

THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION AND THE WORLD'S MAJOR BELIEF SYSTEMS

1. Uwagi ogólne

Tekst *The origin of religion and the world's major belief systems* jest adresowany do studentów kierunków humanistycznych, w szczególności: religioznawstwa, porównawczych studiów cywilizacji, kulturoznawstwa, etnologii, historii, filozofii, socjologii. Jednak ze względu na ogólnopoznawczy charakter materiałów może być wykorzystany w pracy ze studentami różnych kierunków humanistycznych.

2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2/B2+, C1

3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń

W zależności od poziomu zaawansowania oraz dynamiki grupy należy poświęcić od dwóch do czterech jednostek lekcyjnych (45 minut).

4. Cele dydaktyczne

Studenci zapoznają się z zarysem ewolucji wierzeń religijnych oraz z głównymi założeniami czterech najważniejszych religii świata: hinduizmu, buddyzmu, judaizmu i islamu. Zasadniczym celem jest rozwijanie kompetencji komunikatywnej, dlatego też oprócz ćwiczeń leksykalnych i na zrozumienie tekstu zajęcia przyjmują formę wymagającą kooperacji między studentami, którzy mają za zadanie pokonać lukę informacyjną lub rozwiązać zadany problem, pracując w parach bądź małych grupach.

5. Uwagi i sugestie

- Temat związany z religią może być dość kontrowersyjny dla niektórych osób, dlatego też należy wykazać się ostrożnością i dać studentom możliwość wyboru zakresu, w jakim będą chcieli się wypowiadać. Dotyczy to szczególnie ćwiczenia 1, w którym studenci mają wyrazić swoją opinię na

temat cytatów związanych z religią i wiarą. Nauczyciel powinien pozostać neutralny podczas dyskusji, jedynie zachęcając studentów do wypowiedzi.

- Mając na uwadze wrażliwą naturę tematu, przed poszczególnymi ćwiczeniami studenci są proszeni o przemyślenie odpowiedzi na zadane pytania, a następnie pracują w parach lub grupach, zanim temat zostanie omówiony na forum całej grupy.
- W ćwiczeniu, w którym studenci porównują i analizują główne religie świata, chrześcijaństwo zostało celowo pominięte, ponieważ jest dobrze znane studentom z naszego kręgu kulturowego, a materiał ten ma również cel poznawczy. Pod koniec tego zadania można poprosić o porównanie chrześcijaństwa z omawianymi religiami.

SPEAKING AND READING

1. Match the halves to make quotations about religion. Check with your partner.
2. What do they mean? Which do you agree with? Do you have any favourites?

Source: www.brainyquote.com, access: 29 January, 2013.

1. *"I would rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't,*
 2. *"Science without religion is lame, ...*
 3. *"If Christ were here now...*
 4. *"In heaven, ...*
 5. *"If there were no God, ...*
 6. *"For a truly religious man...*
 7. *"Religion is what keeps...*
 8. *"There is only one religion,*
-
- a. *...the poor from murdering the rich."* Napoleon Bonaparte
 - b. *...though there are a hundred versions of it."* George Bernard Shaw
 - c. *...religion without science is blind."* Albert Einstein
 - d. *...there is one thing he would not be – a Christian."* Mark Twain
 - e. *...all the interesting people are missing."* Friedrich Nietzsche
 - f. *...than live my life as if there isn't and die to find out there is."* Albert Camus
 - g. *...it would have been necessary to invent him."* Voltaire
 - h. *...nothing is tragic."* Ludwig Wittgenstein

3. You are going to read the text about the origin of religion. The following concepts occur in the text. In pairs, discuss their possible relevance to the birth and development of religion.

- language
- burial rituals
- symbols
- agriculture
- writing

4. Read the text, ignoring the gaps, and check your ideas in exercise 1.

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolutionary_origin_of_religions, access: 29 January, 2013.

The origin of religion

Religion is an organized collection of belief systems, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the Universe. They tend to **derive** morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature. According to some estimates, there are roughly 4,200 religions in the world.

Many religions may have organized behaviours, clergy, a definition of what **constitutes** adherence or membership, holy places, and **scriptures**. The practice of a religion may also include rituals, sermons, commemoration or **veneration** of a deity, gods or goddesses, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service or other aspects of human culture. Religions may also contain mythology.

The word religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or belief system; however, religion differs from private belief in that it is “something **eminently** social”. A global 2012 poll reports that 59% of the world’s population is religious, 23% are not religious, and 13% are atheists.

Religion requires a system of symbolic communication, such as a language, to be transmitted from one individual to another. Philip Lieberman states “human religious thought and moral sense clearly rest on a cognitive-linguistic base.” From this **premise** science writer Nicholas Wade states: “Like most behaviours that are found in societies throughout the world, religion must have been present in the ancestral human population before the **dispersal** from Africa 50,000 years ago. Although religious rituals usually involve dance and music, they are also very verbal, since the sacred truths have to be stated. If so, religion, at least in its modern form, cannot pre-date the emergence of language. It is often argued that language **attained** its modern state shortly before the exodus from Africa. If religion had to await the evolution of modern, articulate language, then it too would have emerged shortly before 50,000 years ago.”

Another view distinguishes individual religious belief from collective religious belief. While the former does not require prior development of language, the latter does. The individual human brain has to explain a phenomenon in order to comprehend and relate to it. This activity predates by far the emergence of language and may have caused it. The theory is, belief in the supernatural emerges from hypotheses arbitrarily assumed by individuals to explain natural phenomena that cannot be explained otherwise. The resulting need to share individual hypotheses with others leads eventually to collective religious belief. A socially accepted hypothesis becomes dogmatic backed by social sanction.

Palaeolithic religion and Prehistoric religion

When humans first became religious remains unknown, but there is **credible** evidence of religious behaviour from the Middle Palaeolithic era (300-500 thousand years ago) and possibly earlier.

The earliest evidence of religious thought is based on the ritual treatment of the dead. Most animals display only a casual interest in the dead of their own species. Ritual burial thus represents a significant change in human behaviour. Ritual burials represent an awareness of life and death and a possible belief in the afterlife. Philip Lieberman states “burials with grave goods clearly signify religious practices and concern for the dead that transcends daily life.”

The earliest evidence for treatment of the dead comes from Atapuerca in Spain. At this location the bones of 30 individuals believed to be *Homo heidelbergensis* have been found in a pit. Neanderthals are also **contenders** for the first hominids to intentionally bury the dead. They may have placed corpses into shallow graves along with stone tools and animal bones. The presence of these grave goods may indicate an emotional connection with the deceased and possibly a belief in the afterlife. Neanderthal burial sites include Shanidar in Iraq and Krapina in Croatia and Kebara Cave in Israel.

The earliest known burial of modern humans is from a cave in Israel located at Qafzeh. Human remains have been dated to 100,000 years ago. The skeletons were found stained with red ochre. A variety of grave goods were found at the burial site.

The use of symbolism

The use of symbolism in religion is a universal established phenomenon. Archeologist Steven Mithen contends that it is common for religious practices to involve the creation of images and symbols to represent supernatural beings and ideas. Because supernatural beings violate the principles of the natural world, there will always be difficulty in communicating and sharing supernatural concepts with others. This problem can be overcome by **anchoring** these supernatural beings in material form through representational art. When translated into material form, supernatural concepts become easier to communicate and understand. Due to the association of art and religion, evidence of symbolism in the fossil record is **indicative of** a mind capable of religious thoughts. Art and symbolism demonstrates a capacity for abstract thought and imagination necessary to construct religious ideas. Wentzel van Huyssteen states that the translation of the non-visible through symbolism enabled early human ancestors to hold beliefs in abstract terms.

Some of the earliest evidence of symbolic behaviour is associated with Middle Stone Age sites in Africa. From at least 100,000 years ago, there is evidence of the use of pigments such as red ochre. Pigments are of little practical use to hunter gatherers, thus evidence of their use is interpreted as symbolic or for ritual purposes. Among **extant** hunter gatherer populations around the world, red ochre is still used extensively for ritual purposes. It has been argued that it is universal among human cultures for the colour red to represent blood, sex, life and death.

The use of red ochre as a proxy for symbolism is often criticized as being too indirect. Some scientists, such as Richard Klein and Steven Mithen, only recognize **unambiguous** forms of art as representative of abstract ideas. Upper Palaeolithic cave art provides some of the most unambiguous evidence of religious thought from the Palaeolithic. Cave paintings at Chauvet depict creatures that are half human and half animal.

Origins of organized religion

Organized religion traces its roots to the Neolithic revolution that began 11,000 years ago in the Near East but may have occurred independently in several other locations around the world. The invention of agriculture transformed many human societies from a hunter gatherer lifestyle to a **sedentary** lifestyle. The consequences of the Neolithic revolution included a population explosion and an acceleration in the pace of technological development. The transition from hunter-gatherer bands to states and empires precipitated more specialized and developed forms of religion that reflected the new social and political environment. While bands and small tribes possess supernatural beliefs, these beliefs do not serve to justify a central authority, justify transfer of wealth or maintain peace between unrelated individuals. Organized religion emerged as a means of providing social and economic stability. It justified the central authority, which in turn possessed the right to collect taxes in return for providing social and security services to the state.

Bands and tribes consist of small number of related individuals. However states and nations are composed of thousands of unrelated individuals. Jared Diamond argues that organized religion served to provide a bond between unrelated individuals who would otherwise be more prone to **enmity**. He argues that the leading cause of death among hunter gatherer societies is murder. Religions that revolved around moralizing gods may have **facilitated** the rise of large, cooperative groups of unrelated individuals.

The states born out of the Neolithic revolution, such as those of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, were theocracies with chiefs, kings and emperors playing dual roles of political and spiritual leaders. Anthropologists have found that virtually all state societies and chiefdoms from around the world have been found to justify political power through divine authority. This suggests that political authority co-opts collective religious belief to bolster itself.

Invention of writing

Following the Neolithic revolution, the pace of technological development (cultural evolution) intensified due to the invention of writing 5000 years ago. Symbols that became words later on made effective communication of ideas possible. Printing, invented only over a thousand years ago, increased the speed of communication exponentially and became the main spring of cultural evolution. Writing is thought to have been first invented in either Sumeria or Ancient Egypt and was initially used for accounting. Soon after, writing was used to record myths. The first religious texts mark

the beginning of religious history. The Pyramid Texts from ancient Egypt are one of the oldest known religious texts in the world, dating to between 2400-2300 BC. Writing played a major role in **sustaining** and spreading organized religion. In pre-literate societies, religious ideas were based on an oral tradition, the contents of which were articulated by shamans and remained limited to the collective memories of the society's inhabitants. With the advent of writing, information that was not easy to remember could easily be stored in sacred texts that were maintained by a select group (clergy). Humans could store and process large amounts of information with writing that otherwise would have been forgotten. Writing therefore enabled religions to develop coherent and comprehensive doctrinal systems that remained independent of time and place. Writing also brought a measure of objectivity to human knowledge. Formulation of thoughts in words and the requirement for validation made mutual exchange of ideas and the sifting of generally acceptable from not acceptable ideas possible. The generally acceptable ideas became objective knowledge reflecting the continuously evolving framework of human awareness of reality that Karl Popper calls 'verisimilitude' – a stage on the human journey to truth.

VOCABULARY

5. Look at the words in bold. With a partner say what they mean.

6. Complete the sentences with the missing words from the previous exercise.
 1. Beowulf is the oldest manuscript written in English.
 2. Careful planning any kind of work.
 3. Finally all the for the crown of this year's carnival queen arrived at the court.
 4. He avoided criticizing the government on the that the submissiveness would lead to his release from jail.
 5. He survived two wars and a great age.
 6. He was also a great man for interpreting sacred for the benefit of the less learned.
 7. I think Mr Jackson is an applicant qualified for the job.
 8. If your girlfriend burns all your letters, texts you that she hates you, and moves a thousand miles away, the message is that she's finished with you.
 9. It is of the change in Margot that this year she is changing her job.
 10. Many English words from Latin.
 11. Scientists believe that one of the causes of the obesity epidemic sweeping the US is our lifestyle.

12. The Cold War was a state of political that existed from 1945 until 1990 between countries led by the Soviet Union and countries led by the United States.
13. The explosion lead to the widespread of poisonous chemicals into the atmosphere.
14. The problem was how to create and the public interest.
15. There is a considerable speculation as to whether these sounds a language.
16. This evidence presented is entirely and as such may be accepted.
17. We must go back almost as far as the ancient Greeks, if we find an example of such great for learning.
18. We should his wheelchair to a big stone.

7. Complete the table with the words related to words from the article.

Noun	Verb	Adjective
1. (person)	adhere
2. ambiguity	X (opposite)
3.	attain
4.	X	credible (opposite)
5.	derive
6.	facilitate
7.	sustain (opposite)
8. veneration

SPEAKING

8. Look at the chart. Identify the religion associated with each of the four symbols.

9. Work in pairs. What does each symbol represent in each religion?

SYMBOL				
RELIGION				
ORIGINS				
GOD(S) AND UNIVERSE				
HUMAN'S LIFE				
AFTERLIFE				

VOCABULARY

10. Match the words with the definitions and decide which religion(s) or belief(s) from exercise 1 they refer to.

*afterlife bodhisattva Brahman deity dharma enlightenment hell
karma messiah mitzvah moksha monotheism nirvana pantheism paradise
polytheism prophet reincarnation samsara stupa theism*

- BUDDHISM:
- HINDUISM:
- ISLAM:
- JUDAISM:

A. a being that compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others and is worshipped as a deity

B. the single absolute being pervading the universe and found within the individual

- C. a god or goddess
- D. the basic principles of cosmic or individual existence: divine law
- E. a final blessed state marked by the absence of desire or suffering
- F. the realm of the devil and the demons in which the damned suffer everlasting punishment
- G. the force generated by a person's actions to perpetuate transmigration and in its ethical consequences to determine the nature of the person's next existence
- H. the expected king and deliverer
- I. a commandment
- J. release from samsara and liberation from karma together with the attainment of Nirvana
- K. the doctrine or belief that there is but one God
- L. the state of perfect happiness and peace in Buddhism where there is release from all forms of suffering
- M. the belief that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent God, or that the universe (or nature) is identical with divinity
- N. an intermediate place or state where the souls of the righteous await resurrection and the final judgment
- O. the worship or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals
- P. an individual who is claimed to have been contacted by the supernatural or the divine, and to speak for them, serving as an intermediary with humanity, delivering this newfound knowledge from the supernatural entity to other people
- Q. rebirth in new bodies or forms of life
- R. the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth to which all conditioned beings are subject
- S. a usually dome-shaped structure (as a mound) serving as a Buddhist shrine
- T. belief in the existence of a god or gods
- U. a life or existence believed to follow death

SPEAKING

11. Work in group of four.

- Student A: Read about Hinduism
- Student B: Read about Islam
- Student C: Read about Buddhism
- Student D: Read about Judaism

12. Complete the table for the religion you have read about. Work with your partners. Share the information you have just read with the other members of the group. Use your own words, as far as possible, without looking at the text.

13. Listen to your partners and complete the rest of the table.

14. What are the most significant similarities between Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism?

STUDENT A

Source: www.religionfacts.com, access: 29 January, 2013.

Hinduism

The term “Hinduism” includes numerous traditions, which are closely related and share common themes but do not constitute a unified set of beliefs or practices.

Hinduism is thought to have got its name from the Persian word *hindu*, meaning “river,” used by outsiders to describe the people of the Indus River Valley. Hinduism has no founder or date of origin. The authors and dates of most Hindu sacred texts are unknown. Scholars describe modern Hinduism as the product of religious development in India that spans nearly four thousand years, making it the oldest surviving world religion. Hinduism is not a homogeneous, organized system. However, there are some beliefs common to nearly all forms of Hinduism that can be identified, and these basic beliefs are generally regarded as boundaries outside of which lies either heresy or non-Hindu religion. These fundamental Hindu beliefs include: the authority of the Vedas (the oldest Indian sacred texts) and the Brahmins (priests); the existence of an enduring soul that transmigrates from one body to another at death (reincarnation); and the law of karma that determines one’s destiny both in this life and the next. The ultimate goal of all Hindus is release (moksha) from the cycle of rebirth (samsara).

The atman is entrapped in the world of “samsara.” Unlike Western treatments of reincarnation, which tend to make the idea of coming back into body after body seem exotic, desirable, and even romantic, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other southern Asian religions portray the samsaric process as unhappy. Life in this world means suffering.

What keeps us trapped in the samsaric cycle is the law of karma. If one dies before reaping the effects of one’s actions (as most people do), the karmic process demands that one come back in a future life. Coming back in another lifetime also allows karmic forces to reward or punish one through the circumstances to which one is born. Hence, for example, an individual who was generous in one lifetime might be reborn as a wealthy person in the next incarnation.

“Moksha” is the traditional Sanskrit term for release or liberation from the endless chain of deaths and rebirths. In the southern Asian religious tradition, it represents the supreme goal of human strivings. Reflecting the diversity of Hinduism, liberation can be attained in a variety of ways, from the proper performance of certain rituals to highly disciplined forms of yoga.

What happens to the individual after reaching moksha? In Upanishadic Hinduism, the individual Atman is believed to merge into the cosmic Brahma. A traditional image is that of a drop of water that, when dropped into the ocean, loses its individuality and becomes one with the sea. Although widespread, this metaphor does not quite capture the significance of this merger. Rather than losing one's individuality, the Upanishadic understanding is that the Atman is never separate from Brahma; hence, individuality is illusory, and moksha is simply waking up from the dream of separateness.

Along with heaven realms, Hinduism also developed notions of hell worlds in which exceptionally sinful individuals were punished. Many of the torments of Hindu hell worlds, such as being tortured by demons, resemble the torments of more familiar Western hells. Unlike Western hells, however, Hindu hell worlds are not final dwelling places. They are more like purgatories in which sinful souls experience suffering for a limited term. After the term is over, even the most evil person is turned out of hell to once again participate in the cycle of reincarnation.

A specific belief about God or gods is not considered one of the essentials, which is a major difference between Hinduism and strictly monotheistic religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. Most Hindus are devoted followers of one of the principal gods Shiva, Vishnu or Shakti, and often others besides, yet all these are regarded as manifestations of a single Reality.

Hinduism is a theistic religion; the difficulty lies in determining whether it is a polytheistic, pantheistic, or perhaps even monotheistic religion.

Supporting a view of Hinduism as a polytheistic religion is the great pantheon of Hindu gods.

Despite these polytheistic elements, however, many Hindus explain that the gods are various forms of a single Supreme Being. Similarly, the philosophical Hindu texts advocate a pantheistic view of ultimate reality. These texts, most notably the Upanishads, explain that there exists a single Supreme Reality, called Brahman. Brahman is often personified and presented as the One that must be sought, and can begin to sound like monotheism. Yet the ultimate revelation of the Upanishads is that the self (atman) is identical with Brahman. So is Hinduism polytheistic, pantheistic, or monotheistic? Taking all of the above into consideration, Hinduism may be classified as "pantheism with polytheistic elements." Why not monotheism? Although "monotheism" literally means belief in the existence of one God, the term has come to denote belief in a God who created and is distinct from the universe. Pantheism is the view that God is essentially identical with the universe and totally immanent in the world: God is the universe and the universe is God. Thus pantheism seems to be the most accurate label for Hinduism. The "with polytheistic elements" qualifier is added because the Supreme Being of Hinduism is most often worshipped in the form of multiple deities.

STUDENT B

Source: www.religionfacts.com, access: 29 January, 2013.

Islam

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, with over 1 billion followers. It is a monotheistic faith founded by a man named Muhammad in 7th-century Saudi Arabia.

According to Muslim belief, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad, a camel driver, in a mountain cave and delivered a message from the one true God. The Prophet Muhammad dedicated the remainder of his life to spreading a message of monotheism in a polytheistic world. His life's work is recorded in the Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam.

In 622 AD, the Prophet fled north to the city of Medina to escape growing persecution. This event is celebrated by Muslims as the hijira ("flight") and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar (622 AD = 1 AH). Eight years later, Muhammad returned to Mecca with an army and defeated it easily. By Muhammad's death, 50 years later, the entire Arabian Peninsula had come under Muslim control.

The word "Islam" means "submission," reflecting the religion's central tenet of submitting to the will of God. Islamic practices centres on the Five Pillars of Islam: confession of faith, daily prayer, fasting during Ramadan, pilgrimage and charity.

The sacred text of Islam, the Qur'an, was written in Arabic within 30 years of Muhammad's death. Muslims believe it contains the literal word of God as gradually revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel over the course of 20 years.

According to the Qur'an, Allah "created man from a clot of blood" at the same time he created the jinn from fire. Humans are the greatest of all creatures, created with free will for the purpose of obeying and serving God.

The single most important belief in Islam, and arguably the central theme of Islam, is that there is one God. The Muslim name for God is Allah, which is simply Arabic for "the (al) God (Ilah)." The term is related to Elohim, the Hebrew word for God.

Muslims believe that God is the all-powerful Creator of a perfect, ordered universe. He is transcendent and not a part of his creation, and is most often referred to in terms and with names that emphasize his majesty and superiority.

Along with Judaism and Christianity, Islam belongs to the religious category of "ethical monotheism." Allah is a God of justice, who expects righteous behaviour and submission to the divine will (the word Islam means "submission," and a Muslim is literally "one who submits") and punishes unrighteousness. Yet divine mercy is not absent from the Qur'an. It teaches that God will respond to anyone who cries out to him in distress and that he mercifully provides guidance to humanity so they can follow "the straight path."

According to Muslim theology, mankind's chief failing is pride and rebellion. In their pride, humans attempt to partner themselves with God and thereby damage the unity of God. Thus pride is Islam's cardinal sin. The cardinal virtue, then, is submission, or islam.

Like Christianity, Islam teaches the continued existence of the soul and a transformed physical existence after death. Muslims believe there will be a day of judgment when all humans will be divided between the eternal destinations of Paradise and Hell.

A central doctrine of the Qur'an is the Last Day, on which the world will be destroyed and Allah will raise all people and jinn from the dead to be judged.

Until the Day of Judgment, deceased souls remain in their graves awaiting the resurrection. However, they begin to feel immediately a taste of their destiny to come. Those bound for hell will suffer in their graves, while those bound for heaven will be in peace until that time.

The resurrection that will take place on the Last Day is physical, and is explained by suggesting that God will re-create the decayed.

On the Last Day, resurrected humans will be judged by Allah according to their deeds. One's eternal destination depends on balance of good to bad deeds in life. They are either granted admission to Paradise, where they will enjoy spiritual and physical pleasures forever, or condemned to Hell to suffer spiritual and physical torment for eternity. The day of judgment is described as passing over Hell on a narrow bridge in order to enter Paradise. Those who fall, weighted by their bad deeds, will remain in Hell forever.

The Qur'an specifies two exceptions to this general rule:

Warriors who die fighting in the cause of God are ushered immediately to God's presence and "Enemies of Islam" are sentenced immediately to Hell upon death.

Paradise (*firdaws*), also called "The Garden" (*Janna*), is a place of physical and spiritual pleasure, with lofty mansions, delicious food and drink, and virgin companions called *houris*. There are seven heavens.

Hell, or *Jahannam* (Greek *gehenna*), is mentioned frequently in the Qur'an and the Sunnah using a variety of imagery. It has seven doors leading to a fiery crater of various levels, the lowest of which contains the tree *Zaqqum* and a cauldron of boiling pitch. The level of hell depends on the degree of offenses. Suffering is both physical and spiritual.

Being a Muslim does not keep one out of Hell, but it is not clear whether Muslims remain in Hell forever. Non-Muslims (*kafir*), however, will be punished eternally.

STUDENT C

Source: www.religionfacts.com, access: 29 January, 2013.

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by an Indian prince named Siddharta Gautama around the year 500 BC. According to tradition, the young prince lived an affluent and sheltered life until a journey during which he saw an old man, a sick man, a poor man, and a corpse. Shocked and distressed at the suffering in the world, Gautama left his family to seek enlightenment through asceticism. But even the most extreme asceticism failed to bring enlightenment.

Finally, Gautama sat beneath a tree and vowed not to move until he had attained enlightenment. Days later, he arose as the Buddha – the “enlightened one.” He spent the remaining 45 years of his life teaching the path to liberation from suffering (the dharma) and establishing a community of monks (the sangha).

Today, there are over 360 million followers of Buddhism. Although virtually extinct in its birthplace of India, it is prevalent throughout China, Japan and Southeast Asia. In the 20th century, Buddhism expanded its influence to the West and even to western religions. Buddhist concepts have also been influential on western society in general, primarily in the areas of meditation and nonviolence.

Buddhist beliefs vary significantly across various sects and schools, but all share admiration for the figure of the Buddha and the goal of ending suffering and the cycle of rebirth.

There is no almighty God in Buddhism. There is no one to hand out rewards or punishments on a supposedly Judgement Day. Buddhism is strictly not a religion in the context of being a faith and worship owing allegiance to a supernatural being. The Buddha himself rejected metaphysical speculation as a matter of principle, and his teachings focused entirely on the practical ways to end suffering.

On the other hand, the Buddha did not explicitly rule out the existence of a God or gods, and very shortly after his death a devotional element formed within Buddhism. Stupas were built to contain relics of the Buddha and pilgrimages were made to places where he had walked.

Soon the idea of past and future Buddhas developed, with Maitreya, the Buddha yet to come, being especially important. In the Mahayana system, a variety of celestial Buddhas and bodhisattvas came to be revered and looked to for assistance on the path to enlightenment.

As Buddhism spread into cultures with existing religious beliefs, it incorporated local deities and religious practices into the Buddhist system.

Scholars and Buddhists alike tend to describe Buddhism as atheistic in the sense that it denies an eternal creator God, while recognizing its theistic and devotional elements.

In Buddhism, the primary purpose of life is to end suffering. The Buddha taught that humans suffer because we continually strive after things that do not give lasting

happiness. We desperately try to hold on to things – friends, health, material things – that do not last, and this causes sorrow.

The Buddha did not deny that there are things in life that give joy, but pointed out that none of them last and our attachment to them only causes more suffering. His teachings were focused entirely on this problem and its solution.

This is done by recognizing the impermanence of all things and freeing oneself from attachment to these things. This will lessen suffering and eventually end the cycle of rebirth. These teachings are expressed most concisely in the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which together form the foundation of belief for all branches of Buddhism.

According to Buddhism, after death one is either reborn into another body (reincarnated) or enters nirvana. Only Buddhas – those who have attained enlightenment – will achieve the latter destination.

Based on his no-soul (anatta) doctrine, the Buddha described reincarnation, or the taking on of a new body in the next life, in a different way than the traditional Indian understanding. He compared it to lighting successive candles using the flame of the preceding candle. Although each flame is causally connected to the one that came before it, is it not the same flame and yet the first flame directly causes the second. In the same way, one human life, with its particular accumulation of karma, gives rise to the next life, even though no permanent soul passes from one to the other. Thus, in Buddhism, reincarnation is usually referred to as “transmigration.” Nirvana is the state of final liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. It is also therefore the end of suffering. The literal meaning of the word is “to extinguish,” in the way that a fire goes out when it runs out of fuel.

STUDENT D

Source: www.religionfacts.com, access: 29 January, 2013.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the oldest religions still existing today. It began as the religion of the small nation of the Hebrews, and through thousands of years of suffering, persecution, dispersion, and occasional victory, has continued to be a profoundly influential religion and culture.

Today, 14 million people identify themselves as Jews, and nearly 3.5 billion others follow belief systems directly influenced by Judaism (including Christianity, Islam, and the Bah' ai Faith). Modern Judaism is a complex phenomenon that incorporates both a nation and a religion, and often combines strict adherence to ritual laws with a more liberal attitude towards religious belief.

The central religious belief of Judaism is that there is only one God. Monotheism was uncommon at the time Judaism was born, but according to Jewish tradition, God himself revealed it to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people. Beginning with Abraham, God has always taken special care of the Hebrews (who would later become the Jews). After rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, God revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses, and many more religious and ethical guidelines in the Torah ("the Law"). Many of the guidelines (*mitzvah*) emphasized ritual purity and the importance of remaining set apart from the surrounding polytheistic cultures.

Aside from its staunch monotheism, Judaism has few essential beliefs. Jewish identity arises primarily from belonging to ancient people and upholding its traditions. Dogma, while important, is secondary. Although the medieval thinker Rabbi Maimonides once enumerated "13 Articles of Faith," many Jews do not accept all these, and Jewish beliefs vary widely on theological matters such as human nature and the afterlife.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism has no official creed or universal doctrinal requirements for membership. In general, a person can be considered "Jewish" whether he adheres to a complete system of beliefs about God and the afterlife, holds only a few simple beliefs that give meaning to ritual, or even (at least in liberal Judaism) does not believe in God at all.

This diversity in Jewish belief arises in part because actions (good deeds and the *mitzvot*), not beliefs, are the most important aspect of Jewish religious life. In addition, the term "Jewish" can be used to describe a race and a culture rather than a religion, so some who identify themselves as Jewish may have little interest in the beliefs and practices associated with the religion of Judaism.

The Torah and Talmud have a great deal to say about God, humanity, and the meaning of life, and Jewish history has seen significant theological and mystical inquiry into religious concepts. These beliefs are of great significance not only for Judaism itself, but also for their direct influence on Christianity and Islam, currently the two largest religions in the world.

In Judaism, ultimate reality is a single, all-powerful God. It is this belief that made the Jews unique among other ancient Semitic peoples and that became the legacy Judaism has passed on to the entire Western world.

The sacred name of God, as revealed to Moses in the book of Exodus, is YHWH. Since ancient Hebrew was written without vowels, we do not know the original pronunciation of this word. The common pronunciation “Jehovah,” however, is incorrect. It is derived from combining the vowels for Adonai (“Lord”) with the four consonants of YHWH.

A more “correct” pronunciation, and that which is used among scholars, is “Yah-weh.” The discussion is irrelevant to observant Jews, however, as they do not pronounce this holiest of names. When the Torah is read aloud, Adonai (“Lord”) is read in its place. This practice is reflected in most English translations, in which YHWH is rendered “LORD.” Jews also refer to God as Hashem, “the Name.”

A fundamental Jewish belief about human beings is that they are created in the image of God. This does not mean that we look like God, for God is incorporeal. The general rabbinical interpretation of this concept is that humans have the ability to reason. The idea of human free will is fundamental to Judaism. The concept of original sin is rejected, and every person has the ability to choose good or evil.

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that death is not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion. It is possible for an Orthodox Jew to believe that the souls of the righteous dead go to a place similar to the Christian heaven, or that they are reincarnated through many lifetimes, or that they simply wait until the coming of the messiah, when they will be resurrected. Likewise, Orthodox Jews can believe that the souls of the wicked are tormented by demons of their own creation, or that wicked souls are simply destroyed at death, ceasing to exist.

KEY

1.

- | | | |
|-------|------|------|
| 1. f. | 4. e | 7. a |
| 2. c. | 5. g | 8. b |
| 3. d. | 6. h | |

6.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. extant | 10. derive |
| 2. facilitates | 11. sedentary |
| 3. contenders | 12. enmity |
| 4. premise | 13. dispersal |
| 5. attained | 14. sustain |
| 6. scriptures | 15. constitute |
| 7. eminently | 16. credible |
| 8. unambiguous | 17. veneration |
| 9. indicative | 18. anchor |

7.

Noun	Verb	Adjective
1. adherent (personal) adherence* adhesion*	adhere	adherent
2. ambiguity	X	ambiguous unambiguous (opposite)
3. attainment	attain	attainable unattainable (opposite)
4. credibility	X	credible incredible (opposite)
5. derivation derivative	derive	derivable* derivative*
6. facilitation	facilitate	facilitative
7. sustainability	sustain	sustainable unsustainable (opposite)
8. veneration	venerate	venerable

* **Adhesion** is preferred when talking about sticking or holding fast in a physical sense and a useful alternative that could be used here is sticking. The word **adherence**, although close in meaning, would be the preferred word when talking about principles, rules and values.

* **derivable** = able to be derived, **derivative** = not original, derived

8./9.



Islam – Crescent Moon and Star: Theories vary, but it is generally accepted that these symbols were adopted from ancient peoples who worshipped the heavenly bodies. These symbols entered Islam when the Ottomans conquered Constantinople (today Istanbul) and adopted the city’s existing flag.



Hinduism – Om or Aum is of paramount importance in Hinduism. This symbol is a sacred syllable representing the impersonal Absolute of Hinduism – omnipotent, omnipresent, and the source of all manifest existence.



Buddhism – The Wheel of Dharma, also called the Dharmachakra, is a common symbol of the Buddhist philosophy. The Wheel can have eight, twelve, twenty-four, or thirty-one spokes. The circle represents the perfection of the teachings of dharma. The spokes represent different teachings, rules or laws of Buddhism, depending on the number of spokes. The hub symbolizes discipline, and the rim mindfulness, which holds everything together.



Judaism – Star of David. Also called “Magen David” (Shield of David in Hebrew): Two triangles that are superimposed on each six points. Traditional sources have described King David’s shield as a six pointed star. According to the general belief, it was the special shape of the shield that drew protection upon King David and his men and led them to their victories in battles. The blue Star of David symbol is the part of the flag design of Israel.

10.

- **BUDDHISM:** afterlife, bodhisattva, deity, dharma, deity, enlightenment, karma, moksha, nirvana, reincarnation, samsara, stupa
- **HINDUISM:** Brahman, deity, dharma, karma, nirvana, moksha, pantheism*, reincarnation, samsara, polytheism, theism
- **ISLAM:** hell, messiah, monotheism, prophet, paradise, theism
- **JUDAISM:** messiah, mitzvah, monotheism, prophet, paradise, theism

* There are elements of pantheism in some forms of Buddhism and Judaism, but they are not discussed in the texts students are to read.

A. bodhisattva

B. Brahman

C. deity

D. dharma

E. enlightenment

F. hell

G. karma

H. messiah

I. mitzvah

J. moksha

K. monotheism
L. nirvana
M. pantheism
N. paradise
O. polytheism
P. prophet

Q. reincarnation
R. samsara
S. stupa
T. theism
U. afterlife

HOMEWORK (ORAL WORK)

1. Refer students to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/> and ask them to:
 - a) research the main religious festivals celebrated in of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.or/and
 - b) complete the table from exercise 12 for Christianity.
2. Ask students to select a religion and research how its beliefs about the value of life, and meaning and purpose of death and afterlife have influenced the history of a given country or region.