**Basic Beliefs**

**HINDUISM**

**How did Hinduism begin?**  
Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma ("eternal spiritual path") began about 4000 years ago in India. It was the religion of an ancient people known as the Aryans ("noble people") whose philosophy, religion, and customs are recorded in their sacred texts known as the Vedas. These texts were initially handed down by word of mouth from teacher to student. It was not until much later that they were actually written down. Archeological evidence from the Indus Valley civilization of northwestern India helps to establish Hinduism as the world's oldest living religion. Today, worldwide, there are almost one billion people professing some aspect of Hinduism. The fundamental teachings of Hinduism, which form the foundation of all its different sects, are contained in the concluding portion of the Vedas, and are therefore known as the Vedanta (the "end or concluding portion of the Vedas"). This part of the Vedas is also known as the Upanishads.  
  
**What do Hindus believe and practice?**The fundamental teaching of Hinduism, or Vedanta, is that a human being's basic nature is not confined to the body or the mind. Beyond both of these is the spirit or the spark of God within the soul. This spirit is within us and also within everything we see. All beings and all things are really, in their deepest essence, this pure or divine spirit, full of peace, full of joy and wisdom, ever united with God. This is not just theory, but it can actually be experienced. Anyone who takes the trouble to undergo the necessary training to purify and refine the mind and senses can begin to feel the truth of this. This training can take various forms and is known as yoga ("union"- union of the individual self with this inner spirit). There are four main types of yoga, meant for the four main types of human temperaments: 

•**Karma Yoga** or the discipline of right actions is for those of active temperament, striving to eliminate selfishness, and to cultivate universal sympathy by seeing the divine reality in all.  
•**Bhakti Yoga** is the path of devotion to God whose presence can be felt in all things. God can be worshipped as present in an image in a Temple. God can be worshipped also as present in suffering humanity by service.   
•**Jnana Yoga**, preferred by those of analytical bent of mind, is the discipline of trying to see the divine reality within all things directly, by mentally brushing aside all the obstructing coverings that hide it.  
•**Raja Yoga** is the process of mental control, purity, and meditation to make the mind very calm and quiet. In that profound quiet, the inner divine light reveals itself.

**What are the manifestation(s) God in Hinduism? What are the different sects of Hinduism?**  
The general name for God in Hinduism is Brahman. The name of the divine essence within us is Atman. They are one and the same, infinite and eternal. However, God is also present in all creation. God's manifestation in creation goes by many names. It is the one infinite, eternal, Divine Being that is manifesting in countless ways. It is like a person at the same time being called "father" by his son, "friend" by his friend, "son" by his own father, "husband" by his wife, etc. A special relationship goes with each name. So the same Divine Lord has been addressed as Shiva, Vishnu, etc and as Divine Mother, Kali, Durga, etc. God can also manifest as an extraordinary being in human form, who is then known as an incarnation of God, such as Krishna, Rama, etc. Since it is the one infinite God alone that is being looked at in different ways, all these manifestations can be prayed to for help and protection. This is the underlying principle behind all the different sects of Hinduism. Those who prefer a particular manifestation of the divinity will form a sect devoted to the contemplation and worship of that manifestation. All the sects, however, will accept the ancient teachings of the Vedas and the Vedanta as the foundation of their practice   
  
**What is reincarnation?**  
In this world every cause must have its effect. We are responsible for the results of our actions. Long ages ago, human beings first asked themselves, why are some people born in happy circumstances, whereas others are born to suffer all their lives? The events of this present life are not enough to account for such suffering. To reasonably explain an excess of suffering or of enjoyment in this life, it was assumed that we all have had previous existences, and that we are now reaping the results of those previous actions. It must also be true then that we can take charge of our destiny right now. We can create a better tomorrow by resolving do better actions today. However, as long as desires remain in the mind, the tendency toward rebirth will exist.  
  
**What is Maya?**  
In this life we do not see things very clearly. We are constantly faced with contradictions. Though we know what is right, we have trouble doing it. Our thoughts soar high, but our actions cannot rise to the level of our thoughts. The world is full of misery and injustice; as quickly as we remove some, more seems to rush in to take its place. We are told by the saints, and we also feel, that a loving God is at work in this creation, but we cannot reconcile this with what we see around us. This complex situation in which we find ourselves is called maya.   
The way out of this, according to Hinduism or Vedanta, is that we are not really seeing the world properly. If we saw it properly, we would see that it is God alone before us. Instead, we superimpose all this complex world on that divine reality. The illustration given is that of a rope, mistaken in semi-darkness for a snake. The snake of this world frightens us. What is the solution? Bring a light and you will see its real nature. It is only a rope. Likewise, the real nature or essence of this world is divinity alone. Bring the light of spiritual wisdom through yoga, and you will see God alone everywhere. This is what constitutes spiritual freedom or liberation, Moksha. When this knowledge dawns, there is complete satisfaction; no desire remains in the mind, and no further impulse for rebirth remains.  
  
**What code of behavior do Hindus follow?**  
The code of behavior is one's dharma. This is determined by the place in society and the duties associated with it. There are four main social positions or varna; Brahmins (priests and teachers) Kshatriyas (rulers and soldiers), Vaishyas (merchants) and Shudras (workers).   
There are four ideal stages of life described in Hindu scriptures: the student, the family man, the recluse, and the wandering holy man. For most Hindu people these represent a metaphorical path, not an actual path.   
  
**What are the Hindu sacred texts?**  
Hindu ancient, sacred texts were written in Sanskrit, the language of ancient India.  
•The Vedas are the oldest - about 3000 years old. They are a collection of hymns, prayers, and magic spells.  
•The Upanishads are stories and parables told by gurus (teachers) to their students  
•The Mahabharata is a story of a war between two royal families. The Bhagavad Gita is a very popular part of this text.  
•The Ramayana is a story of the god Rama and the rescue of his wife Sita from Ravana, the evil demon king

**JUDAISM**

**How did Judaism begin?**  
Judaism began about 4000 years ago with the Hebrew people in the Middle East. Abraham, a Hebrew man, is considered the father of the Jewish faith because he promoted the central idea of the Jewish faith: that there is one God. At the time many people in the Middle East worshipped many gods. It is said that Abraham and his wife Sarah, who were old and childless, were told by God that their children would be as plentiful as the stars in the sky and that they would live in a land of their own -- the Promised Land. This gradually came true.   
  
Abraham's son, Isaac had a son, Jacob, also called Israel. In this way the descendants of Abraham came to be known as the Israelites. God promised the Israelites he would care for them as long as they obeyed God's laws. While still traveling, the Hebrews lived in Egypt where they were enslaved. Moses, a Hebrew, was chosen by God to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. Moses led the Hebrew people out of the Sinai Desert toward the promised land. At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Law which would guide the Israelites to today. The laws were called the Ten Commandments and form the basis of the Torah, the book of Jewish law.   
  
It took many years for the Israelites to finally get to what they thought was the Promised Land -Canaan. After some fighting the Jews established the Israelite kingdom. After many years, Canaan was conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians and then eventually the Romans. The Israelites once again found themselves enslaved, this time by Babylonians. The Israelites were then taken over by Romans who destroyed much of what had been built in Jerusalem by the Israelites. Most of the Jews were scattered all over the region and eventually moved from place to place to avoid persecution which continues to this day. The dispersion of the Jews is called the Diaspora.   
  
The worst persecution of the Jews was during World War II by the Nazis who murdered more than six million Jews or a third of the world's Jewish population. This was called the Holocaust. Beginning in the 1880's Jews began returning to their homeland in growing numbers, this time to avoid persecution where they lived. After World War II, many Jews believed that for the Jewish people and culture to survive, Jews needed to live in their own country where all Jews from anywhere in the world would have the right to live and be citizens. In 1948, Palestine was divided up and a Jewish state of Israel was formed in the land that was once called Canaan, surrounded by countries with predominantly Muslim populations. Since Muslims also claimed rights to the land where the Jews were living, there was conflict, which continues to this day in the Middle East.   
  
Today nearly fourteen million Jewish people live all over the world. Approximately half of them live in the United States, one quarter live in Israel, and a quarter are still scattered around the world in countries in Europe, Russia, South America, Africa, Asia and other North American and Middle Eastern countries. Anyone born to a Jewish mother is considered a Jew.   
  
**What do Jewish people believe?**  
Jewish people believe in the Torah, which was the whole of the laws given to the Israelities at Sinai. They believe they must follow God's laws which govern daily life. Later legal books, written by rabbis, determine the law as it applies to life in each new place and time.   
  
The Ten Commandments, as written in the Torah, are:

•Worship no other God but me.  
•Do not make images to worship.  
•Do not misuse the name of God.  
•Observe the Sabbath Day (Saturday). Keep it Holy.  
•Honor and respect your father and mother.  
•Do not murder.  
•Do not commit adultery.  
•Do not steal.  
•Do not accuse anyone falsely. Do not tell lies about other people.  
• Do not envy other's possessions.

There are three basic groups of Jewish people who have a different understanding of the interpretation of the Torah.   
•Orthodox Jews believe that all of the practices in the Torah which it is practical to obey must be obeyed without question.  
•Conservative and Reform Jews believe that the ancient laws and practices have to be interpreted for modern life with inclusion of contemporary sources and with more concern with community practices than with ritual practices.  
•Reform Jews also allow everyone to sit together, men and women, and both Hebrew and the local language are spoken in services.  
  
**What are the sacred texts of the Jewish people?**  
The Tenakh is the ancient collection of writings that are sacred to the Jews. They were written over almost a thousand years from 1000 to 100 BCE. The word Tenakh comes from the three first letters of the three books included in this text: the Torah, plus the Nev'im (prophets) and the Ki'tuvim (writings, which include histories, prophecies, poems, hymns and sayings).  
  
The Torah is written on scrolls and kept in a special cabinet called the aron hakodish, the holy ark, in synagogues. The Torah is read with a pointer called a yad (hand) to keep it from being spoiled. Each week, one section is read until the entire Torah is completed and the reading begins again.  
  
The Talmud is also an important collection of Jewish writings. Written about 2000 years ago, it is a recording of the rabbis discussion of the way to follow the Torah at that time. Later texts, the Mishnah Torah and the Shulhan Aruch, are recordings of rabbinic discussions from later periods.

**BUDDHISM**

**How did Buddhism begin?**  
About 2500 years ago, a prince named Siddhartha Gautama began to question his sheltered, luxurious life in the palace. He left the palace and saw four sights: a sick man, an old man, a dead man and a monk. These sights are said to have shown him that even a prince cannot escape illness, suffering and death. The sight of the monk told Siddhartha to leave his life as a prince and become a wandering holy man, seeking the answers to questions like "Why must people suffer?" "What is the cause of suffering?" Siddartha spent many years doing many religious practices such as praying, meditating, and fasting until he finally understood the basic truths of life. This realization occurred after sitting under a Poplar-figtree in Bodh Gaya, India for many days, in deep meditation. He gained enlightenment, or nirvana, and was given the title of Buddha, which means Enlightened One.   
  
**What did Buddha teach?**  
Buddha discovered Three Universal Truths and Four Noble Truths, which he then taught to the people for the next 45 years.   
  
**Three Universal Truths**

1. Everything in life is impermanent and always changing.
2. Because nothing is permanent, a life based on possessing things or persons doesn't make you happy.
3. There is no eternal, unchanging soul and "self" is just a collection of changing characteristics or attributes.

**Four Noble Truths**

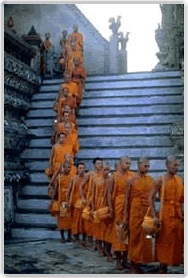
1. Human life has a lot of suffering.
2. The cause of suffering is greed.
3. There is an end to suffering.
4. The way to end suffering is to follow the Middle Path.

Buddha then taught people not to worship him as a god. He said they should take responsibility for their own lives and actions. He taught that the Middle Way was the way to nirvana. The Middle Way meant not leading a life of luxury and indulgence but also not one of too much fasting and hardship. There are eight guides for following the Middle path.  
  
**The Eightfold Path**

1. Right understanding and viewpoint (based on the Four Noble Truths).
2. Right values and attitude (compassion rather than selfishness).
3. Right speech (don't tell lies, avoid harsh, abusive speech, avoid gossip).
4. Right action (help others, live honestly, don't harm living things, take care of the environment).
5. Right work (do something useful, avoid jobs which harm others).
6. Right effort (encourage good, helpful thoughts, discourage unwholesome destructive thoughts).
7. Right mindfulness (be aware of what you feel, think and do).
8. Right meditation (calm mind, practice meditation which leads to nirvana).

**What is meditation?**  
Meditation is an essential practice to most Buddhists. Buddhists look within themselves for the truth and understanding of Buddha's teachings. They seek enlightenment, or nirvana, this way. Nirvana is freedom from needless suffering and being fully alive and present in one's life. It is not a state that can really be described in words -- it goes beyond words.  
  
Meditation means focusing the mind to achieve an inner stillness that leads to a state of enlightenment. Meditation takes many forms.

* It can be sitting quietly beside a beautiful arrangement of rocks, contemplating beauty.
* It can be practicing a martial art such as karate or aikido since they require mental and physical control and strong concentration.
* It can mean focusing on a riddle such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"
* It can be contemplating a haiku or short poem that captures a moment in time.
* It can be in a meditation room of a monastery.
* It can involve chanting.
* It can involve the use of a mandala to focus attention to the invisible point at the center of interlocking triangles.
* It can involve quietly noticing one's breath as it goes in and out
* It can happen anywhere at any time.

**Where are Buddha's words written down?**After Buddha died, his teachings were gradually written down from what people remembered. The ripitaka, or The Three Baskets, is a collection of Buddha's sayings, his thoughts about them, and rules for Buddhists monks. The Ripitaka was first written on palm leaves which were collected together in baskets.   
  
**If Buddhism began in India, why is it all over some many eastern countries?**There are over 500 million Buddhists today. After Buddha's death, some of his followers had some differences of opinion which eventually led to their breaking away and forming separate kinds of Buddhism. There are two main types, Theravada, which spread to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and Mahayana which spread to Nepal, Viet Nam, China, Korea and Japan. Mahayana took on aspects of the cultures where it was practiced and became three distinct branches: Vajrayana Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.   
  
**The Five Precepts**Even though each form of Buddhism took on its own identity, all Buddhists follow a set of guidelines for daily life called the Five Precepts. These are:

1. Do not harm or kill living things.
2. Do not take things unless they are freely given.
3. Lead a decent life.
4. Do not speak unkindly or tell lies.
5. Do not abuse drugs or drink alcohol.

**CHRISTIANITY**

**How did Christianity begin?**  
Christianity traces its beginning to the miraculous birth, adult ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, known as Jesus Christ. Over 2000 years ago in Palestine (today's Israel), Jesus was born into a humble Jewish family. His mother was a young peasant woman named Mary. Christians believe that his father was the Holy Spirit of God, making Jesus both fully human and fully divine. His earliest followers came to believe that he was the Messiah, or messenger, sent by God to free God's people from slavery, sin, and death. God sent his son Jesus in human form so that people would better understand God as a caring and loving parent. Jesus lived and experienced the suffering of humans. Jesus healed the sick and told stories, or parables, and preached sermons that taught what God wanted people to do – to love God with all their hearts and love their neighbors as themselves. Jesus taught by example. By being loving and forgiving himself, Jesus taught others to be loving and forgiving - especially toward those who were considered outcasts in society. This is the central message and style of Jesus' teaching. During his adult ministry, Jesus built up a loyal following, led by his twelve disciples. But Jesus also made enemies among the religious and political leaders of his time. In the end, these powerful leaders were so threatened by Jesus' growing following that the Roman governor sentenced Jesus to death and had him crucified. The third day after Jesus' death, his followers found his tomb empty and discovered that he had been raised from the dead. Christians believe that the painful sacrifice of Jesus' life on the cross shows how much God loves God's people. Jesus paid with his life on Earth for the sins of the world. Christians believe that in raising Jesus' from the dead, God showed that Jesus' message of love and forgiveness was more powerful than death, and that believing in Jesus and following the example of his life and his teaching would lead to eternal life after death. The resurrection (rising from the dead) is the sign of God's salvation offered to all people.   
  
After his resurrection, Jesus Christ's followers spread his message throughout the world, creating the Christian Church. Today there are about two billion Christians living all over the world.  
  
**What do Christians believe?**  
Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God – fully human and fully divine – and that through believing in him and following his teachings they can inherit eternal life. Christians believe that Jesus died for humanity, that God raised him from the dead, and that Jesus will come again at the end of time. In addition, Christians believe in the Trinity, or the three parts of God: God the Father or Creator, God the Son (Jesus) or Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit or Sanctifier. The Holy Spirit is God's presence in the world.

The essence of Jesus' teaching comes from his summary of the Jewish law he grew up with:

* Love God with all your heart, soul and mind.
* Love your neighbor as yourself.
* Christians also seek to follow the ten commandments God gave Moses to give the Israelites:
* Worship no other God but me.
* Do not make images to worship.
* Do not misuse the name of God.
* Observe the Sabbath Day (Sunday, for Christians). Keep it Holy.
* Honor and respect your father and mother.
* Do not murder.
* Do not commit adultery.
* Do not steal.
* Do not acuse anyone falsely. Do not tell lies about other people.
* Do not envy other's possessions.

**What are the sacred texts of Christianity?**  
The sacred text of Christianity is the Holy Bible. The Christian Bible has two parts: the Old Testament which is essentially the Hebrew scriptures of Jesus' time; and the New Testament which contains writings about Jesus Christ and about the early church. The four gospels (a word meaning ‘good news') of the New Testament are accounts of Jesus' life and teaching, of his death and resurrection. The New Testament also contains the Acts of the Apostles, which describes the early growth of the Christian church; the letters of Paul and other important leaders in the early church; the Letter to the Hebrews; and the Book of Revelation. The New Testament teaches that salvation comes through believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in following his teachings. It teaches that salvation is a gift God extends freely through Jesus Christ to all people.  
  
**Why are there so many different kinds of Christians?**  
From its beginning with a tiny group of Jesus' followers, Christianity has spread all over the world. Today, it is practiced by two billion people. As with any large group, Christianity has experienced many different interpretations, disagreements and struggles for power over the centuries. These have led to the growth of many different branches of Christianity interpreting the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in different ways. There are three basic streams of Christianity: Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic.

**ISLAM**

**How did Islam begin?**  
Islam is a monotheistic faith centered around belief in the one God (Allah). In this regard, it shares some beliefs with Judaism and Christianity by tracing its history back to the patriarch Abraham, and ultimately to the first prophet, Adam. All the prophets preached the same universal message of belief in one God and kindness to humanity. The last in the series of prophets, according to Muslims, was Muhammad. Muhammad was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia around 570 CE. He worked first as a shepherd and then as a merchant. He was not happy with the people around him because of superstitions and social and economic injustice. The people were worshipping many gods and had forgotten the message of prophet Abraham to worship one God. Muhammad loved to pray and meditate in the mountains. On one of those occasions, in the year 610 CE, when he was about 40 years old, he received a revelation from God through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). He continued to receive messages from God throughout his life and he began preaching to others what he had learned. His main message is that there was no other God but Allah and that people should lead their lives in a way that was pleasing to Allah.  
  
**How many Muslims are there?**Islam spread quickly first throughout Arabia and surrounding countries and then throughout the world. There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world with 7 million in the United States. Only about 18% of Muslims are Arabs and live in the Middle East. The countries with the largest Muslim populations are Indonesia and India. There are two basic groups of Islam: the Sunnis (about 80% of the world's Muslims) and the Shi'ites (about 20% of the world's Muslims). Although they share the same basic beliefs, they disagree on who was the rightful leader of Islam after Muhammad's death.  
  
**What does Islam mean?**  
Islam is an Arabic word which means "surrender, submission, commitment and peace." Thus, Islam can be defined as a path to attain complete peace through voluntary submission to the divine will.   
  
**Who is Allah (God)?**  
"Allah" is simply the Arabic word for God. He is the same universal God worshipped by people of all faiths. The word "Allah" is sometimes preferred over God because it is neither masculine nor feminine. Also, there is no plural for "Allah."  
  
**What do Muslim's believe?**Muslims have six major beliefs.  
•Belief in one God (Allah).  
•Belief in the Angels.  
•Belief in the holy books sent to all the prophets including Torah that was revealed to the prophet Moses, Bible that was revealed to the prophet Jesus, and Qur'an (Koran) that was revealed to the prophet Muhammad.  
•Belief in all the prophets sent by God including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Although Muslims believe in Isa or Jesus they don't think of Jesus as the Son of God the way Christians do.  
•Belief in the Day of Judgment and life after death. The best reward for performing good deeds is getting closer to God.  
•Belief in divine decree. This means that God is all-powerful and nothing can happen without His permission, however, he has given human beings freedom to choose whether to be good or bad. In the end, everyone will be judged on how they lived in this life.   
  
**What are the Five Pillars of Islam?**

These are guides for daily life for putting the beliefs of Muslims into practice.  
•Shahadah (declaration of faith)—to bear witness or testify that there is no god except one God (Allah) and Muhammad is His prophet or messenger.  
•Salat (ritual prayer)—the five daily prayers are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night. The prayers are offered in Arabic language and facing the direction of Mecca.  
•Zakah (alms tax) –Giving 2.5% of one's wealth to the poor and needy.  
•Sawm (fasting)—Muslims fast during the daylight hours in the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar called Ramadan. The purpose is to remind people of the goodness of what they have and to show equality with the poor. Ramadan is a time for study and self-discipline.   
•Hajj (pilgrimage): Muslims believe in making a pilgrimage to Mecca to the Ka'bah at least once in their lifetime. The kA'bah is believed to have been built by Ibrahim (Abraham)and one of his sons. Muhammad restored it to worship Allah. For this reason it is a very sacred place to Muslims.  
  
**What is the final revealed scripture (a sacred text) for Muslims?**Muslims believe that the last revealed scripture sent by God is the Qur'an or Koran. It is the speech of God revealed in the Arabic language to Muhammad during his mission of twenty-three years. The Qur'an was written down by scribes and memorized during the lifetime of Muhammad. The Qur'an emphasizes moral, ethical and spiritual values with the aim of establishing justice for everyone. Many Muslims try to learn to read the Koran in its original language, Arabic. It is not uncommon for Muslims to memorize whole chapters of it. They read part of it every day. The Sunnah is a record of Muhammads words and deeds. The Sunnah is used to help interpret the Koran. There is also instruction in it on belief, worship and behavior.

**NAME:**

**HINDUISM**

**Who, When, Where and What texts began Hinduism?**

Who-

When-

Where-

Texts-  
  
  
**What is the fundamental teaching of Hindusim and describe the different ways people practice this belief?**

**Please summarize the manifestation(s) God in Hinduism and the different sects of Hinduism?**  
**Explain the belief system surrounding reincarnation?**  
**What is Maya and why is it important to a Hindu?**  
**What is dharma?**  
**What are the Upanishads?**

**JUDAISM**

**Who is Abraham and what is his significance to Judaism?**

**What was the promise that God made to the Jews?**

**What groups of people have conquered Canaa**n?

**What term is given to the dispersion of Jews from their homeland?**

**Approximately how many Jews exist today? And is one considered Jewish?**

**BUDDHISM**

**Please explain the creation of Buddhism.**

**True or False the Buddha taught people to worship him as a God. Explain.**

**What is meditation?**

**What form of meditation is most appealing to you? Why?**

**Where are Buddha's words written down?**

**What are the differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism?**

**CHRISTIANITY**

**Summarize how Christianity began.**

**What do Christians believe?**

**What is the difference between the new and old testament**

**Why are there so many different kinds of Christians?**

**ISLAM**

**How did Islam begin?**

**How many Muslims are there and where do they mostly live?**

**What does Islam mean?**

**What do Muslim's believe?**

**What are the Five Pillars of Islam?**

**What is the final revealed scripture (a sacred text) for Muslims?**

**Religion comparisons**

What are the similarities between:

* 1. **Judaism and Christanity**
  2. **Hinduism and Buddhism**
  3. **Islam and Judaism**
  4. **Buddhism and Christianity**