

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

MAJOR UNIVERSALIZING RELIGIONS

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with just over 2 billion followers. The variety in the Christian religion is immense, from the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches to the Protestant Churches found in Northern Europe and in many portions of the United States. There are three main branches of Christianity: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox.

ARCHITECTURE

The religious architecture of Christianity is focused around the cross, which is usually located somewhere within the primary structure of worship, the church. The steeple of the church extends to the heavens to symbolize a reaching toward God. The cross is often located at the top of the steeple to signify God in the heavens. (See Figure 5.4.)

In the Middle Ages in Europe, churches were built with great splendor but also at great expense. Many of these churches are still standing today; Notre Dame in Paris and the Canterbury Cathedral in England are just two. In many European towns, the church was built in the center of towns and homes were built around it; this is because the church was seen as not only the religious center but also the social center of the community. Likewise, in many communities today in the United States, churches are just as much a social space as they are a place of religious significance.



FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

The foundation of the Christian religion is the life of Jesus Christ, who, according to the Bible, lived on Earth and died on a cross. After death, he was resurrected, and his transcendence of death means that followers of the Christian faith can be saved. Jesus Christ took on the sins of humanity (or all Christians, or Christians who meet certain criteria—different denominations offer different interpretations) when He died. In some denominations, all humans are created evil and their only hope of salvation is a belief in Jesus Christ; other denominations believe that newborn babies are without sin and offer hope of salvation through good works and repentance in this life. The holy book of Christianity is the Bible. The Bible is composed of two distinct sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is based on the lives of the Israelites and follows the lives of Moses, Abraham, David, and other leaders prophesying about the coming of the Savior, whom Christians believe to be Jesus Christ. The New Testament describes the life of Jesus Christ and the foundations of the new faith. Most Christians believe in the existence of the Holy Trinity: God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three combine to form one God.

STRUCTURE

Who leads the church varies by denomination. The head of the Roman Catholic Church is the pope; the hierarchy also includes cardinals, bishops, and priests. For Protestants, the head of the Church is a pastor or minister. For the Orthodox Church, the head is a patriarch.

DISTRIBUTION AND DIFFUSION

One justification for colonization was the opportunity to convert “unsaved” populations outside of Europe. To almost all of the areas that Europeans colonized, they brought their religion with them. Christian missionaries from a variety of denominations are found all over the world today in both urban and remote areas. Because of these missionaries, Christianity is now growing fastest in Africa and Asia. In the first century CE many evangelists migrated (relocation diffusion) throughout the Roman Empire spreading the teachings of Christ. During early Christian times, people would often spread the teachings from neighbor to neighbor (contagious diffusion). In the early 4th century CE the Roman Emperor Constantine supposedly converted to Christianity

on his deathbed. This allowed for the hierarchical diffusion of the religion throughout the empire (hierarchical diffusion). During the age of exploration (early 1400s through 1600s), many Christian missionaries spread the religion and converted indigenous populations all over the world. Through the combination of these different forms of diffusion, Christianity has become the most widely distributed religion on Earth.

DENOMINATIONS

Denominations are branches of a religion that differ on specific aspects of the principles of the religion. The largest denomination of Christianity is the Roman Catholic Church. Over 1 billion people are professed Roman Catholics, making this the largest denomination of any religion in the world. The Roman Catholic religion is based in Vatican City, where the Pope resides. The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest denomination in the Christian religion. It was started by the Apostle Paul in the first century bce in Rome. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther developed the idea of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, instead of talking to God through priests and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. He posted his 95 Theses upon a church door in Germany in 1517, launching the Protestant movement (named after the “protesting” against the Catholic Church). Luther created the Lutheran Church in northern Europe. Other Protestant denominations have branched off, creating the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and many more. Today, just over 400 million people are professed Protestants. The results are indelible on the landscape of the United States. The South is dominated by one of the largest branches of Christianity in the United States, the Southern Baptists. Fundamentalist Baptists generally do not believe in drinking, premarital sex, or dancing. Methodists dominate the midsections of the country, whereas Lutherans still dominate the northern sections. The Roman Catholic Church has a strong foothold in New England, Southern Louisiana, and the Latino Southwest.

ISLAM

The second largest religion in the world today is Islam. The followers of Islam are called Muslims. The Muslim population is approaching 2 billion people. The majority of Muslims live in the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Southeast Asia. Islam is a universalizing, monotheistic religion. Some of the same prophets exist in Islam as in the Jewish and Christian religions. For Muslims, prophets like Abraham hold spiritual significance, and Jesus Christ was one of the prophets but not the main prophet. The primary prophet is Muhammad, who lived in the sixth century ce. According to traditionalist theory, he received divine revelations from Allah (God) and wrote them down into what is today known as the Koran (Quran).

ARCHITECTURE

The religious architecture of Islam is centered around the mosque. The mosque is also a focal point of any Islamic community. Many mosques have several minarets, which extend from the sides of the mosque and reach up to Allah. The minaret is usually one of the tallest structures in an Islamic community. The verticality of the minaret signifies the relationship between Heaven and Earth. (See Figure 5.5.)

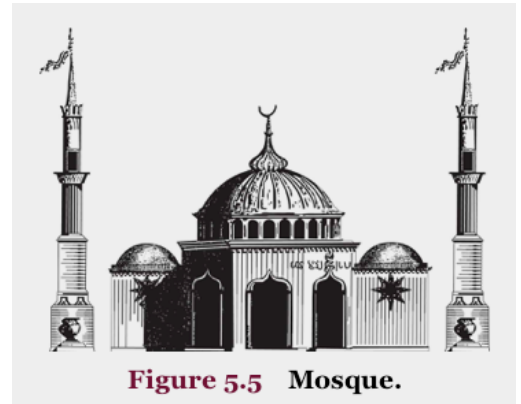


Figure 5-5 Mosque.

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

There are five fundamental principles in Islam, sometimes called the five pillars of Islam. Each Muslim needs to strive to achieve the five pillars. The five pillars, listed in no particular order, are: There is only one God, Allah (Shahadah). Prayer must be done five times daily facing the city of Mecca (Salah). Taxes must be paid directly to the poor and needy or the mosque (zakat). One must fast during Ramadan (sawm). One must make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during one's life (hajj). The profession of Allah as being the one and true god is taken by all Muslims upon acceptance of the faith. It means more to Muslims than anything else in life. A Muslim's passion for religion should dominate every aspect of life. When one accepts the creed of Allah, or the Shahadah, one has officially become a Muslim and then needs to follow the other four pillars of Islam. The Salah must be prayed five times daily: at dawn, in the early afternoon, in the late afternoon, just after the sun has set, and during the nighttime hours. These prayers must face the Kabah, which is the stone in the center of the primary mosque in Mecca. Praying five times a day helps Muslims focus on Allah throughout the day, no matter how busy their lives may be. The zakat is the giving of alms to the poor or needy. It is given to the mosque once a year. In Christianity, the traditional tithing amount is 10 percent. In the Islamic religion, the

amount varies depending upon one's income and savings. The zakat is not a tax nor is it a tithe. It is a form of worship that is required of all Muslims. Through the giving of money, one purifies one's own heart and maintains the purity and holiness of one's family . The recipients of the zakat are the poor, the needy, and the converts to Islam. Travelers may also receive some of the zakat funds to assist them in their hajj to Mecca. Muslims must fast, or perform the sawm, during the holy month of Ramadan . Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, usually occurs during the late fall in the United States. (In the Islamic world, calendars are based upon the lunar cycle, while in the Western calendar , months are based on the solar cycle.) Muslims fast during the day. Once the sun sets, they are allowed to eat. It is thought that fasting focuses one's thoughts on Allah as well as focusing the attention of Muslims on the poor. The pilgrimage to Mecca is called a hajj . Sometimes the hajj is called the "Muslim pilgrimage." If one can afford the journey, one should make a trip to Mecca and attend the ceremonies around the Kabah. Mecca is the holiest city in Islam. Medina and Jerusalem also have religious significance to Muslims. Structure The leader of the mosque is called an imam. The imam leads prayers at the different times of the day and is in charge of an individual mosque.

DISTRIBUTION AND DIFFUSION

Islam began in present-day Saudi Arabia and extended its borders rather quickly along trade routes, reaching Southeast Asia in the Middle Ages. Islam even extends to western China, and most of Central Asia is Islamic. In addition to its spread eastward into Asia, it spread westward throughout northern Africa. Today, Indonesia is the country with the largest population of Muslims. Islam diffused in a matter of centuries throughout North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and northern India from its heart in the Saudi Arabian peninsula. The religion spread by a combination of the expansion and conquest of invading armies (relocation and hierarchical diffusion). Later Islam spread to various ports throughout the Indian Ocean region to parts of East Africa and Southeast Asia via trade networks (relocation and contagious diffusion). Today Islam is also spreading, in small numbers, to Europe and North America via migration (relocation diffusion).

DENOMINATIONS

There are two fundamental branches of Islam in the world. The Shiites, or Shiahs, comprise about 15 to 20 percent of all of Muslims. The largest percentage of Muslims are Sunnis. On the whole , the Shiites are the more conservative branch of Muslims, interpreting the Koran literally. The Sunnis are more liberal in their interpretation of the Koran and have made exceptions to traditional beliefs in response to modern times. Shiite Muslims live predominately in Iraq and Iran, whereas Sunni Muslims live in the rest of the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Southeast Asia. Many of the governments in these areas are theocracies. A theocracy is a state that is ruled by religious leaders, where religion plays an integral part in the administration of the country. The laws and principles outlined in the Koran play a vital role in the institutional laws of the society. Islamic theocracies are ruled by Sharia Law. Sharia Law does not separate church and state. It based on the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad. Fundamentalism is based on a literal interpretation of a holy book and urges strict behavioral guidelines to comply with the basic principles of a religion. Failure to follow those basic rules means less likelihood one will enjoy the benefits of the afterlife.

BUDDHISM

One of the Eastern religions, Buddhism focuses of the elimination of unwanted desires from the human soul through meditation. Therefore , the worship of a god is not a part of the Buddhist religion. Instead, the religion focuses on the personal devotion of the individual follower. The majority of the world's Buddhists live in East Asia, and the Buddhist religion extends from Northeast to Southeast Asia. Buddhism is a universalizing religion. However, one can be a Buddhism as well as an animist or a follower of any other faith, as long as that other faith allows it. When a person combines two or more faiths into one belief system, the result is known as a syncretic religion. In many cases, followers of Buddhism also follow Shintoism or Confucianism.

ARCHITECTURE

Buddhists do not have churches or mosques but rather pagodas (see Figure 5.8). Pagodas are tall buildings of ornate design. They often extend high into the sky and are the focal point of many Asian communities. Pagodas are made

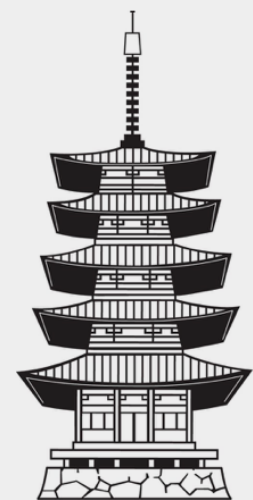


Figure 5.8 Pagoda.

more for individual worship than congregational worship and, unlike many Western places of worship, do not serve as a social space. Individuals will enter a pagoda and burn incense to release the spirits of their ancestors and contemplate or meditate on the principles of becoming a better person.

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

The foundation of the Buddhist religion focuses on Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha was a prince who lived in Nepal during the fifth century bce. His father was the king of a large empire and tried to shield his son from the religious teachings of the day as well as the poverty of the time. The prince lived a life of luxury until his teen years. He left the confines of his palace and saw abject poverty. He felt this was unjust, and from that moment on, he began living a life focused on getting rid of material possessions to obtain a state of Nirvana. It is thought that Siddhartha received his enlightenment at the Bodhi tree in northeastern India, still a holy site in the Buddhist religion. There are four universal or noble truths in the Buddhist religion. These truths are the cornerstone of the faith.

All living beings should experience and endure suffering. Suffering leads to the desire to live, which leads to reincarnation. The goal is to leave the suffering of this Earth perpetuated by reincarnation. Nirvana can be achieved through practicing the following eight steps: rightness of belief, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, thought, and meditation. Structure Buddhist monks live in monasteries, usually separated from urban areas so the monks can focus on meditation. They often leave their monasteries only to beg for food. The villagers in the surrounding region will donate food to the monks as they travel.

DISTRIBUTION AND DIFFUSION

Since its founding, Buddhism has spread from Nepal and India across East Asia. Like Islam, Buddhism was spread along trade routes. Most of East Asia professes to be Buddhist. Many Chinese claim to be Confucian and Buddhist; likewise, many Japanese claim to be Shintoists yet follow Buddhism as well. Today, few remnants of Buddhism are left in India, the religion's birthplace. Asoka, emperor of the Mauryan dynasty in India, converted to Buddhism around 257 bce. He sent missionaries (relocation, hierarchical, and contagious diffusion) to Sri Lanka, to Myanmar (Burma), to Tibet, and throughout India. A few hundred years later, missionaries traveling on the Silk Roads spread Buddhism to China and eventually the religion spread to Korea and Japan. Today Buddhism is well represented throughout most of East and Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.

SECTS

As with other religions, there are different branches of Buddhism. The largest is the Mahayanist, the northern branch, which includes approximately 56 percent of all Buddhists. China, Japan, and Korea for the most part practice the Mahayanist branch of Buddhism. The Theravadas, the southern branch, is the second-largest branch of Buddhists. Southeast Asia is the home of the Theravadi branch. The last branch is the Tantrayanaists, located in the Tibet region of China and in Mongolia.

MAJOR ETHNIC RELIGIONS

JUDAISM

One of the oldest religions in the world is Judaism . It's important to note that Jews may follow the Jewish religion, but the Jewish population also includes people who are born into Jewish families or have Jewish ancestry but are not religious . Most geographers would agree that the Jewish people are a nation. In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled in a discrimination case that being Jewish could be classified as a "race." However, the idea of race frightens many Jewish people, owing to the devastating application of that term to them during the Holocaust. Most would agree then that the Jewish population is an ethnicity.

ARCHITECTURE

The Jewish symbol is the Star of David (see Figure 5.6). The Star of David is displayed on synagogues. The Star of David is significant because David was one of the patriarchs of the Jewish religion . The Star of David is even incorporated into the Israeli flag. Some scholars suggest that the six sides of the star represent the days of the week. Other scholars suggest that the six sides of the star represent the astrological chart at the time of David's anointment as king.



FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

Judaism is an ethnic religion and a monotheistic religion. The god figure is called Yahweh in Hebrew. The Jewish bible is called a Tanakh. Judaism is based on the Torah and the Talmud, the two holy books of the Jewish religion. Jewish worship is led by a rabbi in the synagogue on Saturday, the holy day in the Jewish faith. The foundations of the Jewish faith are also fundamental tenets of Christianity and Islam, as well as the Bahai faith. Religious Jews believe that Yahweh is an omnipotent yet loving God. In the Jewish tradition , the faith began when Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, who is considered the patriarch of the Jewish religion. The tenets of the faith are embodied through Moses in the Ten Commandments, which are written in the Talmud.

DISTRIBUTION

The majority of the world's Jewish population lives in the United States, and the majority of Jews in the United States live in larger urban areas on the East Coast, such as New York City. The place most associated with Judaism is Israel. Israel was founded in 1948 as a homeland for Jewish populations after World War II. Because of this establishment of a state in an area formerly occupied by Palestine, tensions have been high between the Jewish population and the Palestinians now living in the occupied areas (Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, and the West Bank). When Israel was created, 7 million Jews occupied the state of Israel. There are over 14 million Jews today. They are dispersed around the globe, but most live in the United States and Israel.

DENOMINATIONS

Like Christianity and Islam, Judaism has different branches. The most traditional, ultra -Orthodox branch is one of the most widely known. Sometimes known as Haredi Judaism, this ultra-Orthodox branch considers all other branches of the Jewish religion to be unreal, because they do not follow the patterns and traditions of the ancestors. Orthodox Jews are similar to Haredi Jews in that they believe that Yahweh gave the Ten Commandments to Moses and these laws must be accepted and practiced. However, Orthodox Jews can live within modern society, whereas the ultra-Orthodox see modern society as sinful and try to avoid its temptations. The Orthodox branch feels that the Torah came from Yahweh but that humans have had a profound impact on it. They believe it is open to interpretation and can change with the times. Religious practices can accommodate modern culture if adaptation is deemed necessary. However, even modified traditions cannot depart from the fundamental tenets of the religion. Another branch is Reform Judaism. Reformists also believe in the fundamental tenets of the religion, such as the Torah . However, they believe strongly that the Torah is open to continuous interpretation. They believe in demonstrating their faith through action. The American-based Reconstructionist branch of Judaism is fundamentally different from some of the other branches.

Reconstructionists believe that the religious community must evolve if change is to assist the Jewish religion as a whole; still they believe that traditions should be kept intact. They emphasize personal autonomy over religious custom. The Humanistic form is one of the newest branches of the faith ; it was founded by Rabbi

Sherwin T. Wine in 1963. Humanists believe in a humanistic approach to Judaism, meaning a reliance on a nontheistic approach to the faith. They emphasize their Jewish roots, not a belief in Yahweh as a supernatural figure. Rational thought is of vital importance. Another branch of Judaism is the Flexidox version. Flexidox Judaism was started in 2003 by Rabbi Gershon Winkler and is considered by some to be the most liberal of all of the branches of the faith, though it remains conservative on such practices as eating kosher foods and keeping the Sabbath on Saturday.

HOLIDAYS

The Jewish calendar has a lot of significance in the faith. One of the most widely known holidays is Passover. Passover always occurs on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nissan. Over 80 percent of all Jews have attended a Passover seder, or holy service. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish new year celebration that occurs in the month of Tishri in the Jewish calendar. During Rosh Hashanah, Jewish people look back at the previous year, analyze their sins or mistakes, and try to amend those sins by resolving to live a better life during the upcoming year. During Rosh Hashanah, no work is done for 24 hours. Worshippers spend most of the day at the synagogue in introspective thought. One of the most important holidays of the year is Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the holiday of atonement in the Jewish faith. It occurs on the tenth day of Tishri in the Jewish calendar. Jewish followers follow a true fast, with no food or water, and try to make up for the sins between man and Yahweh. The only people who are exempt from fasting are children under the age of nine and pregnant women. Fasting may also be lifted when someone is at risk of death. This Day of Atonement is a special time, because once sins are made known, they are sealed in a book forever until the Day of Judgment.

HINDUISM

Many geographers consider Hinduism to be the oldest religion on Earth, with origins dating back over 3,000 years. It is an ethnic religion: One can practice the religion, but you cannot become a Hindu unless you are born to Hindu parents. The majority of the world's Hindus live in India. Hinduism is the world's third-largest religion, in part because India's population is so large. Over 80 percent of the population of India professes to be Hindu. Also, over 90 percent of the population of Nepal professes to be Hindu. As with Judaism, the diffusion of Hinduism is almost nonexistent except for cases of relocation diffusion, when Hindus migrate to other parts of the world. However, more Hindu temples are being built in the United States with the immigration of more people from India.

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

The foundations of the faith are built on a legal code of behavior in addition to the principles of the deities themselves. There are three primary deities in the Hindu faith: Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Brahma created the universe. Shiva destroys the universe, and Vishnu is the preserver of not only the Earth but also the universe. These three gods keep the balance in the universe. These three primary deities are called the triumvirate.

In India, thousands of temples (see Figure 5.7) are devoted to the worship of Shiva and Vishnu, while only two temples are devoted to Brahma. Vishnu and Shiva each have their different sects of the religion. Over 70 percent of all Hindus worship Vishnu, and 25 percent worship Shiva. The third sect of the religion belongs to the mother goddess called Shakti. Shakti is the female personification of God and the word means energy. Shakti also represents the power of femininity.

SECTS

Vishnu worshipers are called Vaishnava. They believe that Vishnu is the true god in the religion and that the other gods exist but are not as powerful as Vishnu. Vishnu has been reincarnated nine times in the history of the world. Believers of Vishnu feel that when he is reincarnated again, the end of the world will be near. Reincarnation is the belief that one has lived a previous life and will continue to live another life after death. Most Hindus believe that Vishnu is represented by a human-looking figure with blue skin and four arms extending from the main body. Shiva is the destroyer of the universe. However, Shiva is not necessarily seen as a negative deity. For something to be rebuilt, it must be destroyed first. The role of Shiva is

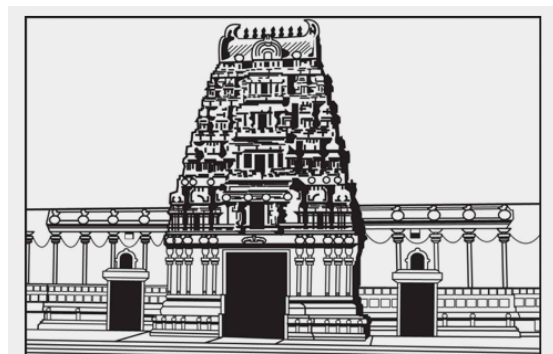


Figure 5.7 Hindu Temple.

to destroy what is wrong with the world to create something new. However, Shiva can be conceived of as evil, too. Therefore, Shiva is in constant conflict between good and evil. Shiva is married to Parvati, who keeps Shiva in balance. When Shiva is represented as a person, his face and throat are blue. The last of the triumvirate is Brahma. Brahma is the creator of the world and the universe. Because Brahma created the universe, he is considered the first god in the triumvirate. Brahma consists of four heads facing in all the directions. These four heads are thought to represent the Vedas, which are holy texts in Hinduism.

There are also four caste systems in India, which are also thought to have originated from Brahma. There are also thousands of other gods, which may be represented by different symbols of the life cycle. The worship of these gods can be done in many different ways.

REINCARNATION

Hinduism deals with the individual's spiritual placement in life as well as in previous lives. The good deeds that one does in this life count toward a higher standing in a future life. Conversely, negative deeds count against a person, causing him or her to lose standing in the hierarchy of the afterlife. One of the highest forms one can achieve is that of a cow. Cows are seen as life builders. They provide milk for the sustenance of people, and dairy products are staples in the Indian diet. Their droppings are often used as insulation in houses in India. The killing of a cow is a terrible crime in the Hindu religion, because Vishnu was a cattle herder. To upset a cow would bring the wrath of Vishnu on you or your family. Because of this belief, cows roam the country. Traffic may come to a standstill in huge cities such as Calcutta, Mumbai, and Delhi when a cow crosses the road.

OTHER UNIVERSALIZING RELIGIONS

The world's five main religions do not encompass all the belief systems of the world. Many smaller religions are practiced by millions of people, and some play major roles in the regions where they dominate.

SIKHISM

Sikhism is a belief in one god formed as a rejection of India's caste system. Founded by Guru Nanak, Sikhs believe that all people are created equal. Therefore, different communities are established where people of different caste systems can congregate and eat together. Individual responsibility is crucial in this faith. Sikhs are located primarily in the Punjab region of India as well as in Pakistan; Sikhism has approximately 24 million followers. Sikhs are best known for the turbans they wear on their heads. Also, men are not meant to cut their facial hair.

BAHAI

Another universalizing religion is the Bahai faith, which is practiced in many parts of Africa and Asia. Founded in Iran in the mid-1800s by Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bahai faith is similar to the Sikh faith in that Bahai followers believe that there should be no class distinctions. The Bahai faith extends this philosophy to race and religious differences as well.

MORMONISM

Mormonism, another universalizing faith, is centered around Utah in the United States. This Church is also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Founded by Joseph Smith, who was proclaimed a prophet of God, and later continued by Brigham Young, Mormonism has established itself as the dominant religion in Utah. The Book of Mormon is the fundamental book in the religion, and Mormons believe that it, in addition to the Old and New Testaments, contains the teachings of God. Although Mormonism is often classified as a Christian religion, there are distinct differences between Mormons and other Christians. Other Christian denominations do not believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. The Book of Mormon is considered sacred to Mormons but not to other Christians. When most people think of Mormons, they think of polygamy, which was practiced by the church's founders. Polygamy is the marriage of one man to more than one wife and is illegal in the United States. In 1890, the church outlawed the practice of polygamy and today even excommunicates (removes from the Church) those who follow the practice. Today, very conservative or fundamentalist Mormons still believe in the practice and are sometimes prosecuted for it.

OTHER ETHNIC RELIGIONS

There are many different ethnic religions around the world. Anthropologists agree that almost every society needs some supernatural worship figure in its culture. This need can be met in a variety of ways. Each of the following religions is strict in its adherence to its fundamental principles.

ANIMISM

Animism is a belief in luck and spirits. Spirits inhabit natural objects and can be either positive or negative. When one of the negative spirits enters your house, field, or animals, it must be removed by a shaman. A shaman has the ability to intermediate between the supernatural and real worlds. The shaman can remove evil spirits by performing ceremonies. In a basic definition, animists believe in the existence of souls and good versus evil. Animism exists in many locations in the remote sections of Southeast Asia, including the islands of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Other areas where animism is widely practiced are rural Africa and the Amazon Basin of South America. Also, many Native Americans hold animistic beliefs. Animism takes on many different forms, and although the names of the gods and the practices may be different, the same themes are consistent across societies that practice animism. There are souls and spiritual beings on Earth. These spirits can be both positive and evil and are in a constant battle.

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is based on the teachings of Confucius, who lived in China about the same time as Siddhartha Gautama lived in Nepal—during the fifth century bce. Confucianism focuses on relationships. Much of the teachings of Confucius are still fundamental to Chinese society and can be linked with the philosophy of feng shui. This geomancy (feng shui) concerns maintaining proper relationships in life through the positioning of items to keep the flow of energy in harmony. The principles of yin and yang come from Confucianism. For every good there is an evil; for every positive there is a negative.

TAOISM

Taoism, or Daoism, like Confucianism, is based on the release of personal desires. Whereas Confucius believed in public service, however, Taoism is based on a mystical understanding of the harmony of life. Started by Lao Tzu, a Chinese philosopher who was a contemporary of Confucius, Taoism is based on the philosophy that things happen that cannot be explained by rational thought.

SHINTOISM

Shintoism, practiced primarily in Japan, has characteristics of both polytheism and monotheism. Shintoists believe that nature is divine. The forces of nature, including rivers, mountains, and other natural features, have spirits associated with them. A person's ancestors play a vital role in preserving the spirits associated with each item. Shintoism became the official religion in Japan in the early 1900s. The religion stresses the battle between good and evil.