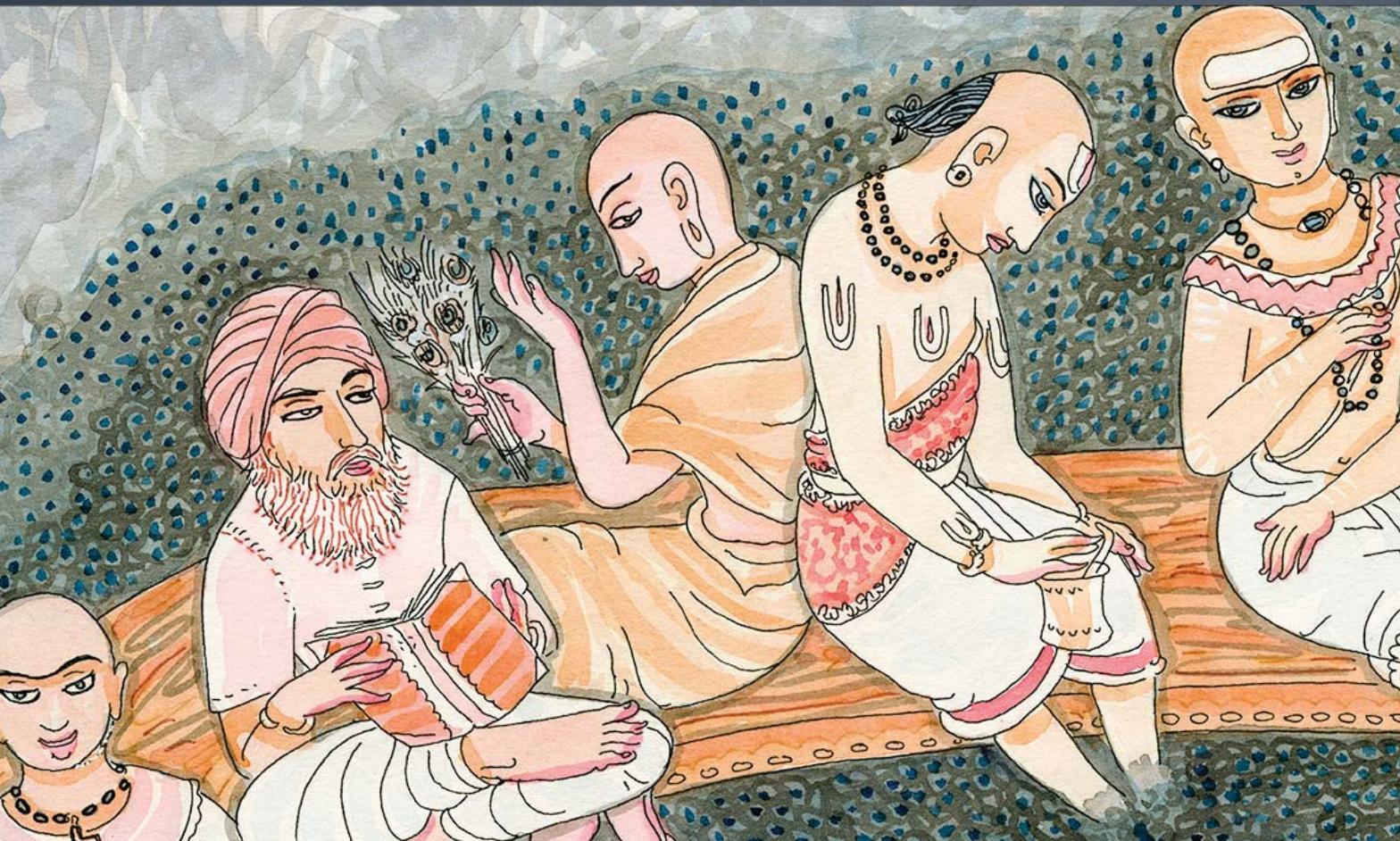
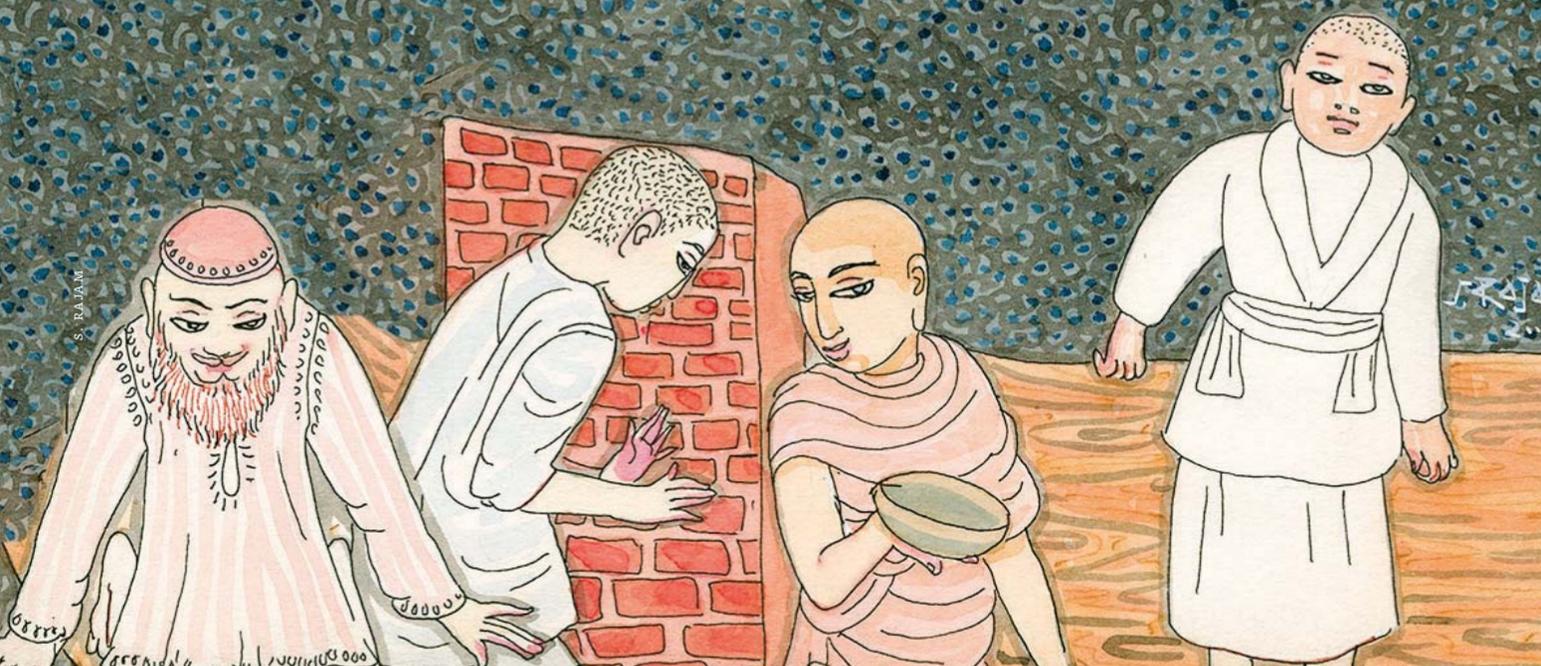


# How the Major Religions View God, Soul & World





# How the Major Religions View God, Soul & World



## Nine Core Beliefs of Twelve World Religions And Three Revealing Comparisons

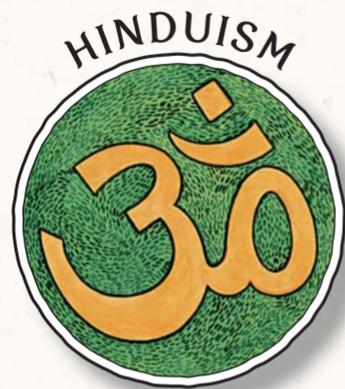
**Introduction by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**

**O**UR BELIEFS DETERMINE OUR THOUGHTS and attitudes about life, which in turn decree our actions. By our actions, we create our destiny. Beliefs about sacred matters—God, soul and cosmos—are essential to one’s approach to life. As you will see from a perusal of this Educational Insight, the beliefs among the world’s faiths are in many cases quite different from one another, a fact that belies the common Hindu’s conception that all religions are one. Distilling a religion down to nine

core beliefs provides a clear window into the essential perspectives within it. Once those perspectives are known, comparisons can be made between religions, making similarities and differences readily apparent. Here we provide three such comparisons: Eastern and Western; Hindu and Christian; and the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This knowledge is useful in many ways. For example, nowadays in any country of the world, many of your friends and coworkers may be of other faiths. Understand-

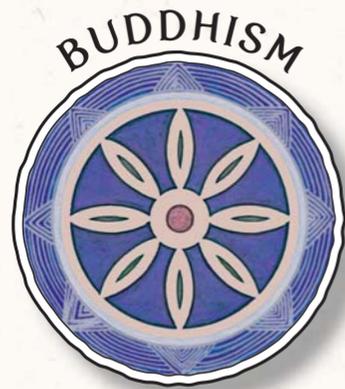
ing how their religions are similar and different from yours helps in preserving harmonious relationships and forming closer ties. It can also inform you about the whys and wherefores of the actions and reactions of other faith members. Some religions declare theirs the one true path, creating a pervasive and persistent antagonism toward those of other persuasions. This may manifest as exclusionism and fanaticism or as an attempt, whether tactical or unintentional, to convert others to their way of thinking. Bolstered with the knowledge of these underlying beliefs and attitudes, one can associate in an informed and sensitive manner. When approached by Christian evangelists, for example, one may, as my guru advised, present a copy of the Hindu/Christian comparison from this Insight, saying, “I appreciate your overtures, but I am firm in my Hindu faith. Here is a document showing what we

believe in comparison to the Christian point of view.” When this point-counterpoint was first published in *Christianity Today*, our editorial offices received dozens of letters in which Christians said they had never truly understood the Hindu view of God and soul and world, confiding that the Hindu perceptions were more in harmony with their personal spirituality than the official doctrines of their church. Hindus may find this is more and more common as the world comes to know about the Sanatana Dharma. While there are hundreds of books addressing deeper matters of religious theology and history, none we know of have attempted such concise synopses and side-by-side comparative summaries. Religions are engaging more with one another than ever before in history, creating a greater need for mutual discovery and acceptance, and this may hopefully begin to meet that need.



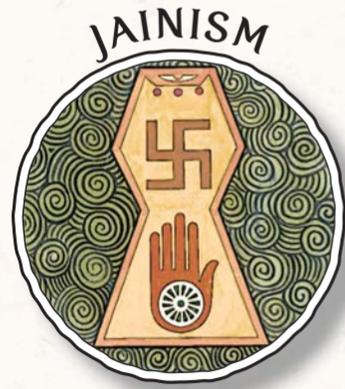
## HINDUISM

1. I believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
2. I believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.
3. I believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. I believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. I believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.
6. I believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. I believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
8. I believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, noninjury.
9. I believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.



## BUDDHISM

1. I believe that the Supreme is completely transcendent and can be described as Sunya, a void or state of nonbeing.
2. I believe in the Four Noble Truths: 1) that suffering is universal; 2) that desire is the cause of suffering; 3) that suffering may be ended by the annihilation of desire; 4) that to end desire one must follow the Eight-Fold Path.
3. I believe in the Eight-Fold Path of right belief, right aims, right speech, right actions, right occupation, right endeavor, right mindfulness and right meditation.
4. I believe that life's aim is to end suffering through the annihilation of individual existence and absorption into nirvana, the Real.
5. I believe in the Middle Path, living moderately, avoiding extremes of luxury and asceticism.
6. I believe in the greatness of self-giving love and compassion toward all creatures that live, for these contain merit exceeding the giving of offerings to the Gods.
7. I believe in the sanctity of the Buddha and in the sacred scriptures of Buddhism: the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets of Wisdom) and/or the *Mahayana Sutras*.
8. I believe that man's true nature is divine and eternal, yet his individuality is subject to the change that affects all forms and is therefore transient, dissolving at liberation into nirvana.
9. I believe in dharma (the Way), karma (cause and effect), reincarnation, the *sanga* (brotherhood of seekers) and the passage on Earth as an opportunity to end the cycle of birth and death.



## JAINISM

1. I believe in the spiritual lineage of the 24 Tirthankaras ("ford-makers"), of whom the ascetic sage Mahavira was the last—that they should be revered and worshiped above all else.
2. I believe in the sacredness of all life, that one must cease injury to sentient creatures, large and small, and that even unintentional killing creates karma.
3. I believe that God is neither creator, father nor friend. Such human conceptions are limited. All that may be said of Him is: He is.
4. I believe that each man's soul is eternal and individual and that each must conquer himself by his own efforts and subordinate the worldly to the heavenly in order to attain moksha, or release.
5. I believe the conquest of oneself can only be achieved in ascetic discipline and strict religious observance, and that nonascetics and women will have their salvation in another life (Digambara sect).
6. I believe that the principle governing the successions of life is karma, that our actions, both good and bad, bind us, and that karma may only be consumed by purification, penance and austerity.
7. I believe in the *Jain Agamas* and *Siddhantas* as the sacred scriptures that guide man's moral and spiritual life.
8. I believe in the Three Jewels: right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.
9. I believe the ultimate goal of moksha is eternal release from samsara, the wheel of birth and death, and the concomitant attainment of Supreme Knowledge.



## SIKHISM

1. I believe in God as the sovereign One, the omnipotent, immortal and personal Creator, a being beyond time, who is called Sat Nam, for His name is Truth.
2. I believe that man grows spiritually by living truthfully, serving selflessly and by repetition of the Holy Name and Guru Nanak's Prayer, Japaji.
3. I believe that salvation lies in understanding the divine Truth and that man's surest path lies in faith, love, purity and devotion.
4. I believe in the scriptural and ethical authority of the *Adi Granth* as God's revelation.
5. I believe that to know God the guru is essential as the guide who, himself absorbed in love of the Real, is able to awaken the soul to its true, divine nature.
6. I believe in the line of ten gurus: Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjun, Guru Har Govind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishnan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Govind Singh—all these are my teachers.
7. I believe that the world is maya, a vain and transitory illusion; only God is true as all else passes away.
8. I believe in adopting the last name "Singh," meaning "lion" and signifying courage, and in the five symbols: 1) white dress (purity), 2) sword (bravery), 3) iron bracelet (morality), 4) uncut hair and beard (renunciation), and 5) comb (cleanliness).
9. I believe in the natural path and stand opposed to fasting, pilgrimage, caste, idolatry, celibacy and asceticism.



## TAOISM

1. I believe that the Eternal may be understood as the Tao, or "Way," which embraces the moral and physical order of the universe, the path of virtue which Heaven itself follows, and the Absolute—yet so great is it that "the Tao that can be described is not the Eternal Tao."
2. I believe in the unique greatness of the sage Lao-tsu and in his disciple Chuang-tsu.
3. I believe in the scriptural insights and final authority of the *Tao te Ching* and in the sacredness of Chuang-tsu's writings.
4. I believe that man aligns himself with the Eternal when he observes humility, simplicity, gentle yielding, serenity and effortless action.
5. I believe that the goal and the path of life are essentially the same, and that the Tao can be known only to exalted beings who realize it themselves—reflections of the Beyond are of no avail.
6. I believe the omniscient and impersonal Supreme is implacable, beyond concern for human woe, but that there exist lesser Divinities—from the high Gods who endure for eons, to the nature spirits and demons.
7. I believe that all actions create their opposing forces, and the wise will seek inaction in action.
8. I believe that man is one of the Ten Thousand Things of manifestation, is finite and will pass; only the Tao endures forever.
9. I believe in the oneness of all creation, in the spirituality of the material realms and in the brotherhood of all men.

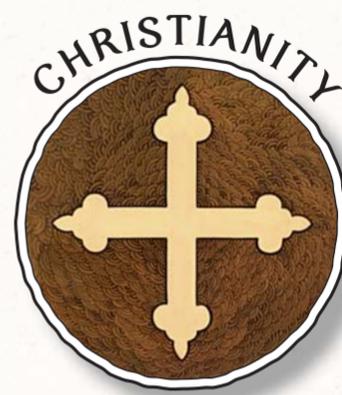


## CONFUCIANISM

1. I believe in the presence of the Supreme Ruler in all things, and in Heaven as the ethical principle whose law is order, impersonal and yet interested in mankind.
2. I believe that the purpose of life is to follow an orderly and reverent existence in accord with Li, propriety or virtue, so as to become the Superior Man.
3. I believe in the Golden Rule: "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you."
4. I believe that Confucius, China's first sage, is the Master of Life whose teachings embody the most profound understanding of Earth and Heaven, and that Mencius is China's second sage.
5. I believe in the writings of Confucius as scriptural truth and in the four sacred books: *The Analects*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Great Learning*, and *Mencius*.
6. I believe that each man has five relationships, entailing five duties to his fellow man: to his ruler, to his father, to his wife, to his elder brother and to his friend—the foremost being his familial duties.
7. I believe that human nature is inherently good, and evil is an unnatural condition arising from inharmony.
8. I believe that man is master of his own life and fate, free to conduct himself as he will, and that he should cultivate qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity.
9. I believe that the family is the most essential institution among men, and that religion should support the family and the state.



1. I believe in the "Way of the Gods," Kami-no-michi, which asserts nature's sacredness and uniquely reveals the supernatural.
2. I believe there is not a single Supreme Being, but myriad Gods, superior beings, among all the wonders of the universe, which is not inanimate but filled everywhere with sentient life.
3. I believe in the scriptural authority of the great books known as the *Record of Ancient Things*, *Chronicles of Japan*, *Institutes of the Period of Yengi* and *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*.
4. I believe in the sanctity of cleanliness and purity—of body and spirit—and that impurity is a religious transgression.
5. I believe that the State is a divine institution whose laws should not be transgressed and to which individuals must sacrifice their own needs.
6. I believe in moral and spiritual uprightness as the cornerstone of religious ethics and in the supreme value of loyalty.
7. I believe that the supernatural reveals itself through all that is natural and beautiful, and value these above philosophical or theological doctrine.
8. I believe that whatever is, is Divine Spirit, that the world is a one brotherhood, that all men are capable of deep affinity with the Divine and that there exists no evil in the world whatsoever.
9. I believe in the practical use of ceremony and ritual, and in the worship of the Deities that animate nature, including the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the Moon God Tsuki-yomi and the Storm God Sasa-no-wo.



1. I believe in God the Father, Creator of the universe, reigning forever distinct over man, His beloved creation.
2. I believe man is born a sinner, and that he may know salvation only through the Savior, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.
3. I believe that Jesus Christ was born of Mary, a virgin.
4. I believe that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, then resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father as the final judge of the dead, and that He will return again as prophesied.
5. I believe that the soul is embodied for a single lifetime, but is immortal and accountable to God for all thoughts and actions.
6. I believe in the historical truth of the *Holy Bible*, that it is sacred scripture of the highest authority and the only word of God.
7. I believe that upon death and according to its earthly deeds and its acceptance of the Christian faith, the soul enters Heaven, Purgatory or Hell. There it awaits the Last Judgment when the dead shall rise again, the redeemed to enjoy life everlasting and the unsaved to suffer eternally.
8. I believe in the affirmative nature of life and in the priceless value of love, charity and faith.
9. I believe in the Holy Trinity of God, who reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and in the existence of Satan, the personification of evil, deception and darkness.



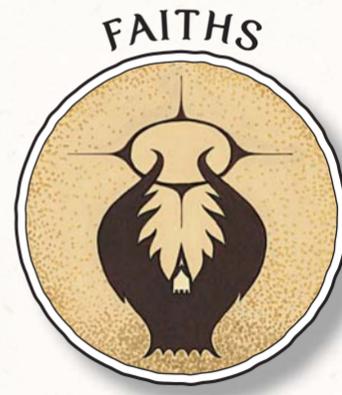
1. I believe there are two Great Beings in the universe. One, Ahura Mazda, created man and all that is good, beautiful and true, while the other, Angra Mainyu, vivifies all that is evil, ugly and destructive.
2. I believe that man has free will to align himself with good or evil, and when all mankind is in harmony with the God Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu will be conquered.
3. I believe the soul is immortal and upon death crosses over Hell by a narrow bridge—the good crossing safely to Heaven and the evil falling into Hell.
4. I believe that a savior named Sayoshant will appear at the end of time, born of a virgin, reviving the dead, rewarding the good and punishing the evil, and thereafter Ahura Mazda will reign.
5. I believe that Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, is the foremost Prophet of God.
6. I believe in the scriptural authority of the *Zend Avesta*.
7. I believe that purity is the first virtue, truth the second and charity the third—and that man must discipline himself by good thoughts, words and deeds.
8. I believe that marriage excels continence, action excels contemplation and forgiveness excels revenge.
9. I believe in God as Seven Persons: Eternal Light, Right and Justice, Goodness and Love, Strength of Spirit, Piety and Faith, Health and Perfection, and Immortality—and that He may best be worshiped through the representation of fire.



1. I believe that Allah is the Supreme Creator and Sustainer, all-knowing and transcendent and yet the arbiter of good and evil, the final judge of men.
2. I believe in the Five Pillars of Faith: 1) praying five times daily, 2) charity through alms-giving, 3) fasting during the ninth month, 4) pilgrimage to Holy Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and 5) profession of faith by acknowledging, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet."
3. I believe in the *Koran* as the Word of God and sacred scripture mediated through the Angel Gabriel to Mohammed.
4. I believe in the direct communion of each man with God, that all are equal in the eyes of God and therefore priests or other intercessors are unneeded.
5. I believe in the pure transcendence of God, great beyond imagining; no form or idol can be worshiped in His Name.
6. I believe that the soul of man is immortal, embodied once on Earth, then entering Heaven or Hell upon death according to its conduct and faith on Earth.
7. I believe in the Last Judgment and that man should stand in humble awe and fear of God's wrathful and vengeful power.
8. I believe that truthfulness should be observed in all circumstances, even though it may bring injury or pain.
9. I believe that salvation is only obtained through God's grace and not through man's efforts, yet man should do good and avoid all sins, especially drunkenness, usury and gambling.

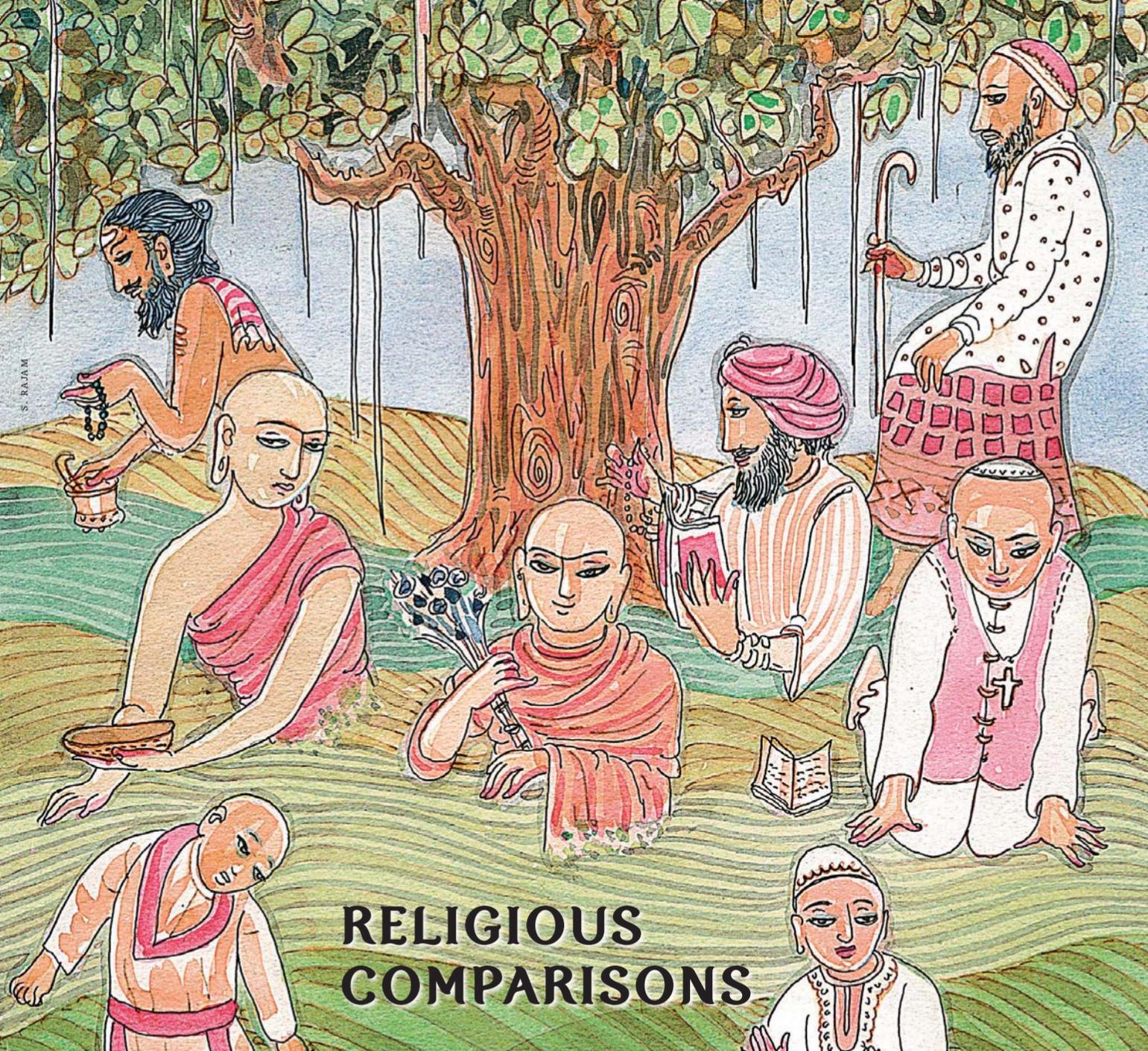


1. I believe in the One God and Creator who is incorporeal and transcendent, beyond the limitation of form, yet who cares for the world and its creatures, rewarding the good and punishing the evil.
2. I believe in the Prophets, of whom Moses was God's foremost, and in the Commandments revealed to him by God on Mount Sinai as man's highest law.
3. I believe in the *Torah* as God's word and scripture, composed of all the *Old Testament* books (the Hebrew Bible) and the *Talmud*. They are God's only immutable law.
4. I believe that upon death the soul goes to Heaven (or to Hell first if it has been sinful), that one day the Messiah will appear on Earth and there will be a Day of Judgment, and the dead shall be called to Life Everlasting.
5. I believe that the universe is not eternal, but was created by and will be destroyed by God.
6. I believe that no priest should intervene in the relationship of man and God, nor should God be represented in any form, nor should any being be worshiped other than the One God, Yahweh.
7. I believe in man's spiritualization through adherence to the law, justice, charity and honesty.
8. I believe that God has established a unique spiritual covenant with the Hebrew people to uphold for mankind the highest standards of monotheism and piety.
9. I believe in the duty of the family to make the home a House of God through devotions and ritual, prayers, sacred festivals and observance of the Holy Sabbath Day.



#### A SAMPLING OF BELIEFS OF FAITHS

1. I believe in the fundamental unity and common source of all religions. (Baha'i and Universalism)
2. I believe man's natural spirituality is best expressed in loving and practical aid to his fellow man, rather than metaphysical inquiry. (Humanitarianism)
3. I believe in polytheism, in the reality of Deities with different powers, in ritual ceremonies as a celebration of life and thanksgiving and in the practices of magic to effect real and positive changes. (Paganism)
4. I believe that spiritual progress comes through analysis of current and past life experiences which resolves past karma most directly. (Scientology)
5. I believe in communal spiritual ceremonies and divinatory rites, which produce a meditative trance to enhance consciousness and provide insights and direction for our life, and in libation, the ritual pouring of water as an offering to God. (African indigenous faith)
6. I believe man's sense of the sacred can be fulfilled naturally, without formal worship, houses of God, ceremony, creeds or theology. (various faiths)
7. I believe religion consists of unitive and direct mystical experience which should be the objective of every religious aspirant. (mysticism)
8. I believe that the cultivation of occult powers, including ESP, astral travel, past life readings, etc., is the highest pursuit of that which is spiritual. (occultism)
9. I believe in the intimate relationship of man, Spirit and the Earth—which is a living, sacred being—and in the brotherhood of all creatures. (indigenous tribalism)



## RELIGIOUS COMPARISONS

### I. EASTERN & WESTERN VIEWS

In the following analysis, using one of several common religious categorizations, we compare the Eastern religions with the Western ones on major points of belief. The Eastern religions are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The Western religions are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. We can see immediately that there is a vast difference between them, with the Eastern goals being unitive and introspective and the Western goals being dualistic, extroverted. The Eastern mind tends to see God everywhere, in all things, and to see everything as sacred. The Western



mind considers it heresy to believe that God pervades all things, and makes a strong difference between what is sacred and what is profane. In general we notice the Eastern holding to karma, reincarnation and liberation, the Western postulating a single life for the soul, followed by reward or punishment. Keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive comparison, as it does not take into account the East Asia religions—Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto. To discover your own belief patterns, take a pencil and put a check mark next to the view—Eastern or Western—which is closest to your own belief on each of the

subjects. We might note here that the Eastern religions described here all originated in India, and that Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism were offshoots of Hinduism. Among the Western faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam all share a common root in Abraham, and in recent times the term *Abrahamic* has been coined to denote these three

world religions. Naturally there are important exceptions to the views expressed (for example, Buddhism does not believe in a Personal God). Nevertheless these broad generalities are useful, as they give a theological window into the East and the West.

### DIFFERENCES

#### On Creation

**EASTERN VIEW:** The universe exists in endless cycles of creation, preservation and destruction. There is no absolute end to the world, neither is there a duality of God and world, but a unity based on the divine presence in all things.

**WESTERN VIEW:** The world was created by God and at some point in the future will be forever destroyed by Him. He is distinct from it and rules it from above. Stresses a dualistic nature of the world divided into good and evil.

#### On the True God

**EASTERN VIEW:** There is but one true and absolute God. All religions speak of Him. All souls are destined to receive God's grace through a process that takes them through diverse experiences on many paths according to their understanding, temperament and maturity of soul. God is pure Love and Consciousness but may be terrifying as well.

**WESTERN VIEW:** There is but one true God and one true religion. Those who accept it will enjoy God's grace; all others, unless they repent and come to my God, will suffer eternally in hell. God is loving as well as wrathful.

#### On Proof of God's Existence

**EASTERN VIEW:** Proof of God's existence and love lies in direct communion, and indirectly through enlightened gurus, the God-Realized men of all ages, and the revealed scriptures they bring forth in every age.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Proof of God's love and promise for man is in the person of His Prophet and in His unchanging and unique revealed scripture.

#### On Personal Experience of God

**EASTERN VIEW:** Personal, inner and often mystical experience of God is the crux of religion. Man can and ultimately must know God during earthly life. Individually oriented and introspective.

**WESTERN VIEW:** It is presumptuous for man to seek personal knowledge of God. The linchpin of religion is not experience but belief and faith coupled with a virtuous life. Socially oriented and extroverted.

#### On the Path to God, and Divine Judgment

**EASTERN VIEW:** Man is free to choose his form of worship, for all paths lead ultimately to God. Sin is only of the mind, not of the soul, which is pure. There is no Judgment Day, for God does not judge or punish. He lovingly guides all souls back to Himself.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Only one path leads to God, others are false and futile. Everyone must convert to the one true religion. Failing that, the soul, laden with sin, will be damned on Judgment Day.

#### On Man's Plight

**EASTERN VIEW:** Man's plight is but his soul's immaturity. He is ever on a progressive path which leads from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Man's plight is due to disobedience to God's will, to nonbelief and nonacceptance of His law.

#### On Hell

**EASTERN VIEW:** God is Love and is inextricably one with the soul, guiding it through karmas into the fulfillment of dharma and finally to moksha, liberation. Hell is a lower astral realm, not a physical place; nor is it eternal. Hell exists as a period of karmic intensity or suffering, a state of mind in life or between lives.

**WESTERN VIEW:** On Judgment Day the physical body of every soul that ever lived is brought to life, and God consigns pure souls to heaven and sinners to hell, a place or state where the body burns without being consumed and one suffers the anguish of knowing he will never be with God.

#### On Evil

**EASTERN VIEW:** There is no intrinsic evil. All is good. All is God. No force in the world or in man opposes God, though the veiling instinctive-intellectual mind keeps us from knowledge of Him.

**WESTERN VIEW:** There is indeed genuine evil in the world, a living force which opposes the will of God. This evil is embodied in Satan and his demons, and partially in man as one of his tendencies.

#### On Virtue and Salvation

**EASTERN VIEW:** Virtuous conduct and right belief are the foundation stones of religious life, the first step toward higher mystical communion. Liberation requires knowledge and personal attainment, not mere belief.

**WESTERN VIEW:** If one obeys God's commands for a moral and ethical life and believes in Him and in His Prophet—for example, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed or Zoroaster—salvation is assured.

#### On the Origin of Religion

**EASTERN VIEW:** Religion is cosmic, eternal, transcending human history, which is cyclical. Stress is placed on revelation of God's presence in the here and now.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Religion is historical, beginning with a prophet or event. Stress is placed on the past and on the rewards or punishments of the future. History is linear, never to be repeated.

#### Nature of Doctrines

**EASTERN VIEW:** Doctrines tend to be subtle, complex and even paradoxical. Freedom to worship and to believe in a variety of ways is predominant. Other paths are accepted as God's divine will at work. Universal and tolerant.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Doctrines tend to be simple, clear and rational. Worship and belief are formalized, exacting and required. Other paths are endured, but not honored. Exclusivist and dogmatic.

#### On Liberation and Enlightenment

**EASTERN VIEW:** The goals of enlightenment and liberation are to be found in this life, within the context of time, within man himself. Doctrines may be dual or nondual, dvaitic or advaitic.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Salvation comes at the end of the world, the end of time, and has nothing to do with enlightenment. Strictly dualistic, dvaitic. (Mystical sects, while minor, provide exceptions.)

### On the Nature of Worship

**EASTERN VIEW:** Worship is individual, highly ritualistic, rich in mantras and offerings, meditative, centering around the holy temple and the home shrine all days of the week.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Worship is congregational, led by a pastor or priest and simple in its rituals, centering around the church, synagogue or mosque, almost exclusively on a Sabbath day.

### On the Path to Sainthood

**EASTERN VIEW:** Path to saintliness is through self-discipline, purification, concentration and contemplation. Value is placed on ascetic ideals, individual sadhana, yoga, renunciation and superconscious awakening.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Path to saintliness is through self-sacrifice, submission to God and concern for the welfare of others. Value is placed on good works, piety and prayer, social concerns and scriptural study.

## SIMILARITIES

### On God and Devas

**EASTERN VIEW:** Belief in a Supreme Deity, maker of all souls and all things, and in lesser Deities and Mahadevas.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Belief in a Supreme Deity, maker of all souls and all things, and in the angels and celestial hosts.

### On Salvation and God's Will

**EASTERN VIEW:** Salvation is through strict obedience to God's will and the descent of His grace through the enlightened spiritual preceptor.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Salvation is through strict obedience to God's will, usually through a messiah, prophet or priest.

### On Good Conduct

**EASTERN VIEW:** To live a virtuous and moral life is essential to further spiritual progress, for adharmic thoughts, deeds and words keep us from knowledge of God's closeness.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Religion must be based on ethical and moral conduct, for their opposite leads us away from God.

### On the Destiny of the Soul

**EASTERN VIEW:** The purpose of life is to evolve, through experience, into our spiritual destiny. Things of the world are not the purpose of the world.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Man's destiny lies beyond this world, which is but an opportunity for earning eternal joy or suffering.

### On the Nature of Reality

**EASTERN VIEW:** There is more to reality than we experience with the five senses. The soul is immortal, deathless and eternal, ultimately merging in God.

**WESTERN VIEW:** There is more to reality than the things of this world. The soul is immortal, deathless and eternal, living forever in God's presence or separated from Him.

## II. HINDUISM & CHRISTIANITY

Our HINDUISM TODAY editors were contacted in 1993 by *Christianity Today* magazine to be interviewed for a major story called "Hindus in America." Thus began a series of dialogs that added to their article crucial and often corrective insights to dispel common myths and misinformation about the world's oldest religion. Perhaps most significantly, they agreed to publish



our own nine fundamental Hindu beliefs. The editors of *Christianity Today* composed nine parallel Christian convictions, written in a series of intense sessions by the best theologians they could assemble. The resulting point-counterpoint—whose brevity is both its strength and its weakness—summarizes the cosmic perspective of two of the world's largest faiths.

### On Revealed Scriptures

**HINDUS BELIEVE** in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** the *Bible* is the uniquely inspired and fully trustworthy word of God. It is the final authority for Christians in matters of belief and practice, and though it was written long ago, it continues to speak to believers today.

### On the Nature of God

**HINDUS BELIEVE** in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** in one God in three persons. He is distinct from his creation, yet intimately involved with it as its sustainer and redeemer.

### On the World's Creation

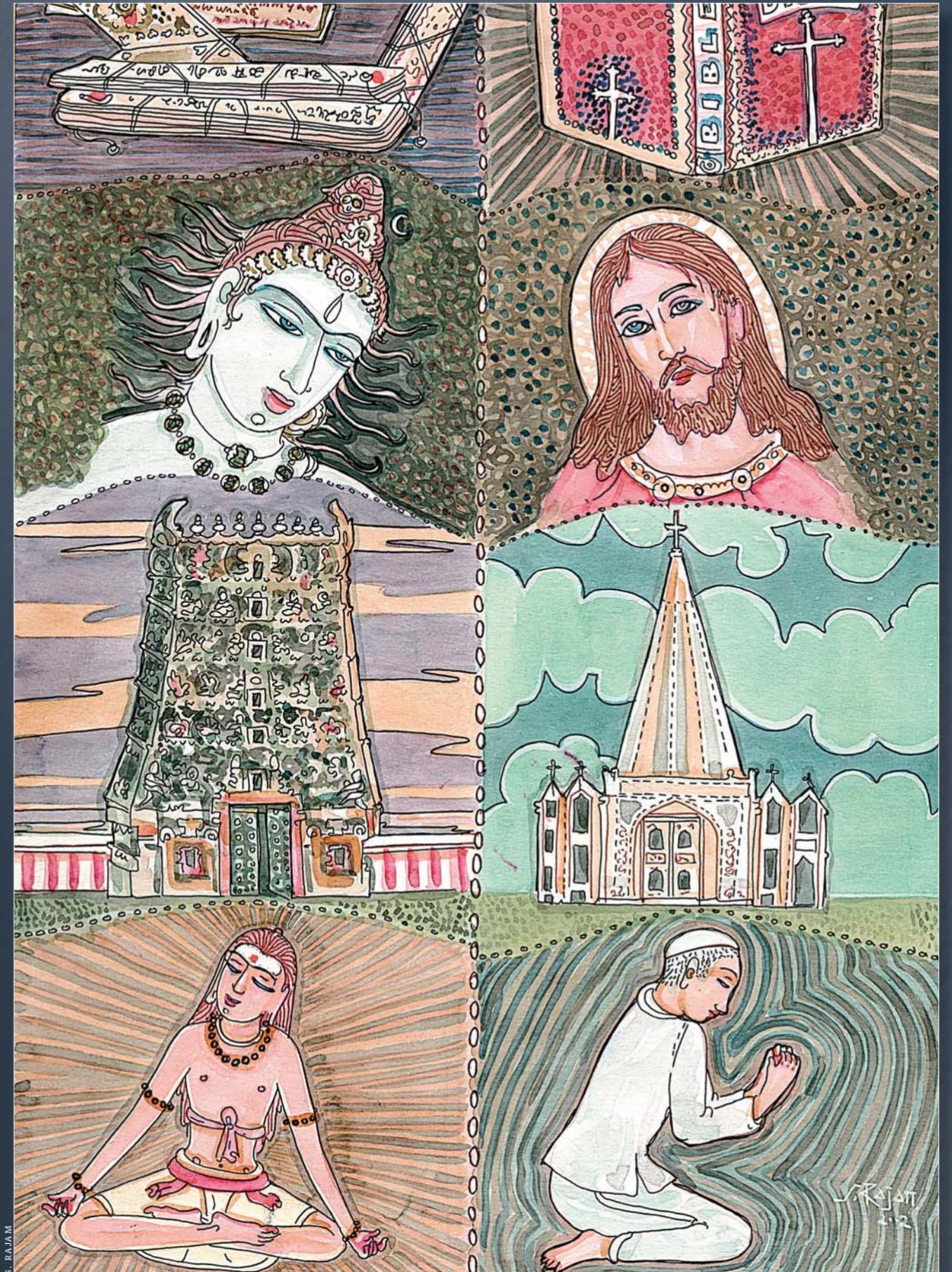
**HINDUS BELIEVE** that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that the world was created once by the divine will, was corrupted by sin, yet under God's providence moves toward final perfection.

### On Karma and Destiny

**HINDUS BELIEVE** in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that, through God's grace and favor, lost sinners are rescued from the guilt, power and eternal consequences of their evil thoughts, words and deeds.





### On Incarnation and Liberation

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that it is appointed for human beings to die once and after that face judgment. In Adam's sin, the human race was spiritually alienated from God, and those who are called by God and respond to his grace will have eternal life. Those who persist in rebellion will be lost eternally.

### On Worship of Divine Beings

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that spirit beings inhabit the universe, some good and some evil, but worship is due to God alone.

### On Spiritual Guidance

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that God has given us a clear revelation of Himself in Jesus and the sacred Scriptures. He has empowered by his Spirit prophets, apostles, evangelists, and pastors who are teachers charged to guide us into faith and holiness in accordance with his Word.

### On Noninjury and the Sanctity of Life

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that life is to be highly esteemed but that it must be subordinated in the service of Biblical love and justice.

### On the Way to Salvation

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that Jesus is God incarnate and, therefore, the only sure path to salvation. Many religions may offer ethical and spiritual insights, but only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

## III. JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY & ISLAM

The similarities between these three Abrahamic religions are stronger than their differences, though historically it is the differences that have been stressed. They each believe in a single life, followed by heaven or hell. They agree that God is opposed by evil, by Satan, who tempts and destroys sinners by causing disobedience to God's law. They are all prophet-oriented, though Christianity is the only one to make the prophet divine. They believe in their religion as the one and only true religion, and that nonbelievers are condemned, though Judaism is more tolerant or universal, believing God judges all men of all



religions by their actions. These three Biblical religions are strongly monotheistic and dualistic, believing man is eternally separate from God and that man's highest destiny is in heaven. Together they rely not so much on inner experience or mystical contact and guidance, as on sacred rites, on faith and belief, and on good works to guide man Godward. Each believes that God has a special covenant with its members, though the terms differ. They each bury their dead, anticipating that the physical body will one day be resurrected on the Earth, rising from the grave on Judgment Day.

### On the True Religion

**JUDAISM:** There is but one true religion, Judaism, and one revealed scripture, the *Torah*, which includes the *Old Testament* and the *Talmud*.

**CHRISTIANITY:** There is but one true religion, Christianity, and one scripture—the *Holy Bible*, *Old and New Testaments*.

**ISLAM:** The one true faith is Islam, and the *Koran* is the highest revealed scripture, but other books are honored as revealed too, including the *Bible* and certain Hindu scriptures.

### On Genesis and Original Sin

**JUDAISM:** Points to Adam, his temptation, the resulting original sin and fall from grace. Some early and modern religious thinkers interpret this narrative as an allegory of the human condition.

**CHRISTIANITY:** The same, but taking Adam's story literally.

**ISLAM:** Same, but Allah forgave Adam. Therefore, there is no original sin.

### On the Proof of God's Power

**JUDAISM:** Such proof can be seen in the historic Exodus.

**CHRISTIANITY:** Proof of God's power lies in Christ's resurrection.

**ISLAM:** Proof of God's power is in the *Koran* itself.

### On Man's Obligation to God

**JUDAISM:** Jews are obligated exclusively to Yahweh, since He delivered them out of Egypt.

**CHRISTIANITY:** Man is obligated to God, since He sacrificed His Son for man's sins.

**ISLAM:** There exists no special obligation; avoidance of hell is man's motivation.

### On the Means to Salvation

**JUDAISM:** Salvation is through strict adherence to the Law as stated in the *Torah*.

**CHRISTIANITY:** Salvation is through acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.

**ISLAM:** Salvation is through total submission to Allah.

This concludes our comparison of humanity's many faiths, affording those who read it carefully an overview of those intangible philosophical and theological beliefs which, in all their variety, lie at the root of our attitudes and behavior that, over time, create culture.