










Religion/Sect/ Belief System	Origins & History	Adherents- Worldwide	God(s) and Universe	Human Situation and Life's Purpose	Afterlife	Practices	Important Texts
 Zoroastrianism	Zoroaster in 6th cent. BC, Persia. Official religion of ancient Persia. May have influenced Judaism and Vedic religion.	c. 200,000	One God , Ahura Mazda, but a dualistic worldview in which an evil spirit, Angra Mainyu, is almost as powerful.	Humans are free to do good or evil, must choose the side of good.	Judgment followed by heaven or hell. Hell is temporary until final purgation and return to Ahura Mazda	Good deeds, charity, equality, hard work.	Zend Avesta
 Judaism	The religion of the Hebrews (c. 1300 BC), especially after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD.	14 million	One God , Yahweh (YHVH).	Obey God's commandments, live ethically. Focus is more on this life than the next.	Not historically emphasized. But, beliefs vary from no afterlife to shadowy existence to the World to Come (similar to heaven)	Circumcision at birth, bar/bat mitzvah at adulthood. Synagogue services on Saturdays. No pork or other non-kosher foods. Holidays related to historical events.	TANAKH (Torah, Nebi'im and Ketuvim) has 39 books = (5 of the Torah, 21 of the Prophets, and 13 of writings)
 Christianity	Founded by Jesus Christ in c. 30 AD, Israel.	2 billion	One God who is a Trinity (three parts): Father, Son, & Holy Spirit	All have sinned & are thereby separated from God. Salvation is through faith in Christ & for some, sacraments & good works.	Eternal heaven or hell (or temporary purgatory)	Prayer, Bible study, baptism, Eucharist (Communion), church on Sundays, numerous holidays.	The Bible = 66 Books (39 Old Testament + 27 New Testament Books)
 Islam	Muhammad, 622 AD, Saudi Arabia	1.3 billion (Sunni: 940 million)	One God (Allah in Arabic)	Humans must submit (<i>islam</i>) to the will of God to gain Paradise after death.	Paradise or Hell	Five Pillars: Faith, Prayer, Alms, Pilgrimage, Fasting. Mosque services on Fridays. Ablutions before prayer. No alcohol or pork. Holidays related to the pilgrimage and fast of Ramadan.	Qur'an (Scripture); Hadith (tradition)
 Hinduism	Indigenous religion of India as developed to present day.	900 million	One Supreme Reality (Brahman) who is manifested in <u>many gods</u> and goddesses	Humans are in bondage to ignorance and illusion, but are able to escape. Purpose is to gain release from rebirth, or at least a better rebirth.	Reincarnation until one gains enlightenment	Yoga, meditation, worship (puja), devotion to a god or goddess, pilgrimage to holy cities, live according to one's dharma (purpose/ role).	The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, etc.
 Buddhism	Founded by Siddharta Gautama (the Buddha) in c. 520 BC, NE India.	360 million	Varies: Theravada atheistic; Mahayana more polytheistic. Buddha taught nothing is permanent.	Purpose is to avoid suffering and gain enlightenment and release from cycle of rebirth, or at least attain a better rebirth by gaining merit.	Reincarnation (understood differently than in Hinduism, with no surviving soul) until gaining enlightenment	Meditation, mantras, devotion to deities (in some sects), mandalas (Tibetan)	Tripitaka (Pali Canon); Mahayana sutras like the Lotus Sutra; others
 Confucianism	Founded by Confucius (551-479 BC), China	5-6 million	Not addressed	Purpose of life is to fulfill one's role in society with propriety, honor, and loyalty.	Not addressed	Honesty, politeness, propriety, humaneness, perform correct role in society, loyalty to family, nation	Analects
 Taoism	Lao-Tzu, c. 550 BC, China.	20 million	Pantheism - the Tao pervades all. Yin-yang - opposites make up a unity.	Purpose is inner harmony, peace, and longevity. Achieved by living in accordance with the Tao.	Revert back to state of non-being, which is simply the other side of being	General attitude of detachment and non-struggle, "go with the flow" of the Tao. Tai-chi, acupuncture, and alchemy to help longevity.	Tao Te Ching, Chuang-Tzu
 Shinto	Indigenous religion of Japan.	3-4 million	Polytheism based on the <i>kami</i> , ancient gods or spirits.	Humans are pure by nature & can keep away evil thru purification rituals and attain good things by calling on the kami.	Death is bad and impure. Some humans become kami after death	Worship and offerings to kami at shrines and at home. Purification rituals.	Kojiki or 'Records of Ancient Matters' and Nihon-gi or 'Chronicles of Japan'