

BELIEF SYSTEMS-VOCABULARY LIST

ABRAHAM: first patriarch in the Bible-was asked by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and was rewarded for being prepared to do so-considered by Jewish people as the father of the Israelites through his son Isaac, and by Muslims as the father of Arab peoples through his son Ishmael.

AHIMSA: In Hinduism, it is the principal of non violence against all living things.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP: worship given to deceased relatives who are believed to be closer to the Gods, and therefore able to grant favors.

ANIMISM: practice of nature worship-believe that everything in the universe has a spirit-also believed that ancestors watch over the living from the spirit world-this resulted in ancestor worship as a means of communicating with and showing respect to ancestors.

ATMAN: In Hinduism, the human soul

BHAGAVAD GITA: Hindu holy book where the god Krishna teaches the importance of selflessness, performing religious duties, and of devotion to God.

BRAHMA: Hindu god called the Creator. Brahma is the first member of the triad that includes Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer.

BRAHMAN: In Hinduism, Brahman is the name given to the oneness of the universe

BUDDHA: Hindu for "enlightened one." See also Siddhartha Gautama.

BUDDHISM: developed in India-based on many of the core concepts of Hinduism-Buddhists believe in an endless cycle of reincarnation, which is similar to beliefs of Hinduism-the Caste System is rejected by Buddhists who believe instead that one is reincarnated until they can achieve nirvana-which is best described as spiritual enlightenment.

CALIPH: In Islam, the successor to the Prophet Mohammed.

CASTE SYSTEM: A rigid social class system in Hinduism

CHRIST, JESUS: (8-4 BCE- 29? CE) Founder of Christianity. Considered by Christians to be the son of God and the Messiah. He is the central figure in the Christian Religion.

CHRISTIANITY: monotheistic religion developed from Judaism-founded by Jesus Christ in the 1st century CE.-The Christian holy book is called the Holy Bible.

CONFUCIANISM: Confucius lived in China during the Chou Dynasty, when there was mass disorder and confusion and degrading moral standards-he was appalled by what appeared to be the fracturing of Chinese society-believed that the only cure was to stress a sense of social order and mutual respect-a philosophy that later became known as Confucianism-teaches that there is a natural social order to society which can best be explained through the Five Relationships.

CONFUCIUS: (551-479 BCE?) Chinese philosopher and writer of The Analects, a collection of moral and social teachings, including the concept of the Five Relationships. Also known as Kong Fu Zi.

DALAI LAMA: The spiritual leader of the Tibetan sect of Buddhism, and is considered to be the reincarnation of the bodhisattva, or "buddha-to-be."

DHARMA : The act of fulfilling one's duty in life. Associated with Hinduism and Buddhism.

DIVINE : Godlike, or coming from, or having to do with a god.

EIGHTFOLD PATH : Code of behavior for followers of Buddhism.

FILIAL PIETY : A part Confucianism where respect is paid to the parents.

FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM : Code of behavior for followers of Islam. Includes Charity, Daily Prayer, Profession of Faith, Fasting during Ramadan, and a pilgrimage to Mecca called the hajj.

FIVE RELATIONSHIPS : Confucian philosophy about social order where everyone has a place and respect is paid to elders, parents, and the government. The relationships are, ruler to ruled, father to son, older brother to younger brother, husband to wife, friend to friend.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS : Siddhartha's Gautama philosophy of the nature of human suffering and its relation to desire is articulated by four statements

GAUTAMA, SIDDHARTHA : (563?-483?BCE), Indian philosopher and the founder of Buddhism. Siddhartha was born into the Brahmin caste, and by all account led a luxurious lifestyle. However, he was troubled by the human misery that he saw around him everyday. Upon reflection, he deduced that desire was the root caused of all suffering. Also known as the Buddha.

HAJJ : The pilgrimage or holy journey to the city of Mecca

HEBREW : Semitic language originating in ancient Palestine and spoken by the Israelites. Modern Hebrew was developed in the 19th and 20th centuries from the ancient written language.

HEGIRA : The flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Median which was instrumental to the founding of the religion of Islam. Occurs in 622 ACE, which dates the founding of Islam.

HINDUISM: polytheistic religion that was formed from a variety of different religious practices. In Hinduism, salvation is achieved through a spiritual oneness of the soul, atman, with the ultimate reality of the universe, Brahma. To achieve this goal, the soul must obtain moksha, or liberation from the samsara, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. As a result of these basic teachings, Hindus believe in reincarnation, which is influenced by karma (material actions resulting from the consequences of previous actions), and dharma (fulfilling one's duty in life). Because all forms of animal life possess souls, Hindus believe in ahimsa, or that all life is sacred and should not be harmed. In fact, one animal which Hindus consider to be extremely sacred is the cow. The peaceful and contented existence of cows is considered virtuous by Hindus and would represent a rewarding reincarnation for a soul. For this reason, most Hindus are vegetarians so that they do not harm other living beings. The belief in reincarnation, karma, and dharma also provides the religious justification for the existence of the rigid social structure known as the Caste System.

HOLY LAND : Term given to lands in present day Israel that is significant to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

IMAM : In Islam, the leader of prayers and religious scholar.

ISLAM : The word Islam, which when translated from Arabic, means "to submit to the will of Allah," is the youngest of the world's major religions. Worshipers of this monotheistic religion are known as Muslims, which means "one who submits to the will of Allah." The Islamic holy book is called the Qur'an. Islam is currently the second most practiced religion in the world, and experts predict that it will overtake Christianity as the most popular religion in the world sometime during the 21st century.

JIHAD : Effort in God's service waged by Muslims in defense of the Islamic faith.

JUDAISM : Judaism is the oldest known monotheistic religion still practiced in the world today. Its fundamental teachings have been influential and are the basis for more recently developed religions such as Christianity and Islam. Judaism teaches that there is one God who is the creator of all things. After the Hebrew exodus from Egypt, many Hebrews began to lose their faith in God. During this time, Moses went atop Mount Sinai and returned with two stone tablets containing laws that all Hebrews needed to follow. These laws, recorded in the Exodus 20:3-17, became known as the Ten Commandments.

KAMI : Sacred spirits that are worshipped in the Shinto religion of Japan.

KARMA : Actions in this life resulting from the consequences of a previous life's actions. Associated with Hinduism and Buddhism

LAO TZE : (570-490 BCE?) Chinese philosopher credited with originating Taoism/Daoism. His teachings were collected and published as the Tao-te Ching.

MECCA : A city in Saudi Arabia where Muslims must make a pilgrimage at least once in their life.

MESSIAH : According to the Hebrew Bible, an anointed king who will lead the Jews back to the land of Israel and establish justice in the world. According to the Christians, the Messiah was Jesus Christ.

MOHAMMED : Prophet of Allah; founder of Islam.

MOKSHA : In Hinduism, it is the release from the cycle of reincarnation through unification with Brahma.

MONOTHEISM : The belief in one god or goddess

MOSES : He is considered a founder of Judaism due to his role in the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt, and his delivery of the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai sometime around 2000 BCE.

MOSQUE : A domed Islamic religious building.

NEW TESTAMENT : The second half of the Christian Bible. It describes the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, as well as other Christian teachings.

NIRVANA : In Buddhism, spiritual enlightenment.

Old Testament : The first half of the Christian Bible, that describes the creation of the world, the history of ancient Israel, the Ten Commandments, and contains the Psalms and the prophetic books. Also is the Hebrew Torah.

PILGRIMAGE : A religious journey to visit a shrine or other holy site.

POLYTHEISM : The belief in many gods or goddesses.

QURAN : Islamic holy book.

RAMADAN : The ninth month of the Muslim calendar. All Muslims must fast during daylight hours, except the very young or sick.

REINCARNATION : The rebirth of a soul into another body.

SHAMAN : Somebody who communicates with the spiritual realms on behalf of the living. Seen in many Animistic types of belief systems.

SHINTO : Shinto, which means "Way of the Gods," is the traditional religion of Japan that focuses on nature. Many consider Shinto to be a form of Animism due to the many similarities found between them. Shinto teaches that there is a sacredness of the whole universe and that humans can be in tune with this sacredness. Every mountain, river, plant, animal, and all the diverse phenomena of heaven and earth have spirits, or kami, which inhabit them. Reverence is paid to the ancestors through the practice of ancestor worship.

SHIVA : Hindu god called the Destroyer. Shiva is the third member of the triad that includes Brahma the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver.

TALMUD : The collection of Jewish writings that is the basis of Jewish religious law.

TAOISM / DAOISM: Chinese philosophy of Taoism (or Daoism) developed in the latter part of the Chou Dynasty, during a period of turmoil in which it was not clear that Chinese civilization would survive-It represents a naturalistic ideal of how one should live their life. The Chinese term Tao can be translated into English, meaning "the way." It is a philosophy which teaches that nature has a "way" in which it moves, and that people should passively accept the "way" of nature, rather than resist it. One concept related to this is that of wu-wei, which means "not doing." This means that people should not act unnaturally by doing things, but rather should openly accept the natural way. An emphasis is placed on the link between people and nature. Taoism teaches that this link lessened the need for rules and order, and leads one to a better understanding of the world.

TEN COMMANDMENTS : The ten laws given to Moses by God, according to the Bible.

TORAH : The holy book of Judaism. It describes the creation of the world, the history of ancient Israel, the Ten Commandments, and contains the Psalms and the prophetic books.

UNTOUCHABLES : Members of Hindu society thought to have been removed from the Caste System, with no hope of returning to it, due to their misdeeds in previous lives. Work that is deemed unclean for all other Hindus is reserved for these Outcasts. After winning its independence from Great Britain in 1947, India adopted a national constitution which stated that "untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden." Since that time many Caste reforms have been enacted to diminish discriminatory practices in India. Today, the Caste System still exists in practice, despite the many laws designed to legally abolish it.

UPANISHADS : Hindu holy book from the 8th century BCE.

VEDAS : A Hindu holy book which is a collection of Aryan hymns that were transmitted orally before being written down in the 6th century BCE.

VISHNU : Hindu god called the Preserver. Vishnu is the second member of the triad that includes Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer.

YIN AND YANG: Symbol used to illustrate the natural harmony that exists in the world. Everything must have an opposing force that allows the harmonious universe to exist.