

# MAJOR BELIEF SYSTEMS BY 1000 C.E.

## POLYTHEISM

ORIGIN: earliest; found in all cultural regions

TENETS: Belief in many spirits and gods; took on characteristics of nature; **animism**

SIGNIFICANCE: Examples: Sumerian, Greek, Germanic, Roman, Aztec, African religions. Hinduism a modern example

## ISLAM

ORIGIN: **Muhammad**, 622

TENETS: one God, **Allah**; Muhammad as the seal of the prophets; accepted Noah, Abraham, Jesus as prophets; **Five Basic Pillars**: “**There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet**”, prayer five times a day facing **Mecca**, charity, fasting during **Ramadan**, pilgrimage to **Kaaba** in Mecca; original teachings in **Quran**  
SIGNIFICANCE: split into **Sunni** (modern majority, original adherents of Umayyads) and **Shi’is** (original followers of **Ali**) sects; development of **Sharia**, legal code; lack of hierarchical structure

## JUDAISM

ORIGIN: Hebrews, 1st historical writings c. 900 BCE; 1st monotheistic faith.

TENETS: one God; chosen people through a special relationship with God; **Messiah** to come; beliefs set forth in **Torah**, **Mosaic Law**, and **Talmud**

SIGNIFICANCE: Monotheism; greatly influenced Christianity and Islam; no widespread hierarchical structure

## CHRISTIANITY

ORIGIN: Teachings of **Jesus**, c.30 CE

TENETS: monotheistic; Jesus as the **Messiah**; humanity saved through God’s grace and acceptance of Christ as savior; sins are forgiven; the main source of early teachings are **Gospels**; much later writing

SIGNIFICANCE: Persecuted by Romans; legalized by **Constantine** in mid 300s; strong **monastic** tradition and missionary movement; disciplined, organized, bureaucratic; power of **papacy** paralleled that of European kings

## BUDDHISM

ORIGIN: Began as reaction to Hindu priest practices; **Gautama Buddha**, c. 550 BCE

TENETS: **Four Noble Truths**: universality of suffering, desire causes suffering, **Nirvana** ceases suffering, **Eighth Path** as the guide to entering nirvana (right knowledge, right speech, right thought, right conduct, right effort, right mind, right livelihood, right meditation)  
SIGNIFICANCE: monastic tradition (as in Christianity); monks carried Buddhism beyond India; eliminated in India due to efforts of Hindus and Muslims by 1000 C.E.; splits into **Mahayana** (northern Asian) & **Theravada** by 100 C.E.; **Zen Buddhism**: 700s in China and 1200s in Japan (sudden enlightenment through meditation)

## DAOISM

ORIGIN: Traditionally attributed to **Lao-tzu**, 400 BCE;

TENETS: **Tao** refers to **The Way**, live in accord with one’s nature; oneness with everything through the Tao; interaction of **yin** and **yang**, passive and active principles

SIGNIFICANCE: Confucian rituals unnatural; popular with peasant beliefs, interest in nature had dramatic influence on art, eventually became polytheistic

## HINDUISM

ORIGIN: Aryan invaders c. 1700 BCE

TENETS: **Brahma** is the ultimate reality; rebirth determined by **karma**; release of the soul (**atman**) achieved through oneness with Ultimate Reality; **dharma** is rules of conduct

SIGNIFICANCE: No founder; tolerant of other religions; few formal beliefs; adaptable, offers meditation and ritual; creation of **caste system**; perhaps oldest religion

## CONFUCIANISM

ORIGIN: China, c. 550 BCE; **Kung Fu-Tzu & Mencius** (c. 350 BCE)

TENETS: **Jen**, a quality of sympathy that relates all humanity to each other; humaneness; **filial piety**; family as the teacher of social roles; family as extension of state; man superior; only the educated should govern

SIGNIFICANCE: philosophical and ethical system of conduct; dominant influence in Chinese government, education, and scholarship for 2000 years; basis of **civil service**; public reserved right to overthrow government due to **mandate of heaven**; ancestor worship

