

# Hinduism

## **Founder:**

None. Vedas collected from 1000 to 900 B.C.; Upanishads from approximately 600 B.C.

## **Role of Founder:**

Not applicable

## **Important Distinctives:**

- No personal god.
- An accumulation of teachings from various sources gathered over centuries; blends contradictory elements with little concern for resolve.
- No central leader or teacher.
- Millions of gods, though ultimately they (and we) are all part of the One (Brahman).
- Krishna is a popular figure but not historical.
- Any person can become enlightened; average people, gurus, and leaders show differences only in degree (though ultimately we are absorbed into the Oneness of the universe).

# Buddhism

## Founder:

Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), approximately 500 B.C.

## Role of Founder:

Enlightened teacher

## Important Distinctives:

- The Buddha “discovered” the Four Noble Truths about suffering and then formulated the Enlightened Path to eliminate suffering.
- Buddhism is essentially a way of life that promises to eradicate suffering by overcoming human desire.
- The Buddha was an agnostic in regard to belief in a supreme being.
- Has much in common with Hinduism, though advocates a “middle way” between extremes and asceticism and hedonism.
- The Buddha’s teachings would be just as valid if he had never lived, because no truth is dependent on him personally; he doesn’t provide “salvation” or deliverance from the human condition, but we “save” ourselves through applying his teachings.

# Confucianism

## **Founder:**

Confucius (approximately 500 B.C.)

## **Role of Founder:**

Collector of wisdom

## **Important Distinctives:**

- Has little to say about classic religious concerns.
- Mostly a way to live more happily through an ideal social system (ethics); no clear teaching about the afterlife or what God is like.
- Collected others' writings; wanted to be known as a transmitter rather than as an author.

# Taoism

## **Founder:**

Lao-Tzu (approximately 500 B.C., though details of his life are uncertain)

## **Role of Founder:**

Teacher of Wisdom

## **Important Distinctives:**

- Concerned with life and health more than God.
- Philosophy of life that attempts to help followers live “the way” (the Tao) through compliant conformity with the underlying pattern of the universe.
- Has some mystical and magical elements; emphasis on simplicity and emptying oneself.

# Islam

## **Founder:**

Muhammad (approximately 600 A.D.)

## **Role of Founder:**

Prophet

## **Important Distinctives:**

- Allah is a personal God and Muhammad is his most recent prophet.
- Allah would never condescend to become a man – an offensive concept to Muslims.
- The Koran teaches Jesus was only a prophet, like Muhammad (though Muhammad is the prophet is the prophet for our age and supersedes Jesus).

# Judaism

## **Founder:**

Ethnically: Abraham (approximately 1800 B.C.)

As a religious and ceremonial system: Moses (approximately 1400 B.C.)

## **Role of Founder:**

Abraham was to have many descendants to create a nation.

Moses gave the Law (Torah) of God.

## **Important Distinctives:**

- Rooted in the same spiritual tradition as Christianity, but rejects Jesus' claims to be Messiah and Deliverer.
- Primitive sacrificial system for sin now obsolete because of destruction of temple in A.D. 70.
- Various branches of modern Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed) differ widely on their approach to spirituality - radical monotheism is at the root of each.

# Christianity

## **Founder:**

Jesus (around 29 A.D.)

## **Role of Founder:**

God in human form (show what God is like)

Die a sacrificial death to pay for humankind's sin, thereby bringing about acceptance by God and life as God intended

## **Important Distinctives:**

- There is no Christianity without Jesus; if Jesus was not Messiah, he was an imposter and Christianity is a hoax.
- Christianity is the only world religion that claims its founder is God in the flesh (not merely a prophet or guru); other religions either reject this teaching or attempt to make Jesus respectable by softening his claims to deity.
- If Jesus didn't pay for our sin when he died, we are still unforgiven and Christianity is an empty promise of new life.