

World Religions and Culture

KEY QUESTION What role does religion have in a culture?

Because religion has such an influence on people's lives, it is an important element in most cultures. **Religion** is an organized system of beliefs and practices, often centered on one or more gods. Religion establishes beliefs and values. These beliefs and values guide people's behaviors toward each other and toward the environment.

Types of Religions There are thousands of religions in the world, but many religions have common elements. These elements may include specific behaviors to be practiced, important dates and rituals, holy books, and standards of proper behavior. Religions are often divided into three types—those with a belief in one god, those with a belief in more than one god, and those with a belief in divine forces in nature. The five major world religions are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, as described in the chart below. You will learn more about them in other chapters of this book and in the World Religions handbook at the back of this text.



COMPARING World Religions

RELIGION	BASIC BELIEFS	TEACHER OR LEADER	FOLLOWERS
Buddhism	Followers can achieve enlightenment by understanding the Four Noble Truths and following the Eightfold Path.	Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha	379 million
Christianity	There is only one God. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus' death and resurrection made eternal life possible.	Jesus of Nazareth	2.1 billion
Hinduism	The soul never dies but is continually reborn until it becomes enlightened. Enlightenment comes after people free themselves from earthly desires.	no one leader	860 million
Islam	There is only one God. Persons achieve salvation by following the Five Pillars of Islam and living a just life.	Muhammad	1.3 billion
Judaism	There is only one God. According to believers, God loves and protects his people, but then holds them accountable for their sins.	Abraham	15.1 million

◀ A Chinese-Buddhist Enlightened Being