necessary. The object of such striving is not the conversion of individuals to Islam but rather the gaining of political control over the collective affairs of societies to run them in accordance with the principles of Islam. Individual conversions occur as a by-product of this process when the power structure passes into the hands of the Muslim community. In fact, according to strict Muslim doctrine, conversions “by force” are forbidden, because after the revelation of the Qur’ân “good and evil have become distinct,” so that one may follow whichever one may prefer (Qur’ân), and it is also strictly prohibited to wage wars for the sake of acquiring worldly glory, power, and rule. With the establishment of the Muslim empire, however, the doctrine of the lesser jihad was modified by the leaders of the community. Their main concern had become the consolidation of the empire and its administration, and thus they interpreted the teaching in a defensive rather than in an expansive sense. The Khârijite sect, which held that “decision belongs to God alone,” insisted on continuous and relentless jihad, but its followers were virtually destroyed during the internecine wars in the 8th century.

Beside a measure of economic justice and the creation of a strong idea of community, the Prophet Muhammad effected a general reform of Arab society, in particular protecting its weaker segments—the poor, the orphans, the women, and the slaves. Slavery was not legally abolished, but emancipation of slaves was religiously encouraged as an act of merit. Slaves were given legal rights, including the right of acquiring their freedom in return for payment, in installments, of a

sum agreed upon by the slave and his master out of his earnings. A slave woman who bore a child by her master became automatically free after her master's death. The infanticide of girls that was practiced among certain tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia—out of fear of poverty or a sense of shame—was forbidden.

Distinction and privileges based on tribal rank or race were repudiated in the Qur'ân and in the celebrated "Farewell Pilgrimage Address" of the Prophet shortly before his death. All are therein declared to be "equal children of Adam," and the only distinction recognized in the sight of God is to be based on piety and good acts. The age-old Arab institution of intertribal revenge (called *tha'r*)—whereby it was not necessarily the killer who was executed but a person equal in rank to the slain person—was abolished. The pre-Islamic ethical ideal of manliness was modified and replaced by a more humane ideal of moral virtue and piety.

### **Fundamental Practices of Islam: The 5 Pillars**

During the earliest decades after the death of the Prophet, certain basic features of the religio-social organization of Islam were singled out to serve as anchoring points of the community's life and formulated as the "Pillars of Islam." To these five, the Khârijite sect added a sixth pillar, the jihad, which, however, was not accepted by the general community.

### **The Shahadah, or Profession of Faith**

The first pillar is the profession of faith: "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God," upon which depends membership in the community. The profession of faith must be recited at least once in one's lifetime, aloud, correctly, and purposively, with an understanding of its meaning and with an assent from the heart. From this fundamental belief are derived beliefs in (1) angels (particularly Gabriel, the Angel of Inspiration), (2) the revealed Book (the Qur'ân and the sacred books of Judaism and Christianity), (3) a series of prophets (among whom figures of Jewish and Christian tradition are particularly eminent, although it is believed that God has sent messengers to every nation), and (4) the Last Day (Day of Judgment).

### ***Prayer***

The second pillar consists of five daily canonical prayers. These prayers may be offered individually if one is unable to go to the mosque. The first prayer is performed before sunrise, the second just after noon, the third in the late afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset, and the fifth before retiring to bed.

Before a prayer, ablutions are performed, including the washing of hands, face, and feet. The muezzin (one who gives the call for prayer) chants aloud from a raised place (such as a tower) in the mosque. When prayer starts, the imam, or leader (of the prayer), stands in the front facing in the direction of Mecca, and the congregation stands behind him in rows, following him in various postures. Each prayer consists of two to four genuflection units (*rakah*); each unit consists of a standing posture (during which verses from the Qur'ân are recited—in certain prayers aloud, in others silently), as well as a genuflection and two prostrations. At every change in posture, “God is great” is recited. Tradition has fixed the materials to be recited in each posture.

Special congregational prayers are offered on Friday instead of the prayer just after noon. The Friday service consists of a sermon (*khumbah*), which partly consists of preaching in the local language and partly of recitation of certain formulas in Arabic. In the sermon, the preacher usually recites one or several verses of the Qur'ân and builds his address on it, which can have a moral, social, or political content. Friday sermons usually have considerable impact on public opinion regarding both moral and sociopolitical questions.

Although not ordained as an obligatory duty, nocturnal prayers (called *tahajjud*) are encouraged, particularly during the latter half of the night. During the month of Ramadan, lengthy prayers called *tarâwîh* are offered congregationally before retiring.

In strict doctrine, the five daily prayers cannot be waived even for the sick, who may pray in bed and, if necessary, lying down. When on a journey, the two afternoon prayers may be followed one by the other; the sunset and late evening prayers may be combined as well. In practice, however, much laxity has occurred, particularly among the modernized classes, although Friday prayers are still very well attended.

### ***The Zakat***

The third pillar is the obligatory tax called *zakât* (“purification,” indicating that such a payment makes the rest of one’s wealth religiously and legally pure). This is the only permanent tax levied by the Qur’ân and is payable annually on food grains, cattle, and cash after one year’s possession. The amount varies for different categories. Thus, on grains and fruits it is 10 percent if land is watered by rain, 5 percent if land is watered artificially. On cash and precious metals it is 2½ percent. *Zakât* is collectable by the state and is to be used primarily for the poor, but the Qur’ân mentions other purposes: ransoming Muslim war captives, redeeming chronic debts, paying tax collectors’ fees, jihad (and by extension, according to Qur’ân commentators, education and health), and creating facilities for travelers.

After the breakup of Muslim religio-political power, payment of *zakât* became a matter of voluntary charity dependent on individual conscience. In the modern Muslim world it has been left up to the individual, except in some countries (such as Saudi Arabia) where the Sharî’ah (Islamic law) is strictly maintained.

### ***Fasting***

Fasting during the month of Ramadan (ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar), laid down in the Qur’ân (2:183-185), is the fourth pillar of the faith. Fasting begins at daybreak and ends at sunset, and during the day eating, drinking, and smoking are forbidden. The Qur’ân (2:185) states that it was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur’ân was revealed. Another verse of the Qur’ân (97:1) states that it was revealed “on the Night of Power,” which Muslims generally observe on the night of 26-27 Ramadan. For a person who is sick or on a journey, fasting may be postponed until “another equal number of days.” The elderly and the incurably sick are exempted through the daily feeding of one poor person if they have the means.

### ***The Hajj***

The fifth pillar is the annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca prescribed for every Muslim once in a lifetime—“provided one can afford it” and provided a person has enough provisions to leave for his family in his absence. A special service is held in the sacred mosque on the 7th of

the month of Dhû al-Hijjah (last in the Muslim year). Pilgrimage activities begin by the 8th and conclude on the 12th or 13th. All worshippers enter the state of *ihram*; they wear two seamless garments and avoid sexual intercourse, the cutting of hair and nails, and certain other activities. Pilgrims from outside Mecca assume *ihram* at specified points en route to the city. The principal activities consist of walking seven times around the Ka'bah, a shrine within the mosque; the kissing and touching of the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad); and the ascent of and running between Mount bafâ and Mount Marwah (which are now, however, mere elevations) seven times. At the second stage of the ritual, the pilgrim proceeds from Mecca to Minâ, a few miles away; from there he goes to Arafât, where it is essential to hear a sermon and to spend one afternoon. The last rites consist of spending the night at Muzdalifah (between  Arafât and Minâ) and offeringsacrifice on the last day of *ihram*, which is the *id* ("festival") of sacrifice. See Eid al-Adha.

Many countries have imposed restrictions on the number of outgoing pilgrims because of foreign-exchange difficulties. Because of the improvement of communications, however, the total number of visitors has greatly increased in recent years. By the early 21st century the number of annual visitors was estimated to exceed two million, approximately half of them from non-Arab countries. All Muslim countries send official delegations on the occasion, which is being increasingly used for religio-political congresses. At other times in the year, it is considered meritorious to perform the lesser pilgrimage (*umrah*), which is not, however, a substitute for the hajj pilgrimage.

### Sacred Places and Days

The most sacred place for Muslims is the Ka'bah sanctuary at Mecca, the object of the annual pilgrimage. It is much more than a mosque; it is believed to be the place where the heavenly bliss and power touches the earth directly. According to Muslim tradition, the Ka'bah was built by Abraham. The Prophet's mosque in Medina is the next in sanctity. Jerusalem follows in third place in sanctity as the first *qiblah* (i.e., direction in which the Muslims offered prayers at first, before the *qiblah* was changed to the Ka'bah) and as the place from where Muhammad, according to tradition, made his ascent (*mirâj*) to heaven. For the Sh ites, Karbalâ' in Iraq (the place of



martyrdom of Alî's son Husayn) and Meshed in Iran (where Imâm Alî al-Rida is buried) constitute places of special veneration where Shiites make pilgrimages.

### ***Shrines of Sufi Saints***

For the Muslim masses in general, shrines of Sufi saints are particular objects of reverence and even veneration. In Baghdad the tomb of the greatest saint of all, Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî, is visited every year by large numbers of pilgrims from all over the Muslim world.

By the late 20th century the Sufi shrines, which were managed privately in earlier periods, were almost entirely owned by governments and were managed by departments of *awqâf* (plural of *waqf*, a religious endowment). The official appointed to care for a shrine is usually called a *mutawallî*. In Turkey, where such endowments formerly constituted a very considerable portion of the national wealth, all endowments were confiscated by the regime of Atatürk (president 1928-38).

### ***The Mosque***

The general religious life of Muslims is centred around the mosque. In the days of the Prophet and early caliphs, the mosque was the centre of all community life, and it remains so in many parts of the Islamic world to this day. Small mosques are usually supervised by the imam (one who administers the prayer service) himself, although sometimes also a muezzin is appointed. In larger mosques, where Friday prayers are offered, a *khamîb* (one who gives the *khumbah*, or sermon) is appointed for Friday service. Many large mosques also function as religious schools and colleges. In the early 21st century, mosque officials were appointed by the government in most countries. In some countries-e.g., Pakistan-most mosques are private and are run by the local community, although increasingly some of the larger ones have been taken over by the government departments of *awqâf*.

### ***Holy Days***

The Muslim calendar (based on the lunar year) dates from the emigration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in 622. The two festive days in the year are the Eids (*îds*), Eid al-Fitr, which

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celebrates the end of the month of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha (the feast of sacrifice), which marks the end of the hajj. Because of the crowds, Eid prayers are offered either in very large mosques or on specially consecrated grounds. Other sacred times include the “Night of Power” (believed to be the night in which God makes decisions about the destiny of individuals and the world as a whole) and the night of the ascension of the Prophet to heaven. The Shīites celebrate the 10th of Muharram (the first month of the Muslim year) to mark the day of the martyrdom of Husayn. The Muslim masses also celebrate the death anniversaries of various saints in a ceremony called *urs* (literally, “nuptial ceremony”). The saints, far from dying, are believed to reach the zenith of their spiritual life on this occasion.

## Chapter 5

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# Hinduism

**H**induism, major world religion originating on the Indian subcontinent and comprising several and varied systems of philosophy, belief, and ritual. Although the name Hinduism is relatively new, having been coined by British writers in the first decades of the 19th century, it refers to a rich cumulative tradition of texts and practices, some of which date to the 2nd millennium BCE or possibly earlier. If the Indus valley civilization (3rd - 2nd millennium BCE) was the earliest source of these traditions, as some scholars hold, then Hinduism is the oldest living religion on Earth. Its many sacred texts in Sanskrit and vernacular languages served as a vehicle for spreading the religion to other parts of the world, though ritual and the visual and performing arts also played a significant role in its transmission. From about the 4th century CE, Hinduism had a dominant presence in Southeast Asia, one that would last for more than 1,000 years. In the early 21st century, Hinduism had nearly one billion adherents worldwide and was the religion of about 80 percent of India's population. Despite its global presence, however, it is best understood through its many distinctive regional manifestations.

## The Term Hinduism

The term Hinduism became familiar as a designator of religious ideas and practices distinctive to India with the publication of books such as *Hinduism* (1877) by Sir Monier Monier-Williams, the notable Oxford scholar and author of an influential Sanskrit dictionary. Initially it was an outsiders' term, building on centuries-old usages of the word Hindu. Early travelers to the Indus valley, beginning with the Greeks and Persians, spoke of its inhabitants as "Hindu" (Greek: *'indoi*), and, in the 16th century, residents of India themselves began very slowly to employ the term to distinguish themselves from the Turks. Gradually the distinction became primarily religious rather than ethnic, geographic, or cultural.

Since the late 19th century, Hindus have reacted to the term Hinduism in several ways. Some have rejected it in favour of indigenous formulations. Others have preferred "Vedic religion," using the term Vedic to refer not only to the ancient religious texts known as the Vedas but also to a fluid corpus of sacred works in multiple languages and an orthoprax (traditionally sanctioned) way of life. Still others have chosen to call the religion *sanatana dharma* ("eternal law"), a formulation made popular in the 19th century and emphasizing the timeless elements of the tradition that are perceived to transcend local interpretations and practice. Finally, others, perhaps the majority, have simply accepted the term *Hinduism* or its analogues, especially *hindu dharma* (Hindu moral and religious law), in various Indic languages.

Since the early 20th century, textbooks on Hinduism have been written by Hindus themselves, often under the rubric of *sanatana dharma*. These efforts at self-explanation add a new layer to an elaborate tradition of explaining practice and doctrine that dates to the 1st millennium BCE. The roots of Hinduism can be traced back much farther—both textually, to the schools of commentary and debate preserved in epic and Vedic writings from the 2nd millennium BCE, and visually, through artistic representations of yakshas (luminous spirits associated with specific locales and natural phenomena) and nagas (cobralike divinities), which were worshipped from about 400 BCE. The roots of the tradition are also sometimes traced back to the female terra-cotta figurines found ubiquitously in excavations of

sites associated with the Indus valley civilization and sometimes interpreted as goddesses.

### **General Nature of Hinduism**

More strikingly than any other major religious community, Hindus accept-and indeed celebrate-the organic, multileveled, and sometimes pluralistic nature of their traditions. This expansiveness is made possible by the widely shared Hindu view that truth or reality cannot be encapsulated in any creedal formulation, a perspective expressed in the Hindu prayer “May good thoughts come to us from all sides.” Thus, Hinduism maintains that truth must be sought in multiple sources, not dogmatically proclaimed.

Anyone’s view of the truth-even that of a *guru* regarded as possessing superior authority-is fundamentally conditioned by the specifics of time, age, gender, state of consciousness, social and geographic location, and stage of attainment. These multiple perspectives enhance a broad view of religious truth rather than diminish it; hence, there is a strong tendency for contemporary Hindus to affirm that tolerance is the foremost religious virtue. On the other hand, even cosmopolitan Hindus living in a global environment recognize and value the fact that their religion has developed in the specific context of the Indian subcontinent. Such a tension between universalist and particularist impulses has long animated the Hindu tradition. When Hindus speak of their religious identity as *sanatana dharma*, they emphasize its continuous, seemingly eternal (*sanatana*) existence and the fact that it describes a web of customs, obligations, traditions, and ideals (dharma) that far exceeds the Western tendency to think of religion primarily as a system of beliefs. A common way in which English-speaking Hindus often distance themselves from that frame of mind is to insist that Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life.

### **The Five Tensile Strands**

Across the sweep of Indian religious history, at least five elements have given shape to the Hindu religious tradition: doctrine, practice, society, story, and devotion. These five elements, to adopt a typical Hindu metaphor, are understood as relating to one another as strands in an elaborate braid. Moreover, each strand develops out of a history

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of conversation, elaboration, and challenge. Hence, in looking for what makes the tradition cohere, it is sometimes better to locate central points of tension than to expect clear agreements on Hindu thought and practice.

### **Doctrine**

The first of the five strands of Hinduism is doctrine, as expressed in a vast textual tradition anchored to the Veda (“Knowledge”), the oldest core of Hindu religious utterance, and organized through the centuries primarily by members of the learned Brahman class. Here several characteristic tensions appear. One concerns the relationship between the divine and the world. Another tension concerns the disparity between the world-preserving ideal of dharma and that of *moksha* (release from an inherently flawed world). A third tension exists between individual destiny, as shaped by karma (the influence of one’s actions on one’s present and future lives), and the individual’s deep bonds to family, society, and the divinities associated with these concepts.

In the following sections, various aspects of this complex whole will be addressed, relying primarily on a historical perspective of the development of the Hindu tradition. This approach has its costs, for it may seem to give priority to aspects of the tradition that appear in its earliest extant texts. These texts owe their preservation mainly to the labours of upper-caste men, especially Brahmans, and often reveal far too little about the perspectives of others. They should be read, therefore, both with and against the grain, with due attention paid to silences and absent rebuttals on behalf of women, regional communities, and people of low status—all of whom nowadays call themselves Hindus or identify with groups that can sensibly be placed within the broad Hindu span.

### **Veda, Brahmans and Issues of Religious Authority**

For members of the upper castes, a principal characteristic of Hinduism has traditionally been a recognition of the Veda, the most ancient body of Indian religious literature, as an absolute authority revealing fundamental and unassailable truth. The Veda is also regarded as the basis of all the later *shastra* texts, which stress the religious merits of the Brahmans—including, for example, the medical corpus known as the *Ayurveda*. Parts of the Veda are quoted in

essential Hindu rituals (such as the wedding ceremony), and it is the source of many enduring patterns of Hindu thought, yet its contents are practically unknown to most Hindus. Most Hindus venerate it from a distance. In the past, groups who rejected its authority outright (such as Buddhists and Jains) were regarded by Hindus as heterodox, but now they are often considered to be part of a larger family of common Indic traditions.

Another characteristic of much Hindu thought is its special regard for Brahmins as a priestly class possessing spiritual supremacy by birth. As special manifestations of religious power and as bearers and teachers of the Veda, Brahmins have often been thought to represent an ideal of ritual purity and social prestige. Yet this has also been challenged, either by competing claims to religious authority—especially from kings and other rulers—or by the view that Brahminhood is a status attained by depth of learning, not birth. Evidence of both these challenges can be found in Vedic literature itself, especially the Upanishads (speculative religious texts that provide commentary on the Vedas), and *bhakti* literature is full of vignettes in which the small-mindedness of Brahmins is contrasted with true depth of religious experience, as exemplified by poet-saints such as Kabir and Ravidas.

### **Doctrine of *Atman-Brahman***

Most Hindus believe in *brahman*, an uncreated, eternal, infinite, transcendent, and all-embracing principle. *Brahman* contains in itself both being and nonbeing, and it is the sole reality—the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal of all existence. As the All, *brahman* either causes the universe and all beings to emanate from itself, transforms itself into the universe, or assumes the appearance of the universe. *Brahman* is in all things and is the self (*atman*) of all living beings. *Brahman* is the creator, preserver, or transformer and reabsorber of everything. Hindus differ, however, as to whether this ultimate reality is best conceived as lacking attributes and qualities—the impersonal *brahman*—or as a personal God, especially Vishnu, Shiva, or Shakti (these being the preferences of adherents called Vaishnavas, Shaivas, and Shaktas, respectively). Belief in the importance of the search for a One that is the All has been a characteristic feature of India's spiritual life for more than 3,000 years.

Hindus generally accept the doctrine of transmigration and rebirth and the complementary belief in karma. The whole process of rebirth, called *samsara*, is cyclic, with no clear beginning or end, and encompasses lives of perpetual, serial attachments. Actions generated by desire and appetite bind one's spirit (*jiva*) to an endless series of births and deaths. Desire motivates any social interaction (particularly when involving sex or food), resulting in the mutual exchange of good and bad karma. In one prevalent view, the very meaning of salvation is emancipation (*moksha*) from this morass, an escape from the impermanence that is an inherent feature of mundane existence. In this view the only goal is the one permanent and eternal principle: the One, God, *brahman*, which is totally opposite to phenomenal existence. People who have not fully realized that their being is identical with *brahman* are thus seen as deluded. Fortunately, the very structure of human experience teaches the ultimate identity between *brahman* and *atman*. One may learn this lesson by different means: by realizing one's essential sameness with all living beings, by responding in love to a personal expression of the divine, or by coming to appreciate that the competing attentions and moods of one's waking consciousness are grounded in a transcendental unity—one has a taste of this unity in the daily experience of deep, dreamless sleep.

### **Dharma and the Three Paths**

Hindus acknowledge the validity of several paths (*margas*) toward such release. The *Bhagavadgita* ("Song of God"; c. 100 CE), an extremely influential Hindu text, presents three paths to salvation: the *karma-marga* ("path of ritual action" or "path of duties"), the disinterested discharge of ritual and social obligations; the *jnana-marga* ("path of knowledge"), the use of meditative concentration preceded by long and systematic ethical and contemplative training (Yoga) to gain a supraintellectual insight into one's identity with *brahman*; and the *bhakti-marga* ("path of devotion"), love for a personal God. These ways are regarded as suited to various types of people, but they are interactive and potentially available to all.

Although the pursuit of *moksha* is institutionalized in Hindu life through ascetic practice and the ideal of withdrawing from the world at the conclusion of one's life, many Hindus ignore such practices. The *Bhagavadgita* states that because action is inescapable, the three



paths are better thought of as simultaneously achieving the goals of world maintenance (dharma) and world release (*moksha*). Through the suspension of desire and ambition and through detachment from the fruits (*phala*) of one's actions, one is enabled to float free of life while engaging it fully. This matches the actual goals of most Hindus, which include executing properly one's social and ritual duties; supporting one's caste, family, and profession; and working to achieve a broader stability in the cosmos, nature, and society. The designation of Hinduism as *sanatana dharma* emphasizes this goal of maintaining personal and universal equilibrium, while at the same time calling attention to the important role played by the performance of traditional religious practices in achieving that goal. Because no one person can occupy all the social, occupational, and age-defined roles that are requisite to maintaining the health of the life-organism as a whole, universal maxims (e.g., *ahimsa*, the desire not to harm) are qualified by the more-particular dharmas that are appropriate to each of the four major *varnas*: Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and nobles), Vaishyas (commoners), and Shudras (servants). These four categories are superseded by the more practically applicable dharmas appropriate to each of the thousands of particular castes (*jatis*). And these, in turn, are crosscut by the obligations appropriate to one's gender and stage of life (*ashrama*). In principle then, Hindu ethics is exquisitely context-sensitive, and Hindus expect and celebrate a wide variety of individual behaviours.

### ***Ashramas* : The Four Stages of Life**

European and American scholars have often overemphasized the so-called "life-negating" aspects of Hinduism—the rigorous disciplines of Yoga, for example. The polarity of asceticism and sensuality, which assumes the form of a conflict between the aspiration for liberation and the heartfelt desire to have descendants and continue earthly life, manifests itself in Hindu social life as the tension between the different goals and stages of life. For many centuries the relative value of an active life and the performance of meritorious works (*pravritti*), as opposed to the renunciation of all worldly interests and activity (*nivriti*), has been a much-debated issue. While philosophical works such as the Upanishads emphasized renunciation, the dharma texts argued that the householder who maintains his sacred fire, begets

children, and performs his ritual duties well also earns religious merit. Nearly 2,000 years ago these dharma texts elaborated the social doctrine of the four *ashramas* (“abodes”). This concept was an attempt to harmonize the conflicting tendencies of Hinduism into one system. It held that a male member of any of the three higher classes should first become a chaste student (*brahmacharin*); then become a married householder (*grihastha*), discharging his debts to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by sacrificing; then retire (as a *vanaprastha*), with or without his wife, to the forest to devote himself to spiritual contemplation; and finally, but not mandatorily, become a homeless wandering ascetic (*sannyasin*). The situation of the forest dweller was always a delicate compromise that was often omitted or rejected in practical life.

Although the householder was often extolled—some authorities, regarding studentship a mere preparation for this *ashrama*, went so far as to brand all other stages inferior—there were always people who became wandering ascetics immediately after studentship. Theorists were inclined to reconcile the divergent views and practices by allowing the ascetic way of life to those who were entirely free from worldly desire (owing to the effects of restrained conduct in former lives), even if they had not gone through the traditional prior stages.

The texts describing such life stages were written by men for men; they paid scant attention to stages appropriate for women. The *Manu-smṛiti* (100 CE; *Laws of Manu*), for example, was content to regard marriage as the female equivalent of initiation into the life of a student, thereby effectively denying the student stage of life to girls. Furthermore, in the householder stage, a woman’s purpose was summarized under the heading of service to her husband. What we know of actual practice, however, challenges the idea that these patriarchal norms were ever perfectly enacted or that women entirely accepted the values they presupposed. While some women became ascetics, many more focused their religious lives on realizing a state of blessedness that was understood to be at once this-worldly and expressive of a larger cosmic well-being. Women have often directed the cultivation of the auspicious life-giving force (*shakti*) they possess to the benefit of their husbands and families, but, as an ideal, this force has independent status.

## Sources of Hinduism

### *Indo-European Sources*

The earliest literary source for the history of Hinduism is the Rigveda, consisting of hymns that were composed chiefly during the last two or three centuries of the 2nd millennium BCE. The religious life reflected in this text is not that of contemporary Hinduism but of an earlier sacrificial religious system, referred to by scholars as Brahmanism or Vedism, which developed in India among Indo-European-speaking peoples. Scholars from the period of British colonial rule postulated that this branch of a related group of nomadic and seminomadic tribal peoples, originally inhabiting the steppe country of southern Russia and Central Asia, brought with them the horse and chariot and the Sanskrit language. These scholars further averred that other branches of these peoples penetrated into Europe, bringing with them the Indo-European languages that developed into the chief language groups now spoken there. These theories

The Vedic people were in close contact with the ancestors of the Iranians, as evidenced by similarities between Sanskrit and the earliest surviving Iranian languages. Thus, the religion of the Rigveda contains elements from three strata: an element common to most of the Indo-European groups, an element held in common with the early Iranians, and an element appearing only in the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism arose from multiple sources and from the geniuses of individual reformers in all periods.

Present-day Hinduism contains few direct survivals from its Indo-European heritage. Some of the elements of the Hindu wedding ceremony, notably the circumambulation of the sacred fire and the cult of the domestic fire itself, are rooted in the remote Indo-European past. The same is probably true of some aspects of the ancestor cult. The Rigveda contains many other Indo-European elements, such as ritual sacrifices and the worship of male sky gods, including the old sky god Dyaus, whose name is cognate with those of Zeus of ancient Greece and Jupiter of Rome ("Father Jove"). The Vedic heaven, the "world of the fathers," resembles the Germanic Valhalla and seems also to be an Indo-European inheritance.

The Indo-Iranian element in later Hinduism is chiefly found in the ceremony of initiation, or "second birth" (*upanayana*), a rite also

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found in Zoroastrianism. Performed by boys of the three “twice-born” upper classes, it involves the tying of a sacred cord. Another example of the common Indo-Iranian heritage is the Vedic god Varuna. Although now an unimportant sea god, Varuna, as portrayed in the Rigveda, possesses many features of the Zoroastrian supreme deity Ahura Mazdâ (“Wise Lord”). A third example can be seen in the sacred drink soma, which corresponds to the sacred *haoma* of Zoroastrianism.

Even in the earlier parts of the Rigveda, however, the religion displays numerous Indian features that are not evident in Indo-Iranian traditions. Some of the chief gods, for example, have no clear Indo-European or Indo-Iranian counterparts. Although some of these features may have evolved entirely within the Vedic framework, it is generally presumed that many of them stem from the influence of inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent who had no connection with Indo-European peoples. For example, some scholars attribute non-Vedic features of Hinduism to a people who are often vaguely and incorrectly called “Dravidian,” a term that refers to a family of languages and not an ethnic group. Some scholars have further argued that the ruling classes of the Indus civilization, also called the Harappaculture (c. 2500-1700 BCE), spoke a Dravidian language and have tentatively identified their script with that of a Dravidian language. But there is little supporting evidence for this claim, and the presence of Dravidian speakers throughout the whole subcontinent at any time in history is not attested.

### **Other Sources: The Process of “Sanskritization”**

The development of Hinduism can be interpreted as a constant interaction between the religion of the upper social groups, represented by the Brahmans, and the religion of other groups. From the time of the Vedas (c. 1500 BCE), people from many strata of society throughout the subcontinent tended to adapt their religious and social life to Brahmanic norms. This development resulted from the desire of lower-class groups to rise on the social ladder by adopting the ways and beliefs of the higher castes. Further, many local deities were identified with the gods and goddesses of the Puranas.

The process, sometimes called “Sanskritization,” began in Vedic times and was probably the principal method by which the Hinduism

of the Sanskrit texts spread through the subcontinent and into Southeast Asia. Sanskritization still continues in the form of the conversion of tribal groups, and it is reflected in the persistence of the tendency among some Hindus to identify rural and local deities with the gods of the Sanskrit texts. Sanskritization also refers to the process by which some Hindus try to raise their status by adopting high-caste customs, such as wearing the sacred cord and becoming vegetarians.

If Sanskritization has been the main means of connecting the various local traditions throughout the subcontinent, the converse process, which has no convenient label, has been one of the means whereby Hinduism has changed and developed over the centuries. Many features of Hindu mythology and several popular gods—such as Ganesha, an elephant-headed god, and Hanuman, the monkey god—were incorporated into Hinduism and assimilated into the appropriate Vedic gods by this means. Similarly, the worship of many goddesses who are now regarded as the consorts of the great male Hindu gods, as well as the worship of individual unmarried goddesses, may have arisen from the worship of non-Vedic local goddesses. Thus, the history of Hinduism can be interpreted as the interplay between orthoprax custom and the practices of wider ranges of people and, complementarily, as the survival of features of local traditions that gained strength steadily until they were adapted by the Brahmins.

### **The Prehistoric Period (3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BCE)**

#### ***Indigenous Prehistoric Religion***

The prehistoric culture of the Indus valley arose in the latter centuries of the 3rd millennium BCE from the metal-using village cultures of the region. There is considerable evidence of the material life of the Indus people, but its interpretation remains a matter of speculation until their writing is deciphered. Enough evidence exists, however, to show that several features of later Hinduism may have had prehistoric origins.

In most of the village cultures, small terra-cotta figurines of women, found in large quantities, have been interpreted as icons of a fertility deity whose cult was widespread in the Mediterranean area and in western Asia from Neolithic times (c. 5000 BCE) onward. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the goddess was apparently

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associated with the bull—a feature also found in the ancient religions farther west.

### ***Religion in the Indus Valley Civilization***

The Harappa culture, located in what is now Pakistan, has produced much evidence of what may have been a cult of a goddess and a bull. Figurines of both occur, female figures being more common, while the bull appears more frequently on the many steatite seals. A horned figure, possibly with three faces, occurs on a few seals, and on one seal he is surrounded by animals. A few male figurines, one apparently in a dancing posture, may represent deities. No building has been discovered at any Harappan site that can be positively identified as a temple, but the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro may have been used for ritual purposes, as were the ghats (bathing steps on riverbanks) attached to later Hindu temples. The presence of bathrooms in most of the houses and the remarkable system of covered drains indicate a strong concern for cleanliness that may have been related to concepts of ritual purity but perhaps merely to ideas of hygiene.

Many seals show what may be religious and legendary themes that cannot be interpreted with certainty, such as seals depicting trees next to figures who may be divinities believed to reside in them. The bull is often depicted standing before a sort of altar, and the horned figure has been interpreted overconfidently as a prototype of the Hindu god Shiva. Small conical objects have been interpreted by some scholars as phallic emblems, though they may have been pieces used in board games. Other interpretations of the remains of the Harappa culture are even more speculative and, if accepted, would indicate that many features of later Hinduism were already in existence 4,000 years ago.

### ***Survival of Archaic Religious Practices***

Some elements of the religious life of current and past folk religions—notably sacred animals, sacred trees (especially the pipal, *Ficus religiosa*), and the use of small figurines for worship—are found in all parts of India and may have been borrowed from pre-Vedic civilizations. On the other hand, these things are also commonly encountered outside India, and therefore they may have originated independently in Hinduism as well.

## **The Vedic Period (2<sup>nd</sup> millennium - 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE)**

The people of the early Vedic period left few material remains, but they did leave a very important literary record called the Rigveda. Its 1,028 hymns are distributed throughout 10 books, of which the first and the last are the most recent. A hymn usually consists of three sections: an exhortation; a main part comprising praise of the deity, prayers, and petition, with frequent references to the deity's mythology; and a specific request.

The Rigveda is not a unitary work, and its composition may have taken several centuries. In its form at the time of its final edition, it reflected a well-developed religious system. The date commonly given for the final recension of the Rigveda is 1200 BCE. During the next two or three centuries it was supplemented by three other Vedas and still later by Vedic texts called the Brahmanas and the Upanishads (*see below* Vedas).

## **Challenges to Brahmanism (6<sup>th</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE)**

Indian religious life underwent great changes during the period 550–450 BCE. This century was marked by the rise of breakaway sects of ascetics who rejected traditional religion, denying the authority of the Vedas and of the Brahmins and following teachers who claimed to have discovered the secret of obtaining release from transmigration. By far the most important of these figures were Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha, and Vardhamana, called Mahavira ("Great Hero"), the founder of Jainism. There were many other heterodox teachers who organized bands of ascetic followers, and each group adopted a specific code of conduct. They gained considerable support from ruling families and merchants. The latter were growing in wealth and influence, and many of them were searching for alternative forms of religious activity that would give them a more significant role than did orthodox Brahmanism or that would be less expensive to support.

The scriptures of the new religious movements throw some light on the popular religious life of the period. The god Prajapati was widely believed to be the highest god and the creator of the universe; Indra, known chiefly as Shakra ("The Mighty One"), was second to him in importance. The Brahmins were very influential, but there was opposition to their large-scale animal sacrifices—on moral, philosophical,

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and economic grounds-and to their pretensions to superiority by virtue of their birth. The doctrine of transmigration was by then generally accepted, though a group of outright materialists-the Charvakas, or Lokayatas-denied the survival of the soul after death. The ancestor cult, part of the Indo-European heritage, was retained almost universally, at least by the higher castes. Popular religious life largely centred around the worship of local fertility divinities (yakshas), cobra spirits (nagas), and other minor spirits in sacred places such as groves. Although these sacred places were the main centres of popular religious life, there is no evidence of any buildings or images associated with them, and it appears that neither temples nor large icons existed at the time.

About 500 BCE asceticism became widespread, and increasing numbers of intelligent young men “gave up the world” to search for release from transmigration by achieving a state of psychic security. The orthodox Brahmanical teachers reacted to these tendencies by devising the doctrine of the four *ashramas*, which divided the life of the twice-born after initiation into four stages: the *brahmacharin* (celibate religious student); the *grihastha* (married householder); the *vanaprastha* (forest dweller); and the *sannyasin* (wandering ascetic). This attempt to keep asceticism in check by confining it to men of late middle age was not wholly successful. Thereafter Hindu social theory centred on the concept of *varnashrama dharma*, or the duties of the four classes (*varnas*) and the four *ashramas*, which constituted the ideal that Hindus were encouraged to follow.

The first great empire of India, the Mauryan empire, arose in the 3rd century BCE. Its early rulers were non-Brahmanic; Ashoka (reigned c. 265 - 238 BCE), the third and most famous of the Mauryan emperors, was a professed Buddhist. Although there is no doubt that Ashoka’s patronage of Buddhism did much to spread that religion, his inscriptions recognize the Brahmans as worthy of respect. Sentiments in favour of nonviolence (ahimsa) and vegetarianism, much encouraged by the non-Brahmanic sects, spread during the Mauryan period and were greatly encouraged by Ashoka. A Brahmanic revival appears to have occurred with the fall of the Mauryas. The orthodox religion itself, however, was undergoing change at this time, as theistic tendencies developed around the gods Vishnu and Shiva.



Inscriptions, iconographic evidence, and literary references reveal the emergence of devotional theism in the 2nd century BCE. Several brief votive inscriptions refer to the god Vasudeva, who by this time was widely worshipped in western India. At the end of the 2nd century, Heliodorus, a Greek ambassador of King Antialcidas of Taxila (in Pakistan), erected a large column in honour of Vasudeva at Besnagar in Madhya Pradesh and recorded that he was a Bhagavata, a term used specifically for the devotees of Vishnu. The identification of Vasudeva with the old Vedic god Vishnu and, later, with Vishnu's incarnation, Krishna, was quickly accepted.

Near the end of the Mauryan period, the first surviving stone images of Hinduism appear. Several large, simply carved figures survive, representing not any of the great gods but rather yakshas, or local chthonic divinities connected with water, fertility, and magic. The original locations of these images are uncertain, but they were probably erected in the open air in sacred enclosures. Temples are not clearly attested in this period by either archaeology or literature. A few fragmentary images thought to be those of Vasudeva and Shiva, the latter in anthropomorphic form and in the form of a lingam, are found on coins of the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE.

### **Early Hinduism (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE - 4<sup>th</sup> century CE)**

The centuries immediately preceding and following the dawn of the Common Era were marked by the recension of the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (the latter incorporating into it the *Bhagavadgita*). The worship of Vishnu, incarnate as Krishna in the *Mahabharata* and as Rama in the *Ramayana*, developed significantly during this period (*see below* Epics and Puranas), as did the cult of Shiva, who plays an active role in the *Mahabharata*.

### **The Rise of the Major Sects: Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism**

The Vedic god Rudra gained importance from the end of the Rigvedic period. In the Svetashvatara Upanishad, Rudra is for the first time called Shiva and is described as the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe. His followers are called on to worship him with devotion (*bhakti*). The tendency for the laity to form themselves into religious guilds or societies-evident in the case of the yaksha cults,

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Buddhism, and Jainism-promoted the growth of devotional Vaishnavism and Shaivism. These local associations of worshippers appear to have been a principal factor in the spread of the new cults. Theistic ascetics are less in evidence at this time, though a community of Shaivite monks, the Pashupatas, existed by the 2nd or 3rd century CE.

The period between the fall of the Mauryan empire (c. 185 BCE) and the rise of the Gupta dynasty (c. 320 CE) was one of great change, including the conquest of most of the area of Pakistan and parts of western India by a succession of invaders. India was opened to influence from the West as never before, not only by invaders but also through flourishing maritime trade with the Roman Empire. The effects of the new contacts were most obvious in art and architecture. One of the oldest freestanding stone temples in the subcontinent has been excavated at Taxila, near Rawalpindi, Pak. During the 1st century BCE the Gandhara school of sculpture arose in the same region and made use of Hellenistic and Roman prototypes, mainly in the service of Buddhism. Hindu temples of the period probably were made of wood, because no remains of them have survived; however, literary evidence shows that they must have existed.

By the time of the early Gupta empire the new theism had been harmonized with the old Vedic religion, and two of the main branches of Hinduism were fully recognized. The Vaishnavas had the support of the Gupta emperors, who took the title *paramabhagavata* (“supreme devotee of Vishnu”). Vishnu temples were numerous, and the doctrine of Vishnu’s avatars (incarnations) was widely accepted. Of the 10 incarnations of later Vaishnavism, however, only two seem to have been much worshipped in the Gupta period (4th–6th century). These were Krishna, the hero of the *Mahabharata*, who also begins to appear in his pastoral aspect as the cowherd and flute player, and Varaha, the divine boar, of whom several impressive images survive from the Gupta period. A spectacular carving in Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh) dating from about 400 CE depicts Varaha rescuing the earth goddess, Vasudha. Temples in Udayagiri (c. 400) and Deogarh (c. 500) also portray Vishnu reclining on the serpent Ananta (“Without End”).

The Shaivites were also a growing force in the religious life of India. The sect of Pashupata ascetics, founded by Lakulisha (or

Nahulisha), who lived in the 2nd century CE, is attested by inscriptions from the 5th century; it is among the earliest of the sectarian religious orders of Hinduism. Representations of the son of Shiva, Skanda (also called Karttikeya, the war god), appeared as early as 100 BCE on coins from the Kushan dynasty, which ruled northern India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia in the first three centuries of the Common Era. Shiva's other son, the elephant-headed Ganesha, patron deity of commercial and literary enterprises, did not appear until the 5th century. Very important in this period was Surya, the sun god, in whose honour temples were built, though in modern times he is little regarded by most Hindus. The solar cult had Vedic roots but later may have expanded under Iranian influence.

Several goddesses gained importance in this period. Although goddesses had always been worshipped in local and popular cults, they play comparatively minor roles in Vedic religion. Lakshmi, or Shri, goddess of fortune and consort of Vishnu, was worshipped before the beginning of the Common Era, and several lesser goddesses are attested from the Gupta period. But the cult of Durga, the consort of Shiva, began to gain importance only in the 4th century, and the large-scale development of Shaktism (devotion to the active, creative principle personified as the mother goddess) did not take place until medieval times.

### **The Development of Temples**

The Gupta period was marked by the rapid development of temple architecture. Earlier temples were made of wood, but freestanding stone and brick temples soon appeared in many parts of India. By the 7th century, stone temples, some of considerable dimensions, were found in many parts of the country. Originally, the design of the Hindu temples may have borrowed from the Buddhist precedent, for in some of the oldest temples the image was placed in the centre of the shrine, which was surrounded by an ambulatory path resembling the path around a stupa (a religious building containing a Buddhist relic). Nearly all surviving Gupta temples are comparatively small; they consist of a small cella (central chamber), constructed of thick and solid masonry, with a veranda either at the entrance or on all sides of the building. The earliest Gupta temples, such as the Buddhist temples at Sanchi, have flat roofs; however, the *sikhara* (spire), typical of the north

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Indian temple, was developed in this period and with time was steadily made taller. Tamil literature mentions several temples. The epic *Silappatikaram* (c. 3rd-4th centuries), for instance, refers to the temples of Srirangam, near Tiruchchirappalli, and of Tirumala-Tirupati (known locally as Tiruvenkatam).

The Buddhists and Jains had made use of artificial caves for religious purposes, and these were adapted by the Hindus. Hindu cave shrines, however, are comparatively rare, and none have been discovered from earlier than the Gupta period. The Udayagiri complex has cave shrines, but some of the best examples are in Badami (c. 570), the capital of the Chalukya dynasty in the 6th century. The Badami caves contain several carvings of Vishnu, Shiva, and Harihara (an amalgamation of Vishnu and Shiva), as well as depictions of stories connected with Vishnu's incarnation, Krishna. Near the Badami caves are the sites of Aihole and Pattadakal, which contain some of the oldest temples in the south; some temples in Aihole, for example, date to approximately 450. For this reason these sites are sometimes referred to as the "laboratory" of Hindu temples. Pattadakal, another capital of the Chalukya empire, was a major site of temple building by Chalukyan monarchs in the 7th and 8th centuries. These temples incorporated styles that eventually became distinctive of north and south Indian architecture.

In the Pallava site of Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram), south of Chennai, a number of small temples were carved in the 7th century from outcroppings of rock; they represent some of the best-known religious buildings in the Tamil country. Mamallapuram and Kanchipuram, near Chennai in the state of Tamil Nadu, were major cities in the Pallava empire (4th–9th centuries). Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, is sometimes called the "city of a thousand temples." Some of its temples date to the 5th century, and many feature magnificent architecture. Dedicated to local manifestations of Shiva, Vishnu, and various forms of the Great Goddess, the temples were patronized by royalty and aristocrats but also received donations and endowments from the larger population.

Evidence for contact between the Pallava empire and Southeast Asia is provided by some of the earliest inscriptions (c. 6th–7th centuries) of the Khmer empire, which are written in "Pallava style"

characters. There are also several visual connections between temple styles in India and in Southeast Asia, including similarities in architecture (e.g., the design of temple towers) and iconography (e.g., the depiction of Hindu deities, epic narratives, and dancers in carvings on temple walls). Yet there are also differences between them. For example, the Cambodian Shiva temples in Phnom Bakheng, Bakong, and Koh Ker resemble mountain pyramids in the architectural idiom of Hindu and Buddhist temples in Borobudur and Prambanan on the island of Java in present-day Indonesia.

### **Importance of the Vedas**

The Vedas (“Knowledge”) are the oldest Hindu texts. Hindus regard the Vedas as having been directly revealed to or “heard” by gifted and inspired seers (*rishis*) who memorized them in the most perfect human language, Sanskrit. Most of the religion of the Vedic texts, which revolves around rituals of fire sacrifice, has been eclipsed by later Hindu doctrines and practices. But even today, as it has been for several millennia, parts of the Vedas are memorized and repeated as a religious act of great merit: certain Vedic hymns (mantras) are always recited at traditional weddings, at ceremonies for the dead, and in temple rituals.

### **The Components of the Vedas**

Vedic literature ranges from the Rigveda (c. 1500 BCE) to the Upanishads (c. 1000-600 BCE) and provides the primary documentation for Indian religion before Buddhism and the early texts of classical Hinduism. The most important texts are the four collections (Samhitas) known as the Veda or Vedas: the Rigveda (“Wisdom of the Verses”), the Yajurveda (“Wisdom of the Sacrificial Formulas”), the Samaveda (“Wisdom of the Chants”), and the Atharvaveda (“Wisdom of the Atharvan Priests”). Of these, the Rigveda is the oldest.

In the Vedic texts following these earliest compilations—the Brahmanas (discussions of the ritual), Aranyakas (“Books of the Forest”), and Upanishads (secret teachings concerning cosmic equations)—the interest in the early Rigvedic gods wanes, and those deities become little more than accessories to the Vedic rite. Belief in several deities, one of whom is deemed supreme, is replaced by the sacrificial pantheism of Prajapati (“Lord of Creatures”), who is the

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All. In the Upanishads, Prajapati merges with the concept of *brahman*, the supreme reality and substance of the universe (not to be confused with the Hindu god Brahma), replacing any specific personification and framing the mythology with abstract philosophy.

The entire corpus of Vedic literature—the Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads—constitutes the revealed scripture of Hinduism, or the Shruti (“Heard”). All other works—in which the actual doctrines and practices of Hindus are encoded—are recognized as having been composed by human authors and are thus classed as Smriti (“Remembered”). The categorization of the Vedas, however, is capable of elasticity. First, the Shruti is not exactly closed; Upanishads, for example, have been composed until recent times. Second, the texts categorized as Smriti inevitably claim to be in accord with the authoritative Shruti and thus worthy of the same respect and sacredness. For Hindus, the Vedas symbolize unchallenged authority and tradition.

### **The Rigveda**

The religion reflected in the Rigveda exhibits belief in several deities and the propitiation of divinities associated with the sky and the atmosphere. Of these, the Indo-European sky god Dyaus was little regarded. More important were such gods as Indra (chief of the gods), Varuna (guardian of the cosmic order), Agni (the sacrificial fire), and Surya (the Sun).

The main ritual activity referred to in the Rigveda is the soma sacrifice. Soma was a hallucinogenic beverage prepared from a now-unknown plant; it has been suggested that the plant was a mushroom and that later another plant was substituted for that agaric fungus, which had become difficult to obtain. The Rigveda contains a few clear references to animal sacrifice, which probably became more widespread later. There is some doubt whether the priests formed a separate social class at the beginning of the Rigvedic period, but, even if they did, the prevailingly loose boundaries of class allowed a man of nonpriestly parentage to become a priest. By the end of the period, however, the priests had come to form a separate class of specialists, the Brahmins, who claimed superiority over all the other social classes, including the Rajanyas (later Kshatriyas), the warrior class.

The Rigveda contains little about birth rituals but does address at greater length the rites of marriage and disposal of the dead, which were basically the same as in later Hinduism. Marriage was an indissoluble bond cemented by a lengthy and solemn ritual centring on the domestic hearth. Although other forms were practiced, the main funeral rite of the rich was cremation. One hymn, describing cremation rites, shows that the wife of the dead man lay down beside him on the funeral pyre but was called upon to return to the land of the living before it was lighted. This may have been a survival from an earlier period when the wife was actually cremated with her husband.

Among other features of Rigvedic religious life that were important for later generations were the *munis*, who apparently were trained in various magic arts and believed to be capable of supernatural feats, such as levitation. They were particularly associated with the god Rudra, a deity connected with mountains and storms and more feared than loved. Rudra developed into the Hindu god Shiva, and his prestige increased steadily. The same is true of Vishnu, a solar deity in the Rigveda who later became one of the most important and popular divinities of Hinduism.

One of the favourite myths of the Vedas attributed the origin of the cosmos to the god Indra after he had slain the great dragon Vritra, a myth very similar to one known in early Mesopotamia. With time, such tales were replaced by more-abstract theories that are reflected in several hymns of the 10th book of the Rigveda. These speculative tendencies were among the earliest attempts of Indian philosophers to reduce all things to a single basic principle.

### **Elaborations of Text and Ritual: The Later Vedas**

The chronology of later Vedic developments is not known with any precision, but it probably encompasses the period from 1000 to 500 BCE, which are the dates of the Painted Gray Ware strata in the archaeological sites of the western Ganges valley. These excavations reflect a culture still without writing but showing considerable advances in civilization. Little, however, has been discovered from sites of this period that throws much light on the religious situation, and historians still must rely on the following texts to describe this phase of the religion.

### ***The Yajurveda and Samaveda***

The Yajurveda and Samaveda are completely subordinate to the liturgy. The Yajurveda contains the lines, usually in brief prose, with which the executive priest (*adhvaryu*) accompanies his ritual activities, addressing the implements he handles and the offering he pours and admonishing other priests to do their invocations. The Samaveda is a collection of verses from the Rigveda (and a few new ones) that were chanted with certain fixed melodies.

### ***The Atharvaveda***

The Atharvaveda stands apart from other Vedic texts. It contains both hymns and prose passages and is divided into 20 books. Books 1–7 contain magical prayers for precise purposes: spells for a long life, cures, curses, love charms, prayers for prosperity, charms for kingship and Brahmanhood, and expiations for evil actions. They reflect the magical-religious concerns of everyday life and are on a different level than the Rigveda, which glorifies the great gods and their liturgy. Books 8–12 contain similar texts but also include cosmological hymns that continue those of the Rigveda and provide a transition to the more-complex speculations of the Upanishads. Books 13–20 celebrate the cosmic principle (book 13) and present marriage prayers (book 14), funeral formulas (book 18), and other magical and ritual formulas. This text is an extremely important source of information for practical religion, particularly where it complements the Rigveda. Many rites are also laid down in the “Kausika-sutra” (the manual of the Kausika family of priests) of the Atharvaveda.

### **The Brahmanas and Aranyakas**

Attached to each Samhita was a collection of explanations of religious rites, called a Brahmana, which often relied on mythology to describe the origins and importance of individual ritual acts. Although not manuals or handbooks in the manner of the later Shrauta-sutras, the Brahmanas do contain details about the performance and meaning of Vedic sacrificial rituals and are invaluable sources of information about Vedic religion.

In these texts the sacrifice is the centre of cosmic processes, human concerns, and religious desires and goals. Through the merit of offering sacrifices, karma is generated that creates for the one who sacrifices



a rebirth after death in heaven (“in the next world”). Ritual was thought to have effects on the visible and invisible worlds because of homologies, or connections (*bandhus*), that lie between the components of the ritual and corresponding parts of the universe. The universalization of the dynamics of the ritual into the dynamics of the cosmos was depicted as the sacrifice of the primordial deity, Prajapati (“Lord of Creatures”), who was perpetually regenerated by the sacrifice.

The lengthy series of rituals of the royal consecration, the *rajasuya*, emphasized royal power and endowed the king with a divine charisma, raising him, at least for the duration of the ceremony, to the status of a god. Typical of this period was the elaborate *ashvamedha*, the horse sacrifice, in which a consecrated horse was freed and allowed to wander at will for a year; it was always followed by the king’s troops, who defended it from all attack until it was brought back to the royal capital and sacrificed in a very complicated ritual.

Vedic cosmic-sacrificial speculations continued in the Aranyakas (“Books of the Forest”), which contain materials of two kinds: Brahmana-like discussions of rites not believed to be suitable for the village (hence the name “forest”) and continuing visions of the relationship between sacrifice, universe, and humanity. The word *brahman*-the creative power of the ritual utterances, which denotes the creativeness of the sacrifice and underlies ritual and, therefore, cosmic order-is prominent in these texts.

## **Vedic Religion**

### ***Cosmogony and Cosmology***

Vedic literature contains different but not exclusive accounts of the origin of the universe. The simplest is that the creator built the universe with timber as a carpenter builds a house. Hence, there are many references to gods measuring the different worlds as parts of one edifice: atmosphere upon earth, heaven upon atmosphere. Creation may be viewed as procreation: the personified heaven, Dyaus, impregnates the earth goddess, Prithivi, with rain, causing crops to grow on her. Quite another myth is recorded in the last (10th) book of the Rigveda: the “Hymn of the Cosmic Man” (Purushasukta) explains that the universe was created out of the parts of the body of

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a single cosmic man (Purusha) when his body was offered at the primordial sacrifice. The four classes (*varnas*) of Indian society also came from his body: the priest (Brahman) emerging from the mouth, the warrior (Kshatriya) from the arms, the peasant (Vaishya) from the thighs, and the servant (Shudra) from the feet. The Purushasukta represents the beginning of a new phase in which the sacrifice became more important and elaborate as cosmological and social philosophies were constructed around it.

In the same book of the Rigveda, mythology begins to be transformed into philosophy; for example, “In the beginning was the nonexistent, from which the existent arose.” Even the reality of the nonexistent is questioned: “Then there was neither the nonexistent nor the existent.” Such cosmogonic speculations continue, particularly in the older Upanishads. Originally there was nothing at all, or Hunger, which then, to sate itself, created the world as its food. Alternatively, the creator creates himself in the universe by an act of self-recognition, self-formulation, or self-formation. Or the one creator grows “as big as a man and a woman embracing” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad) and splits into man and woman, and in various transformations the couple create other creatures. In one of the last stages of this line of thought (Chandogya Upanishad), the following account became fundamental to the ontology of the philosophical schools of Vedanta: in the beginning was the Existent, or *brahman*, which, through heaven, earth, and atmosphere (the triadic space) and the three seasons of summer, rains, and harvest (the triadic time), produced the entire universe.

As indicated in these accounts, the Vedic texts generally regarded the universe as three layers of worlds (*loka*): heaven, atmosphere, and earth. Heaven is that part of the universe where the sun shines and is correlated with sun, fire, and ether; the atmosphere is that part of the sky between heaven and earth where the clouds insert themselves in the rainy season and is correlated with water and wind; earth, a flat disk, like a wheel, is here below as the “holder of treasure” (*vasumdhara*) and giver of food. In addition to this tripartite pattern, there is an ancient notion of duality in which heaven is masculine and father and earth is feminine and mother. Later texts present the conception that the universe was formed by combinations and

permutations of five elements: ether-space (*akasha*), wind (*vayu*), fire (*agni*), water (*apas*), and earth (*bhumi*).

### **Theology**

Generally speaking, Vedic gods share many characteristics: several of them (Indra, Varuna, Vishnu) are said to have created the universe, set the sun in the sky, and propped apart heaven and earth. All the gods are susceptible to human praise. Some major gods were clearly personifications of natural phenomena, and these deities assumed no clearly delineated personalities.

The three most frequently invoked gods are Indra, Agni, and Soma. Indra, the foremost god of the Vedic pantheon, is a god of war and rain. Agni (a cognate of the Latin *ignis*) is the deified fire, particularly the fire of sacrifice, and Soma is the deified intoxicating or hallucinogenic drink of the sacrifice, or the plant from which it is pressed; neither is greatly personified.

The principal focus of Vedic literature is the sacrifice, which in its simplest form can be viewed as a ritualized banquet to which a god is invited to partake of a meal shared by the sacrificer and his priest. The invocations mention, often casually, the past exploits of the deity. The offered meal gives strength to the deity so that he may repeat his feats and give aid to the sacrificer.

The myth of Indra killing the dragon Vritra has many levels of meaning. Vritra prevents the monsoon rains from breaking. The monsoon is the greatest single factor in Indian agriculture, and thus the event celebrated in this myth impinges on every Indian's life. In the social circles represented in the Rigveda, however, the myth is cast in a warrior mold, and the breaking of the monsoon is viewed as a cosmic battle. The entire monsoon complex is involved: Indra is the lord of the winds, the gales that accompany the monsoon; his weapons are lightning and thunderbolt, with which he lays Vritra low. To accomplish this feat, he must be strengthened with soma. Simultaneously, he is also the god of war and is invoked to defeat the non-Vedic *dasyus*, the indigenous peoples referred to in the Vedas. These important concerns—the promptness and abundance of the rains, success in warfare, and the conquest of the land—all find their focus in Indra, the king of the gods. Although he ceased being a major god as

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Hinduism incorporated Vedic tradition in the course of its development, Indra's royal status as the king of the gods continued to be evoked even in areas influenced by India—for example, in dozens of lintels and temple carvings across Southeast Asia.

Because the Vedic gods were not fully anthropomorphic, their functions were subject to various applications and interpretations. In the view of the noble patrons of the Vedic poets, Indra, the greatest and most anthropomorphic god of the early Vedas, was primarily a warrior god who could be invoked to bring booty and victory. Agriculturalists and hunters emphasized Indra's fecundity, celebrating his festivals to produce fertility, welfare, and happiness. Indra, however, was essentially a representative of useful force in nature and the cosmos; he was the great champion of an ordered and habitable world. His repeated victories over Vritra, the representative of obstruction and chaos, resulted in the separation of heaven and earth (the support of the former and the stabilization of the latter), the rise of the sun, and the release of the waters—in short, the organization of the universe.

Although morality is not an issue in Indra's myth, it plays a role in those of the other principal Vedic deities. Central to ancient morality was the notion of *rita*, which appears to have been the fidelity with which the alliances between humans (and between humans and the gods) were observed—a quality necessary for the preservation of the physical and moral order of the universe. Varuna, an older sovereign god, presides over the observance of *rita* with Mitra (related to the Persian god Mithra). Thus, Varuna is a judge before whom a mortal may stand guilty, while Indra is a king who may support a mortal monarch. Typical requests that are made of Varuna are for forgiveness, for deliverance from evil committed by oneself or others, and for protection; Indra is prayed to for bounty, for aid against enemies, and for leadership against demons and *dasyus*.

Distinct from both is Agni, the fire, who is observed in various manifestations: in the sacrificial fire, in lightning, and hidden in the logs used in fires. As the fire of sacrifice, he is the mouth of the gods and the carrier of the oblation, the mediator between the human and the divine orders. Agni is above all the good friend of the Vedic people, who prayed to him to strike down and burn their enemies and to mediate between gods and humans.

Among other Vedic gods, only a few stand out. One is Vishnu, who seems more important perhaps in retrospect because of later developments associated with him. He is famous for the three strides with which he traversed the universe, thus creating and possessing it. This pervasiveness, which invites identification with other gods, is characteristic of his later mythology. His function as helper to the conqueror-god Indra is important.

Impersonality is increased by the prevalence of pairs and groups of gods. Thus, Varuna and Mitra are members of the group of Adityas (sons of Aditi, an old progenitrix), who generally are celestial gods. They are also combined in the double god Mitra-Varuna. Indra and Vishnu are combined as Indra-Vishnu. There is also Rudra, an ambivalent god who is dreaded for his unpredictable attacks (though he can be persuaded not to attack); Rudra is also a healer responsible for 1,000 remedies. Although there are many demons (*rakshasas*), no one god embodies the evil spirit; rather, many gods have their devil within, inspiring fear as well as trust.

Among the perpetually beneficent gods are the Ashvins (horsemen), helpers and healers who often visit the needy. Almost otiose is the personified heaven, Dyaus, who most often appears as the sky or as day. As a person, he is coupled with Earth (as Dyava-Prithivi) as a father; Earth by herself is more predominantly known as Mother (Matri). Apart from Earth, the other goddess of importance in the text of the Rigveda is Ushas (Dawn), who brings in the day and thus brings forth the Sun.

In the later Vedic period the significance of the Rigvedic gods and their myths began to wane. The peculiar theism of the Rigveda-in which any one of several different gods might be hailed as supreme and the attributes of one god could be transferred to another (called "kathenotheism" by the Vedic scholar Max Müller)-stressed godhead more than individual gods. In the end this led to a pantheism of Prajapati, the deified sacrifice or the ritualized deity, who, with his consort Vach, the speech of ritual recitation, is said to have begotten the world.

During the Vedic period, Purusha fused with the figure Narayana ("Scion of Man") and with Prajapati ("Lord of Creatures"). In the speculative thought of the ritualists, Prajapati emerged as the creator god and in many respects as the highest divinity-the One, the All, or

Totality. He was the immortal father even of the gods, whom he transcends, encompasses, and molds into one complex. By a process of emanation and self-differentiation (by dividing himself), Prajapati created all beings and the universe. After this creation, Prajapati became the disintegrated and differentiated All of the phenomenal world and was exhausted. By means of a rite, he then reintegrated himself to prepare for a new phase of creativity. Because the purpose of a sacred rite is the restitution of the organic structural norm, which ensures the ordered functioning of the universe, Prajapati's rite was regarded as the prototype for all Vedic and Hindu rites. Thus, by performing the rite, those offering sacrifice to Prajapati may temporarily restore oneness and totality within themselves and within the universe.

### ***Ethical and Social Doctrines***

In Vedic times, sin (*enas*) or evil (*papman*) was associated with illness, enmity, distress, or malediction; it was conceived of as a sort of pollution that could be neutralized by ritual or other devices. An individual could incur sin by improper behaviour, especially improper speech. Thus, one could be guilty of *anrita*-i.e., infidelity to fact, or departure from what is true and real or from what constitutes the established order-whether or not one had deliberately committed a crime. Other transgressions included making mistakes in sacrifices and coming into contact with corpses, ritually impure persons, or persons belonging to the lower classes of society. These acts were only rarely considered to be misdeeds against a god or violations of moral principles of divine origin, and the consciousness of guilt was much rarer than the fear of the evil consequences of sin, such as disease or untimely death. Sometimes, however, a god (Agni, the evil-devouring fire, or Varuna, the god of order, whose role included punishing and fettering the "sinner") was invoked to forgive the neglect or transgression or to release the sinner from its concrete results. More usually, however, these results were abrogated by means of purifications, such as the ceremonial use of water, and a variety of expiatory rites.

The pure who earned ritual merits hoped to win a safe world (*loka*) or condition. The meticulous effort to purify oneself from every evil also involved *shanti*, the observance of various customs regarding the avoidance of inauspicious occurrences. Ritual purity was the principal concern of the compilers of the manuals of dharma (religious

law), which have contributed much to the special character of Hinduism. According to the authorities on dharma, ritual purity is the first approach to dharma, the resting place of the Vedas (*brahman*), the abode of prosperity (*shri*), the favourite of the gods, and the means of clearing (soothing) the mind and of seeing (realizing) the *atman* in the body.

### ***The Sacred: Nature, Humanity and God***

The Vedic poets were convinced that the world is an organized cosmos governed by order and truth and that it is always in danger of being damaged or destroyed by the powers of chaos (*asat*). This conviction inspired the performance of rituals to preserve the order of the universe, and it found mythological expression in the continual conflict between gods (*devas*) and antigods (*asuras*).

Gods were conceived as presiding over certain provinces of the universe or as being responsible for cosmic or social phenomena. Their deeds are timeless and exemplary presentations of mythic events replete with power and universal significance. To retain their vitality and efficacy, mythical events need to be repeated—that is, celebrated and confirmed by means of the spoken word and ritual acts.

### ***Vedic and Brahmanic Rites***

Vedic religion is primarily a liturgy differentiated in various types of ritual, which are described in the sacred texts in great detail and are designed for almost any purpose. In these rites, theoretically, no operation, no gesture, no formula is meaningless or left to an officiant's discretion. The often complicated ritual technique, based on an equally complicated speculative system of thought, was devised mainly to safeguard human life and survival, to enable people to face the many risks and dangers of existence, to thwart the designs of human and superhuman enemies that cannot be counteracted by ordinary means, to control the unseen powers, and to establish and maintain beneficial relations with the supramundane sacred order. Belief in the efficacy of the rites is the natural consequence of the belief that all things and events are connected with or participate in one another.

Another characteristic of Vedic religion is the belief that there is a close correspondence between sacred places - such as the sacrificial place of many Vedic rites, a place of pilgrimage, or a consecrated

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area-and provinces of the universe or even the universe itself. In such places, direct communication with other cosmic regions (heaven or underworld) is possible, because they are said to be at the point of contact between this world and the “pillar of the universe”- the “navel of the earth.” The sacred place is understood as identical to the universe in its various states of emanation from, reabsorption into, integration with, and disintegration from the sacred. This idea has as its corollary the possibility of ritually enacting the cosmic drama and, thus, of influencing those events in the cosmos that continuously affect human weal and woe.

The Vedic ritual system is organized into three main forms. The simplest, and hierarchically inferior, type of Vedic ritualism is the *grihya*, or domestic ritual, in which the householder offers modest oblations into the sacred household fire. The more ambitious, wealthy, and powerful married householder sets three or five fires and, with the help of professional officiants, engages in the more complex *shrauta* sacrifices. These require oblations of vegetable substances and, in some instances, of parts of ritually killed animals. At the highest level of Vedic ritualism are the soma sacrifices, which can continue for days or even years and whose intricacies and complexities are truly stunning.

In the major *shrauta* rites, requiring three fires and 16 priests or more, “the man who knows”- the person with insight into the correspondences (*bandhu*) between the mundane and cosmic phenomena and the eternal transcendent reality beyond them and who knows the meaning of the ritual words and acts-may, it is believed, set great cosmic processes in motion for the benefit of humanity. In these rites, Brahman officiants repeat the mythic drama for the benefit of their patron, the “sacrificer,” who temporarily becomes its centre and realizes through ritual symbolism his identity with the universe. Such officiants are convinced of the efficacy of their rites: “the sun would not rise, were he [the officiant] not to make that offering; this is why he performs it” (Shatapatha Brahmana). The oblations should not be used to propitiate the gods or to thank them for favours bestowed, since the efficacy of the rites, some of which are still occasionally performed, does not depend on the will of the gods.



## Chapter 6

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# Buddhism

**B**uddha, (Sanskrit: “awakened one”) clan name (Sanskrit) Gautama or (Pali)Gotama, personal name (Sanskrit) Siddhartha or (Pali) Siddhatta (born *c.* 6th-4th century BCE, Lumbini, near Kapilavastu, Shakya republic, Kosala kingdom [now in Nepal] - died, Kusinara, Malla republic, Magadha kingdom [now Kasia, India]), the founder of Buddhism, one of the major religions and philosophical systems of southern and eastern Asia. *Buddha* is one of the many epithets of a teacher who lived in northern India sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries before the Common Era.

His followers, known as Buddhists, propagated the religion that is known today as Buddhism. The title *buddha* was used by a number of religious groups in ancient India and had a range of meanings, but it came to be associated most strongly with the tradition of Buddhism and to mean an enlightened being, one who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and achieved freedom from suffering. According to the various traditions of Buddhism, there have been buddhas in the past and there will be buddhas in the future. Some

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forms of Buddhism hold that there is only one buddha for each historical age; others hold that all beings will eventually become buddhas because they possess the buddha nature (*tathagatagarbha*).

All forms of Buddhism celebrate various events in the life of the Buddha Gautama, including his birth, enlightenment, and passage into nirvana. In some countries, where the older and more conservative Theravada tradition predominates, the three events are observed on the same day, which is called Wesak. In regions adhering to the other major form of Buddhism, the Mahayanatradition, the festivals are held on different days and incorporate a variety of rituals and practices. The birth of the Buddha is celebrated in April or May, depending upon the lunar date, in these countries. In Japan, which does not use a lunar calendar, the Buddha's birth is celebrated on April 8. The celebration there has merged with a native Shintô ceremony into the flower festival known as Hanamatsuri.

### ***General Considerations***

The clan name of the historical figure referred to as the Buddha (whose life is known largely through legend) was Gautama (in Sanskrit) or Gotama (in Pali), and his given name was Siddhartha (Sanskrit: "he who achieves his aim") or Siddhatta (in Pali). He is frequently called Shakyamuni, "the sage of the Shakya clan." In Buddhist texts, he is most commonly addressed as Bhagavat (often translated as "Lord"), and he refers to himself as the Tathagata, which can mean both "one who has thus come" and "one who has thus gone." Information about his life derives largely from Buddhist texts, the earliest of which were not committed to writing until shortly before the beginning of the Common Era, several centuries after his death. The events of his life set forth in these texts cannot be regarded with confidence as historical, although his historical existence is accepted by scholars. He is said to have lived for 80 years, but there is considerable uncertainty concerning the date of his death. Traditional sources on the date of his death or, in the language of the tradition, "passage into nirvana," range from 2420 BCE to 290 BCE. Scholarship in the 20th century limited this range considerably, with opinion generally divided between those who place his death about 480 BCE and those who place it as much as a century later.

## **Historical Context**

The Buddha was born in Lumbini (Rummin-dei), near Kapilavastu (Kapilbastu) on the northern edge of the Ganges River basin, an area on the periphery of the civilization of North India, in what is today southern Nepal. Scholars speculate that during the late Vedic period the peoples of the region were organized into tribal republics, ruled by a council of elders or an elected leader; the grand palaces described in the traditional accounts of the life of the Buddha are not evident among the archaeological remains. It is unclear to what extent these groups at the periphery of the social order of the Ganges basin were incorporated into the caste system, but the Buddha's family is said to have belonged to the warrior (Kshatriya) caste. The central Ganges basin was organized into some 16 city-states, ruled by kings, often at war with each other.

## Chapter 7

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### Jainism

The rise of these cities of central India, with their courts and their commerce, brought social, political, and economic changes that are often identified as key factors in the rise of Buddhism and other religious movements of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. Buddhist texts identify a variety of itinerant teachers who attracted groups of disciples. Some of these taught forms of meditation, Yoga, and asceticism and set forth philosophical views, focusing often on the nature of the person and the question of whether human actions (karma) have future effects. Although the Buddha would become one of these teachers, Buddhists view him as quite different from the others. His place within the tradition, therefore, cannot be understood by focusing exclusively on the events of his life and times (even to the extent that they are available). Instead, he must be viewed within the context of Buddhist theories of time and history.

According to Buddhist doctrine, the universe is the product of karma, the law of the cause and effect of actions, according to which virtuous actions create pleasure in the future and nonvirtuous actions create pain. The beings of the universe are reborn without

beginning in six realms: as gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings. The actions of these beings create not only their individual experiences but the domains in which they dwell. The cycle of rebirth, called *samsara* (literally “wandering”), is regarded as a domain of suffering, and the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice is to escape from that suffering. The means of escape remains unknown until, over the course of millions of lifetimes, a person perfects himself, ultimately gaining the power to discover the path out of *samsara* and then compassionately revealing that path to the world.

A person who has set out on the long journey to discover the path to freedom from suffering, and then to teach it to others, is called a bodhisattva. A person who has discovered that path, followed it to its end, and taught it to the world, is called a buddha. Buddhas are not reborn after they die but enter a state beyond suffering called nirvana (literally “passing away”). Because buddhas appear so rarely over the course of time and because only they reveal the path to liberation (*moksha*) from suffering (*dukkha*), the appearance of a buddha in the world is considered a momentous event in the history of the universe.

The story of a particular buddha begins before his birth and extends beyond his death. It encompasses the millions of lives spent on the bodhisattva path before the achievement of buddhahood and the persistence of the buddha, in the form of both his teachings and his relics, after he has passed into nirvana. The historical Buddha is regarded as neither the first nor the last buddha to appear in the world. According to some traditions he is the 7th buddha; according to another he is the 25th; according to yet another he is the 4th. The next buddha, named Maitreya, will appear after Shakyamuni’s teachings and relics have disappeared from the world. The traditional accounts of the events in the life of the Buddha must be considered from this perspective.

### **Sources of the Life of the Buddha**

Accounts of the life of the Buddha appear in many forms. Perhaps the earliest are those found in the collections of sutras, discourses traditionally attributed to the Buddha. In the sutras, the Buddha recounts individual events in his life that occurred from the time that he

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renounced his life as a prince until he achieved enlightenment six years later. Several accounts of his enlightenment also appear in the sutras. One text, the *Mahaparinirvana-sutra* (“Discourse on the Final Nirvana”), describes the Buddha’s last days, his passage into nirvana, his funeral, and the distribution of his relics. Biographical accounts in the early sutras provide little detail about the Buddha’s birth and childhood, although some sutras contain a detailed account of the life of a prehistoric buddha, Vipashyin.

Another category of early Buddhist literature, the *vinaya* (concerned ostensibly with the rules of monastic discipline), contains accounts of numerous incidents from the Buddha’s life but rarely in the form of a continuous narrative; biographical sections that do occur often conclude with the conversion of one of his early disciples, Shariputra. While the sutras focus on the person of the Buddha (his previous lives, his practice of austerities, his enlightenment, and his passage into nirvana), the *vinaya* literature tends to emphasize his career as a teacher and the conversion of his early disciples. The sutras and *vinaya* texts, thus, reflect concerns with both the Buddha’s life and his teachings, concerns that often are interdependent; early biographical accounts appear in doctrinal discourses, and points of doctrine and places of pilgrimage are legitimated through their connection to the life of the Buddha.

Near the beginning of the Common Era, independent accounts of the life of the Buddha were composed. They do not recount his life from birth to death, often ending with his triumphant return to his native city of Kapilavastu (Pali: Kapilavatthu), which is said to have taken place either one year or six years after his enlightenment. The partial biographies add stories that were to become well-known, such as the child prince’s meditation under a rose-apple tree and his four momentous chariot rides outside the city.

These accounts typically make frequent reference to events from the previous lives of the Buddha. Indeed, collections of stories of the Buddha’s past lives, called *Jatakas*, form one of the early categories of Buddhist literature. Here, an event reminds the Buddha of an event in a past life. He relates that story in order to illustrate a moral maxim, and, returning to the present, he identifies various members of his audience as the present incarnations of characters in his past-life tale, with himself as the main character.

The *Jataka* stories (one Pali collection contains 547 of them) have remained among the most popular forms of Buddhist literature. They are the source of some 32 stone carvings at the 2nd-century BCE stupa at Bharhut in northeastern Madhya Pradesh state; 15 stupa carvings depict the last life of the Buddha. Indeed, stone carvings in India provide an important source for identifying which events in the lives of the Buddha were considered most important by the community. The *Jataka* stories are also well-known beyond India; in Southeast Asia, the story of Prince Vessantara (the Buddha's penultimate reincarnation)-who demonstrates his dedication to the virtue of charity by giving away his sacred elephant, his children, and finally his wife-is as well-known as that of his last lifetime.

Lives of the Buddha that trace events from his birth to his death appeared in the 2nd century CE. One of the most famous is the Sanskrit poem *Buddhacharita* ("Acts of the Buddha") by Ashvaghosa. Texts such as the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya* (probably dating from the 4th or 5th century CE) attempt to gather the many stories of the Buddha into a single chronological account. The purpose of these biographies in many cases is less to detail the unique deeds of Shakyamuni's life than to demonstrate the ways in which the events of his life conform to a pattern that all buddhas of the past have followed. According to some, all past buddhas had left the life of the householder after observing the four sights, all had practiced austerities, all had achieved enlightenment at Bodhi Gaya, all had preached in the deer park at Sarnath, and so on.

The life of the Buddha was written and rewritten in India and across the Buddhist world, elements added and subtracted as necessary. Sites that became important pilgrimage places but that had not been mentioned in previous accounts would be retrospectively sanctified by the addition of a story about the Buddha's presence there. Regions that Buddhism entered long after his death-such as Sri Lanka, Kashmir, and Burma (now Myanmar)-added narratives of his magical visitations to accounts of his life.

No single version of the life of the Buddha would be accepted by all Buddhist traditions. For more than a century, scholars have focused on the life of the Buddha, with the earliest investigations attempting to isolate and identify historical elements amid the many legends. Because

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of the centuries that had passed between the actual life and the composition of what might be termed a full biography, most scholars abandoned this line of inquiry as unfruitful. Instead they began to study the processes-social, political, institutional, and doctrinal-responsible for the regional differences among the narratives of the Buddha. The various uses made of the life of the Buddha are another topic of interest. In short, the efforts of scholars have shifted from an attempt to derive authentic information about the life of the Buddha to an effort to trace stages in and the motivations for the development of his biography.

It is important to reiterate that the motivation to create a single life of the Buddha, beginning with his previous births and ending with his passage into nirvana, occurred rather late in the history of Buddhism. Instead, the biographical tradition of the Buddha developed through the synthesis of a number of earlier and independent fragments. And biographies of the Buddha have continued to be composed over the centuries and around the world. During the modern period, for example, biographies have been written that seek to demythologize the Buddha and to emphasize his role in presaging modern ethical systems, social movements, or scientific discoveries. What follows is an account of the life of the Buddha that is well-known, yet synthetic, bringing together some of the more famous events from various accounts of his life, which often describe and interpret these events differently.

### ***Previous Lives***

Many biographies of the Buddha begin not with his birth in his last lifetime but in a lifetime millions of years before, when he first made the vow to become a buddha. According to a well-known version, many aeons ago there lived a Brahman named (in some accounts) Sumedha, who realized that life is characterized by suffering and then set out to find a state beyond death. He retired to the mountains, where he became a hermit, practiced meditation, and gained yogic powers. While flying through the air one day, he noticed a great crowd around a teacher, whom Sumedha learned was the buddha Dipamkara. When he heard the word *buddha* he was overcome with joy. Upon Dipamkara's approach, Sumedha loosened his yogin's matted locks and laid himself down to make a passage across the mud for the Buddha. Sumedha reflected that were he to practice the



teachings of Dipamkara he could free himself from future rebirth in that very lifetime. But he concluded that it would be better to delay his liberation in order to traverse the longer path to buddhahood; as a buddha he could lead others across the ocean of suffering to the farther shore. Dipamkara paused before Sumedha and predicted that many aeons hence this yogin with matted locks would become a buddha. He also prophesied Sumedha's name in his last lifetime (Gautama) and the names of his parents and chief disciples and described the tree under which the future Buddha would sit on the night of his enlightenment.

Over the subsequent aeons, the bodhisattva would renew his vow in the presence of each of the buddhas who came after Dipamkara, before becoming the buddha Shakyamuni himself. Over the course of his lifetimes as a bodhisattva, he accumulated merit (*punya*) through the practice of 6 (or 10) virtues. After his death as Prince Vessantara, he was born in the Tusita Heaven, whence he surveyed the world to locate the proper site of his final birth.

### ***Birth and Early Life***

He determined that he should be born the son of the king Shuddhodana of the Shakya clan, whose capital was Kapilavastu. Shortly thereafter, his mother, the queen Maha Maya, dreamed that a white elephant had entered her womb. Ten lunar months later, as she strolled in the garden of Lumbini, the child emerged from under her right arm. He was able to walk and talk immediately. A lotus flower blossomed under his foot at each step, and he announced that this would be his last lifetime. The king summoned the court astrologers to predict the boy's future. Seven agreed that he would become either a universal monarch (*chakravartin*) or a buddha; one astrologer said that there was no doubt, the child would become a buddha. His mother died seven days after his birth, and so he was reared by his mother's sister, Mahaprajapati. As a young child, the prince was once left unattended during a festival. Later in the day he was discovered seated in meditation under a tree, whose shadow had remained motionless throughout the day to protect him from the sun.

The prince enjoyed an opulent life; his father shielded him from exposure to the ills of the world, including old age, sickness, and death, and provided him with palaces for summer, winter, and the rainy season,

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as well as all manner of enjoyments (including in some accounts 40,000 female attendants). At age 16 he married the beautiful princess Yashodhara. When the prince was 29, however, his life underwent a profound change. He asked to be taken on a ride through the city in his chariot. The king gave his permission but first had all the sick and old people removed from the route. One old man escaped notice. Not knowing what stood before him, the prince was told that this was an old man. He was informed, also, that this was not the only old man in the world; everyone—the prince, his father, his wife, and his kinsmen—would all one day grow old. The first trip was followed by three more excursions beyond the palace walls. On these trips he saw first a sick person, then a corpse being carried to the cremation ground, and finally a mendicant seated in meditation beneath a tree. Having been exposed to the various ills of human life, and the existence of those who seek a state beyond them, he asked the king for permission to leave the city and retire to the forest. The father offered his son anything if he would stay. The prince asked that his father ensure that he would never die, become ill, grow old, or lose his fortune. His father replied that he could not. The prince retired to his chambers, where he was entertained by beautiful women. Unmoved by the women, the prince resolved to go forth that night in search of a state beyond birth and death.

When he had been informed seven days earlier that his wife had given birth to a son, he said, “A fetter has arisen.” The child was named Rahula, meaning “fetter.” Before the prince left the palace, he went into his wife’s chamber to look upon his sleeping wife and infant son. In another version of the story, Rahula had not yet been born on the night of the departure from the palace. Instead, the prince’s final act was to conceive his son, whose gestation period extended over the six years of his father’s search for enlightenment. According to these sources, Rahula was born on the night that his father achieved buddhahood.

The prince left Kapilavastu and the royal life behind and entered the forest, where he cut off his hair and exchanged his royal robes for the simple dress of a hunter. From that point on he ate whatever was placed in his begging bowl. Early in his wanderings he encountered Bimbisara, the king of Magadha and eventual patron of the Buddha, who, upon learning that the ascetic was a prince, asked

him to share his kingdom. The prince declined but agreed to return when he had achieved enlightenment. Over the next six years, the prince studied meditation and learned to achieve deep states of blissful concentration. But he quickly matched the attainments of his teachers and concluded that despite their achievements, they would be reborn after their death. He next joined a group of five ascetics who had devoted themselves to the practice of extreme forms of self-mortification. The prince also became adept at their practices, eventually reducing his daily meal to one pea. Buddhist art often represents him seated in the meditative posture in an emaciated form, with sunken eyes and protruding ribs. He concluded that mortification of the flesh is not the path to liberation from suffering and rebirth and accepted a dish of rice and cream from a young woman.

### *The Enlightenment*

His companions remained convinced of the efficacy of asceticism and abandoned the prince. Now without companions or a teacher, the prince vowed that he would sit under a tree and not rise until he had found the state beyond birth and death. On the full moon of May, six years after he had left his palace, he meditated until dawn. Mara, the god of desire, who knew that the prince was seeking to put an end to desire and thereby free himself from Mara's control, attacked him with wind, rain, rocks, weapons, hot coals, burning ashes, sand, mud, and darkness. The prince remained unmoved and meditated on love, thus transforming the hail of fury into a shower of blossoms. Mara then sent his three beautiful daughters, Lust, Thirst, and Discontent, to tempt the prince, but he remained impassive. In desperation, Mara challenged the prince's right to occupy the spot of earth upon which he sat, claiming that it belonged to him instead. Then, in a scene that would become the most famous depiction of the Buddha in Asian art, the prince, seated in the meditative posture, stretched out his right hand and touched the earth. By touching the earth, he was asking the goddess of the earth to confirm that a great gift that he had made as Prince Vessantara in his previous life had earned him the right to sit beneath the tree. She assented with a tremor, and Mara departed.

The prince sat in meditation through the night. During the first watch of the night, he had a vision of all of his past lives, recollecting

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his place of birth, name, caste, and even the food he had eaten. During the second watch of the night, he saw how beings rise and fall through the cycle of rebirth as a consequence of their past deeds. In the third watch of the night, the hours before dawn, he was liberated. Accounts differ as to precisely what it was that he understood. According to some versions it was the four truths: of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering. According to others it was the sequence of dependent origination: how ignorance leads to action and eventually to birth, aging, and death, and how when ignorance is destroyed, so also are birth, aging, and death. Regardless of their differences, all accounts agree that on this night he became a buddha, an awakened one who had roused himself from the slumber of ignorance and extended his knowledge throughout the universe.

The experience of that night was sufficiently profound that the prince, now the Buddha, remained in the vicinity of the tree up to seven weeks, savouring his enlightenment. One of those weeks was rainy, and the serpent king came and spread his hood above the Buddha to protect him from the storm, a scene commonly depicted in Buddhist art. At the end of seven weeks, two merchants approached him and offered him honey and cakes. Knowing that it was improper for a buddha to receive food in his hands, the gods of the four directions each offered him a bowl. The Buddha magically collapsed the four bowls into one and received the gift of food. In return, the Buddha plucked some hairs from his head and gave them to the merchants.

### *The First Disciples*

He was unsure as to what to do next, since he knew that what he had understood was so profound that it would be difficult for others to fathom. The god Brahma descended from his heaven and asked him to teach, pointing out that humans are at different levels of development, and some of them would benefit from his teaching. Consequently, the Buddha concluded that the most suitable students would be his first teachers of meditation, but he was informed by a deity that they had died. He thought next of his five former comrades in the practice of asceticism. The Buddha determined through his clairvoyance that they were residing in a deer park in Sarnath, outside Varanasi (Banaras). He set out on foot, meeting along the way a wandering ascetic with

whom he exchanged greetings. When he explained to the man that he was enlightened and so was unsurpassed even by the gods, the man responded with indifference.

Although the five ascetics had agreed to ignore the Buddha because he had given up self-mortification, they were compelled by his charisma to rise and greet him. They asked the Buddha what he had understood since they left him. He responded by teaching them, or, in the language of the tradition, he “set the wheel of the dharma in motion.” (*Dharma* has a wide range of meanings, but here refers to the doctrine or teaching of the buddhas.) In his first sermon, the Buddha spoke of the middle way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification and described both as fruitless. He next turned to what have come to be known as the “Four Noble Truths,” perhaps more accurately rendered as “four truths for the [spiritually] noble.” As elaborated more fully in other discourses, the first is the truth of suffering, which holds that existence in all the realms of rebirth is characterized by suffering. The sufferings particular to humans are birth, aging, sickness, death, losing friends, encountering enemies, not finding what one wants, finding what one does not want. The second truth identifies the cause of this suffering as nonvirtue, negative deeds of body, speech, and mind that produce the karma that fructifies in the future as physical and mental pain. These deeds are motivated by negative mental states, called *klesha* (afflictions), which include desire, hatred, and ignorance, the false belief that there is a permanent and autonomous self amidst the impermanent constituents of mind and body. The third truth is the truth of cessation, the postulation of a state beyond suffering, called nirvana. If the ignorance that motivates desire and hatred can be eliminated, negative deeds will not be performed and future suffering will not be produced. Although such reasoning would allow for the prevention of future negative deeds, it does not seem to account for the vast store of negative karma accumulated in previous lifetimes that is yet to bear fruit. However, the insight into the absence of self, when cultivated at a high level of concentration, is said to be so powerful that it also destroys all seeds for future lifetimes. Cessation entails the realization of both the destruction of the causes of suffering and the impossibility of future suffering. The presence of such a state, however, remains hypothetical without a method for attaining it, and the fourth truth, the path, is that method.

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The path was delineated in a number of ways, often as the three trainings in ethics, meditation, and wisdom. In his first sermon, the Buddha described the Eightfold Path of correct view, correct attitude, correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood, correct effort, correct mindfulness, and correct meditation. A few days after the first sermon, the Buddha set forth the doctrine of no-self (*anatman*), at which point the five ascetics became arhats, those who have achieved liberation from rebirth and will enter nirvana upon death. They became the first members of the sangha, the community of monks.

### *The Post-Enlightenment Period*

The Buddha soon attracted more disciples, sometimes converting other teachers along with their followers. As a result, his fame began to spread. When the Buddha's father heard that his son had not died following his great renunciation but had become a buddha, the king sent nine successive delegations to his son to invite him to return home to Kapilavastu. But instead of conveying the invitation, they joined the disciples of the Buddha and became arhats. The Buddha was persuaded by the 10th courier (who also became an arhat) to return to the city, where he was greeted with disrespect by clan elders. The Buddha, therefore, rose into the air, and fire and water issued simultaneously from his body. This act caused his relatives to respond with reverence. Because they did not know that they should invite him for the noon meal, the Buddha went begging from door to door instead of going to his father's palace. This caused his father great chagrin, but the Buddha explained that this was the practice of the buddhas of the past.

His wife Yashodhara had remained faithful to him in his absence. She would not go out to greet him when he returned to the palace, however, saying that the Buddha should come to her in recognition of her virtue. The Buddha did so, and, in a scene often recounted, she bowed before him and placed her head on his feet. She eventually entered the order of nuns and became an arhat. She sent their seven-year-old son Rahula to his father to ask for his patrimony, and the Buddha responded by having him ordained as a monk. This dismayed the Buddha's father, and he explained to the Buddha the great pain that he had felt when the young prince had renounced the world. He asked, therefore, that in the future a son be ordained only with the

permission of his parents. The Buddha made this one of the rules of the monastic order.

The Buddha spent the 45 years after his enlightenment traveling with a group of disciples across northeastern India, teaching the dharma to those who would listen, occasionally debating with (and, according to the Buddhist sources, always defeating) masters from other sects, and gaining followers from all social classes. To some he taught the practice of refuge; to some he taught the five precepts (not to kill humans, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, or use intoxicants); and to some he taught the practice of meditation. The majority of the Buddha's followers did not renounce the world, however, and remained in lay life. Those who decided to go forth from the household and become his disciples joined the sangha, the community of monks. At the request of his widowed stepmother, Mahaprajapati, and women whose husbands had become monks, the Buddha also established an order of nuns. The monks were sent out to teach the dharma for the benefit of gods and humans. The Buddha did the same: each day and night he surveyed the world with his omniscient eye to locate those that he might benefit, often traveling to them by means of his supernatural powers.

It is said that in the early years the Buddha and his monks wandered during all seasons, but eventually they adopted the practice of remaining in one place during the rainy season (in northern India, mid-July to mid-October). Patrons built shelters for their use, and the end of the rainy season came to mark a special occasion for making offerings of food and provisions (especially cloth for robes) to monks. These shelters evolved into monasteries that were inhabited throughout the year. The monastery of Jetavana in the city of Shravasti (Savatthi), where the Buddha spent much of his time and delivered many of the discourses, was donated to the Buddha by the wealthy banker Anathapindada (Pali: Anathapindika).

The Buddha's authority, even among his followers, did not go unchallenged. A dispute arose over the degree of asceticism required of monks. The Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, led a faction that favoured more rigorous discipline than that counseled by the Buddha, requiring, for example, that monks live in the open and never eat meat. When the Buddha refused to name Devadatta as his successor, Devadatta

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attempted to kill him three times. He first hired assassins to eliminate the Buddha. Devadatta later rolled a boulder down upon him, but the rock only grazed the Buddha's toe. He also sent a wild elephant to trample him, but the elephant stopped in his charge and bowed at the Buddha's feet. Another schism arose between monks of a monastery over a minor infraction of lavatory etiquette. Unable to settle the dispute, the Buddha retired to the forest to live with an elephant for an entire rainy season.

### *The Death of the Buddha*

Shortly before his death, the Buddha remarked to his attendant Ananda on three separate occasions that a buddha can, if requested, extend his life span for an aeon. Mara then appeared and reminded the Buddha of his promise to him, made shortly after his enlightenment, to pass into nirvana when his teaching was complete. The Buddha agreed to pass away three months hence, at which point the earth quaked. When Ananda asked the reason for the tremor, the Buddha told him that there are eight occasions for an earthquake, one of which was when a buddha relinquishes the will to live. Ananda begged him not to do so, but the Buddha explained that the time for such requests had passed; had he asked earlier, the Buddha would have consented.

At age 80 the Buddha, weak from old age and illness, accepted a meal (it is difficult to identify from the texts what the meal consisted of, but many scholars believe it was pork) from a smith named Chunda, instructing the smith to serve him alone and bury the rest of the meal without offering it to the other monks. The Buddha became severely ill shortly thereafter, and at a place called Kusinara (also spelled Kushinagar; modern Kasia) lay down on his right side between two trees, which immediately blossomed out of season. He instructed the monk who was fanning him to step to one side, explaining that he was blocking the view of the deities who had assembled to witness his passing. After he provided instructions for his funeral, he said that lay people should make pilgrimages to the place of his birth, the place of his enlightenment, the place of his first teaching, and the place of his passage into nirvana. Those who venerate shrines erected at these places will be reborn as gods. The Buddha then explained to the monks that after he was gone the dharma and the *vinaya* (code of monastic conduct) should be their teacher. He also gave permission to the monks



to abolish the minor precepts (because Ananda failed to ask which ones, it was later decided not to do so). Finally, the Buddha asked the 500 disciples who had assembled whether they had any last question or doubt. When they remained silent, he asked two more times and then declared that none of them had any doubt or confusion and were destined to achieve nirvana. According to one account, he then opened his robe and instructed the monks to behold the body of a buddha, which appears in the world so rarely. Finally, he declared that all conditioned things are transient and exhorted the monks to strive with diligence. These were his last words. The Buddha then entered into meditative absorption, passing from the lowest level to the highest, then from the highest to the lowest, before entering the fourth level of concentration, whence he passed into nirvana.

### ***The Buddha's Relics***

The Buddha had instructed his followers to cremate his body as the body of a universal monarch would be cremated and then to distribute the relics among various groups of his lay followers, who were to enshrine them in hemispherical reliquaries called stupas. His body lay in a coffin for seven days before being placed on a funeral pyre and was set ablaze by the Buddha's chief disciple, Mahakashyapa, who had been absent at the time of the Buddha's death. After the Buddha's cremation, his relics were entrusted to a group of lay disciples, but armed men arrived from seven other regions and demanded the relics. In order to avert bloodshed, a monk divided the relics into eight portions. According to tradition, 10 sets of relics were enshrined, 8 from portions of the Buddha's remains, 1 from the pyre's ashes, and 1 from the bucket used to divide the remains. The relics were subsequently collected and enshrined in a single stupa. More than a century later, King Ashoka is said to have redistributed the relics in 84,000 stupas.

The stupa would become a reference point denoting the Buddha's presence in the landscape of Asia. Early texts and the archeological record link stupa worship with the Buddha's life and the key sites in his career. Eight shrines are typically recommended for pilgrimage and veneration. They are located at the place of his birth, his enlightenment, his first turning of the wheel of dharma, and his death, as well as sites in four cities where he performed miracles. A stupa in Samkashya,

for example, marked the site where the Buddha descended to the world after teaching the dharma to his mother (who died seven days after his birth) abiding in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods.

The importance given to the stupa suggests the persistence of the Buddha in the world despite his apparent passage into nirvana. Two types of nirvana are commonly described. The first is called the “nirvana with remainder,” which the Buddha achieved under the Bo tree, when he destroyed all the seeds for future rebirth. This first nirvana is therefore also called the final nirvana (or passing away) of the afflictions. But the karma that had created his present life was still functioning and would do so until his death. Thus, his mind and body during the rest of his life were what was left over, the remainder, after he realized nirvana. The second type of nirvana occurred at his death and is called the “final nirvana of the aggregates (*skandha*) of mind and body” or the “nirvana without remainder” because nothing remained to be reborn after his death. Something, in fact, did remain: the relics found in the ashes of the funeral pyre. A third nirvana, therefore, is sometimes mentioned. According to Buddhist belief, there will come a time in the far distant future when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha will disappear from the world and the relics will no longer be honoured. It is then that the relics that have been enshrined in stupas around the world will break out of their reliquaries and magically return to Bodh Gaya, where they will assemble into the resplendent body of the Buddha, seated in the lotus posture under the Bo tree, emitting rays of light that illuminate 10,000 worlds. They will be worshiped by the gods one last time and then will burst into flame and disappear into the sky. This third nirvana is called the “final nirvana of the relics.” Until that time, the relics of the Buddha are to be regarded as his living presence, infused with all of his marvelous qualities. Epigraphic and literary evidence from India suggests that the Buddha, in the form of his stupas, not only was a bestower of blessings, but was regarded as a legal person and an owner of property. The relics of the Buddha were, essentially, the Buddha.

### ***Images of the Buddha***

The Buddha also remains in the world in the form of the texts that contain his words and statues that depict his form. There is no historical evidence of images of the Buddha being made during his lifetime.

Indeed, scholars of Indian art have long been intrigued by the absence of an image of the Buddha on a number of early stone carvings at Buddhist sites. The carvings depict scenes in which obeisance is being paid, for example, to the footprints of the Buddha. One scene, considered to depict the Buddha's departure from the palace, shows a riderless horse. Such works have led to the theory that early Buddhism prohibited depiction of the Buddha in bodily form but allowed representation by certain symbols. The theory is based in part on the lack of any instructions for depicting the Buddha in early texts. This view has been challenged by those who suggest instead that the carvings are not depictions of events from the life of the Buddha but rather represent pilgrimages to and worship of important sites from the life of the Buddha, such as the Bo tree.

Consecrated images of the Buddha are central to Buddhist practice, and there are many tales of their miraculous powers. A number of famous images, such as the statue of Mahamuni in Mandalay, Myanmar, derive their sanctity from the belief that the Buddha posed for them. The consecration of an image of the Buddha often requires elaborate rituals in which the Buddha is asked to enter the image or the story of the Buddha's life is told in its presence. Epigraphic evidence from the 4th or 5th century indicates that Indian monasteries usually had a room called the "perfumed chamber" that housed an image of the Buddha and was regarded as the Buddha's residence, with its own contingent of monks.

### ***The Mahayana Tradition and the Reconception of the Buddha***

Some four centuries after the Buddha's death, movements arose in India, many of them centred on newly written texts (such as the *Lotus Sutra*) or new genres of texts (such as the *Prajnaparamita* or Perfection of Wisdom sutras) that purported to be the word of the Buddha. These movements would come to be designated by their adherents as the Mahayana, the "Great Vehicle" to enlightenment, in contradistinction to the earlier Buddhist schools that did not accept the new sutras as authoritative (that is, as the word of the Buddha).

The Mahayana sutras offer different conceptions of the Buddha. It is not that the Mahayana schools saw the Buddha as a magical being whereas non-Mahayana schools did not. Accounts of the Buddha's wondrous powers abound throughout the literature. For

example, the Buddha is said to have hesitated before deciding to teach after his enlightenment and only decides to do so after being implored by Brahma. In a Mahayana sutra, however, the Buddha has no indecision at all, but rather pretends to be swayed by Brahma's request in order that all those who worship Brahma will take refuge in the Buddha. Elsewhere, it was explained that when the Buddha would complain of a headache or a backache, he did so only to convert others to the dharma; because his body was not made of flesh and blood, it was in fact impossible for him to experience pain.

One of the most important Mahayana sutras for a new conception of the Buddha is the *Lotus Sutra (Saddharmapundarika-sutra)*, in which the Buddha denies that he left the royal palace in search of freedom from suffering and that he found that freedom six years later while meditating under a tree. He explains instead that he achieved enlightenment innumerable billions of aeons ago and has been preaching the dharma in this world and simultaneously in myriad other worlds ever since. Because his life span is inconceivable to those of little intelligence, he has resorted to the use of skillful methods (*upaya*), pretending to renounce his princely life, practice austerities, and attain unsurpassed enlightenment. In fact, he was enlightened all the while yet feigned these deeds to inspire the world. Moreover, because he recognizes that his continued presence in the world might cause those of little virtue to become complacent about putting his teachings into practice, he declares that he is soon to pass into nirvana. But this also is not true, because his life span will not be exhausted for many more billions of aeons. He tells the story of a physician who returns home to find his children ill from having taken poison during his absence. He prescribes a cure, but only some take it. He therefore leaves home again and spreads the rumour that he has died. Those children who had not taken the antidote then do so out of deference to their departed father and are cured. The father then returns. In the same way, the Buddha pretends to enter nirvana to create a sense of urgency in his disciples even though his life span is limitless.

### ***The Doctrine of the Three Bodies***

Such a view of the identity of the Buddha is codified in the doctrine of the three bodies (*trikaya*) of the Buddha. Early scholastics speak of the Buddha having a physical body and a second body, called a

“mind-made body” or an “emanation body,” in which he performs miraculous feats such as visiting his departed mother in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods and teaching her the dharma. The question also was raised as to whom precisely the Buddhist should pay homage when honouring the Buddha. A term, *dharmakaya*, was coined to describe a more metaphorical body, a body or collection of all the Buddha’s good qualities or dharmas, such as his wisdom, his compassion, his fortitude, his patience. This corpus of qualities was identified as the body of the Buddha to which one should turn for refuge.

All of this is recast in the Mahayana sutras. The emanation body (*nirmanakaya*) is no longer the body that the Buddha employs to perform supernatural feats; it is rather the only body to appear in this world and the only body visible to ordinary humans. It is the Buddha’s emanation body that was born as a prince, achieved enlightenment, and taught the dharma to the world; that is, the visible Buddha is a magical display. The true Buddha, the source of the emanations, was the *dharmakaya*, a term that still refers to the Buddha’s transcendent qualities but, playing on the multivalence of the term *dharma*, came to mean something more cosmic, an eternal principle of enlightenment and ultimate truth, described in later Mahayana treatises as the Buddha’s omniscient mind and its profound nature of emptiness.

### ***The Presence of Multiple Universes***

Along with additional bodies of the Buddha, the Mahayana sutras also revealed the presence of multiple universes, each with its own buddha. These universes-called buddha fields, or pure lands-are described as abodes of extravagant splendour, where the trees bear a fruit of jewels, the birds sing verses of the dharma, and the inhabitants devote themselves to its practice. The buddha fields became preferred places for future rebirth. The buddhas who presided there became objects of devotion, especially the buddha of infinite light, Amitabha, and his Western Paradise called Sukhavati. In the buddha fields, the buddhas often appear in yet a third form, the enjoyment body (*sambhogakaya*), which was the form of a youthful prince adorned with the 32 major marks and 80 minor marks of a superman. The former include patterns of a wheel on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, elongated earlobes, a crown protrusion (*usnisa*) on

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the top of his head, a circle of hair (*urna*) between his brows, flat feet, and webbed fingers. Scholars have speculated that this last attribute derives not from a textual source but the inadequacies of early sculptors.

The marvelous physical and mental qualities of the Buddha were codified in numerous litanies of praise and catalogued in poetry, often taking the form of a series of epithets. These epithets were commented upon in texts, inscribed on stupas, recited aloud in rituals, and contemplated in meditation. One of the more famous is “thus gone, worthy, fully and completely awakened, accomplished in knowledge and virtuous conduct, well gone, knower of worlds, unsurpassed guide for those who need restraint, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, fortunate.”

## Chapter 8

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### Jainism

**J**ainism, a religion of India that teaches a path to spiritual purity and enlightenment through a disciplined mode of life founded upon the tradition of *ahimsa*, nonviolence to all living creatures. Beginning in the 7th–5th century BCE, Jainism evolved into a cultural system that has made significant contributions to Indian philosophy and logic, art and architecture, mathematics, astronomy and astrology, and literature. Along with Hinduism and Buddhism, it is one of the three most ancient Indian religious traditions still in existence.

While often employing concepts shared with Hinduism and Buddhism, the result of a common cultural and linguistic background, the Jain tradition must be regarded as an independent phenomenon. It is an integral part of South Asian religious belief and practice, but it is not a Hindu sect and not a Buddhist heresy, as earlier scholars believed.

The name Jainism derives from the Sanskrit verb *ji*, “to conquer.” It refers to the ascetic battle that, it is believed, Jain renunciants (monks and nuns) must fight against the passions and bodily senses to gain

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omniscience and purity of soul or enlightenment. The most illustrious of those few individuals who have achieved enlightenment are called Jina (literally, “Conqueror”), and the tradition’s monastic and lay adherents are called Jain (“Follower of the Conquerors”), or Jaina. This term came to replace a more ancient designation, Nirgrantha (“Bondless”), originally applied to renunciants only.

Jainism has been confined largely to India, although the recent migration of Indians to other, predominantly English-speaking countries has spread its practice to many Commonwealth nations and to the United States. Precise statistics are not available, but it is estimated that there are roughly four million Jains in India and 100,000 elsewhere.

### **Early History (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE - c. 5<sup>th</sup> century CE)**

Scholars of religion generally hold that Jainism originated in the 7th-5th century BCE in the Ganges basin of eastern India, the scene of intense religious speculation and activity at that time. Buddhism also appeared in this region, as did other belief systems that renounced the world and opposed the ritualistic Brahmanic schools whose prestige derived from their claim of purity and their ability to perform the traditional rituals and sacrifices and to interpret their meaning. These new religious perspectives promoted asceticism, the abandonment of ritual, domestic and social action, and the attainment of gnosis (illumination) in an attempt to win, through one’s own efforts, freedom from repeated rebirth.

Jains believe that their tradition does not have a historical founder. The first Jain figure for whom there is reasonable historical evidence is Parshvanatha (or Parshva), a renunciant teacher who may have lived in the 7th century BCE and founded a community based upon the abandonment of worldly concerns. Jain tradition regards him as the 23rd Tirthankara (literally, “Ford Maker”; i.e., one who leads the way across the stream of rebirths to salvation) of the current age (*kalpa*). The 24th and last Tirthankara of this age was Vardhamana, who is known by the epithet Mahavira (“Great Hero”) and is believed to have been the last teacher of “right” knowledge, faith, and practice. Although traditionally dated to 599-527 BCE, Mahavira must be regarded as a close contemporary of the Buddha (traditionally believed to have lived in 563-483 BCE but who probably flourished about a century later). The legendary accounts of Mahavira’s life preserved by the Jain



scriptures provides the basis for his biography and enable some conclusions to be formulated about the nature of the early community he founded.

Mahavira, like the Buddha, was the son of a chieftain of the Kshatriya (warrior) class. At age 30 he renounced his princely status to take up the ascetic life. Although he was accompanied for a time by the eventual founder of the Ajivika sect, Goshala Maskariputra, Mahavira spent the next 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years following a path of solitary and intense asceticism. He then converted 11 disciples (called *ganadharas*), all of whom were originally Brahmans. Two of these disciples, Indrabhuti Gautama and Sudharman, both of whom survived Mahavira, are regarded as the founders of the historical Jain monastic community, and a third, Jambu, is believed to be the last person of the current age to gain enlightenment. Mahavira is believed to have died at Pavapuri, near modern Patna.

The community appears to have grown quickly. According to Jain tradition, it numbered 14,000 monks and 36,000 nuns at the time of Mahavira's death. From the beginning the community was subject to schisms over technicalities of doctrine, however, these were easily resolved. The only schism to have a lasting effect concerned a dispute over proper monastic practice, with the Shvetambara ("White-Robed") sect arguing that monks and nuns should wear white robes and the Digambara ("Sky-Clad"; i.e., naked) sect claiming that a true monk (but not a nun) should be naked. This controversy gave rise to a further dispute as to whether or not a soul can attain liberation (*moksha*) from a female body (a possibility the Digambaras deny).

This sectarian division, still existent today, probably took time to assume formal shape. Its exact origins remain unclear, in part because the stories describing the origins of the schism were designed to justify each sect's authority and denigrate the other. These accounts were written centuries after the fact and are valueless as genuine historical testimony. The consolidation of the Shvetambara-Digambara division was probably the result of a series of councils held to codify and preserve the Jain scriptures, which had existed as oral tradition long after Mahavira's death. Of the councils recorded in Jain history, the last one, held at Valabhi in Saurashtra (in modern Gujarat) in either 453 or 456 CE, without Digambara participation, codified the Shvetambara canon that is still in use. The Digambara monastic

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community denounced the codification, and the schism between the two communities became irrevocable.

During this period, Jainism spread westward to Ujjain, where it apparently enjoyed royal patronage. Later, in the 1st century BCE, according to tradition, a monk named Kalakacharya apparently overthrew King Gardabhilla of Ujjain and orchestrated his replacement with the Shahi kings (who were probably of Scythian or Persian origin). During the reign of the Gupta dynasty (320-c. 600 CE), a time of Hindu self-assertion, the bulk of the Jain community migrated to central and western India, becoming stronger there than it had been in its original home in the Ganges basin.

### **Early Medieval Developments (500 - 100)**

There is archaeological evidence of the presence of Jain monks in southern India from before the Common Era, and the Digambara sect has had a significant presence in what is now the state of Karnataka for almost 2,000 years. The early medieval period was the time of Digambara Jainism's greatest flowering. Enjoying success in modern-day Karnataka and in neighbouring Tamil Nadu state, the Digambaras gained the patronage of prominent monarchs of three major dynasties in the early medieval period—the Gangas in Karnataka (3rd-11th century); the Rashtrakutas, whose kingdom was just north of the Ganga realm (8th-12th century); and the Hoysalas in Karnataka (11th-14th century). Digambara monks are reputed to have engineered the succession of the Ganga and the Hoysala dynasties, thus stabilizing uncertain political situations and guaranteeing Jain political protection and support.

The Digambaras' involvement in politics allowed Jainism to prosper in Karnataka and the Deccan. Many political and aristocratic figures had Jain monks as spiritual teachers and advisers. Epigraphical evidence reveals an elaborate patronage system through which kings, queens, state ministers, and military generals endowed the Jain community with tax revenues and with direct grants for the construction and upkeep of temples. Most famously, in the 10th century the Ganga general Chamundaraya oversaw the creation of a colossal statue of Bahubali (locally called Gommateshvara; son of Rishabhanatha, the first Tirthankara) at Shravanabelagola.

During this period Digambara writers produced numerous philosophical treatises, commentaries, and poems, which were written in Prakrit, Kannada, and Sanskrit. A number of kings provided patronage for this literary activity, and some wrote various works of literature themselves. The monk Jinasena, for example, wrote Sanskrit philosophical treatises and poetry with the support of the Rashtrakuta king Amoghavarsha I. An author in Kannada and Sanskrit, Amoghavarsha apparently renounced his throne and became a disciple of Jinasena in the early 9th century.

The Shvetambaras in the north were less prominently embroiled in dynastic politics than their southern counterparts, though there is evidence of such activity in Gujarat and Rajasthan. They supported the accession of kings such as Vanaraja in the 8th century and Kumarapala, whose accession was masterminded by Hemachandra, the great Shvetambara scholar and minister of state, in the 12th century. The Shvetambaras were no less productive than their Digambara contemporaries in the amount and variety of literature they produced during this period.

While Mahavira had rejected the claims of the caste system that privileged Brahman authority on the basis of innate purity, a formalized caste system nonetheless gradually appeared among the Digambara laity in the south. This hierarchy was depicted and sanctioned by Jinasena in his *Adipurana*, a legendary biography of the Tirthankara Rishabhanatha and his two sons Bahubali and Bharata. The hierarchy differed from the Hindu system in that the Kshatriyas were assigned a place of prominence over the Brahmans and in its connection of purity, at least theoretically, with a moral rather than a ritual source. In addition, Jinasena did not see the caste system as an inherent part of the universe, as did Hindu theologians and lawgivers.

### **Late Medieval-Early Modern Developments (1100-1800)**

In the period of their greatest influence (6th-late 12th century), Jain monks of both sects, perhaps influenced by intense lay patronage, turned from living as wandering ascetics to permanent residence in temples or monasteries. A legacy of this transformation is the contemporary Digambara practice of the *bhattaraka*, through which a cleric takes monastic initiation but, rather than assuming a life of naked ascetic wandering, becomes an orange-robed administrator and

guardian of holy places and temples. Some medieval Jain writers saw this compromise with ancient scriptural requirements as both a cause of and evidence for the religion's inexorable decline. However, Jainism's marginalization in India can best be ascribed to sociopolitical factors.

The Shvetambara Jain community's eclipse was greatly accelerated by the successful invasion of western and northern India by Muslim forces in the 12th century. Although it faced persecution and the destruction of important shrines, the Jain community perhaps suffered most from the sudden shift of political control from indigenous to foreign hands and the loss of direct access to sources of power. While some Jain laymen and monks served Muslim rulers as political advisers or teachers—including Hiravijaya, who taught the Moghul emperor Akbar—the Shvetambara community was gradually compelled to redefine itself and today thrives as a mercantile group.

At roughly the same time, various Shvetambara monastic subsects (*gaccha*) appeared, forming on the basis of both regional and teacher associations. Some of the most important of these subsects still exist, such as the Kharatara Gaccha (founded 11th century) and the Tapa Gaccha (founded 13th century). The *gacchas* included lay followers, often differed markedly from one another over issues of lineage, ritual, and the sacred calendar, and claimed to represent the true Jainism. According to tradition, their leading teachers sought to reform lax monastic practice and participated in the conversion of Hindu Rajput clans in western India that subsequently became Shvetambara Jain caste groups.

Although most *gacchas* accepted the practice of image worship, the Lumpaka, or Lonka Gaccha, did not. Founded by the mid-15th-century layman Lonka Shah, the Lonka Gaccha denied the scriptural warranty of image worship and in the 17th century emerged as the non-image-worshipping Sthanakavasi sect. At the end of the 18th century, the Sthanakavasi underwent a schism when Acharya Bhikshu founded the Terapanthi ("Following the 13 Tenets") sect, which claims to have avoided heresy and laxity throughout its history by investing authority in a single teacher.

In the south, Digambara Jainism, for all its prominence in aristocratic circles, was attacked by Hindu devotional movements that arose in

Tamil Nadu as early as the 6th century. One of the most vigorous of these Hindu movements was that of the Lingayats, or Virashaivas, which appeared in full force in the 12th century in northern Karnataka, a stronghold of Digambara Jainism. The Lingayats gained royal support, and many Jains themselves converted to the Lingayat religion in the ensuing centuries. With the advent of the Vijayanagar empire in the 14th century, the Digambara Jains lost much of their royal support and survived only in peripheral areas of the southwest and in pockets of the north.

As with the Shvetambaras, the Digambara laity were among the most strident critics of their community's deteriorating situation. The most significant Digambara reform movement occurred in the early 17th century, led by the layman and poet Banarsidas. This movement stressed the mystical elements of the Jain path and attacked what it saw as the emptiness of Digambara temple ritual and the profligacy of the community's clerical leaders.

### **Recent Jain History**

By the middle of the 19th century, image-worshipping Shvetambara monks had virtually disappeared, and control of temples and ritual passed into the hands of quasi-monastic clerics known as *yati*. Monastic life, however, experienced a revival under the auspices of charismatic monks such as Atmaramji (1837–96), and the number of Shvetambara image-worshipping renunciants grew to approximately 1,500 monks and 4,500 nuns in the 20th century. The Tapa Gaccha is the largest subsect; the non-image-worshipping Shvetambara sects (the Sthanakavasis and Terapanthis) are smaller in number. The Digambara monastic community also experienced a revival of its ideals in the early 20th century with the ascendance of the great monk Acharya Shantisagar, from whom virtually all the 120 or so contemporary Digambara monks claim lineal descent.

In modern times the Shvetambara and Digambara communities in India have devoted much energy to preserving temples and publishing their religious texts. The Jains also have been involved in general welfare work, such as drought relief in Gujarat in the 1980s, support for Jain widows and the poor, and, as part of their philosophy of nonviolence and vegetarianism, maintaining shelters to save old animals from slaughter.

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During the 20th century, Jainism evolved into a worldwide faith. As a result of age-old trading links, many Jains from western India settled in eastern African countries, most notably Kenya and Uganda. Political unrest in the 1960s compelled many of them to relocate to the United Kingdom, where the first Jain temple outside India was consecrated in Leicester, and then increasingly to the United States and Canada, where they successfully assumed their traditional mercantile and professional occupations. A desire to preserve their religious identity has led expatriate Jains to form trans-sectarian organizations such as the Jain Samaj, founded in Europe in 1970, and the Federation of Jain Associations in North America (also known as JAINA), founded in 1981. English-language publications such as *Jain Digest* and *Jain Spirit* have presented Jain ideals, such as nonviolence, vegetarianism, and, most recently, environmentalism, to members of the Jain diaspora and the wider world.

### ***Important Figures of Jain Legend***

The Jains developed their own legendary history, the *Deeds of the 63 Illustrious Men*, which Western scholars call the *Universal History*. The most important figures in this history are the 24 Tirthankaras, perfected human beings who appear from time to time to preach and embody the faith. Other important figures in the history are from the Hindu tradition, most notably Krishna-regarded by the Jains as a cousin of the 22nd Tirthankara, Arishtanemi-and the hero Rama, who is treated as a pious, nonviolent Jain. By incorporating yet redefining such important Hindu figures, the Jains were able to both remain part of and separate from the surrounding Hindu world.

### ***Doctrines of Jainism***

Even though Jain doctrine holds that no one can achieve liberation in this corrupt time, the Jain religious goal is the complete perfection and purification of the soul. This, they believe, occurs only when the soul is in a state of eternal liberation from corporeal bodies. Liberation of the soul is impeded by the accumulation of karmas, bits of material, generated by a person's actions, that attach themselves to the soul and consequently bind it to physical bodies through many births. This has the effect of thwarting the full self-realization and freedom of the soul. As a result, Jain renunciants do not seek immediate enlightenment; instead, through disciplined and meritorious practice of nonviolence, they pursue a human rebirth that will bring them nearer to that state.

To understand how the Jains address this problem, it is first necessary to consider the Jain conception of reality.

### ***Time and the Universe***

Time, according to the Jains, is eternal and formless. It is understood as a wheel with 12 spokes (*ara*), the equivalent of ages, six of which form an ascending arc and six a descending one. In the ascending arc (*utsarpini*), humans progress in knowledge, age, stature, and happiness, while in the descending arc (*avasarpini*) they deteriorate. The two cycles joined together make one rotation of the wheel of time, which is called a *kalpa*. These *kalpas* repeat themselves without beginning or end.

The Jain world is eternal and uncreated. Its constituent elements, the five basics of reality (*astikayas*), are soul, matter, space, the principles of motion, and the arrest of motion; for the Digambaras there is a sixth substance, time. These elements are eternal and indestructible, but their conditions change constantly, manifesting three characteristics: arising, stability, and falling away. On this basis, Jainism claims to provide a more realistic analysis of the world and its complexities than Hinduism or Buddhism.

Jains divide the inhabited universe into five parts. The lower world (*adholoka*) is subdivided into seven tiers of hells, each one darker and more painful than the one above it. The middle world (*madhyaloka*) comprises a vast number of concentric continents separated by seas. At the centre is the continent of Jambudvipa. Human beings occupy Jambudvipa, the second continent contiguous to it, and half of the third. The focus of Jain activity, however, is Jambudvipa, the only continent on which it is possible for the soul to achieve liberation. The celestial world (*urdhvaloka*) consists of two categories of heaven: one for the souls of those who may or may not have entered the Jain path and another for those who are far along on the path, close to their emancipation. At the apex of the occupied universe is the *siddhashila*, the crescent-shaped abode of liberated souls (*siddhas*). Finally, there are some areas inhabited solely by *ekendriyas*, single-sense organisms that permeate the occupied universe.

### ***Jiva and Ajiva***

Jain reality comprises two components, *jiva* (“soul,” or “living substance”) and *ajiva* (“nonsoul,” or “inanimate substance”). *Ajiva* is

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further divided into two categories: nonsentient material entities and nonsentient nonmaterial entities.

The essential characteristics of *jiva* are consciousness (*chetana*), bliss (*sukha*), and energy (*virya*). In its pure state, *jiva* possesses these qualities limitlessly. The souls, infinite in number, are divisible in their embodied state into two main classes, immobile and mobile, according to the number of sense organs possessed by the body they inhabit. The first group consists of souls inhabiting immeasurably small particles of earth, water, fire, and air, along with the vegetable kingdom, which possess only the sense of touch. The second group comprises souls that inhabit bodies that have between two and five sense organs. Moreover, the universe is populated with an infinite number of minute beings, *nigodas*, some of which are slowly evolving while the rest have no chance of emerging from their hapless state.

Formless and genderless, *jiva* cannot be directly perceived by the senses. Like the universe, it is without a point of ultimate origin or end. While not all-pervasive, it can, by contraction or expansion, occupy various amounts of space. Like the light of a lamp in a small or a large room, *jiva* can fill both the smaller and the larger bodies it occupies. The soul assumes the exact dimensions of the body it occupies, but it is not identical with that body. On death it assumes the shape of the last physical body that housed it.

Matter (*pudgala*) has the characteristics of touch, taste, smell, and colour; however, its essential characteristic is lack of consciousness. The smallest unit of matter is the atom (*paramanu*). Heat, light, and shade are all forms of fine matter.

The nonsentient nonmaterial substances are space, time, and the principles of motion and its arrest. They are always pure and are not subject to defilement. The principles of motion and its arrest permeate the universe; they do not exist independently but rather form a necessary precondition for any object's movement or coming to rest.

### **Karma**

The fundamental tenet of Jain doctrine is that all phenomena are linked in a universal chain of cause and effect. Every event has a definite cause. By nature each soul is pure, possessing infinite knowledge, bliss, and power; however, these faculties are restricted



throughout time by the soul's contact with matter. This matter, which produces the chain of cause and effect, of birth and death, is karma, an atomic substance and not a process, as it is in Hinduism and Buddhism. To be free from the shackles of karma, a person must stop the influx of new karmas and eliminate the acquired ones.

Karmic particles are acquired as the result of intentional "passionate" action, though the very earliest Jain teachings on this subject claimed that any action, even if unintentional, attracted karma. Acquired karmas can be annihilated through a process called *nirjara* ("wearing away"), which includes fasting, restricting diet, controlling taste, retreating to lonely places, along with mortifications of the body, atonement and expiation for sins, modesty, service, study, meditation, and renunciation of the ego. *Nirjara* is, thus, the calculated cessation of passionate action.

Because of karma a soul is imprisoned in a succession of bodies and passes through various stages of spiritual development before becoming free from all karmic bondage. These stages of development (*gunasthanas*) involve progressive manifestations of the innate faculties of knowledge and power and are accompanied by decreasing sinfulness and increasing purity.

### Theories of Knowledge as Applied to Liberation

In Jain thought, four stages of perception-observation, will to recognize, determination, and impression-lead to subjective cognition (*matijnana*), the first of five kinds of knowledge (*jnana*). The second kind, *shrutajnana*, derives from the scriptures and general information. Both are mediated cognition, based on external conditions perceived by the senses. In addition there are three kinds of immediate knowledge-*avadhi* (supersensory perception), *manahparyaya* (reading the thoughts of others), and *kevala* (omniscience). *Kevala* is necessarily accompanied by freedom from karmic obstruction and by direct experience of the soul's pure form unblemished by attachment to matter. Omniscience, the foremost attribute of a liberated *jiva*, is the emblem of its purity; thus, a liberated soul, such as a Tirthankara, is called a *kevalin* ("possessor of omniscience"). However, not all *kevalins* are Tirthankaras: becoming a Tirthankara requires the development of a particular type of karmic destiny.

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For the Jains all knowledge short of omniscience is flawed. Because reality is characterized by arising, change, and decay, as opposed to simple permanence (for the Hindus) and impermanence (for the Buddhists), the Jains developed an epistemological system based on seven perspectives (*naya*). This system, *anekantavada*, “the many-pointed doctrine,” takes into account the provisional nature of mundane knowledge. To gain some approximation to reality, a judgment must ideally be framed in accord with all seven perspectives.

According to Jainism, yoga, the ascetic physical and meditative discipline of the monk, is the means to attain omniscience and thus liberation (*moksha*). Yoga is the cultivation of true knowledge of reality, faith in the teachings of the Tirthankaras, and pure conduct; it is thus intimately connected to the Three Jewels (*ratnatraya*) of right knowledge, right faith, and right practice (respectively, *samyagjnana*, *samyagdarshana*, and *samyakcharitra*).

### **Jain Ethics**

The Three Jewels constitute the basis of the Jain doctrinal and ethical stance. Right knowledge, faith, and practice must be cultivated together because none of them can be achieved in the absence of the others. Right faith leads to calmness or tranquillity, detachment, kindness, and the renunciation of pride of birth, beauty of form, wealth, scholarship, prowess, and fame. Right faith leads to perfection only when followed by right practice. Yet, there can be no virtuous conduct without right knowledge, the clear distinction between the self and the nonself. Knowledge without faith and conduct is futile. Without purification of mind, all austerities are mere bodily torture. Right practice is thus spontaneous, not a forced mechanical quality. Attainment of right practice is a gradual process, and a layperson can observe only partial self-control; a renunciant, however, is able to observe more comprehensive rules of conduct.

Two separate courses of conduct are laid down for the ascetics and the laity. In both cases the code of morals is based on the doctrine of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence. Because thought gives rise to action, violence in thought merely precedes violent behaviour.

Violence in thought, then, is the greater and subtler form of violence because it arises from ideas of attachment and aversion, grounded in

passionate states, which result from negligence or lack of care in behaviour. Jainism enjoins avoidance of all forms of injury-whether committed by body, mind, or speech-and subscribes emphatically to the teaching that “nonviolence is the highest form of religious practice.” For Jains, this principle, which manifests itself most obviously in the form of vegetarianism, is the single most important component of their tradition’s message. Notable in this connection is the friendship between the Jain layman Raychandrabhai Mehta and Mohandas Gandhi, who considered his interactions with Mehta to have been important in formulating his own ideas on the use of nonviolence as a political tactic.

## Chapter 9

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### Sikhism

Sikhism, Indian religion founded in the Punjab in the late 15th century. Its members are known as Sikhs. The Sikhs call their faith Gurmat (Punjabi: “the Way of the Guru”). According to Sikh tradition, Sikhism was established by Guru Nanak (1469–1539) and subsequently led by a succession of nine other Gurus. All 10 human Gurus, Sikhs believe, were inhabited by a single spirit. Upon the death of the 10th, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the spirit of the eternal Guru transferred itself to the sacred scripture of Sikhism, *Guru Granth Sahib* (“The Granth as the Guru”), also known as the *Adi Granth* (“First Volume”), which thereafter was regarded as the sole Guru. In the early 21st century there were nearly 25 million Sikhs worldwide, the great majority of them living in the Indian state of Punjab.

The following discussion of the lives of the 10 Gurus relies on the traditional Sikh account, most elements of which are derived from hagiographic legend and lore and cannot be verified historically. This point should be borne in mind throughout, especially in the sections on the early Gurus.

### ***History and Doctrine***

Sikh in Punjabi means “learner,” and those who joined the Sikh community, or Panth (“Path”), were people who sought spiritual guidance. Sikhs claim that their tradition has always been separate from Hinduism. Nevertheless, many Western scholars argue that in its earliest stage Sikhism was a movement within the Hindu tradition; Nanak, they point out, was raised a Hindu and eventually belonged to the Sant tradition of northern India, a movement associated with the great poet and mystic Kabir (1440-1518). The Sants, most of whom were poor, dispossessed, and illiterate, composed hymns of great beauty expressing their experience of the divine, which they saw in all things. Their tradition drew heavily on the Vaishnava bhakti (the devotional movement within the Hindu tradition that worships the god Vishnu), though there were important differences between the two. Like the followers of bhakti, the Sants believed that devotion to God is essential to liberation from the cycle of rebirth in which all human beings are trapped; unlike the followers of bhakti, however, the Sants maintained that God is *nirgun* (“without form”) and *notsagun* (“with form”). For the Sants, God can be neither incarnated nor represented in concrete terms.

### ***The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica***

Certain lesser influences also operated on the Sant movement. Chief among them was the Nath tradition, which comprised a cluster of sects, all claiming descent from the semilegendary teacher Gorakhnath and all promoting Hatha Yoga as the means of spiritual liberation. Although the Sants rejected the physical aspects of Hatha Yoga in favour of meditation techniques, they accepted the Naths’ concept of spiritual ascent to ultimate bliss. Some scholars have argued that the Sants were influenced by Islam through their contact with the Mughal rulers of India from the early 16th century, but there is in fact little indication of this, though Sufism (Islamic mysticism) may have had a marginal effect.

### **The 10 Gurus**

#### ***Guru Nanak***

A member of the Khatri (trading) caste and far from illiterate, Nanak was not a typical Sant, yet he experienced the same

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spirit of God in everything outside him and everything within him as did others in the movement he founded. He was born in the Punjab, which has been the home of the Sikh faith ever since.

Nanak composed many hymns, which were collected in the *Adi Granth* by Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, in 1604. Nanak's authorship of these works is beyond doubt, and it is also certain that he visited pilgrimage sites throughout India. Beyond this very little is known. The story of his life has been the imagined product of the legendary *janam-sakhis* ("life stories"), which were composed between 50 and 80 years after the Guru's death in 1539, though only a tiny fraction of the material found in them can be affirmed as factual.

The first *janam-sakhis* were attributed to the lifelong companion of Nanak, Bhai Bala (1466-1544), who composed an account of the Guru's life that was filled with miracles and wonder stories. By the end of the 19th century, the Bala version had begun to create serious unease among Sikh scholars, who were greatly relieved when a more rational version, since known as the *Puratan* ("Ancient") tradition, was discovered in London, where it had arrived as a gift for the library of the East India Company. Although it too contained fantastic elements, it had far fewer miraclestories than the Bala version, and it presented a more plausible account of the course of Guru Nanak's journeys. When supplemented by references from a discourse by the poet Bhai Gurdas (1551-1637), the *Puratan* seems to provide a satisfactory description of the life of Guru Nanak.

According to this version, Nanak made five trips, one in each of the four directions of the cardinal points of the compass, followed by one within the Punjab. He traveled first to the east and then to the south, reaching Sri Lanka. He then journeyed to the north, deep in the Himalayas, where he debated with Nath masters known as Siddhs, who were believed to have attained immortality through the practice of yoga. His trip to the west took him to Baghdad, Mecca, and Medina. He then settled in Kartarpur, a village on the right bank of the Ravi River in the Punjab. After visiting southern Punjab, he died in Kartarpur, having appointed a loyal disciple as his successor.

The hagiographic character of the *Puratan* tradition is well illustrated by the story of Nanak's visit to Mecca. Having entered the

city, Nanak lay down with his feet pointing at the mihrab (the niche in a mosque indicating the direction of the Ka'bah). An outraged *qâ'î* (judge) found him there and demanded an explanation. In reply Nanak asked him to drag his feet away from the mihrab. This the *qâ'î* did, only to discover that, wherever he placed Nanak's feet, there the mihrab moved. The lesson of the story is that God is everywhere, not in any particular direction.

Another popular *Puratan* story concerns Nanak's visit to the "Land Ruled by Women" in eastern India. Mardana, Nanak's faithful minstrel and travel companion, went ahead to beg for food but was turned into a sheep by one of the women. When Nanak arrived, he caused a pot to adhere to the woman's head and restored Mardana to his original form after instructing him to say "Vahi Guru" ("Praise to the Guru"). The women then tried all manner of fearsome magic on the pair, without success. After the queen of the Land Ruled by Women, Nur Shah, failed in her attempt to seduce Nanak, the women finally submitted.

Nanak was certainly no admirer of the Naths, who apparently competed with him for converts. (The *janam-sakhi* anecdotes give considerable prominence to debates between Nanak and the Siddhs, in which Nanak invariably gets the better of his opponents.) By contrast, he accepted the message of the Sants, giving it expression in hymns of the most compelling beauty. He taught that all people are subject to the transmigration of souls and that the sole and sufficient means of liberation from the cycle of rebirth is meditation on the divine *nam* (Persian: "name"). According to Nanak, the *nam* encompasses the whole of creation—everything outside the believer and everything within him. Having heard the divine word (*shabad*) through a grace bestowed by God, or Akal Purakh (one of Nanak's names for God), and having chosen to accept the word, the believer undertakes *nam simaran*, or meditation on the name. Through this discipline, he gradually begins to perceive manifold signs of the *nam*, and the means of liberation are progressively revealed. Ascending to ever-higher levels of mystical experience, the believer is blessed with a mounting sense of peace and joy. Eventually the *sach khand* ("abode of truth") is reached, and the believer passes into a condition of perfect and absolute union with Akal Purakh.

## Theology of other Religions

Sikhs believe that the “voice” with which the word is uttered within the believer’s being is that of the spirit of the eternal Guru. Because Nanak performed the discipline of *nam simaran*, the eternal Guru took flesh and dwelt within him. Upon Nanak’s death the eternal Guru was embodied, in turn, in each of Nanak’s successors until, with the death of Guru Gobind Singh, it was enshrined in the holy scripture of the Sikhs, the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The fourth Guru, Ram Das, introduced two significant changes: he introduced the appointment of *masands* (vicars), charged with the care of defined congregations (*sangats*), and he founded the important centre of Amritsar. The chief contribution of Arjan, the fifth Guru, was the compilation of the Sikhs’ sacred scripture, using the *Goindval Pothis*, which had been prepared at the instructions of Guru Amar Das. All of the Gurus continued the teaching of Nanak concerning liberation through meditation on the divine name. The first five Gurus were, therefore, one as far as the central belief was concerned.

Under the sixth Guru, however, the doctrine of *miri/piri* emerged. Like his predecessors, the Guru still engaged in *piri*, spiritual leadership, but to it he now added *miri*, the rule of a worldly leader. The Panth was thus no longer an exclusively religious community but was also a military one that was commonly involved in open warfare. All Sikhs were expected to accept the new dual authority of the Gurus.

The final contribution of the Gurus came with Gobind Singh. As before, there was no weakening of the doctrine affirming meditation on the divine name. Guru Gobind Singh, however, believed that the forces of good and evil fell out of balance on occasion, and at times the latter increased enormously. Akal Purakh then intervened in human history to correct the balance, choosing as his agents particular individuals who fought the forces of evil that had acquired excessive power. Gobind Singh believed that the Mughals, through Emperor Aurangzeb, had tipped the scale too far toward evil and that he had been divinely appointed to restore the balance between good and evil. He also believed that drawing the sword was justified to rein in evil.

### ***Guru Angad***

In 1539 Nanak died, having first appointed Guru Angad (1504 - 52) as his successor. Originally known as Lahina, Angad had been a



worshipper of the Hindu goddess Durga. While leading a party to the holy site of Javalamukhi (a temple in a town of the same name in Himachal Pradesh state, India), he passed by Kartarpur and was instantly won over by the beauty of Nanak's hymns. Thereafter the future Guru was completely loyal to his new master, and his behaviour persuaded Nanak that he would be a more suitable successor than either of the Guru's two sons. A thoroughly obedient disciple, Angad made no innovations in Nanak's teachings, and the period of his leadership was uneventful.

### ***Guru Amar Das***

When Angad died, the title of Guru was passed to Amar Das (1479-1574), who was distinguished by his total loyalty to the second Guru. According to tradition, Amar Das was a Vaishnava who had spent his life looking for a Guru. While on a trip to the Ganges River, he decided to become a Sikh when he overheard the daughter of Angad singing a hymn by Nanak. Amar Das, who was 73 years old when he became Guru, assumed responsibility for the Panth at a time when it was settling down after the first flush of its early years. Many Sikhs had been born into the Panth, and the enthusiasm and excitement that characterized the religion under Nanak had dissipated. Believing that rituals were necessary to confirm the Sikhs in their faith, Amar Das ordered the digging of a sacred well (*baoli*), which he designated as a pilgrimage site; created three festival days (Baisakhi, Maghi, and Diwali); and compiled a scripture of sacred hymns, the so-called *Goindval Pothis*. In addition, because the Sikhs had spread throughout the Punjab, he established *manjis* (dioceses) to help spread the faith and better organize its adherents. Despite these changes, there was no weakening of the obligation to meditate on the *nam*.

### ***Guru Ram Das***

Guru Ram Das (1534-81), the fourth Guru, was the son-in-law of Guru Amar Das. He is perhaps best known as the founder of the town of Amritsar ("Pool of Nectar"), which became the capital of the Sikh religion and the location of the Harmandir Sahib (later known as the Golden Temple), the chief house of worship in Sikhism. He also replaced the *manjis* with *masands* (vicars), who were charged with the care of defined *sangats* (congregations) and who at least once a year presented the Guru with reports on and gifts from the

Sikh community. Particularly skilled in hymn singing, Guru Ram Das stressed the importance of this practice, which remains an important part of Sikh worship. A member of the Khatri caste and the Sodhi family, Ram Das appointed his son Arjan as his successor, and all subsequent Gurus were his direct descendants.

### ***Guru Arjan***

Prithi Chand, the oldest brother of Guru Arjan (1563-1606), took a distinctly hostile view of his brother's appointment and in retaliation attempted to poison Hargobind, Arjan's only son. Prithi Chand and his followers also circulated hymns that they alleged were written by the earlier Gurus. This prompted Arjan to compile an authentic version of the hymns, which he did using Bhai Gurdas as his scribe and the *Goindval Pothis* as a guide. The resulting *Adi Granth*, in a supplemented version, became the *Guru Granth Sahib*. It remains the essential scripture of the faith, and Sikhs always show it profound respect and turn to it whenever they need guidance, comfort, or peace.

During Arjan's lifetime the Panth steadily won converts, particularly among members of the Jat agrarian caste. The Mughal governor of the Punjab was concerned about the growth of the religion, and Emperor Jahângîr was influenced by rumours concerning Arjan's alleged support for Jahângîr's rebellious son Khusro. Guru Arjan was arrested and tortured to death by the Mughals. Before he died, however, he urged his son-Hargobind, the sixth Guru-always to carry arms.

### **Guru Hargobind: A New Direction for The Panth**

The appointment of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), marks a transition from a strictly religious Panth to one that was both religious and temporal. Arjan's command to his son was later termed *miri/piri* ("temporal authority"/"spiritual authority"). Hargobind was still the Guru, and as such he continued the pattern established by his five predecessors. He was, in other words, a *pir*, or spiritual leader, but he was also a *mir*, or chieftain of his people, responsible for protecting them against tyranny with force of arms. The new status of the Guru and the Panth was confirmed by the actions of Hargobind and came to be reflected in the architecture of Amritsar. Opposite the Harmandir Sahib, the symbol of *piri*, there is

a building known as the Akal Takht, the symbol of *miri*. Thus, when Hargobind stood between the Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht and buckled on two swords, the message was clear: he possessed both spiritual and temporal authority.

Hargobind fought intermittently with Mughal forces in the Punjab. Following four such skirmishes, he withdrew from Amritsar and occupied Kiratpur in the foothills of the Shiwalik Hills. This was a much more suitable position because it was outside the territory directly controlled by the Mughal administration. There he remained until his death in 1644.

Before he died, the question of who should succeed him emerged. Although it was certain that the successor should be a descendant of his, it was far from clear which of his children or grandchildren should take his place. Hargobind had three wives who bore him six children. The eldest son, Gurditta, who was evidently his favourite for the position, had predeceased him, and none of the remaining five seemed suitable for the position. The older son of Gurditta, Dhir Mal, was rejected because, from his seat in Jalandhar district, he had formed an alliance with Emperor Shâh Jahân. This meant that the younger son of Gurditta, Har Rai, would become the seventh Guru. But Dhir Mal continued to make trouble for the orthodox Panth and attracted many Sikhs as his followers. He also claimed to possess the sacred scripture prepared by Guru Arjan and used it to buttress his claims to be the only legitimate Guru.

### **Guru Har Rai**

The period of Guru Har Rai (1630–61) was a relatively peaceful one. He withdrew from Kiratpur and moved farther back into the Shiwalik Hills, settling with a small retinue at Sirmur. From there he occasionally emerged onto the plains of the Punjab to visit and preach to the Sikhs. In this regard he was well served by several *masands*, who brought him news about the Sikhs and offerings of money to pay the expenses of the Panth.

The period of peace did not last, however. Guru Har Rai faced the same problems with the Mughals as Guru Arjan had. Aurangzeb, the successful contender for the Mughal throne, defeated his elder brother Dara Shikoh and established himself in Delhi. He then sent a

message to Har Rai requiring him to deliver his son Ram Rai as a hostage for Har Rai's reputed support of Dara Shikoh. Aurangzeb evidently wished to educate the future Guru in Mughal ways and to convert him into a supporter of the Mughal throne. In an episode that illustrated the success of this quest, Aurangzeb once asked Ram Rai to explain an apparently demeaning line in the *Adi Granth*, which claimed that earthenware pots were *mitti musulaman ki*, or formed from deceased Muslim bodies. Ram Rai replied that the words had been miscopied. The original text should have been *mitti beiman ki*, the dust that is formed from the bodies of faithless people. When this answer was reported to Har Rai, he declared his intention never to see Ram Rai again. Because he had committed the serious crime of altering the words of Guru Nanak, Ram Rai could never be the Guru, and the position passed instead to his younger brother, Hari Krishen, who inherited the title when he was only five years old.

### **Guru Hari Krishen**

Aurangzeb summoned Guru Hari Krishen (1656-64) to Delhi from the Shiwalik Hills. While in Delhi, Hari Krishen contracted smallpox, which proved fatal. Before he died, he uttered the words "Baba Bakale," which indicated to his followers the identity of his successor, the *baba* ("old man") who is in the village of Bakala. Hari Krishen meant to identify Tegh Bahadur, who dwelt in Bakala and was the son of Guru Hargobind by his second wife and the half brother of Guru Hari Krishen's grandfather.

### **Guru Tegh Bahadur**

As soon as these words became known, many hopeful persons rushed to Bakala to claim the title. Sikh tradition records that Makhan Shah, a trader, had been caught by a violent storm at sea and in his distress vowed to give the Sikh Guru 501 gold mohurs (coins) if he should be spared. After the storm abated, the survivor traveled to the Punjab, and, learning that the Guru resided in Bakala, he proceeded there. He discovered that several people claimed the title following the death of Guru Hari Krishen. He decided to test them all, laying before each claimant two gold mohurs. Finally he reached Tegh Bahadur, who asked him for the remainder of what he had promised. Rushing up to the rooftop, Makhan Shah proclaimed that he had indeed found the true Guru.

The period of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-75) is important for two reasons. The first is that several hymns that Tegh Bahadur wrote were added by Guru Gobind Singh to the collection originally made by Guru Arjan; the canon was then closed, and the *Adi Granth* has remained inviolable ever since. The second concerns the manner of Tegh Bahadur's death. Sikh tradition maintains that he was arrested by Mughal authorities for having aided Kashmiri Brahmans against Mughal attempts to convert them to Islam. Offered the choice of conversion or death, he chose the latter and was immediately beheaded.

A Sikh who witnessed the execution spirited away Tegh Bahadur's headless body and lodged it in his house outside Delhi. To cremate the body without raising suspicion, he burned the whole house. Meanwhile, three outcaste Sikhs secured the head of the Guru and carried it in secret up to Anandpur, a service which earned them and all their successors the right to be called Ranghreta Sikhs, an honoured group of outcaste followers of the Guru. Arriving in Anandpur, they produced the severed head amidst cries of great lamentation.

### **Guru Gobind Singh and the Founding of the Khalsa**

Following the death of Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the most important of all the Gurus with the exception of Guru Nanak, assumed leadership of the Sikhs. Gobind Rai, whose name was altered to Gobind Singh possibly at the time of the creation of the Khalsa, was born in Patna, the only child of Guru Tegh Bahadur. At the age of five he was brought to Anandpur and educated in Sanskrit and Persian and in the arts of poetry and warfare. His father's execution in Delhi by Aurangzeb must have made a deep impression on the child. For several years after his succession as Guru, he continued his education in the Shiwalik Hills. He grew to manhood as the ruler of a small Shiwalik state, participating in various wars against other Shiwalik chieftains and demonstrating a particular delight in the sport of hunting.

According to Sikh tradition, on Baisakhi Day (the Indian New Year) late in the 17th century (the exact year is uncertain, though it was probably 1699), a fair was held at Anandpur, and all Sikhs were ordered to attend. The Guru remained concealed until the celebrations were at their height, when he suddenly appeared from a tent carrying a drawn sword and demanding the head of one of his loyal followers.

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At once the crowd became silent, wondering what had happened. The Guru repeated the command, and eventually Daya Singh volunteered and was taken behind a screen to be dispatched. Gobind Singh then reappeared, his sword dripping blood, and demanded a second victim. He too was escorted behind the screen, and again the sound of the sword could be heard. In this manner five loyal Sikhs agreed to die for their master. When he had apparently dispatched the fifth, the screen was removed, and all five were seen to be very much alive. At their feet lay five slaughtered goats. The five volunteers became the Panj Piare, the “Cherished Five,” who had proved that their loyalty was beyond question.

Guru Gobind Singh explained that he desired the Panj Piare to be the beginning of a new order, the Khalsa (“the Pure,” from the Persian *khalisah*, also meaning “pure”). The *masands* (many of whom had become quarrelsome or corrupt) would be eliminated, and all Sikhs, through their initiation into the Khalsa, would owe allegiance directly to the Guru. Gobind Singh then commenced the *amrit sanskar* (“nectar ceremony”), the service of initiation for the Panj Piare. When the rite was concluded, the Guru himself was initiated by the Panj Piare. The order was then opened to anyone wishing to join, and Sikh tradition reports that enormous crowds responded.

It should be noted that, contrary to the belief of many Sikhs, some central features of the present-day Khalsa did not exist in Gobind Singh’s time. For example, although the Guru required that those initiated into the Khalsa carry arms and never cut their hair (so that at least the men would never be able to deny their identity as Khalsa Sikhs), the wearing of the “Five Ks”- *kes* or *kesh* (uncut hair), *kangha* (comb), *kachha* (short trousers), *kara* (steel bracelet), and *kirpan* (ceremonial sword) - did not become an obligation of all Sikhs until the establishment of the Singh Sabha, a religious and educational reform movement of the late 19th and the early 20th century. The Sikh wedding ceremony, in which the bride and groom walk around the *Guru Granth Sahib*, is also a modern development, having replaced the essentially Hindu rite, in which the bride and groom walk around a sacred fire, by the Anand Marriage Act of 1909. The names Singh (“Lion”) for Sikh males and Kaur (“Princess”) for Sikh females, formerly adopted upon initiation into the Khalsa, are now bestowed to all Sikhs in a birth and naming ceremony (*see*

*below* Rites and festivals). All of these changes have been incorporated into the *Rahit*, the Sikh code of belief and conduct, which reached nearly its final form in the early 20th century.

Guru Gobind Singh believed that the forces of good and evil in the world sometimes fall out of balance. When the forces of evil become too great, Akal Purakh intervenes in human history to correct the balance, using particular human individuals as his agents. In Gobind Singh's time the forces of evil, represented by the Mughals under Aurangzeb, had gained the ascendance, and it was Gobind Singh's task, he believed, to right the balance. In the service of this mission, the Sikhs were justified in drawing the sword. He expressed this conviction in *Zafar-nama* ("Epistle of Victory"), a letter that he addressed late in life to Augangzeb.

Soon after the creation of the Khalsa, the Guru was attacked by other Shiwalik chieftains in league with the Mughal governor of the town of Sirhind. In 1704 he was compelled to withdraw from Anandpur, losing two of his four sons in the battle that followed. The two remaining sons were taken prisoner and delivered to the governor of Sirhind, who cruelly executed them by bricking them up alive. The fate of these two children has remained an agonizing tale for Sikhs ever since.

From Anandpur Gobind Singh escaped to southern Punjab, where he inflicted a defeat on his pursuers at Muktsar. He then moved on to Damdama, remaining there until 1706 and, according to tradition, occupying himself with the final revision of the *Adi Granth*. When Aurangzeb died in 1707, Gobind Singh agreed to accompany Aurangzeb's successor, Bahâdur Shâh, to southern India. Arriving at Nanded on the banks of the Godavari River in 1708, he was assassinated by agents of the governor of Sirhind.

Guru Gobind Singh is without doubt the beau ideal of the Sikhs. Illustrations of him and of Guru Nanak are commonly found in Sikh homes. He is regarded as the supreme exemplar of all that a Sikh of the Khalsa (a Gursikh) should be. His bravery is admired, his nobility esteemed, his goodness profoundly revered. The duty of every Khalsa member, therefore, is to follow his path and to perform works that would be worthy of him.

### The 18th and 19th Centuries

The most significant figure in Sikh history of the 18th century is Lachman Dev, who was probably born in Punch in Kashmir and had become a Vaishnava ascetic known as Madho Das. He journeyed to the south and was in the vicinity of Nanded at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's arrival. The two met shortly before the Guru's death, and Madho Das was instantly converted to the Sikh faith and renamed Banda ("the Slave"). The Guru also conferred on him the title of Bahadur ("the Brave"); he has been known as Banda Bahadur ever since.

According to tradition, Banda Bahadur was commissioned by Gobind Singh to mount a campaign in the Punjab against the governor of Sirhind. A *hukam-nama*, or letter of command, from the Guru was entrusted to him certifying that he was the Guru's servant and encouraging all Sikhs to join him. Arriving in the Punjab with a group of 25 Sikhs, Banda issued a call to join him, and, partly because the peasants were struggling against the excessive land tax of the Mughals, he had considerable success. The fact that he had been commissioned by the 10th Guru also counted for much. The process evidently took some time, and it was not until late 1709 that Banda and his army of peasants were able to mount an attack, sacking the towns of Samana and Sadhaura.

Banda then turned his attention to the town of Sirhind and its governor, who had bricked up the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. For this and many other crimes, the Sikhs believed that he merited death. Banda's army, fighting with great determination, attacked and overwhelmed Sirhind, and the governor was put to the sword. Thereafter much of the Punjab was plunged into turmoil, though Banda's army clearly was the dominant force in the early years of the rebellion. Many of the peasants had rallied to Banda, and the Mughals were exceedingly hard-pressed to maintain control. Finally, after six years of fighting, Banda was cornered in the village of Gurdas Nangal, where he chose to construct a defense by flooding a surrounding canal. This proved to be a mistake, since the Mughals only had to wait until hunger drove Banda's army to surrender. Banda was put in chains and carried to Delhi in a cage, and in June 1716 he was tortured and barbarously executed.



Although Banda is greatly admired by Sikhs for his bravery and his loyalty to the 10th Guru, he has never commanded the complete approval of the Panth. This is presumably because he introduced changes to the Khalsa, including a new greeting, “Fateh darshan” (“Facing victory!”), in place of the traditional “Fateh Vahi Guruji” (“Victory to the Guru!”). He also required his followers to be vegetarians and to wear red garments instead of the traditional blue. Those who accepted these changes were called Bandai Sikhs, while those opposed to them—led by Mata Sundari, one of Guru Gobind Singh’s widows—called themselves the Tat Khalsa (the “True” Khalsa or “Pure” Khalsa), which should not be confused with the Tat Khalsa segment of the Singh Sabha, discussed below.

After the execution of Banda, the Sikhs endured several decades of persecution by the Mughals, though there were occasional periods of peace. Only the Sikhs of the Khalsa—whose identity could be easily recognized by their uncut hair and flowing beards—were persecuted; other Sikhs were seldom affected. This period, nonetheless, is remembered by Sikhs as one of great suffering, accompanied by acts of great bravery by many Khalsa Sikhs in their struggle against the Mughal authorities in Lahore.

Beginning in 1747, the ruler of Afghanistan, A%mad Shâh Durrânî, led a series of nine invasions of the Punjab that eventually brought Mughal power in the region to an end. In rural areas, the Sikhs took advantage of the weakening of Mughal control to form several groups later known as *misls* or *misals*. Beginning as warrior bands, the emergent *misls* and their *sardars* (chieftains) gradually established their authority over quite extensive areas.

As Mughal power declined, the *misls* eventually faced the Afghan army of A%mad Shâh, with whom an important Sikh tradition is associated. After the Afghans occupied the Harmandir Sahib in 1757, Dip Singh, a member of the Shahid *misl*, pledged to free the shrine or die in the attempt. His small army was met by a much larger one several kilometres from Amritsar, and in the ensuing battle Dip Singh’s head was cut off. According to one version of events, the body of Dip Singh, holding the head in one hand, continued fighting, eventually dropping dead in the precincts of the Harmandir Sahib. Another account reports that the body fought its way to the outskirts

of Amritsar and then hurled the head toward the Harmandir Sahib, the head landing very close to the shrine; the place where the head is believed to have landed is marked by a hexagonal stone.

By the end of Ahmad Shâh's invasions in 1769, the Punjab was largely in the hands of 12 *misl*s, and, with the external threat removed, the *misl*s turned to fighting between themselves. Eventually, one *misl*dar (commander), Ranjit Singh, the leader of the Sukerchakia *misl* (named after the town of Sukkarchak in what is now northeastern Punjab province, Pakistan), which included territories north and west of Lahore, won almost complete control of the Punjab. The lone exception was the Phulkian *misl* (so called after its founder, Phul, the disciple of Guru Har Rai) on the southeastern border of the Punjab, which survived because the English East India Company had reached the Sutlej River and Ranjit Singh recognized that he was not yet ready to fight the British army. For their part, the British recognized that Ranjit Singh was in the process of establishing a strong kingdom, and, for as long as it survived, they were content to have it as a buffer state between their territories and their ultimate objective, Afghanistan.

Sikhs remember Ranjit Singh with respect and affection as their greatest leader after the Gurus. He succeeded as Sukerchakia *misl*dar when his father died in 1792. By 1799 he had entered Lahore, and in 1801 he proclaimed himself maharaja of the Punjab. He sheathed the two upper stories of the Harmandir Sahib in gold leaf, thereby converting it into what became known as the Golden Temple. Within the kingdom that replaced the *misl* system, Sikhs of the Khalsa received special consideration, but places were also found for Hindus and Muslims. The army was Ranjit Singh's particular interest. His objective was to create an entirely new army on a Western model, and for this purpose he employed numerous Europeans, only the British being excepted. When his new army was ready to do battle, the city of Multan, the Vale of Kashmir, and the citadel of Peshawar were all added to the kingdom of the Punjab.

Notwithstanding his many accomplishments, Ranjit Singh failed to provide a firm financial footing for his government, nor was he interested in training a successor. When he died in 1839, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Kharak Singh, though effective authority was exercised by Kharak Singh's son Nau Nihal Singh. Kharak Singh

died in 1840 as a result of excessive opium consumption, and Nau Nihal Singh was killed by a falling arch on the day of his father's funeral. The Punjab quickly descended into chaos, and, following two wars with the British, the state was annexed in 1849 to become a part of British India. After annexation, the British favoured the Sikhs for recruitment as soldiers, and many Sikhs made the British army their career.

For their loyalty to the British administration during the unsuccessful Indian Mutiny of 1857-58, the Sikhs were rewarded with grants of land and other privileges. Peace and prosperity within the Punjab made possible the founding of the first Singh Sabha, a religious and educational reform movement, in Amritsar in 1873. Its purpose was to demonstrate that Sikhs were not involved in the Indian Mutiny and to respond to signs of decay within the Panth, such as haircutting and tobacco smoking. Because the men who gathered in Amritsar were, for the most part, large landowners and persons of high status, the positions they adopted were generally conservative. In response a more radical branch of the Singh Sabha was established in Lahore in 1879. The Amritsar group came to be known as the Sanatan ("Traditional") Sikhs, whereas the radical Lahore branch was known as the Tat Khalsa.

The differences between the two groups were considerable. The Sanatan Sikhs regarded themselves as part of the wider Hindu community (then the dominant view within the Panth), and they tolerated such things as idols in the Golden Temple. The Tat Khalsa, on the other hand, insisted that Sikhism was a distinct and independent faith. The pamphlet *Ham Hindu Nahin* (1898; "We Are Not Hindus"), by the Tat Khalsa writer Kahn Singh Nabha, provided an effective slogan for the movement. Other radical adherents, influenced by Western standards of scholarship, set out to revise and rationalize the *rahit-namas* (the manuals containing the *Rahit*), removing parts that were erroneous, inconsistent, or antiquated. Many prohibitions were eliminated, though tobacco and halal meat (flesh of an animal killed according to Muslim ritual) continued to be enjoined. Their work eventually resulted in a clear statement of the Five Ks, which has since been adopted by all orthodox Sikhs. Marriage was also reformed according to Tat Khalsa views.

The controversy between the Sanatan Sikhs and the Tat Khalsa Sikhs continued for some time, as other factions within the Singh Sabha lent their support to one group or the other. Most factions, however, supported the radical group, and, by the beginning of the 20th century, the dominance of the Tat Khalsa movement had become apparent. Eventually its victory was total, and, during the early decades of the 20th century, it converted the Panth to its distinctive way of thinking, so much so that the accepted contemporary understanding of the Sikh faith is the Tat Khalsa interpretation.

### **The 20th Century to the Present**

During the early 1920s the Akali movement, a semimilitary corps of volunteers raised to oppose the British government, disputed with the British over control of the larger *gurdwaras* (Punjabi: “doorways to the Guru”), the Sikh houses of worship, in the Punjab. This conflict led eventually to the adoption by the Legislative Council of the Punjab of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, whereby the principal *gurdwaras* were entrusted to Sikh control. The *gurdwaras* have been governed ever since by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Supreme Committee of Temple Management), an elected body that is regarded by many Sikhs as the supreme authority within the Panth.

### **The Punjabi *Suba***

During India’s struggle for independence, the Sikhs were on both sides of the conflict, many continuing to serve in the British military and others opposing the colonial government. The partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 produced deep dissatisfaction among the Sikhs, who saw the Punjab divided between the two new states. Almost all Sikhs in the western Punjab migrated to the portion retained by India. Having settled there, however, they soon felt that the government of the Indian National Congress lacked sympathy for them, a situation that was put right by the creation in 1966 of the Punjabi *suba*, or the Punjabi state, within the union of India. Because the boundaries of the Punjab were redrawn to embrace those whose first language was Punjabi, the Sikhs constituted a majority in the new state.

For four decades following partition, the Sikhs enjoyed growing prosperity, including greater educational opportunities. Tat Khalsa Sikhs

had long emphasized female education at the primary and secondary levels; now stress was laid upon tertiary education for both sexes. Punjabi University in Patiala was opened in 1962 with strong Sikh support, followed by Guru Nanak University (now Guru Nanak Dev University) in Amritsar in 1969, founded to honour the quincentenary of the birth of Guru Nanak. (Another reason for the establishment of Guru Nanak University was that Punjabi University tended to favour the trading castes; Guru Nanak University, by contrast, favoured the Jats.)

The growth of the Punjab was interrupted in the mid-1980s by conflict between the central government and Sikh fundamentalists, who were demanding a separate Sikh nation-state. In an effort to reign in the principal Sikh political party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Supreme Akali Party), the government unwisely enlisted the support of a young Sikh fundamentalist, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In 1984 Bhindranwale and his armed followers occupied the Akal Takht in the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar. In response, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered a military assault on the complex, which proved much more difficult than had been anticipated and led to severe damage to some of the complex's buildings (notably the Akal Takht, which subsequently was repaired). Later in the year, Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for the assault. This in turn prompted a pogrom against the Sikhs, particularly in the Delhi area, and led to guerrilla warfare against the central government in Punjab that lasted until 1992. At the start of the 21st century, the demands of the fundamentalists still had not been met, but at least the Punjab was quiet. Meanwhile, the appointment of Manmohan Singh, a Sikh, as prime minister in 2004 was the source of great pride in the Sikh community.

### **The Sikh Diaspora**

Until well into the modern era, most migrant Sikhs were traders who settled in India outside the Punjab or in neighbouring lands to the west. In the late 19th century, the posting of Sikh soldiers in the British army to stations in Malaya and Hong Kong prompted Sikh emigration to those territories, which eventually became jumping-off points for further migration to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji, especially for

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those seeking temporary employment as unskilled labourers. Others Sikhs discovered opportunities along the west coast of North America, the first emigrants evidently arriving in 1903. Semiskilled artisans were also transported from the Punjab to British East Africa to help in the building of railways. After World War II, Sikhs emigrated from both India and Pakistan, most going to the United Kingdom but many also headed for North America. Some of the Sikhs who had settled in eastern Africa were expelled by Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in 1972; most of them moved to the United Kingdom. In the early 21st century the Sikh population in that country was more than 300,000, and there are communities of 180,000 to 200,000 members each in the United States and Canada.

# Religious Pluralism

The sense in which the matter of pluralism is being discussed by contemporary theologians is the religious and theological counterpart to the sense in which it is discussed by contemporary social scientists, especially political scientists and sociologists. This sense is clearly and concisely expressed in the definition offered as number 4 in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Mass: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1966):

### **Pluralism as an Issue**

*Pluralism*: a state or condition of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization 4b: a concept, doctrine, or policy proposing or advocating this state

While the reality of which this definition speaks (or rather, of which this word speaks, and which this definition clarifies) has certainly been around for a very

long time (otherwise there would be nothing to discuss in this essay!), the *concept* of pluralism is of quite recent vintage. This is easily determined by comparing the definition given above with the definitions in earlier great dictionaries of the English and/or American languages. The Second edition of the *New International Dictionary*, for example, stops just before it reaches the definition above, which appears in the Third Edition for the first time; thus, between 1934 (Second Edition) and 1966 (Third Edition) this usage of the word “pluralism” came to the attention of America’s leading lexicographers for the first time. An examination of other dictionaries will confirm the matter quite readily. The term is well-known to past generations in its application to moonlighting clergymen and to philosophical non-monists and non-dualists, but in this special sense it was not known to our forefathers.

Why this was so is beyond the scope of this essay; but, like Moses or yore, we may accept the fact that our fathers knew the reality indeed, but the name is only in our day revealed unto us. Perhaps this linguistic revelation will similarly open up for us some deeper grasp of our religious tradition and our community’s faith.

*Pluralism* (in this new sense) should be seen as genuinely different from, and as an alternative to, either *indifferentism* on the one hand, or *toleration* on the other. *Indifferentism* is the principle that differences of religious belief or practice are essentially unimportant, and is no doubt related to the use of “indifferent” in the sense of “without interest or concern; not caring; apathetic”. It may be that there are civilizations where indifferentism permits a form of pluralism, but it becomes a serious question whether in fact those civilizations are merely a congeries of many cultures rather than true “civilizations,” possessing some kind of coherent unity. *Toleration* is the allowance by a government of the exercise of religions other than the religion which is officially established or recognized, or forbearance of what is not actually approved. In this case, there is no doubt the possibility of a situation of pluralism in society; the primary difference between a tolerant society and a pluralist society is the risky character of the tolerated groups within a society which tolerates them.

Genuine *pluralism*, it seems to me, differs from either of these other policies which might result in the permission of deviation within a society or civilization, primarily because it implies a positive attitude



toward such deviation, a positive valuation of the presence of diverse religious (or other) groups within the society, free to participate in and develop their special interest or culture. Certainly the second definition presented in the *Third International Dictionary* includes this implication: “a concept, doctrine, or policy proposing or advocating this state.”

It is in terms of this positive attitude toward variety or deviation or diversity that we shall consider the question of pluralism in the Biblical context, rather than considering only toleration or indifferentism. We shall first examine the *practice* of pluralism, or its presence as a reality, in the Biblical context, and then proceed to examine the possible presence of the *doctrine* of pluralism, or the use of the concept or policy implied in pluralism, in the context of the Bible. We will conclude with some observations deriving from this examination.

### **Pluralism in Practice**

A casual reading of the Old Testament and the New Testament may result in an impression of a religious monolith, both in terms of cultus and in terms of faith and/or belief. But this is only a superficial impression. We tend to be misled by the fearsome denunciations of deviation in cultus or faith by prophets, by law-givers, and by priests, into supposing that except for infidelity to the common religion, all was unity, or was supposed to be, at any rate.

The actual practice in the community which produces the Bible was quite otherwise: it was pluralistic from its beginnings, and except for periodic show-downs (coming about every tenth generation, or 250-300 years, according to George Mendenhall's latest book[1]) which amounted to intensive efforts by one group within the pluralistic community to destroy the pluralism in favor of their own singular form of tradition, cultus, or belief, this pluralism continued to find expression through the Biblical community's history.

In the earliest stages of Israel's history, we find a league of diverse tribal groups, with differing traditions, shrines, and even gods. One group preserved the Abraham traditions, while another told the stories of Jacob; the Joseph tribes brought into the larger community the traditions of Egypt and bondage and Exodus, and perhaps Sinai as well. The later scheme of Jacob with twelve sons, born of two Aramean wives and two Canaanite concubines, no doubt reflects the

diverse origins of the league that formed in Shechem, just as the tradition of Joseph's two sons being born of an Egyptian mother (daughter of the Egyptian priest of On!) surely reflects ancient ties with Egypt, another mark of diverse origins. The great shrines at Shechem, Gilgal, Bethel, Hebron, and Beersheba, held their own for centuries, even against powerful efforts to centralize worship at Samaria and Jerusalem, and the ruins of the great shrine at Shiloh were still looked on with deep feeling as late as Jeremiah (7:12-14). The gods who were worshipped in this early phase, and whose names are carried on in the traditions, were several: the family gods or clan deities (the Shield of Abraham, the Fear of Isaac or the Kinsman of Isaac, the Mighty One of Jacob [Gen. 15:1; 31:42; 49:24]), the various forms of *El*, such as *El Olam* (Gen. 21:33), *El Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1; 49:25), *El Elyon* (Gen. 14:18), *El Bethel* (Gen. 31:13), sometimes with *El* apparently a proper name (as in *El Elohe Israel* [Gen. 33:20] and *El Elohe Abhika* [Gen. 46:3]), even sometimes in the early period the various *Baals* (surviving in the names of Saul's son *Ish-Baal* and grandson *Meri-Baal* [II Sam. 2:8-10; 4:4], both of which were editorially altered later to conceal the presence of the name of *Baal* in the names of Saul's own family; also note Judges 6:32, where the hero *Jerub-Baal* is identified with Gideon and the name is given an anti-Baal significance!), as well as (of course!) the god from the mountain or the desert, *Yahweh*, brought in by the Joseph tribes and their Mosaic traditions. (It is interesting to note the type of welding of the traditions where the names of the gods are concerned which appears in Ex. 6:3: *Yahweh* says that he in fact appeared to the patriarchs as *El Shaddai*, but that he did not reveal to them his name *Yahweh*.)

Political unification under David and under his son Solomon might have posed a threat to the astonishing pluralism exhibited prior to the monarchy; but while centralization of political power in the king and in the city Jerusalem combined with the beginnings of religious centralization in the Temple, a remarkable openness to the diversity must have remained, an openness which we witness in the composition of the great epic we call "J", probably written during the reign of Solomon. Here the diversities of tradition, cultus, gods, and shrines are brought into a complex unity (probably paralleling the political unity under Solomon) which nevertheless allows each tradition its

own place and witness. Instead of suppression of variety and diversity, we have appreciation of them, and appropriation of what each strand can offer to the larger, complex whole. The great contribution of J with respect to pluralism (we must sadly pass over his contributions to literature, contributions which show J to have been one of the greatest story-tellers of all time) is that he managed to hold all these diversities together by means of two things alone: the construction of a genealogical scheme which united all the various traditions into one family's heritage, and the claim that Yahweh alone was Israel's God, the other gods being only variant names for his worship and self-revelation. The latter is a stroke of genius if it is hoped to permit pluralism to continue; the commoner course would have been to denounce all the other gods in the tradition as bogus or as alien, and demand allegiance to Yahweh alone. But J arranged for another possibility to predominate: the possibility of creating the unity of the Israelite society in terms of faith in Yahweh as Lord of history, who can permit diversity in names, shrines, cultus, traditions, and all the rest, but who unites his people into one complex whole in terms of their history, a common history under Yahweh's invincible guidance. About the meaning of this unity we shall reflect in the next section; but it should be noted that J is neither tolerant of false gods nor indifferent to them. Rather, he comprehends them, in the main, even absorbing the EIs and the Baals into the larger and greater deity of Yahweh, and their worship into the larger unity of the worship of Israel.

The division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon fractured the unity envisioned by J, and perhaps aggravated the tensions which tend to make pluralism a difficult matter politically and religiously. The activities of Elijah and Elisha testify to the ease with which Yahwism could become exclusivist, and pluralism accused of being mere toleration or indifferentism. But the appearance of the great eighth-century prophets renews the possibility of understanding Israel as a single society under a single god, Yahweh, whose unity is understood not in terms of a single shrine, tradition, cultus, or even name, but rather as an ethical unity. The claim of these prophets that the demand of Yahweh for fidelity to himself meant responsible and moral behavior was a claim that allowed for the development of a variety of cultures and special interests within the one society, so long

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as none of them were developed at the expense of the others or at the expense of the well-being of persons who live within the society. An Elijah might tear down the altars of the Baals, but an Amos would stand at the altar and demand righteous behavior by the powerful and rich. The Yahwism of the latter, happily, is the one that prevailed in the mainstream of the Old Testament writings.

The collapse of the two kingdoms in little over a century and the subsequent Exile led to a further development of pluralism. Israel (or, now, Judah) was enabled to survive religiously only because of a practice of toleration on the part of Babylonian authorities (a practice denied four centuries later by the author of Daniel), and then a policy of even more generous toleration by the Persian kings later. The “universalism” of Second-Isaiah is an example of the expansion of the pluralism of J (and subsequent similar pluralism) to embrace even the actions of those who do not know themselves to be part of the one civilization or society under the supreme lordship of Yahweh. The prophet announces that Cyrus is Yahweh’s Messiah (45:1), that he is carrying out Yahweh’s will, even though he does not know Yahweh. To be sure, this is in the service of the people Israel, but it is not any sort of exclusivism; rather, Israel herself is to be the Servant whose service and suffering accomplish the redemption of the nations, who together will form the one society under Yahweh, despite their many backgrounds and traditions and worships. His healing or salvation will reach to the end of the earth, signalled by the new Exodus which is about to come to pass. Outsiders of all sorts-foreigners, eunuchs, outcasts-will be gathered into the new, greater Israel, according to the school of this great prophet (56:3-8). The unity sought is a unity of righteousness, an ethical unity, not a suppression of dissent to create a unity of all expression (59:1-21, and elsewhere).

The activities of Nehemiah and Ezra represent an anti-pluralist move, though they surely saw themselves as anti-indifferentist; the hostility to every form of co-operation with neighboring peoples is more reminiscent of Elijah than of Amos or Second-Isaiah. It is here that Judaism begins to take shape, and perhaps its survival in the midst of an alien and more-powerful culture seemed to require the suppression of all deviation and diversity. But the efforts at such suppression did not have permanent results; and within a few centuries we not only witness the rise of much variety within Judaism, but we

see the narrowness and anti-pluralism of Nehemiah and Ezra countered by such magnificent writings as Ruth and Jonah, which envision pluralism's practice, whether historical or fictional.

The New Testament presents a somewhat different situation, primarily because of the far shorter time-span covered; it is not as easy to disentangle the history (and thus the practice) from the literary remains of the situation. Rather than try to move through the literature section by section, it would be wiser to consider the general outlines of the early church's history. And just here we find ourselves facing the problem of a literature which conceals the full character of the diversity in the early church. We tend to read the New Testament in the light of the later church's notion of an unbroken line of "orthodoxy" stretching back to the Apostles, and to see diversity as instances of divergence from that line. In fact, it was probably quite otherwise, as a generation of research growing from the epoch-making work of Walter Bauer has shown.

Bauer's thesis, examined by him in terms of the first few centuries of the church's life, and tested within the New Testament by the most recent generation of scholars, is that Christianity existed as a religion of great variety in tradition, practice, and belief, from the beginning, and that "heresy" exists earlier than "orthodoxy," or rather that "orthodoxy" is the successful effort of the majority in one community to defeat or suppress the divergence from their tradition, practice, and belief which exist in other communities. Efforts made by the Jerusalem church to suppress the Pauline "deviation" failed, perhaps partly because of the death of its original leaders and perhaps partly because of the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70. But the pluralism represented in the Pauline churches, and so eloquently defended by Paul himself against efforts to require uniformity of practice within the churches, continued to be attacked, and in the end it lost out to the efforts of other churches, especially that of Rome, to establish one standard of belief, practice, and tradition (its own) as "orthodox."

But long before this happened, the situation was quite fluid. Differences of Christology (i.e., differences in conceptual categories used to understand Jesus, *and also* differences in the understanding itself) abounded in the early church. The so-called "Christological titles" scarcely conceal the plurality of modes of doing theology, both

in the Palestinian church and in the Hellenistic church of the first century. Sometimes the titles in one community simply did not make sense in another (e.g. *Messiah* or *Christ* soon became nothing but a proper name in Hellenistic circles), or were understood quite differently (e.g., *Kyrios* in Jewish circles would probably have conveyed “Yahweh,” since it is the LXX translation thereof); but in Hellenistic circles it might simply mean “master,” or it could mean the “Lord” of the mystery religion), or underwent a sea-change in meaning (e.g., *Son of God* in the Old Testament means “Israel,” or [as representing Israel] the king of Israel; but in Hellenistic culture it meant at the very least a *theios aner*, and at most a demi-god begotten by a god of a woman), or perhaps at first lost its meaning only to be revived in a transformed sense (e.g., *Son of Man*, which was meaningless after the shift to Hellenistic culture, but which was perhaps revived by Mark in the sense of “Suffering Servant,” “Crucified One,” as a polemic supporting Pauline Christianity against the triumphalist Christology which claimed the Twelve and especially Peter as authority and support).

Similarly, great differences existed as to the extent to which the new community should understand itself as related to the religion of Judaism. The early Jerusalem community apparently felt itself to be a genuine part of Judaism, and behaved accordingly, and even after this became impossible because of conflict with Jewish leaders, allegiance to the norms of Judaism was deep (e.g., dietary laws, circumcision). The Pauline churches apparently were heavily rooted among the *sebomenoi ton theon* or *foboumenoi ton theon*, the Gentile fringe attending the synagogues but declining to become proselytes, and as a result were much freer in their attitudes toward the Jewish connections of Christianity. The more “gnostic” churches not only felt themselves totally free of the Old Testament and Judaism, but felt or came to feel that Judaism and the Old Testament were hostile to (and even antithetical to) the Gospel and Christianity. Paul’s churches were subjected to vigorous efforts on the part of both “Jewish” and “gnostic” sympathizers (and missionaries?) to win their adherence, away from Paul’s own pluralist position (if we may anticipate in using that term of him).

The author of Acts was clearly aware of such diversities; but he arranged to play them down, showing all the apostles as preaching

the same message, doing the same great works, and, when fundamental divisions could not be ignored by such devices, agreeing on a compromise settlement (the so-called “Apostolic Council”). “Luke” is rightly seen as one of the creators of “early Catholicism.” The same sort of thing is visible in his Gospel, where Mark’s frequent exposures of the Twelve, and especially Peter, are eliminated (the old formula was, “Luke spares the Twelve”) wherever possible. (Cf. Mark 8:27-33 and parallels: Mark has Jesus turn on Peter and call him “Satan,” which Matthew retains, but only after having Jesus bless Peter for his confession and give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whereas Luke totally eliminates the condemnation of Peter.) But it would be unfair to picture “Luke” as merely a harmonizer; he clearly intends to retain elements of diversity in the church, and he above the other Evangelists insists on the presence in the church of those considered outsiders and outcasts by many- the poor, women, foreigners, even thieves.

We should also note that the New Testament contains four Gospels, with quite different thrusts, each of which was apparently authoritative for some early communities; and at least one of them, John, was apparently regarded as heretical by some in its original form. The kind of diversity represented by the four Gospels, each of which was held in high esteem by part of the early church (and all of which supposedly are, today!), is itself a testimony to the practice of pluralism in the early Christian church.

Of course, there were no doubt from the beginning the attempts to suppress divergence from what was felt to be the “norm,” which always means “what our group does and believes”; we can see this in the struggles which have been reconstructed among the Pauline churches with the aid of the Bauer hypothesis, as well as just beneath the surface of Acts. And there are always the Nehemiahs and Ezras: II Peter, for example, indulges in the ancient rhetoric of charging that his opponents in belief are of course wholly immoral and dissolute as well-they are not merely wrong, but they are wicked and sinful (*ipso facto!*). But this is happily not a dominant trend in the New Testament, even if it has in subsequent generations found more imitators than we might wish.

The overall picture of the early Christian church, then, is not too different with respect to pluralism from the Old Testament community,

once we have allowed for the obvious differences of time-scale and of nation as distinct from non-national religious community. Throughout the Biblical community, Old and New Testaments, Israel, Judaism, and Christianity, we find something very like pluralism in practice, even though from time to time there are opponents of it as indulgence in heresy. We do not find so much toleration or indifferentism (though Judaism profited from toleration after the Exile) as the real permission of “diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups” to “maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common” community [“civilization” is perhaps too grand a term for the Biblical community]. We find pluralism in practice; do we find it in concept and policy?

### **Pluralism as Policy**

Implicit in much of the preceding discussion is the view that pluralism is not merely present in practice in the history of the Biblical community, but is there in consequence of something quite basic and essential to the faith of that community; in other words, it is intentional, and thus there is at least implicitly a doctrine, concept, or policy of pluralism in its history. Obviously, if the concept of pluralism as such is new in our century, we are not likely to find it spelled out in so many words within the text of the Bible. But surely that sort of hermeneutics has long since died the death, and we may search instead for something that could be seen as finding ancient expression of our modern concept; that is to say, we are to seek a functional equivalent, whatever the conceptual and linguistic apparatus attached to it.

It must be acknowledged at the outset that, if we had no history beyond the end of the ninth century B.C.E., we could give quite utilitarian explanations for the presence of diversity in early Israel. The league was formed as a means of seizing and holding the land of Canaan, and thus the diversity of the clans and tribes had to be respected in order to maintain any sort of military front. And the united kingdom under David and Solomon would have necessitated a policy of toleration, if not pluralism, in order to hold together a tenuous nation—a unity so tenuous that it collapsed in the third generation of the dynasty. We could then see Elijah and Elisha as representing an authentic protest against such utilitarian policies, and J as being merely the literary-theological justification of the Davidic dynasty and policy, merely an



epic of the royal theology. But the history of Israel is much longer than this, and as so often happens, the future shows what the past meant (though it might have meant otherwise, had it issued in a different future!). The real future of Israel lay with the Amoses and Hoseas, not with the Elijahs and Elishas (though the latter could protest injustice as well, the problem being that they identified it as being linked with pluralism, whereas Amos moved in exactly the contrary fashion), as the bulk of our Old Testament shows. It is in this light that we will look through the history once more.

The great diversity which obtained in the early stages of Israel's history is treated by J, not as an unfortunate rampant growth of heresy, but as a complex unity under the sovereignty of Yahweh. This unity was conceived of historically, rather than simply or primarily as natural; that is, the unity was not one of a grand design whose parts are present at any one time, but it was instead one which was being accomplished historically, in time, as the affairs of men were brought into line with the purposes of Yahweh. All of the various parts of society and various groups contribute to the larger future, which ultimately is the reign of Yahweh in righteousness over all the earth. That reign is implicit in the beginnings of mankind of all races, as shown in the notice of Gen. 4:26: already in the time of Adam's son Seth, men began to worship Yahweh. J's comprehension of complexity into the unity of Yahweh's reign is carried forward by E, two centuries later, who reflects some of the ethical emphasis of his contemporary prophets Amos and Hosea (e.g., note his magnificent conclusion to the Joseph cycle, Gen. 50:20, where even the evil intentions of men are taken up into God's purposes of good). And while J does not see the use of various names of God as a matter of progressive revelation, as P centuries later does (e.g., Ex. 6:3), instead simply combining his traditions as all involving worship of Yahweh, he nonetheless unhesitatingly accepts and approves the diverse traditions and shrines that were affirmed in his time (e.g., J's version of the tradition of Jacob at Bethel, Gen. 28:10, 13-16, 19). The history of Israel continued to be written along such pluralist lines, comprehending diversity under the larger historical purposes of God, as shown by E's version and P's final version. The Deuteronomists in some sense may represent a backward move, in their intolerance of most forms of diversity (note the Josianic reform of 622 B.C.C. and its connection with Deuteronomy, which was both ultra-nationalistic

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and hyper-orthodox, suppressing “heresy” with a vengeance); in their favor may be observed the humaneness of their version of the laws, no doubt influenced by the ethical prophets during the century preceding their compilation. However, “ethical” is not the same as “pluralist,” and it must be conceded that Deuteronomic history represents a rather different concept than the pluralism we have noted in J, E, and P.

The discussion of Second-Isaiah in the preceding section was already a discussion of “policy” or “concept” or “doctrine,” since he was describing the future as Yahweh intended it, rather than as things then stood; and time would fail us to tell of the rest of the Old Testament writers (Heb. 11:32) in detail. Ruth and Jonah, already mentioned, are short enough and obvious enough to testify to the presence even in late post-Exilic Judaism of the kind of pluralism represented in the great histories and in Second-Isaiah.

The New Testament, as we have seen, exhibits a great diversity in early Christianity with respect to many aspects of belief and practice. Was this diversity merely tolerated, or indeed was it attacked as heretical? Or was it acceptable as a legitimate expression of the Gospel? That diversity was under attack as “heresy” is of course obvious, even without knowing the work of the Bauer school; but did these attacks represent the understanding of the Gospel which came to expression in the New Testament itself?

My contention is clearly that diversity of “ethnic, racial, religious, and social groups” found approval or at least acceptance by the mainstream of New Testament authors. What Jesus’ attitude was is subject to so much dispute about historical methods that it would be foolish to venture my own reconstruction. But we do have such authors as the Evangelists and Paul lying before us in their works, and their position seems rather clear.

Matthew represents one of the narrower forms of early church theology, much more legalistic and more Judaic than most of the New Testament. And yet we find him identifying the righteous as those who in fact minister to the needs of the needy, without knowing that it is the Christ who encounters them thereby (Matt. 25:31-46), rather than those who believe right doctrine or confess the right Christology (7:21); and he goes so far as to include a tradition that even those

who prophesy in Christ's name, who exorcise demons in Christ's name, and who do mighty works in Christ's name will be rejected if they are not doers of the will of the heavenly Father (7:22-23), a sharper form of the tradition than is found elsewhere (cf. Luke 13:26, where it is only applied to those [who] were physically adjacent to Jesus). The "common community" within which diversity may occur is clearly not one of "orthodoxy," but one of behavior, a community which does the will of the Father by loving and caring for the weak and helpless and needy.

Mark's Gospel as a whole probably represents a Pauline form of Christianity and theology (the case for which has been made by several scholars in various ways); but rather than lean on that conclusion, we might note a few pericopes in which he carries forward the traditions that show Jesus as being disinterested in any kind of uniformity of piety or belief or confession, but instead resolutely concerned with behavior or living. We have earlier noted the famed "confession of Peter" pericope, in which there is no approval of Peter's confession, but only a turning from it to teach about the suffering of the Son of Man; in response to the talk of suffering (the whole point of the Gospel according to Mark!), Peter rebukes Jesus, whereupon Jesus rebukes Peter as Satan, and as being not on God's side but men's (Mark 8:27-33, cf. 34ff.). Similarly, chapter 7 combines two traditions, one about clean and unclean foods and the other about the Syrophenician woman and her daughter, in order to further the theme that the community cannot be bound by restrictions as to legal traditions, ritual codes, or even race (and religion?). And in the same tradition as the traditions noted in Matthew, Mark early presents us with Jesus' rejection of the idea of a community bound by human ties of relationship: His brother and sister and mother are whoever does the will of God, not those who are blood-relatives (3:31-35).

Luke's emphasis on the importance of the "outsiders" in the community has already been mentioned. Samaritans, Gentile (Roman) soldiers, men from east and west and north and south, women, the poor, even thieves, will fill Abraham's table in Paradise. When James and John wish to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village where they were not welcome, Jesus rebukes them and goes on to another village (Luke 9:51-56), a passage which rightly follows Luke's transmission of Mark's account of John forbidding an exorcist

from casting out demons in Jesus' name "because he does not follow with us," and Jesus in turn overruling the forbidding: "He that is not against you is for you" (9:49-50). The community is not to be limited to those who "follow with us"; and vengeance against those who refuse to welcome Jesus is forbidden, even rebuked. (As already noted, in Acts there is a tendency to offer compromise as a solution to diversities which plague the community overmuch, and to blur distinctions and differences. But even there, Luke sees a possibility of more than one form of piety and cultus, at least a difference between what is laid on Jews and what is laid on Gentiles (put into the mouth of James, in what today would appear a piece of black humor!), a possibility which is worked out at the "Apostolic Council" (Acts 15).)

The situation in the Fourth Gospel is more complex, and cannot be handled by means of citing traditions he transmits, since the Gospel is constructed dialectically and thus requires that any part be interpreted by what follows after; systematic misinterpretation is easily done. Perhaps it will suffice to point out that on one hand John makes a clear distinction between the community of Jesus and the "world" (here *kosmos*), as in 15:18-25, but on the other hand he presents God as aiming at the salvation of the "world" through the sending of Jesus (3:16f.). He clearly does not envision any sort of "common community" between the church and the world. Yet he sees the unity of the church to be an organic unity of love, rather than one which requires suppression of diversity in belief and practice. Jesus has other sheep, not of this fold, to be united into one flock under one shephard (10:16), who will become one through the proclamation of the word (17:20f.)- a oneness reflecting the unity of Jesus with the Father, which is a oneness of love (17:22-26). And in the school of John, it is those who have left us who are not of us-for if they were of us, they would not have left! (I John 2:19); notice that it is not a matter of excluding the diverse elements, but a matter of their departing our community. The unity of the community is presented as an organic one, like a vine and branches; and the life of the vine is interpreted as love (15:1-17), not common practice of belief or race or social group. (The crucial question, of course, is whether love is interpreted in such a way as to be equated with agreement in belief, practice, etc. I am persuaded that in John it is not.)

Paul is so obvious a case that he scarcely requires treatment. The diversities which Paul insists on as permissible within the community are legion. Indeed, he sees the exclusion of diversity as being sinful in the extreme. I Corinthians is devoted almost in toto to this theme. It is schism, not diversity, which is the evil of the church there, and schism is the antithesis of pluralism, for it excludes the diverse group or belief or practice. The unity of the body of Christ, which is the church, is an organic one, like a true body, which has a diversity of members, organs, gifts, practices, responsibilities, and so on. To set one's own group (or self) against the others as superior or even as alone Christian is to fracture the body of Christ. And the way in which the body is knit together is love, described in terms which read like a description of Jesus as Paul perceives him. The other writings of Paul press the same theme. Romans, written to a powerful church Paul did not know first-hand, nonetheless includes discussions of the need for allowance of diversity in cultic practices. Galatians, fulminating against a perversion of Paul's Gospel, is directed against those who would bring every Christian under one set of requirements and practice, a move which Paul sees as the end of the community named by the name of Christ.

The Pauline school did not abandon the pluralism Paul saw as essential to the community. Both Colossians and Ephesians represent (similarly, but with striking differences as well) the Body of Christ, the true community, as being made up of all mankind, Jew and Gentile, insider and outsider, with all parts being held together in an organic unity like a body, but with diversities being essential to its well-being. Whether the Pastorals should be considered as part of the Pauline school is not settled (I for one cannot see them as connected to the school in any way, unless the school itself was gradually turned into a wholly un-Pauline group), but they do not seem to deal with the issue seriously at all, one way or another.

### **Some Observations**

The conclusions are probably self-evident at this point. Aside from a few writings, the Biblical history and the Biblical literature tend to present a picture of pluralism in practice, and a policy of pluralism in attitude. The diversities within the community are not merely tolerated, and they are certainly not treated with indifference. They are regarded

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as being part of a more complex whole, a whole which is finally (in Paul and John) perceived in organic images, a living, growing, historical organism, thus bringing to culmination the historical understanding of the unity seen by J at the beginning of the history of the community.

Where the unity is given any further clarification, it is usually seen as being either *ethical* or as constituted by *love*, which are surely intimately related to each other; in each case, it means activity on behalf of the other for the good of the other. Such a unity allows, at least in principle, the notion of the ultimate bringing into one complex unity of the whole of mankind, a notion which frequently find expression in our Biblical texts. And pluralism is essential to such a unity, for without it we engage in exclusionary processes, which by their very nature divide and alienate. The image of the community of mankind as a body is, after all, only an image; but it is in terms of images that we do most of our thinking and most of our acting, and thus it matters whether the image is one which furthers the good we acknowledge or not. The church later was willing to see this diversity-in-unity in the Godhead itself (unless it is there, it cannot be defended among men), by acknowledging that there was ultimately only one understanding (sub-stantia), but what this one understanding, like the actor in the Greek theater, wore three masks (personae). For mankind to do less would be at best error, at worst sin. To express one understanding in several ways would, at the least, be an imitation of the God who has revealed himself in these many times, places, and ways.

## Chapter 11

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# Religious Pluralism and the Position of the Catholic Church

The Church recognizes and defends the fundamental dignity of man to be free from coercion in matters religious (*Dignitatis humanae*, no. 2). But even as she respects each man's religious liberty, the position of the Church on religious pluralism is clear: all men are called in freedom to Jesus Christ and to his Church, which has a divine mission, indeed a mandate, to evangelize the whole world, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10–11). The Lord said: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole of creation" (Mark 16:15; cf. Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47). For example LG 5 says: "Henceforward the Church, endowed with the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility and self-denial, received the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom" (*Lumen gentium*, no. 5).

To all peoples, the Church "preaches Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and a folly to Gentiles, but to

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those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24). All men and women are called by God to faith and baptism in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. *Extra ecclesiam, nulla salus.*

However, some misunderstandings (within and without the Church) have given way to the erroneous ideas that salvation is accessible outside the mediation of Christ and his Church; that other religions offer a complementary path to salvation without Jesus’ name; or that, even if the mediation of Christ and his Church is necessary for salvation, it need not be proclaimed-worse, that it is somehow offensive to proclaim it-to those who fail to call upon the “name under heaven among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Serious attention to these misunderstandings crystallized with the publication of *Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism* by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J. Not long after (*Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published *Dominus Iesus* in order to affirm the Church’s teaching on these matters (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dominus Iesus*,); since some confusion remained even after *Dominus Iesus*, the CDF also issued a *Notification* in regard to Dupuis’ book and ambiguities presented therein, as well as a *Commentary on the Notification* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Commentary on the Notification of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the Book “Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism” by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J.* March 12, 2001). The *Notification* enunciates five points in perfect clarity and consistency. First, Jesus Christ is the sole and universal Mediator of Salvation. Second, God’s revelation is one and complete in Jesus Christ. Third, the salvific work of the Holy Spirit does not extend beyond the universal salvific economy of the Incarnate Word. Fourth, Christ’s Church is the sign and the instrument of salvation for all people; all are called to join her. Finally, the elements of truth and goodness found in other religions are preparations to hear the gospel.

Recently, the misunderstandings were exacerbated in the United States of America by a statement entitled *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*. The statement drew criticism from Avery Cardinal



Dulles, S.J.: “The statement is ambiguous, if not erroneous, in its treatment of topics such as evangelization, mission, covenant and dialogue.” The statement is, in fact, theologically and logically confused as it relates to things Catholic; so too is the response to Dulles offered by some of the statement’s authors. Particularly troublesome is the statement’s invalid rendering of Matthew 28:19 to mean that the Church’s mission is to all peoples, except the Jewish people. Just the opposite is the case, as Saint Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

The Church’s mission is the same as it was yesterday, today, and tomorrow: to evangelize the whole world. “It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the Cross of Christ as the sign of God’s universal love and the source of all grace.” (*Nostra aetate*, no. 4).

### **Religious Pluralism and the Catholic Church**

When Pope John Paul II on 22 December 1986 recalled the Inter-religious World Day of Prayer for Peace held in Assisi on 27 October 1986, he clearly stated that considering the spirit which guided the whole day through preaching, fasting and walking, the certainty, instilled by the Second Vatican Council, ‘of the unity in the principle and aim of the human family and of the sense and value of the non-Christian religions’ became real ‘without any shade of confusion and syncretism.’ In order to better explicate the meaning of unity, the Pope went further: ‘The order in unity is the one hailed from the creation and the redemption’, so in this way it is ‘divine’. ‘It may be the case that persons are often unaware of this radical unity of their origin and destination, and their place in one and the same divine plan; and when they profess religions which are diverse and mutually incompatible, they can also feel that their divisions are insuperable. Yet, despite this division, they are included in the great and unique design of God, in Jesus Christ, who has “united himself in a certain manner to every man” (GS 22), even if the person in question is not aware of this.’ Moreover, given the aim of the gathering, which was a common prayer for peace, the Pope asserted: ‘Every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit “who intercedes insistently for us... because we do not even know how to pray as we ought”’ but

he prays in us “with unutterable groanings” (Rom 8, 26-27). We can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.<sup>1</sup>

The topic of religious pluralism within the Catholic Church is challenging and controversial. In a comment to the Allocution of December 22, Jacques Dupuis strongly stressed how the main text of the papal discourse was borrowed from the Conciliar documents, especially from *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), *Gaudium et Spes* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and *Lumen Gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church). According to him, the pronouncements of John Paul II from his election up to 1986 echoed the ‘rediscovery of the universal economy of the Holy Spirit made progressively by Vatican II.’<sup>2</sup>

He detected this imprinting in many other texts, but nonetheless at the end of his comment he highlighted the theme of the prayer: the Pope, in fact, had asked the religious groups to gather in Assisi to pray. He had not asked them to pray together or to share a common prayer for multiple reasons: the meeting was official, the traditions involved were many with very different attitudes to prayer and meditation, and the sensitivities of the people belonging to each tradition were variegated. Even if they prayed differently, Dupuis clearly stated that the guidelines for Inter-religious dialogue issued by the Commission on Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, already allowed common prayer as theologically justified and concretely practicable. Moreover, prayer was considered to be a ‘form of dialogue which [went] to the deepest levels of religious life.’<sup>3</sup>

Jacques Dupuis was a theologian who lived and taught in India for thirty-six years. He had also been a Professor at the Gregorian University in Rome for nearly fifteen years and served as assistant to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue from 1985 to 1995. He proposed his idea of religious pluralism through three books, but *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, published in 1997, was brought to the public eye as a groundbreaking work.<sup>4</sup> The main question that the book aims to answer is whether theology can confer a positive meaning to the plurality of religious traditions in the framework of God’s design for humanity. Dupuis was trying to extend

the exclusivist and inclusivist approaches, without however totally embracing the pluralist paradigm which, he felt, 'denies the constitutive salvation of Christ.' He shared along with other theologians the classic typology which is composed by three paradigms - exclusivism or ecclesiocentrism, inclusivism or Christocentrism, and pluralism or teocentrism.

Dupuis significantly helped encourage further debate on the topic by demonstrating that religious pluralism exists *de jure* in God's providence, because the 'Trinitarian, Christological model is capable of holding in creative tension the depth of God's commitment to humankind in Jesus and the authenticity of other paths in accord with divine providence.' By the end of 1998, Dupuis was suspended from teaching and the news that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – presided over by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger - was investigating his views was all over the newspapers. As Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Calcutta later stated, he could hardly believe the news: the theologian was after all known for his orthodoxy. After thirty-two months, on 24 January 2001, the Congregation published a notification on Fr. Dupuis' book, 'intended to safeguard the doctrine of the Catholic faith from errors, ambiguities and harmful interpretations.'

What later came to be called 'The Dupuis Case' is not the main focus here. The debate on the *querelle* and on the topic in general has been wide and theologically robust. In order to understand the positions of the actors involved and the conception of religious pluralism itself, it would be useful to look at some of the documents to which both sides referred to. As John Paul II stated in the allocution recalled earlier, the main themes are (a) the centrality of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965); (b) the concept of unity in creation and redemption, which implies that creatures take part in the same divine design and in Jesus Christ; and (c) the notion of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of members of other religious traditions. Herein lies the idea that the only choice for dialogue is the reunion of all religious traditions in the main pillar of the Church: Jesus Christ.

No doubt the topic is controversial, but from a historical perspective the focal point here is the recall of the council. The Second Vatican Council was announced on 25 January 1959 and started working on 11 October 1962 after a preparatory period during which a Secretariat

for Christian Unity was formed to work on the topic of ecumenism, but which soon also considered the intertwined issues of religious freedom and interreligious dialogue. Within the Secretariat's activities and analyses, the relation of the Roman Catholic Church with Judaism and Islam received a more articulated evaluation than did other religious traditions for political, historical and theological reasons. The main one was that Jews were the principal others for Christianity; their relationship marked by allegations of common origin and subsequent betrayal. Islam, on the other hand, was the third monotheistic religion of the book and Muslims were expressing a strong disagreement with the Holy See's recognition of Israel. Finally, the international context: the Bandung Conference was held less than five years before the election of John XXIII and the Cold War blocs had already been clearly defined. Moreover in 1960, the Vietnam war had begun and the President of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was a Catholic, while John F. Kennedy had become the first Catholic President of the US.

How could the idea of renewal (*aggiornamento*) deal with such complex dynamics? Among the documents issued by the Council, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate, NA), was proclaimed on 28 October 1965. Two Jesuits, Joseph Neuner and Paul Pfister (both Austrians, the first from Pune, India, and the second from Japan) were brought into the group of experts who wrote the second chapter, which is dedicated to Hinduism and Buddhism. It states: 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.'

Moreover, when talking about dialogue, the declaration goes further: 'The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men' (NA 2).<sup>5</sup>

This is not the only document which at that time dealt with the topic of dialogue. For instance, in the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*,

issued on 6 August 1964, just a few months before the approval of *Nostra Aetate*, Pope Paul VI talked about ‘dialogue as a method.’ He enlisted the characteristics of dialogue and indicated some of the points which could be the basis for a dialogue with the ‘Worshippers of the One God.’ He recognized that the religious traditions were different and that while the Christian religion was the *one and true*, dialogue was possible and it could promote and defend ‘common ideals such as religious liberty, human brotherhood, education, culture, social welfare, and civic order’ (ES 108).<sup>6</sup>

Before *Nostra Aetate*, the debate was actually focused on the ecclesio-centric view: salvation was neither conceived nor possible out of the Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup> But an important fissure had already been opened on 31 December 1952, when Pius XII gave a radio broadcast to the Church in India to celebrate the anniversaries of the supposed arrival of St. Thomas and Francis Xavier. In that address he referred to ‘whatever may be true and good in other religions.’ Even if he spoke of completion in Christ, it was nonetheless a long step after his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (29 June 1943), where salvation was indicated as possible only through ‘baptism of desire’ within the Catholic Church. A second and even more striking sign arose during Paul VI’s visit to India on 3 December 1964: in front of the representatives of the various religions of India he quoted from the Upanishads, ‘From the unreal lead me to the real; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality’ (Br [Brihadâranyaka] Up. I, 3, 28).<sup>8</sup>

Along with the documents just mentioned, the Council produced many other texts on the relationship between the Church and other religions. To look only at the second decade of John Paul II’s papacy we find, on the one hand, documents firmly fixed on normative Christology such as *Christianity and the World Religions*<sup>9</sup> and *Dominus Iesus*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, even as the Dupuis case was still ongoing.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, there are also some other acts or declarations of Pope John Paul II, such as the address given in 1999 after the silent pilgrimage to the Gandhi memorial to the representatives of other religions and Christian confessions. On that occasion, he stated: ‘To choose tolerance, dialogue and cooperation as the path into the future is to preserve what is most precious in the great religious heritage of mankind. It is

also to ensure that in the centuries to come the world will not be without that hope which is the life-blood of the human heart. May the Lord of Heaven and Earth grant this now and forever.’<sup>11</sup>

It is not the task of the historian to define the pertinence or obsolescence of the theological typologies which are more commonly used when studying debates about religious pluralism within the Roman Catholic Church exclusivism/inclusivism/ pluralism, ecclesiocentrism/christocentrism/theocentrism, or the more recent replacement/fulfillment/mutuality/ acceptance proposed by Paul Knitter.<sup>12</sup> Looking at the historical context, however, it seems possible that the future frontier will be marked by the meaning attributed to the word ‘dialogue’.

It is equally possible that the acceptance of the plurality of religions and of the potential encounter implicit in the recognition of the validity of all of them in interpreting the transcendent absolute might even not be among the objectives considered important by the Catholic Church in the years to come. The long step of the Council was an intuition, the first of many other steps to come. Behind the declaration on non-Christian religions did not lie the long process of doctrinal exploration that had marked other Conciliar decisions, but a primary sense of otherness, which was definitely new and unprecedented. That sense evolved by reflecting on the special relationship between Judaism and Christianity as the key to understanding each and every otherness, without impinging on its religious dignity and within the framework of human freedom. *Nostra Aetate* opened up and called for dialogue and collaboration with the followers of all *other* religions (and not just of ‘non-Christian religions’) to promote both spiritual and moral well-being.

The event in Assisi showed that the ‘method of the dialogue’ must take into account what other religions are, with their ways of preaching and meditation. There is now a growing debate over the topic - even if there is no consensus - and a Church which might look more seriously at the Asian Churches through the eyes of its Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin, or maybe through the eyes of one of the Pope’s eight counsellors, Oswald Gracias, who is President of the Indian Episcopal Conference, where three rites are represented (Latin, Syro-malabar and Syro-malankara).

Moreover, with the election of a Jesuit to the Papal seat, the floor is open to discussing his ideas and perspectives as well as to a more confident reading of the words of Adolfo Nicolás, Superior General of the order, who in a recent article clearly stated that the starting point for Ignatian spirituality is the unconditional openness to the other, approached with a pastoral and salvific spirit through the mystery and freedom of God, in a constant and continuing ‘state of discernment’. In his words: ‘When we undertake interreligious dialogue, our aim must be to help one another mutually to combine and direct our energies towards [such] global problems and opportunities, for the benefit of more human, more just, more caring and more merciful world.’<sup>13</sup>

### Footnotes:

1. John Paul II, ‘To the Roman Curia at the Exchange of Christmas Wishes’, 22 December 1986. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1986/december/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19861222\\_curia-romana\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861222_curia-romana_it.html)
2. Jacques Dupuis, ‘World Religions in God’s Salvific Design in Pope John Paul II’s Discourse to the Roma Curia (22 December, 1986)’, *Seminarium* (1-2), 1987, p. 35.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.
4. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1997.
5. Among the documents of the Council, other references to dialogue are given in *Gaudium et Spes* 92 (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World; 7 December 1965), in *Lumen Gentium* 16-17 (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; 21 November 1964), in *Ad Gentes* 11 (The Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church; 7 December 1965).
6. Both of the documents, in their Latin version, make use of the word ‘colloquia’, not ‘dialogos’, which might mean ‘conversation’, not ‘dialogue’.
7. Bernard Sesboüé, *Hors de l’église pas de salut. Histoire d’une formule et problèmes d’interprétation*. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2004; Francis A. Sullivan, s.j., *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*. Paulist Press, New York-Mahwah (NJ), 1992.
8. Paul VI, Address to Members of the Non-Christian Religions, 3 December 1964. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/speeches/1964/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19641203\\_other-religions\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641203_other-religions_en.html)

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9. Christianity and the World Religions, Preliminary Note issued by the International Theological Commission in 1997. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_1997\\_cristianesimo-religioni\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1997_cristianesimo-religioni_en.html)
10. Declaration 'Dominus Iesus'. On the Unicity and Salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, issued by the Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, 6 August 2000. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html)
11. John Paul II, Meeting with representatives of other religions and other Christian confessions, Sunday, 7 November 1999, Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_07111999\\_new-delhi\\_meeting%20other%20religions\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_07111999_new-delhi_meeting%20other%20religions_en.html).
12. Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2002.
13. Adolfo Nicolás, 'Interreligious Dialogue: The Experience of Some Pioneer Jesuits in Asia', *The Way* 50, 2011, p. 32.