

ALTERNATIVES TO CHRISTIANITY

Buddhism Quick Facts

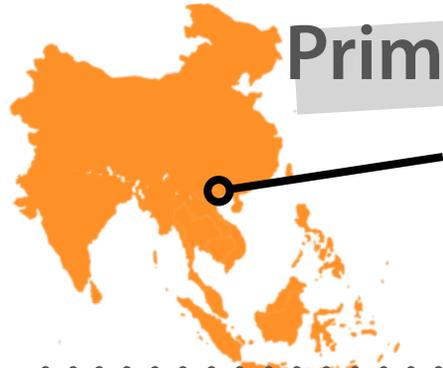
History

Buddhism started sometime in the 6th century B.C. by an Indian prince (according to legend). That is why there are many connections to Hinduism in Buddhism.



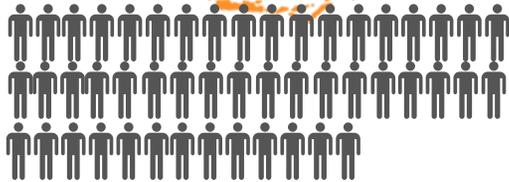
Primary Location

Although Buddhism started in India, it is essentially non-existent in that country today. It is most common in Southeast Asia, Tibet, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, and Korea (different sects are more common in different locations).



Population

 = 10 million Buddhists



There are over 490 million Buddhists in the world today. But because Buddhism is such a tricky religion to nail down (more on that in a moment), some estimate the total Buddhist population as over 1 billion!

Holy Books

 Buddhism has no official "Holy Book" that you could consider to be the equivalent of the Bible. There are some sects (think denominations, but more extreme than that) of Buddhism that have Holy Books, but it would be incorrect to give any book the authority that Christians do the Bible.

But Buddhism is still a religion based on teaching, given by the first Buddha: the Four Noble Truths. They are:

- (1) To live is to suffer.
- (2) Suffering is caused by desire.
- (3) You can eliminate suffering by eliminating desire.
- (4) You eliminate desire by following the eight-fold path.

God

0?

Buddhism is a non-theist religion, basically meaning that believing in God isn't important or even necessary to be a Buddhist (confused yet?). While the majority of Buddhists believe in gods (including the veneration of Buddhas who have gone before them), there are some Buddhists who are atheists as well! The important thing isn't the belief in a god, but instead the belief in the Four Noble Truths given by the original Buddha.

Human Condition

Somewhat similar to Hindus, Buddhists don't believe that there is anything inherently wrong with human nature. As alluded to earlier, the problem is found in existence: to live is to suffer. This is because Buddhists believe that reality is not really reality (try saying that 10 times fast). This life is a lot like a dream: it's real, but it's just a projection. The key to overcoming wickedness and suffering is to overcome this projection.



Salvation

Much like Hinduism, the Buddhist understanding of salvation is quite different than our Christian understanding of salvation. Because sin and suffering are illusory, there is no need for an atonement. Instead, salvation is the state of nirvana that is reached through following the eightfold path. Here's the eightfold path that one must follow to achieve salvation:

- (1) Right View (understanding the truths of existence.)
- (2) Right Intentions (being willing to achieve enlightenment)
- (3) Right Speech (saying all that is, and only what is, required)
- (4) Right Action (doing all that is, and only what is, required)
- (5) Right Livelihood (being a monk)
- (6) Right Effort (directing one's energy properly)
- (7) Right Mindfulness (meditating properly)
- (8) Right Concentration (maintaining continuous focus)

Afterlife

Again, the Buddhist understanding of the afterlife has some similarities with the Hindu one. If you don't reach the afterlife in this life, you will be reincarnated for more suffering on your path to reach nirvana. Yet once one does reach nirvana, one doesn't become a part of a panentheistic god. Instead, one just becomes a part of the great nothingness. Buddhism, in its truest sense, is a quest to realize the illusion of self-existence and overcome it.

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Hinduism Quick Facts

History

Hinduism started somewhere between the year 3000 - 1200 BC, making it the oldest religion in the world

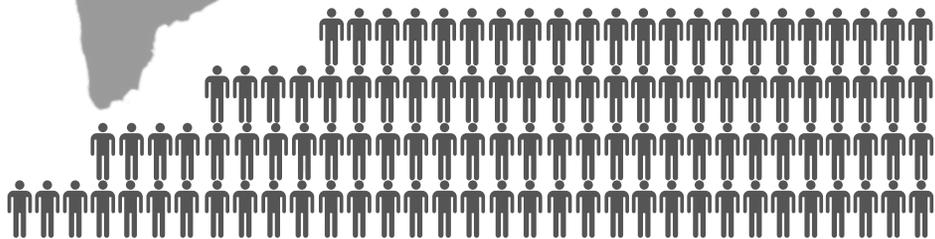


Primary Location



"Hinduism" literally means "the religion of India," so it's no surprise that it is primarily found in India and the surrounding countries.

Population



= 10 million Hindus

Don't feel like counting? There are over 1.1 billion Hindus in the world today, making it the 3rd largest religion in the world.

Holy Books

There are 4 Vedas, which are the oldest and most important texts to Hinduism. There are many more books that Hindus read, but none of them (including the Vedas) are as important to them as the Bible is to Christians. In fact, some Hindus believe that they have advanced past needing the Vedas!



God

330.

Million, that is. There are alleged to be over 330 million gods in Hinduism. This is because they believe in "pantheism," which means that the universe is a part of God. There is a bit of the divine in everything, so idols, people, and even loaves of bread can be seen as gods.

Each person has a "favorite god" that they worship, since there are so many to choose from. The main God is named "Brahman" and is a distant, impersonal god, almost more of a force than a personal God as found in Christianity.

Human Condition

Hindus believe that perfection is within the grasp of all humanity. The reason that we see so much evil in this world isn't because there is a sin problem, but merely because of ignorance. The key to overcoming this ignorance and in turn overcoming evil, is through rituals, meditation, the worship of the gods, and karma (see below).



Salvation

The concept of salvation in Hinduism is much different than in Christianity. Salvation is something that each of us is capable of attaining on our own, either in this life or in future lives after reincarnation. Salvation can be earned in three ways: through works, through knowledge, or through devotion to your god. If one doesn't achieve salvation in this life, they will be reincarnated based off of karma—if they were good in this life, they will be rewarded in their



Afterlife

Hindus believe in an afterlife, just nothing like the Christian understanding of heaven. The goal of Hinduism is to one day free oneself from the cycle of suffering that is the life around us. When someone finally breaks free, they enter into nirvana. This means to be re-absorbed into the god Brahman and cease to exist as an individual consciousness.