

A STUDY OF EASTERN RELIGIONS

by

David Cambridge

© D.E. Cambridge, 1996. All Rights Reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any form without the written permission from the author.

IT IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL TO DUPLICATE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

PART ONE – HINDUISM

A Brief History Of The Development Of Hinduism

The Hindu Scriptures

The Hindu Gods

Hindu Worship And Festivals

Basic Hindu Beliefs

PART TWO – KRISHNAISM

The Basic Ideas Of Krishnaism

PART THREE – ISLAM

A Brief History Of Islam

The Three Major Sects Of Islam

Islamic Scriptures

Basic Teachings Of Islam

Islamic Worship

PART FOUR – SIKHISM

The Emergence Of Sikhism

The Sikh Scriptures

Basic Sikh Beliefs

Sikh Worship, Pilgrimages And Festivals

PART FIVE – BUDDHISM

The Birth Of Buddhism

What The Buddha Taught

Buddhist Sects

Buddhist Scriptures

Buddhist Worship, Pilgrimages And Festivals

CONCLUSION

GLOSSARY

INTRODUCTION

Why Study The Religions Of The East?

Hinduism, Islam, Krishnaism, Sikhism, and Buddhism are not small insignificant movements that can be ignored - They are prominent growing religions that have, and will continue to influence the thought of, and lead astray, millions of people all over the world. Surely, then, we can see the need, not only to evangelise, but to have some basic knowledge of these religions.

The religions of the East arose, initially, because man turned away from the true and living God, and made his own false and lifeless gods; these religions, whether their origins be of antiquity or more recent, are of the devil who seeks to deceive the world (1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 20:7-8).

“And we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Discussion Points:

How have the major religions of the world influenced today's society? What influences and effects have you seen in your own community? Has the way you play, shop or work been influenced?

Why is it important to have some basic knowledge of other religions?

Agree/challenge. *“Idolatry is an earlier stage of true religion that was gradually superseded by what is now the norm (for us).”*

Although it is not essential to know all about other religions, we can at least see some value in understanding the basics of other faiths. Knowing something of these faiths will put us in better position to lead them from to the truth.

Why Study Hinduism?

Hinduism is a religion that is evolving and growing; it is a religion that can assimilate many new and different ideas. There are many gods in which to believe and a variety of ways in which to worship. It is a religion that is able to accommodate almost everyone.

The very nature of Hinduism makes it a good place to begin our study because it is in Hinduism that other religions, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Krishnaism have their roots. The study of Hinduism, then, lays the foundation to understanding other eastern religions.

Hinduism - An Evolving Religion

Hinduism, like Judaism, is a religion named after a people rather than a particular founder or doctrine. Hinduism is a very old religion and no one is able to pinpoint its beginning. It is also an evolving religion - many of the beliefs and teachings of Hindus today were unknown 2500 years ago; even the gods themselves evolved, both literally and in power and position. For example, in the Vedic texts (1500 - 1000 BC), Vishnu and Siva are only of minor importance, but in the Bhagavad Gita (contained in the Bahabharata), Vishnu is revealed as the Supreme Being! There are also examples of new teachings that emerged. One such teaching is that of Avatars (a fleshly incarnation of the Supreme Being, Vishnu). Such a concept cannot be found in the Vedas but is found in the Upanishads. As Hinduism evolves, its teachings tend to become more and more complex, and even contradictory. Many, however, soon became dissatisfied and disillusioned. This spiritual vacuum was filled by the Buddha (the enlightened one), who rejected the authority of the Vedas. Even within the last few years there has arisen a militant fundamentalist group, who reject the religion of the Upanishads and seek to restore the religion of the Vedas. *“Back to the Vedas,”* is their cry.

Hinduism - A Universal Religion

Hinduism claims to be a universal religion because they see similarities in all religions. All religions and their founders fit into the Hindu framework - there is a place for Jesus, Mohammed and even Buddha. Buddha, for example, rejected the authority of the Vedas but was considered the ninth Avatar of Vishnu! How can this be? Well, according to Hindu scholars, Vishnu appeared as Buddha to delude the wicked by leading them away from the Vedas. In this way the cosmic balance would be retained. We can see then, how, with a little imagination, it is possible for Hinduism to assimilate many beliefs and philosophies into itself; even if they are opposing ideas.

Some Basic Hindu Beliefs

Although Hinduism encompasses a wide variety of beliefs, there is a central core of teachings to which all Hindus hold:

1. Brahman, the eternal Trimutri, or three-in-one God.
 - a. Brahma, the creator.
 - b. Vishnu, the preserver.
 - c. Siva, the destroyer.
2. Submission to fate: for man is not outside, but part of Brahman.
3. The caste system: determined by the laws of Manu.
4. The law of Karma: good comes from good and evil from evil.
5. Reincarnation: a chain of rebirths in which each can rise to a higher state through virtuous living.
6. Nirvana: freedom from the chain of rebirths.
7. Yoga: a discipline which allows control of body and passions.
8. Dharma: the law of moral order, which each must find and follow to reach Nirvana.

Part One

Hinduism

“The people across the Indus River”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF HINDUISM

The Harappa People

In 1921 an excavation, led by Sir John Marshall, unearthed an ancient city beneath the Himalayas. The city was called Harappa, a great city three and a half miles in circumference, with walls forty feet thick. It is estimated that the city could have numbered 35,000 people. Harappa was not the only city. The city of Mohenjo-Daro lay near the bank of the Indus, being equal in size to Harappa. These two cities formed the hub of a network of smaller towns and villages throughout the Indus valley. According to the radio carbon dating method, cities like Harappa flourished between 2300 - 1750 BC.

The Harappa Gods

Not much is known about this people's religion but many terra-cotta figurines have been found. These have been of standing females, either naked or wearing short skirts, with elaborate head-dresses and laden with jewellery. The same figure has been found on seals, with a plant growing from her vulva, intended to show the production of vegetation from the womb of the earth. This has led to the conclusion that these figurines are icons of the Mother goddess. Other figures and seals also suggest a male deity.

The Decline Of The Harappan Civilisation

The decline of the Harappan civilisation began around 1750 BC. There was a breakdown of social order, mansions were converted into tenements, the street plans were no longer maintained and much jewellery was left buried in the earth; they appear to have left in a hurry.

Apparently the River Indus, which they relied on for agriculture and transport, is given to periodic changes of course. When this happened the cities were unable to sustain such large populations. Being so weakened they became susceptible to attacks from foreign invaders.

The Aryans

Originally the word "*aryan*" referred to a particular ethnic group thought to have moved into the subcontinent from the region of the Iranian Plateau.

During the decline of the Harappa society invaders from the Northwest came Indo-Europeans. It was once thought that this was a mass invasion but now it is believed to cover many centuries, and involved many migrating groups. As these groups interacted and expanded there occurred social and religious developments. From this process developed the complex religious phenomenon called Hinduism.

Social And Religious Developments

One of the social developments was that of the gradation of society into four castes. At the top of this hierarchy are the three Aryan or free classes: The priestly class (Brahmins), the warrior class, who wielded secular power (Ksatriyas), and the Artisan class, craftsmen, cultivators, etc. (Vaisyas). These three classes comprise the "*twice-born*" who obtain a second birth through initiation. This is a very ancient ritual that pre-dates the arrival of the Aryans. The ceremony usually takes place after learning the Vedas, usually at 8, 11 or 12. The slaves (Dasa) and mixed Aryan were known as the "*first-born*" Shudra peasant caste. Below these were the mass of the "*impure*" or "*untouchables*"; these consisted mainly of the indigenous peoples.

Another development was the emphasis placed on ritual. Rituals became more and more elaborate and complicated, and the priests' status increased. According to Vedic mythology the world was produced by sacrifice and so sacrifice must be continually offered to sustain the universe. Thus, the whole of the universe, including the gods, are dependent upon continual sacrifices, which are offered by the priests!

Hindu Texts

During such social and religious developments, texts began to be written. The Vedas, also known as the Samhitas, were written between 1500 - 1000 BC. This period is known as the Vedic age. From these Vedas the priests (Brahmins) wrote texts for the guidance of priests in the performance of Vedic sacrifices.

THE HINDU SCRIPTURES

The Hindu scriptures are divided into two parts - Sruti, "*What is heard,*" and Smriti, "*What is remembered.*"

Sruti, "*what is heard,*" refers to the eternal truths of religion which the seers (Rishis) heard. These eternal truths are the primary and final authority of religious truth. These eternal truths were recorded by the disciples of the Rishis (seers) and are known as.....

THE VEDAS, also known as the SAMHITAS. Veda means "*knowledge*" or "*wisdom.*" These texts were composed between 1500 - 1000 BC.

THE RIG-VEDA, a collection of 1028 hymns that are divided into ten parts praising Hindu deities (e.g., Indra, Soma, Varuna).

THE YAJUR-VEDA, a collection of mantras (chants) borrowed from the Rig-Veda and applied to specific ritual situations carried out by the executive priest and his assistants.

THE SAM-VEDA, mantras borrowed from the Rig-Veda used for chanting.

THE ATHARA-VEDA, magical spells and incantations carried out by the priests.

THE BRAHMANAS. These texts were composed between 1300-700 B.C. for the guidance of priests in the performance of Vedic sacrifices.

THE UPANISHADS are a collection of speculative writings. They were composed during the period 800-600 B.C. The word Upanishads conveys the idea of secret teaching.

In these writings we see a definite change of emphasis from the sacrificial hymns and magic formulas in the Vedas to the mystical ideas about man and the universe, specifically the eternal Brahman or soul. The Upanishads include the following:

THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD. This is in six parts and consists of an inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality called Brahman.

THE CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD. The story of a boy sent away by his father to be educated. The boy returns home at age 24 full of pride. When his father sees this he begins to instruct him about the nature of reality and his own nature.

THE KATHA UPANISHAD. A young boy is granted three wishes by Yama, the god of death. The boy's third wish is to know what happens after death. The text records this discussion.

THE PRASANA UPANISHAD. This text consists of six questions asked of a teacher by his students. These relate to the nature of the universe, the supreme being, and the meditative sound OM (pronounced AUM).

THE TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD. A teacher tries to help a student realise Brahman. After many attempts, the student sets himself to pray for a long time, and then he finally realises Brahman as joy.

THE ISA UPANISHAD. This text deals with human relationship with the cosmos.

THE MANDUKYA UPANISHAD. The main teaching of this text concerns the four states of consciousness: waking life, dream, deep sleep and Samadhi (a state of pure consciousness of oneness with ultimate reality).

THE KENA UPANISHAD. This contains questions about the nature of reality behind outward appearances.

THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD. This deals with the subject of the soul as it relates to the universe. The universe is perceived as a wheel, and on it are revolving all living things, bound to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

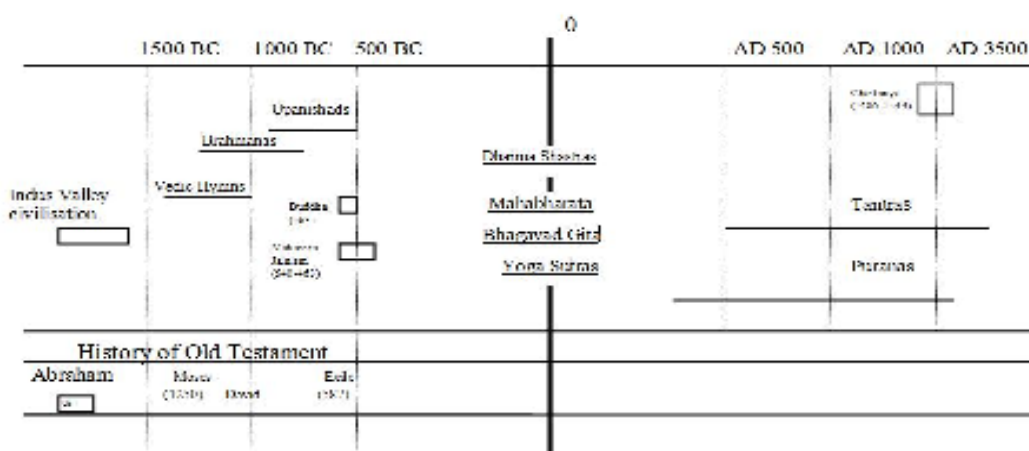
Smriti, *“what is remembered,”* expands the principles of the Sruti. The Smriti contains all the sacred texts, apart from the Vedas, and includes the law books. Texts include: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Puranas, the Aqamas and the Sultras. There is also much common literature of a devotional nature which some sects accept as authoritative.

THE RAMAYANA. This is one of two epic tales of India. Authorship is ascribed to the sage poet Valmiki, although other poets have added to this work over the years. The work consists of 24,000 couplets based upon the life of Rama, a righteous king who was, supposedly, an incarnation of the god Vishnu.

THE MAHABHARTA. This is the second epic tale and tells the story of Aryan clans. It consists of some 100,000 verses written over a period of 800 years, from about 400 BC. This text also contains the classic work, The Bhagavad, or the *“song of the blessed Lord.”*

THE PURANAS. This text includes the legend of gods, goddesses, demons and ancestors. They describe pilgrimages and rituals to demonstrate the importance of Bhakti (devotion), caste and Dharma (duty). The heroes of these legends display all the desirable virtues which has made a significant contribution to the formation of Hindu moral codes.

Time chart showing approximate dating of main Hindu texts.



Readings From The Scriptures

In the beginning there was neither naught nor aught;
 Then there was neither sky nor atmosphere above.
 What then enshrouded all this teeming Universe?
 In the receptacle of what was it contained?
 Was it enveloped in the gulf profound of water?
 Then was there neither death nor immortality,
 Then was there neither day, nor night, nor light, nor darkness,
 Only the existent One breathed calmly, self-contained.
 Naught else than him there was - naught else above, beyond.

Then first came darkness hid in darkness, gloom in gloom.
 Next all was water, all a chaos indiscreet,
 In which the One lay void, shrouded in nothingness.
 Then turning inwards, He by self-developed force
 Of inner fervour and intense abstraction, grew.

And now in Him Desire, the primal germ of mind
 Arose, which learned men, profoundly searching, say
 Is the first subtle bond, connecting Entity
 With Nullity. This ray that kindled dormant life,
 Where was it then? before? or was it found above?
 Were there parturient powers and latent qualities,
 And fecund principle beneath, and active forces
 That energize aloft? Who knows? Who can declare?
 How and from what has sprung this Universe? the gods
 Themselves are subsequent to its development.
 Who then can penetrate the secret of its rise?
 Whether 'twas framed or not, made or not made, He only
 Who in the highest heaven sits, the omniscient Lord,
 Assuredly knows all, or haply knows He not. *R. V.*

What god shall we adore with sacrifice?
 Him let us praise, the golden child that rose
 In the beginning, who was born the lord--
 The one sole lord of all that is--who made
 The earth, and formed the sky, who giveth life,
 Who giveth strength, whose bidding gods revere,
 Whose hiding place is immortality.
 Whose shadow, death; who by his might is king
 Of all the breathing, sleeping, waking, world--
 Who governs men and beast, whose majesty
 These snowy hills, this ocean with its rivers,
 Declare; of whom these spreading regions form
 The arms; by whom the firmament is strong,
 Earth firmly planted, and the highest heavens
 Supported, and the clouds that fill the air
 Distributed and measured out; to whom
 Both earth and heaven, established by his will,
 Look up with trembling mind; in whom revealed
 The rising sun shines forth upon the world.
 Where're let loose in space, the mighty waters
 Have gone, depositing a fruitful seed,
 And generating fire, there He arose,
 Who is the breath and life of all the gods,
 Whose mighty glance looks round the vast expanse
 Of watery vapour--source of energy,
 Cause of the sacrifice--the only God
 Above the gods. May he not injure us!
 He the Creator of the earth--the righteous
 Creator of the sky, Creator too
 Of oceans bright, and far-extending waters. *R. V.*

THE HINDU GODS

Do Hindus believe in one God or many gods? At first glance it may appear that they believe in many gods, evidenced by the many idols. But an enlightened Hindu will tell you that the many apparent gods are but representations of the One true God, and that many of the attributes of the true God have been personified and given names. Yet images are made of these gods and worship is offered, as if to a god who is real! A belief in many gods is called Polytheism.

THE ULTIMATE REALITY

The True God

For the Hindu, the true God, the supreme Being, is BRAHMAN. Brahman is unknowable and unreachable by men. Brahman is the supreme soul or essence of the universe. He is not merely external to an individual but is the human soul or self (ATMAN). From Brahman all things emanate - the universe, man and the gods. The belief that God is all and all is God is known as Pantheism.

The Trinity

Though Brahman is spoken of as one He is in fact, for some sects, a member of the Hindu Godhead, called a Trimutri (Trinity). This Trimutri is made up of Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Siva, the destroyer. Though we may see some similarities here with the Christian Trinity we should not think that there are comparisons to be made in regards to their natures.

THE DEVAS AND DEVATAS

The Devas (gods), as we mentioned above, are the attributes of the one true God that have been personified. These gods, like all things, emanated from Brahman, over a period of time. In the Vedas you will find no mention of the gods that exist today. The gods that exist today are many, so we will mention only a few of the more prominent.

Some Of The Prominent Male Deities

INDRA is known for his great strength and heroic deeds. He is fond of feasting and drinking. Associated with storms, he releases the waters from the clouds and in his hand he carries a thunder bolt.

VARUNA is credited with the act of creation. He later became regarded as the administrator of the cosmic law, which regulates all activities in this world. Consequently, the function of Varuna was to ensure that no transgression of the law occurred, and that the worshipper was protected. Varuna abhors sin. Today, so it would seem, the worship of Varuna has ceased.

AGNI is the god of fire (200 hymns are addressed to him in the rig-Veda). Agni was personified and deified, especially as the sacrificial fire.

“He is the fire on the alter, and so is instrumental in conveying the sacrifice to heaven and by extension, in bringing the gods down to the sacrifice.”

Agni is the god who, as fire, consumes the sacrifice and, as priest, presents it to the gods above. He is, then, the mediator between humans and gods.

SOMA. Whereas Agni is fire, Soma is the plant sacrificed.

YAMA was the first human to die, and so became Lord of the dead.

Some Of The Prominent Female Deities

USAS is associated with the dawn and reveals herself with the daily coming of light into the world. It is Usas who causes all living creatures to rise from their sleep and sets all things in motion for the new day.

PRTHIVI is associated with the Earth and is coupled with DYAUS, the male god of the sky. When Dyaus rains on her, she nourishes all that live on her. This couple are similar to Baal and Astoreth, the gods of the Canaanites in the Old Testament.

SAVARTI is the name of the river to which this goddess is associated.

Consorts Of The Gods

LAKSMI, also called SRI is the wife of Vishnu and one of the most popular goddesses in India. Vishnu and Laksmi provide a picture of domestic order and marital contentment. Laksmi is associated with fertility and is worshipped throughout the year in a variety of festivals - the most important being held in autumn when she is thanked for fertility and good harvests.

SITA is the consort of the god Rama. Like Laksmi, Sita portrays the role of an ideal Hindu wife. Because of her loyalty and devotion to her husband she gains the ear of Rama; and so she acts as an intermediary between Rama and the worshipper.

RADHA was married to another but had an affair with Krishna.

DURGA is the consort of Siva, whose function is to combat demons that threaten the stability of the cosmos. This goddess is neither submissive nor subordinate to a male deity, and she excels in what are traditionally male functions.

KALI is described as terrible and frightening. She is black, with long dishevelled hair. She is naked and adorned with severed arms as a girdle, severed heads as a necklace, children's corpses as earrings and serpents as bracelets. She haunts the battlefield where she gets drunk on the blood of her victims. Kali is seen as a personification of anger and fury, threatening stability and order.

We have seen at the highest level Brahma, the ultimate reality; on a second level we have seen the supreme reality personified, in various forms, and worshipped as a god in it's own right. On a third level are the Devatas (godlings) or Gramadevatas (guardian deities). These guardian deities are the regional gods. But at a lower level there are the undomesticated demons and BHUT. The Bhut is enjoined to a village, and is even believed to have a direct and manifest action in the affairs of the village. The Bhut is thought to be the ghost of a dead person and usually brings misfortune and illness by possession. The Bhut is usually expelled by the shamanistic healers called Ojas.

MORE ABOUT THE TRINITY

BRAHMA is seen as the creator from which all things emanate, however, it is also believed that Brahma permeates the universe. In fact, there is no sharp distinction made between God and the universe. But Brahma is ONE? This means that all the diversity which exists is only an appearance. This is not to say that the universe is an illusion, but it gives a distorted view of reality by making what is one appear as many. This teaching is known as Maya. Once a person realizes this he may escape the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

VISHNU, known as the preserver, is the great Lord of power and the skillful user of it: God of gods, monarch universal, incomprehensible, imperishable, changeless, beginning - middle - end, awesome, eternal. Vishnu is, ethically speaking, without fault, strictly impartial and giver of eternal law. The role of Vishnu is to preserve the universe, the earth and righteousness. When it is necessary, Vishnu appears on earth to save or preserve the world and man.

“For whenever the law of righteousness withers away and lawlessness arises, then do I generate Myself (on earth) for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the setting up of the law of righteousness I come into being age after age” (Gita 4:7-8)

It is said that Vishnu has appeared on earth - such appearances are known as AVATARS. Throughout history there have been nine Avatars and there is one final Avatar to come at the end of the age. Two Avatars you might recognise were Krishna and Buddha.

SIVA, like Brahma and Vishnu, is considered to be the ultimate divinity by his followers. Siva is something of a paradox for he is the great ascetic and the God of erotic, the creator and the destroyer, life and death. Such opposing strands of his nature have been accepted as aspects of his one nature. Siva is the Lord of destruction who lurks in the battlefields and the cremation grounds. Siva is death and time which destroy all things. Yet from destruction comes life.

HINDU WORSHIP AND FESTIVALS

Worship

There seems to be no restrictions as to time or place of worship, though some places are favored, e.g., river banks, mountain tops, sites of pilgrimages, solitary groves, etc. (in fact there are very few places that are unacceptable). A Hindu may even worship at home, though there are some acts of worship that may only be performed by a priest.

Temples, of course, are a prominent feature of India and are places where people congregate to worship and receive a blessing. Temples may vary in shape and size but all have the following features in common: first, there will be a statue or some sacred object which represents the god being worshipped. The god worshipped varies from region to region. Second, the idol will be covered by a canopy which symbolizes their position of honor. Third, the temple will be attended by a priest whose duties include caring for the idol, making offerings and giving blessings.

These temples are places of congregational worship and open to all - but this was not always so. Before 1951 some were not allowed into the temples - those who ate meat and those who belonged to the lower castes.

There are basically three forms of worship called Arti, Havan and the singing of the Bhajans. It is not necessary to perform all these acts of worship but they are usually combined in the Sunday meetings - Sunday is not a set day for worship but being a rest day, is convenient. Let us now examine the three forms of worship.

HAVAN, the offering of fire. The priest kindles a fire using small pieces of wood and camphor (an aromatic crystalline compound), then pours liquid butter into the fire. While doing this the priest will chant from the Vedas. The priest will then offer a prayer of purity for the worshippers and another for the good of all mankind.

ARTI, the worship of light. This is a ceremonial offering of love and devotion of the Lord. During this ceremony symbols of the five elements are present. A flat tray with five lights (fire) is waved before the statue, incense and flowers (earth) may also be offered, a fan is waved (air) and a conch shell is blown (ether), which contains water, the fifth element. The priest then puts a spot of red paint on the forehead of the statue and the worshippers.

The singing of the **BHAJANS**. During the Arti everyone joins in the singing of hymns, accompanied by instrument, then the dancing begins. Also during Arti a collection is taken up.

Festivals

There are many festivals celebrated by Hindus throughout the year and each has many myths associated with it. It is not possible to list them all but nine of the more prominent festivals are listed.

UGADI is the Hindu new year festival. On this day families rise early to clean the house and sweep the courtyard before decorating it with patterns made of flour. The whole family bathes and new clothes are worn. It is a time when everyone looks to the future with hope, which often involves consulting an astrologer to see what the future holds.

RAM NAVAMI. This is the birthday of Rama, one of many gods. Rama was the first human avatar of Vishnu. The day is observed by reading from the Ramayana and offering worship in front of pictures or statues of Rama. It is also a fast day - certain foods such as vegetables, cereals and salt are abstained from. However, other foods - mainly delicacies are enjoyed.

RAKSHA BANDAN. There is a story in the Hindu texts which describes how the goddess Indra's wife saved him from the attack of the demon Bali. She had tied a magic string to his wrist. When boys aged 8-12 are initiated into their caste they are given a sacred thread which they are to wear on their right wrist. It is at this time of year that the initiated or twice born renew their thread and remember the story of Indra. Thus, all male Hindus are given string or tinsel bracelets to wear. The man is expected to give a gift to the girl who gives him the bracelet.

KRISHNA JANAMASHTAMI. This festival celebrates the birthday of Lord Krishna, who was an avatar of Vishnu. Krishna was born at midnight so his devotees stay up until this hour and then celebrate with singing and dancing. The following day is a fast, followed in the evening by a feast. During the festivities many stories of Krishna are told.

NAVARATRI. Navaratri means *nine nights* . Thus, the celebrations last nine nights. The festival seems to be in remembrance of the story of Rama and Sita. Rama lost his kingdom and his wife but he turned to Durga for help. The whole story can be found in the Ramayana.

DUSSEHRA. This festival has two meanings. First, it is on this day that the Spirit of God departs from the statue of Durga. The statue is taken to the river and put in the water. As the statue sinks the people greatly rejoice, believing that it has carried away with it all unhappiness and ill-fortune. Secondly, on this day Rama rescued his wife Sita from the clutches of the evil demon Ravana. A thirty metre high statue is made of the ten headed demon Ravana, then it is burned as a central feature of a huge firework display. It is also a time to remember that good overcomes evil. Also, all differences are forgotten and friendship is stressed. Presents are also given.

DIWALI. This festival celebrates many things: The birth of the goddess Durga (also known as Kali), Krishna's defeat of a demon called Naraka, Vishnu's defeat of the demon Bali, and the best known reason for celebrating DIWALI is the triumphant return of Rama to Ayodhya to claim the throne which had remained vacant for fourteen years. It is also believed that the goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, visits homes bringing gifts and prosperity, but only to homes that are clean and brightly lit. This time of year is one of renewal: new clothes are worn, homes are cleaned and decorated, animals cleaned and groomed, businessmen settle their accounts and children are taught about turning over a new leaf. Presents and cards are exchanged. Hindus describe Diwali as our Christmas.

MAHASHIVATRI. The origins and meaning of this festival are lost in history. But it seems to be a reminder of the fact that Siva is the destroyer as well as the creator.

HOLI. Basically this is a festival which welcomes the coming of spring.

Hindu Festivals

Hindus may use any of at least three religious calendars, depending on the part of India in which they live or originally came from. All these calendars are lunar, so although the number of the year may differ and there may be disagreements about the date of New Year's Day, nevertheless each month begins with one new moon and ends just before the next. The names of the months have also become standardised, as has the practice of inserting an extra month in every third year to keep the calendar in phase with the seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter which are determined by the sun.

Lunar months subdivide into the light part, when the moon is waxing, called shuklapaksha, and the dark half, when it is waning, called krishnapaksha. As the following list shows, Hindu festivals tend to occur at new moon just before it reappears.

Table of Hindu Festivals

Hindu Month	Gregorian Equivalent	Festival
Chaitra	March/April	UGADI (first day Ram Navami (ninth day))
Vaisakha	April/May	
Jyestha	May/June	
Ashadha	June/July	
Sravana	July/August	Raksha Bandan (full moon) Krishna Janamashtami (eighth dark day)
Bhadrapada	August/September	
Asvina	September/October	Navaratri (first nine days) Dussehra (tenth day) Diwali (last three of dark part and first two of light in next month)
Karttika	October/November	Diwali ends
Margasirsha	November/December	
Pausa	December/January	
Magha	January/February	Mahashivaratri (day before new moon)
Phalguna	February/March	Holi (full moon)

BASIC HINDU BELIEFS

In this section we shall examine nine Hindu beliefs.

Caste	Avatars
Karma and Reincarnation	Gurus
Astrology	Beginnings
Yoga	Dharma (duty)
Salvation	

Caste

After the decline of the Harappan civilisation and the “invasion” that followed, we noted some of the religious and social developments that occurred. One of these social developments was that of the gradation of society into four castes: BRAHMINS, the priestly caste; KSATRIYAS, the warrior caste; VAISYAS, the artisans and SHUDRA, the commoners. Below these castes are the untouchables, basket makers, etc.

Jat Caste)	Traditional Occupation	Varna
Brahmin Bhojki	Landowner and Priests Temple Priests	Brahmin
Rajput Mahajan	Landowner and Warriors Traders	Kshatriya Vaishya
Turkhan Lohar Sonyar Nai Kumhar Girth	Carpenters Blacksmiths Goldsmiths Barbers Potters Cultivators	Shudra (Some may claim to be higher caste)
Dumna Chamar Bhangi	Basket-makers Tanners Sweepers	Untouchables

Idealised Indian Social Categories
(The listing gives a sample of various jats that may be found in an Indian village.)

The caste system is characterized by certain features:

Separation. It is the parents who arrange their children's marriage and they will always ensure they are married to associated members of the same caste. There also exists separation in regards to diet - each caste is restricted in the types of food they eat and with whom they may eat it. This separation is made obvious at feasts when different castes sit in their respective groups.

Occupation. Also, with each caste there is associated certain occupations and each person is expected to follow the occupation associated with their own caste.

For the individual, caste dictates his whole way of life.

“Thus the practise of caste dictates to each member customs to be observed in the matter of diet, the observance of ceremonial uncleanness, and whether he may or may not marry or remarry a widow. It prescribes to some extent (or at least limits his choice) ritual to be observed at birth, initiation, marriage and death. It may state, for instance, whether or not his ears shall be bored, and if so, in how many places. With regards to the individual the function of caste is to predetermine his pattern of behaviour to a very considerable degree of nicety, leaving much less to individual choice than is usual in a casteless society” (J.H. Hutton, Caste in India)

No one can change his caste or ritual status; he will always eat, marry and behave in the manner prescribed by his caste. But what is it that determines all these things? The doctrines of Samsara and Karma.

Karma And Reincarnation

Every Hindu believes that the self (ATMAN) is eternal, and so survives the death of the physical body. But what becomes of the Atman? Well, unless one has achieved MOKSHA (freedom from the successive series of births and deaths) one is, literally, born again! For the Hindu this is only natural and has always been so. A person might be reborn as an animal, even an insect. If one returns as a human he may be of noble or lowly birth, rich or poor, our intellect may be great or small. Is this all just a matter of luck or have these things been predetermined?

KARMA comes from the root Kr, meaning a deed or action, but later came to have a broader meaning, referring both to actions and their consequences. The basic idea being that after death all the deeds we commit in this life are judged to be either good or bad and that the verdict determines what we will be in the next incarnation. In fact, the whole of a person's life is predetermined. This basically means that a noble birth, wealth, health, etc. are the consequences of good deeds in the previous life, and that a lowly birth and deprivation are the consequences of bad deeds committed in the previous life. All good and bad luck may be explained by Karma.

Astrology

Astrology is just as important to the Hindu as his religion. In fact, it is now a part of their religion. For the Christian, of course, religion and astrology are separate philosophies that do not mix. However, for the Hindu the two are inseparable. We noted earlier that during the feast of Ugadi many Hindus eagerly consult the astrologer to see what the future holds for them. The astrologer provides guidance for every important decision including marriage, children, profession, etc. How, then, does astrology fit in with the Hindu idea of Karma?

We have already seen how the Karma we bring with us from our previous life affects the present one. Our lives are pretty well mapped out for us. Being so fixed, it is an easy step to take in assuming that astrology reveals one's Karma. Though there are problems that arise, clever self-deceived philosophers are able to pull the wool over the eyes of the gullible.

Yoga

What is Yoga? *"In Hinduism, physical and mental discipline to attain a state of well-being through union with the absolute, Brahman."* It is when union with the absolute is achieved that one is liberated from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. All these physical and mental processes are described in the Yoga Sutras, written around AD 150.

Yoga is not an easy subject and we do not have time and space to cover every aspect of it. We present below just some of the basic ideas:

1. YAMA - restraint, abstention from harming others.
2. NIYAMA - observance, physical and mental purity.
3. ASANA - physical exercise.
4. PRANAYAMA - breath control to gain mastery of vital energy.
5. PRATYAHARA - withdrawal, detachment from sensuality.
6. DHARANA - concentration, fixing the mind on a single point.
7. DHYANA - meditation.
8. SAMADHI - self collectiveness, being able to see the object of concentration as it really is.

These eight limbs form the framework for most Yoga systems.

There are many systems of Yoga and each may emphasize a particular aspect but all with the goal of attaining union with the absolute, Brahman.

TANTRISM

Tantras emphasise magic, spells and rituals. They also claim that by prolonging the sexual act one may begin to experience the ultimate oneness of reality!

HATHA

It is believed that each time we breath two warring impulses or currents are set in motion which lead to feelings of restlessness. Hatha Yoga tries to harness those two sets of currents and by making them unite to still both body and mind. The person is then free to concentrate on their true self. Hatha Yoga is considered beneficial for many physical and emotional problems.

JNANA

Jnana consists of mental effort and involves meditation upon the Vedic scriptures and thoughtful discrimination on the circumstances of life.

KARMA

Karma Yoga is the Yoga of work and everyday life. This system consists of selfless action, it calls for the performance of the ordinary activities of daily life but being detached from the fruits.

“For the Karma Yogi, then, the art of living lies in his performance of action, the discharging of his duties, without the intervention of ego, without self-involvement.”

The best known practitioner of this form of Yoga was Mahatma Gandhi.

BHAKTI

This is for those who are devotional in character and involves the repetition of a word or phrase (MANTRA). It is believed that constant repetition of a mantra generates powerful vibrations that are absorbed into him.

TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

Or TM as it is known, was introduced into this country by it's founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Great sage). In the sixties he gained some famous followers - The Beatles, Mia Farrow and Joe Namath (the New York Jets' quarterback).

This form of Yoga was promoted as *“a scientific technique enabling one to do less and accomplish more.”* It is claimed a person would use his full mental potential and yet attain a deep sense of rest. Many other claims were made but the thing they stressed most was that the TM techniques were not religious. By the end of 1968 there were over 12,000 meditators. By October 1972 there were 10,000 new meditators being enrolled every month.

Is TM a religion? Consider the following points...

1. The objective of TM is to directly experience pure being or self. This self is what Hindus call the ATMAN, which is Brahman, the world soul, the universal principal. As the great refrain of the Chandogya Upanishad says:

“That which is the finest essence - this whole world has that as its soul. This is reality. That is Atman (Soul). That art thou...” (ChU 6:15:3)

Since Brahman is the only reality, one is encouraged to believe that everything else is illusory (MAYA). In relation to Brahman, then, man is insignificant.

2. According to TM, man's greatest need is for a state of consciousness called Unity (i.e., absorption into Brahman). In this state of consciousness one sees both aspects of life - the ever changing relative and the absolute - simultaneously and as one.

(The Beatles left the movement and said, *“We were wrong.”* They accused the Maharishi of being a lecherous womaniser.)

The experience TM promotes is not scientific, or a technique of health and education. TM offers a Hindu type of self-salvation.

Salvation

For the Hindu, salvation is the liberation from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth and absorption into Brahman. The concept of sin against and forgiveness by a loving God are absent in Hindu thought; instead is the concept of Karma. According to the law of Karma the sin we commit in this life will be paid for in the next life - no mercy or forgiveness - only justice. But how may one be liberated from the wheel of birth, death and rebirth? Liberation is achieved in one of three ways: works, knowledge or devotion.

The Way Of Works

The way of works consists of carrying out prescribed ceremonies, duties and religious rites, so adding favourable Karma to his merit. If such works are done religiously one might be reborn a Brahman and so be on one's way to liberation.

The Way Of Knowledge

Man's problem in this: He thinks the universe, even the earth, is real. Further, he believes himself to be a real and separate entity. This is a very grave mistake for only Brahman is real and all else is that which emanates from Brahman and is illusory (MAYA). Now, if a person comes to realize this great truth then one is freed. But this realization is not just intellectual, it is experimental! One must reach a level of consciousness which is reached through discipline and meditation (see Yoga).

The Way Of Devotion

The way of devotion is that devotion to a deity reflected in acts of worship, both public and private. This devotion will also be carried out in human relationships, i.e., love of family, friends, etc. This is the most popular way of salvation. The Krishna devotees are a good example of this devotion.

Avatars

An Avatar is an incarnation of Vishnu, who comes into the world to save it from some great danger. Throughout history there have been nine Avatars with one yet to come. These Avatars are listed below:

1. The Fish (Matsya) - the world was overwhelmed by a universal flood and Vishnu took the form of a fish. He saved Manu (the first man) and also saved the seven great sages and the Vedas.
2. The Tortoise (Kurma).
3. The Boar (Varaha).
4. Narasimha, the Man Lion.
5. The Dwarf (Vamana).
6. Parasurama.
7. Rama.
8. Krishna. There are few people who have not heard of Krishna.
9. Buddha - well known in the west but not many realize that he is an Avatar of Vishnu.
10. Kalkin. Vishnu's final appearance will be at the end of the age when he comes mounted on a white horse with a flaming sword in his hand. He will judge the wicked and reward the good. This doctrine does not fit in too well with the idea of an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Gurus

Vishal Mongalwadi said in his book *The World of Gurus...*

“The authority and worship of the Gurus are subtly replacing the authority of scriptures and idol worship. The four classes are being reduced to two: initiates and non-initiates.”

After being initiated into his caste, a young boy would then be under the guidance of a guru who would teach him the Vedas, astronomy and mathematics. Because of the absence of printed books, the student was not able to evaluate his teachers opinions. The guru's authority came from his own personal mystical experiences (all Gurus focus upon Yoga and mysticism). So, with the gradual decrease of the importance of the caste system, and the priest, the Guru gradually gained a greater standing.

Nowadays the Guru is perceived as either absolute deity, being like God or he may be seen as one further along the road of merging into the ultimate reality. Consider the following quote:

“Guru and God are both standing, whose feet shall I touch first? I shall touch yours O Guru, for you revealed God to me.”

It is easy to see how the Guru can become the focus of devotion for a disciple. Some disciples gave themselves up completely to their Guru. A Guru will often have his own centre, called an ASHRAM . Here disciples would learn, among other things, the Vedas.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was the Guru who brought TM to the west, after being ignored in India.

Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada was the Guru who brought Krishna consciousness to Britain in 1969.

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was another Guru who began a movement and set up a commune in Oregon. The movement collapsed in 1985.

Beginnings

What do the Hindu texts tell us about the beginning? It should come as no surprise that there are several different themes that can be identified. One gets the feeling that the writers struggled with this question of the origin of the universe.

Five main themes are listed below but I can't say I understand all of them:

1. The creator is pictured as an artisan, forming what we know today out of some already existing material. There is no hint of creation out of nothing.
2. This second theme is based upon pregnancy and birth from the original waters. A golden embryo arises and once born is the Lord of creation.
3. Creation out of unity - totality. (I do not understand this.)
4. Order out of chaos. But no creation out of nothing.
5. Creation by sacrifice. Without continuous sacrifice the universe will disintegrate. This emphasizes the importance of the priest.

Dharma

Dharma is the performance of one's duty. In all areas of life we have certain responsibilities or duties that we must perform - duties as a citizen, in the home and religious duties. But for the Hindu the idea of duty is a little more complex. The following quotes may help us to understand the concept of Dharma:

“The word Dharma means more than is conveyed by the English word duty . It includes discipline and the responsibilities of life that are considered essential for the support of the family and society.”

“(But) work alone is your proper business, never the fruits: let not your motive be the fruit of works nor your attachment to (mere) worklessness.”

Part Two

Krishnaism

KRISHNAISM

The Hare Krishna movement cannot be classified as a world religion; it is really a Hindu sect. However, the teachings of this sect go against the traditional Hindu doctrines. The Krishna movement stands, virtually, on its own two feet.

The Krishna sect has about 10,000 members in America and thousands more throughout the world. I was not able to find a worldwide estimate. Anyway, considering the movement's distinctiveness and worldwide influence, I thought it might merit a brief study.

The Roots of Krishnaism

It was back in the fifth century AD that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu developed the doctrines of Krishnaism from the Hindu text called the Bhagavad Gita or song of the blessed Lord. He sought to popularize philosophical Hinduism. The God of the Vedas, Brahman, is unknowable, impersonal, unreachable and indescribable; while Krishna is a loving God, a personal God who wants our love and devotion.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings contradict the traditional Hindu teachings. The chart below shows some of the differences:

TRADITIONAL		KRISHNAISM
(Brahma) unknowable, unreachable, indescribable	God	(Krishna) Knowable, reachable and describable
Brahma, Siva and Vishnu make up the Hindu trinity Vishnu once appeared as Krishna	Trinity	Krishna is supreme among all the gods, no one is equal to or above Him Krishna once appeared on the Earth as Vishnu
To reach a state of consciousness where the law of karma has no effect	Avatar	To earn enough good karma to atone for the bad
To lose one's identity and be absorbed into Brahman	Goal	To go to Nirvana and be a servant of Krishna. Identity is retained
Liberation is achieved by knowledge, works or devotion	Heaven	Liberation is achieved by an ascetic lifestyle and devotion to Krishna
	Salvation	

As the chart shows, traditional Hinduism and Krishnaism don't mix

The Spread Of Krishna Consciousness

His divine grace Abhay Charan De Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was born in Calcutta in 1896 (died 1977, age 81), and it was in 1922 that he met his Guru, Siddhartha Goswami, who taught him about Krishna consciousness. For the past 350 years (1572 - 1922) the "truth" about Krishna was confined mainly to the Ganges plain area of India. In 1965 Prabhupada's Guru, Siddhartha Goswami, commissioned him to take Krishna consciousness to the west, which he did. He went first to New York and came to England a year later (1968). What we know today as The International Society for Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON, was formerly set up in 1966. There are now centres all over the world.

The Song Of The Blessed Lord

"*Song of the Blessed Lord*" or as it is more commonly called, the Bhagavad Gita, is itself contained in the Mahabharata, the second great Indian epic. The story itself is quite complicated and the outline below is very simplified.

King Bharata has two sons, who each established their own royal families.

King Pandu was the first son and he had five sons, known as the Pandavas. King Dhritarashtra was the second son, he had 100 sons, known as the Kauravas.

King Pandu gave up his throne to retire to the forest, so his brother, Dhritarashtra, ruled in his stead. He brought up Pandu's sons with his own.

King Dhritarashtra's sons became jealous of Pandu's sons and plotted to kill them. Thinking Pandu's sons were in their palace they set fire to it, but Pandu's sons had escaped to the forest, unknown to the Kauravas.

One day one of the Pandavas, Arjuna, returned. They decided to share the kingdom but the Pandavas got the desolate parts.

Jealousy soon reared its head and war might have broken out but the Kauravas won the kingdom in a dice game instead!

Without going into all the details, war eventually broke out.

As the two sides faced each other Arjuna saw family members on both sides and questioned whether it was right to kill them. The Bhagavad Gita records the discussion that took place between Arjuna and his charioteer, who persuades him that he must fight.

Arjuna's charioteer turned out to be none other than the Supreme being, Vishnu, come in the flesh as Krishna; or as ISKCON would have it, Krishna the Supreme Being coming as Vishnu.

The Bhagavad Gita may be divided into three convenient parts: First, chapters 1 - 6 which deal with the different ways in which a soul may attain liberation. Second, chapters 7-11 discuss the nature of God and ends with a great vision of Deity. Third, chapters 12-18 introduce the concept of a loving God who seeks devotion.

The sect of Krishnaism largely depends on this text for all its basic beliefs, though it does not reject the other.

BASIC IDEAS

God

The God of the Vedas is unknowable and unreachable but the Lord Krishna is a God of love who desires fellowship with his creatures. Traditionally Krishna is an avatar of Vishnu, but for the Hare Krishna sect the opposite is true - Vishnu is an avatar of Krishna! We have already seen in previous lessons that Hindus believe in a trinity, Brahma, Siva and Vishnu. But in Krishnaism there is only one God, one personality. Prabhupada, commenting on a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, says:

“He (Krishna) is the supreme Personality of Godhead. No living entity, including Brahma, Lord Siva, or even Marayana, can possess opulence as fully as Krishna...no one is equal to or above Him. He is the primeval Lord...and He is the supreme cause of all causes...the absolute truth.”

Consider the following quotes from the Bhagavad Gita:

“Of the whole universe the origin and dissolution too am I. Higher than I there is nothing whatsoever” (Bhg. 7:6-7)

“By Me, unmanifest in form, this whole universe was spun: In me subsist all beings, I do not subsist in them” (Bhg. 9:4)

“Yet even those who worship other gods with love and sacrifice to them, fulfilled with faith, do really worship Me” (Bhg. 9:23)

“The source of all am I; from Me all things proceed” (Bhg. 10:8)

Jesus

Jesus is seen as Krishna's Son, but in a position no more unique to God than any other man could strive to attain. I could not find any other comments about Jesus, which, I suppose, is not surprising.

Salvation

Sin, teaches ISKCON, is ignorance of Lord Krishna, and Krishna consciousness dispels such ignorance. To be saved or, more accurately, liberated, one must, of course, join the sect. By keeping the rules of the sect and devoting one's life to Lord

Krishna liberation is assured. Life within the sect is a combination of asceticism and devotion.

Rules for an ascetic life:

1. Forbids all forms of gambling, various sports and conversation not associated with the development of Krishna consciousness.
2. Forbids the use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, tea and coffee.
3. Forbids illicit sex. This includes sex for pleasure.
4. Prescribes vegetarianism. Foods classed as low and not suitable for offering to Krishna are also forbidden, e.g., garlic, mushrooms, bread and vinegar. The disciple is expected to live almost entirely on a diet of milk, nuts, yoghurt and fruit.

The male devotee is also expected to shave the head, except for a pigtail and wear a khirtan (shirt) and Dhoti (loose trousers). Women are to wear a Sari. These help to play down physical attraction between the sexes.

The devotional life:

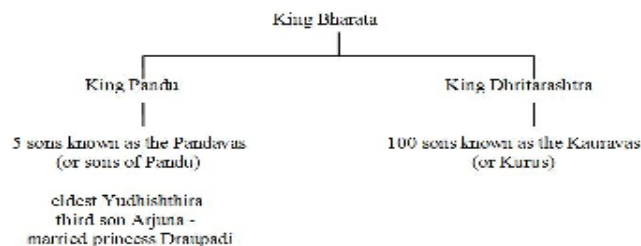
It is believed that by chanting the Mahamantra...

*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama,
Rama Rama, Hare Hare.*

...one is taking the direct way to the supreme personality of Godhead. The chant is supposed to cleanse one's heart of all material dirt. It cleanses the accumulated dust of past Karma from the mind. Ideally this should be chanted 24 hours a day.

Other devotions include hearing and singing praises to Krishna, meditating upon the divine play and deeds of Krishna and engaging in rites and ceremonies of worship.

By practising asceticism and engaging in devotion, one can "atone for his bad deeds and so escape the cycle of rebirths and go to Krishna or Nirvana, similar to our idea of heaven.



The Family Tree Of The Pandavas

The story of the poem. King Pandu gave up his throne to retire to the forest, so Dhritarashtra, his brother, ruled in his place. He brought up King Pandu's sons with his own. However, the Kaurava brothers became jealous of the heroism and virtue of their cousins and decided to kill them by burning down their palace. The five Pandavas, hearing of the plot, retired to the forest where they lived.

Part Three

Islam

“Submission to Allah”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAM

Muhummad

Muhummad was born in 570 AD in the city of Mecca, situated on the west coast of Arabia. Muhummad was of the Hashimite clan of the Al Qu'raysh tribe. His father died before his birth and his mother died when he was six years old. It was his grandfather, Abdul-Muttalib, who raised him.

The Night Of Power

As Muhummad was growing up he became increasingly dissatisfied with the pagan type, polytheistic worship that surrounded him. In Mecca itself was the famous Kaaba building which contains the famous black stone. It is claimed that Abraham was commissioned by God to build a copy of the heavenly Kaaba. This instruction came through the angelic agency of Gabriel, who gave him a stone. So Abraham and Ishmael built the Kaaba and the sacred stone was set in one of the walls. The stone, it claimed, was originally white but turned black when the Arabs forgot God. It was this same angel, Gabriel, who appeared to Muhummad in a cave, just outside Mecca, called Hira. Gabriel revealed to Muhummad the word of God, which we know today as the Koran. It is that night which is referred to as the night of power .

The Message

The divine message was not revealed all at once but over a period of 22 years, through the angel Gabriel. Muhummad would have been 62 when the revelations were completed - the same year he died (632 AD). The divine message was revealed to Muhummad during two periods known as the Meccan period, the revelation at this time related to the knowledge of God, self-purification and abandonment, submission to the infinite reality, human salvation, awakening to mankind's divine origin, fear of God and the last judgement. It was during the Medina period that revelations concerning worship and social order were revealed. These recitations (Koran) are the words of Allah, the last revelation to man and Muhummad is the last prophet or the seal of the prophets. One important difference between the Koran and the Bible is: The Bible is a revelation about God, the Koran is a revelation from God, Allah is unknowable.

For the Muslim, the Koran is the infallible word of God and the main guide for all matters of faith and practise. Other accepted revelations include the Torah (of Moses), the Suhuf (books of the prophets), the Zabur (Psalms of David), the Injil (the gospel of Jesus). The texts of these revelations are the "*uncorrupted*" versions (of course).

Hijrah

The Meccans were not impressed with Muhummad or his "revelations" and they opposed him greatly. It was this opposition that forced Muhummad to flee to Yathrib. Muhummad was accompanied by family and friends who believed him to be a prophet. One of Muhummad's first converts was his wife Khadijah, a rich widow 15 years his senior. This whole episode, fleeing in the night to Medina, is called Hijrah, and occurred on 24 September 622 AD.

Growth In Medina

It was in Medina that Muhummad set up the first community of Muslims, and he was selected the divinely inspired philosopher-king . The early years were marked by many battles with the Quraysh and other tribes. After eight years in Medina the community had begun to outgrow its physical boundaries and expanded as converts joined them during their pilgrimage to Mecca. It was in Medina that Muhummad received revelations that pertained to acts of worship and ordinances governing social order.

Acceptance In Mecca

By 630 AD the Meccans had accepted Muhummad as a prophet of Allah. When Muhummad returned to Mecca he went to the ka'aba, which contained the black stone, and declared that the Ka'aba was a shrine for the one true God, Allah. He rode around the shrine seven times, then he ordered the destruction of the 300 or so idols within it and the scraping of paintings of Abraham and the angels from the walls. Muhummad was well on the way to unifying the Arab tribes under a theocracy governed by the will of God. In 632 AD Muhummad suddenly died.

The Spread Of Islam

After the death of Muhammad there was much contention over who the new leader (Caliph) should be. Some said that Muhammad appointed his son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, others said that any suitable believer was eligible and still others that the leader should only come from the family of Umayya. The question was never really settled, which gave rise to three distinctive sects: the Sunnis, the most popular; the Shi'a; and the Sufis. These we will discuss later.

Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's elderly companions, was proclaimed the new Caliph and his reign marked the beginning of the spread of Islam. Under the rule of the Caliphs (632-656 AD) the Arabian empire spread to Egypt, Persia and Cyprus. Sicily, Rhodes and other Mediterranean ports also came under their rule. During the period from 656-705 AD there was much internal strife and contention and numerous civil wars broke out. The period from 705-1400's saw the spread of the empire eastward into Persia, Pakistan, then to India. Even during this period there was much internal strife.

THE THREE MAJOR SECTS OF ISLAM

As we have said, the controversy over leadership eventually led to the formation of three distinct sects: the Sunnis, the Shi'a and the Sufis. These we shall now study.

Sunni (One Who Follows The Sunnah)

As well as the Caliphate controversy another conflict raged, that of law and theology. Out of this conflict arose four schools of thought, each accepted the Qur'an, the Sunna and the four bases of Islamic law - the Koran, the Hadith (tradition, the Ij'ma (consensus) and the Q'iyas (reason).

The Four Schools Of Thought:

School	Founder	Emphasis On...
Hanafi	Abu Hanifa	Opinion reached by individual reasoning and analogy.
Maliki	Malik Anas	The ways of the elders of Medina, the perfect model.
Shafite	Al-Shafi'i	General principles and specific commandments of the Koran. Also on Hadith.
Hanbali	Ibn Hanbal	Hadith, reject analogy.

These four groups are called the Sunnis.

In settling disputes over Muslim behaviour the Sunnis would appeal to the Koran, if such injunctions seemed insufficient or inapplicable then the Sunna (the practise of Muhammad in Medina) or Hadith (traditions that recorded the prophets' decisions and judgements) would be consulted. If no decision is arrived at then an appeal to the consensus of opinion of the Medina community is made. If this proved unfruitful then an analogy is drawn from the Koran and applied.

As far as leadership is concerned, the Sunnis believe that any suitable believer is eligible for leadership (Caliphite).

Shi'a (Follower)

The Shi'is have their own system of law called the Ja'fari School of Law, named after the sixth Shi'i Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq. The Shi'i will only regard consensus as valid if the Imam also concurs. They also came to reject the idea or need for analogy. Thus the Shi'i school is based entirely upon the traditions and teachings of the 12 Imams. There are also minor differences relating to worship.

The Shi'is believe that Muhammad appointed his son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, as his successor and that only Muhammad's direct descendants can be legitimate Caliphs. They also believe that such leaders are divinely appointed and supernaturally guided, usually called and Imam.

Sufis

Sufism is a reaction, mainly from among Sunnis, against the formal, impersonal and legalistic worship that naturally arose. Sufis seek a direct personal experience of the divine; this is achieved by practising asceticism and knowledge of self. These are the mystics of Islam. Sufis tend to focus on the qualities of personal piety, perpetual remembrance, prayer and abandonment. One of the ritualistic practises that emerged was that of chanting the name of God as a means of enhancing remembrance of Allah and maintaining self-awareness. Some Sufi writings seem to reject monotheism for a form of *"immanent Pantheism."*

Comment by Ali Ibn Abi Talib on asceticism:

"Asceticism is not that you should not own anything, but that nothing should own you."

Comment on man's objective:

"The ultimate objective that human beings can achieve in this world is the spontaneous unification between the inner and outer, the seen and the unseen" (The elements of Islam. p.33)

Other Islamic sects include Isma'ilis, Nizaris, Bohras, Druze, Alawis, Baha'is, Wahhabis, Ahadis.

ISLAMIC SCRIPTURES**The Holy Koran**

How did the Koran (recitations) come into being? Muhammad, in his search for God and truth, would often retire to a cave outside of Mecca; it was in this cave that he received the first in a series of visions. Muhammad claimed that the angel Gabriel appeared to him and said, *"Read,"* but, being illiterate, he could not. This happened three times and he then realized that the words were being *"given to him."* For the next 22 years Muhammad received revelations; sometimes he would hear the words being spoken, but usually he would simply *"find them in his heart."* At first he had doubts as to the origin of such visions - were they from God or the devil? It was his wife, Khadijah, who persuaded him that they were of God.

Some say that the Koran was penned during the prophet's lifetime, while others say it was written down after his death by those who had memorized it. We think there is truth in both views. The Koran is about four-fifths the length of the New Testament and is divided into 114 chapters (77,639 words), which vary in length. The shorter revelations are usually dated to the earlier years of Muhammad's ministry in Mecca (610 - 622 AD), and deal with knowledge of God, submission, salvation and the last judgement. The longer revelations are dated after 622 AD during his stay in the town of Medina. These revelations deal with matters of law and conduct. For the Muslim the Koran is the inspired word of God.

Below are some examples taken from the Koran on how to live, pray and work:

"Do they not ponder the Qur'an? If it had been from other than Allah, surely they would have found in it a lot of differences" (4:82).

"God has permitted trading and forbidden taking interest" (2:275).

"Show kindness to your parents and to near relatives, orphans, the needy, the neighbour who is a stranger to you, and your companion by your side and the wayfarer, and anyone who is your responsibility" (4:36).

"You who believe, liquor and gambling, idols and raffles, are only a work of Satan; avoid them that you may prosper" (5:90).

"You who believe, whenever you intend to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your head and wash your feet up to the ankles" (5:6).

"Children of Adam, wear your best clothes at every time of worship" (7:3)

The Hadith

Muslims believe that Muhammad was just a man and his words and deeds that of a man. However, they also believe that he was a perfect example of a Muslim. It was in Medina that Muhammad set up the first Muslim community, and it was here that his followers recorded his teachings and practices; these writings became known as the Hadith or traditions. The Hadith do not carry the same force as the Koran, but are used to complement it, e.g., a principle of the Koran states, *“eat and drink, but do not be extravagant”* (7:3). The Hadith goes on to say, *“A wedding feast on the day after the marriage is proper, on the second day it is good, but on the third day it is pretentious and an hypocrisy.”* It is the Holy Koran and the Hadith that provide the basis of Islamic law.

The Sunna

This is the law or authority by which Islamic belief and practise is regulated. There are matters that the Koran and the Hadith do not deal with specifically (This is true of the Bible). In such a case the principle of analogy is employed to determine the right action, e.g., is birth control and abortion unlawful? The Koran says, *“Do not kill your children in dread of poverty; we shall provide for both them and you. Killing them is a serious error”* (17:31). By analogy, then, birth control and abortion are seen to be unlawful. It is this analogical reasoning that the Shi'ite sect reject.

Other Scriptures

Revelations that have come to us in times past such as the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospels are all accepted. However, they also believe them to be corrupted and untrustworthy. So where contradictions are found between the two, then the Koran wins out. Muslims believe that only the Koran is infallible and divinely protected from corruption.

“Indeed, We sent down the message and We will guard it” (15:9)

BASIC TEACHINGS OF ISLAM

Allah

Muslims believe that the one true God is Allah (the strong one). Allah is so unified to himself that He cannot be associated with creation. He is transcendent and he acts impersonally. Being so united and transcendent, Allah is unapproachable by sinful man. It is Allah who has created both good and evil; making Him capricious. Whatever Allah chooses to do becomes right. Allah is a God of judgment and wrath; grace and mercy are not great themes of the Holy Koran. In order to avoid the wrath of Allah, a Muslim must totally submit himself to Allah and do good works. There is no concept in the Koran of a loving heavenly Father.

Jesus

Muslims believe that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary; she conceived through the agency of an angel rather than by the Holy Spirit. So do Muslims believe that Jesus is God's son? The Koran says, *“Jesus...was only a messenger of Allah...Far is it removed from his transcendent majesty that He should have a son”* (4:171). Further, the idea of Jesus being part of a trinity is blasphemous to them. Jesus, they say, was sent by Allah to be a prophet to His people of that day. Muslims do not believe that Jesus died on the cross; the Koran says, *“They slew Him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them...”* (4:157). One Muslim tradition says that it was Judas who was crucified in His place. The Koran teaches that, in fact, Jesus did not die at all but returned to heaven in bodily form (4:157). There is also a belief among Muslims that Jesus will one day return to establish Islam throughout the earth. We can see, then, that Muslims have a high regard for Jesus; or so it seems. In reality, they reject Him as the eternal Word of God, they reject his vicarious sacrifice, and they reject His resurrection.

Sin And Salvation

What does sin mean Muslims? In all the books I read on Islam, very little is said about sin, which probably reflects their lack of concern for sin and its consequences. One reference suggested that sin is a lack of obedience to Allah. One of the benefits of Ramadan (It is during this month that Muslims are required to fast each day until sunset) is that this somehow atones for sins committed during the past year. I could find no other information. The emphasis in regards to salvation seems to be on meritorious works. This means submission to Allah and obedience to His law. Muslims must hold to the articles of faith and follow the pillars of faith, which we shall examine shortly. But adherence to the law and being given to good works is still no guarantee (see The Last Day).

Angels

Muslims believe in angels; they believe them to be made of light. According to Muslims, there are millions of angels who have varied responsibilities. We remember that it was the angel Gabriel who revealed the Koran to Muhammad and it was an angel that appeared to Mary. Muslims also believe that each person has two angels assigned to him to record his good and bad deeds.

The Last Day

Muslims believe in a coming day of resurrection and judgement, when this will be is unknown; however, there are supposed to be 25 signs of its approach. On judgement day one's deeds will be weighed on scales - if your good deeds tip the scales then you go to heaven. In heaven a person delights in earthly type pleasures. Those whose bad deeds outweigh the good will go to a fiery hell; here he will be forced to drink scalding hot water - just one of the graphic torments in hell (See 84:7-12; 17:13-14; 99:708; 23:102-4; 6:160).

THE SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH

1. There is only One True God and His name is Allah.
2. The Koran is Allah's truly inspired book.
3. God's angels are God's messengers and aides, and there are evil spirits to oppose them.
4. God sent His prophets to earth at stated times and for stated purposes. (The six greatest prophets are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.) The greatest prophet is Muhammad.
5. The day of judgement will find good and evil deeds weighed in the balance, and souls will pass to heaven or hell on a bridge "*finer than a hair and sharper than a sword.*"
6. Fate or Kismet. The lives and acts of men are fore-ordained by an all-knowing God, but this does not eliminate the exercise of free will.

(These six articles are copied from *Today's Religions* by Josh McDowell and Don Stewart and *Major Religions of the World* by Marcus Bach.)

THE FIVE PILLARS OF FAITH

1. The Creed - "*There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.*" This must be said aloud in public to become a Muslim. It is repeated constantly by the faithful.
2. The daily prayer (salat) is spoken in Arabic by devout Muslims five times each 24 hours. They pray with their faces towards Mecca.
3. Almsgiving (zakat). Muslims have to give 1/40th of their income towards the expansion of the faith and support of the poor.
4. Fasting. Every Muslim is expected to observe Ramadan, which is the 9th month of the Muslim calendar. A strict fast is kept during the daylight hours of Ramadan as a commemoration of the first revelation of the Koran.
5. The pilgrimage (Hajj). Every Muslim is expected to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca during their lifetime.

Apart from these five pillars there is also another duty associated with these, Jihad or Holy War. If the circumstances arise, each one is required to go to war to spread Islam or defend it against infidels.

The following extract is from a booklet called *The Muslim's Belief* by Shaikh Muhammad Al-Saleh Al-Uthaimin.

"It is our opinion that whoever claims the acceptability of any existing religion today, other than Islam, such as Judaism, Christianity, and so forth is a non-believer. He should be asked to repent, if he does not, he must be killed as an apostate because he is rejecting the Qur'an" (emphasis mine.)

READINGS FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Verily, they who believe (Muslims), and they who follow the Jewish religion, and the Christians, and the Sabeites - whoever believeth in God and the Last Day, and doeth that which is right, shall have their reward with their Lord: and fear shall not come upon them, neither shall they be grieved...And observe prayer and pay the legal impost: and whatever good thing ye have sent on before for your soul's sake, ye shall find it with God. Verily God seeth what ye do...But, they who set their face with resignation Godward, and do what is right, - their reward is therefore with their Lord, and no fear shall come on them, neither shall they be grieved...We believe in God, and that which hath been sent down to us, and that which hath been sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and that which hath been given to Moses and to Jesus, and that which was given to the prophets from their Lord.

No difference do we make between any of them; and to God are we resigned (Muslims). It is prescribed to you when any one of you is at the point of death, that if he leaves goods, he bequeatheth equitably to his parent and kindred; this is binding on those who fear God. O believers! a Fast is prescribed to you, as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may fear God for certain days. But he among you who shall be sick, or on a journey, shall fast that same number of other days: and for those who are able to keep it and yet break it, there shall be as an expiation the maintenance of a poor man. And he who of his own accord performeth a good work, shall derive good from it: and that ye fast is good for you - if ye but knew it. As to the month Ramadan in which the Qur'an was send down to be man's guidance, and an explanation of that guidance, and an illumination, as soon as any one of you observeth the moon, let him set about the fast; but he who is sick, or upon a journey, shall fast a like number of other days. God wisheth you ease and wisheth not your discomfort, and that you fulfil the number of days, and that you glorify God for his guidance: and haply you will be thankful. And when my servants ask thee concerning Me, then verily will I be nigh unto them - will answer the cry of him that crieth, when he crieth unto Me: but let them hearken unto Me, and believe in Me, haply they will proceed aright...God! There is no god but He; the Living, the Self-subsisting; neither slumber seizeth Him, nor sleep; his, whatsoever is in Heavens and whatsoever is in the Earth! Who is he that can intercede with Him but by his own permission? He knoweth what is present with his creatures, and what is yet to befall them; yet nought of his knowledge do they comprehend, save what He willeth. His throne reacheth over the Heavens and the Earth, and the upholding of both burdeneth Him not; and He is the High, the Great! Let there be no compulsion in Religion...O ye who believe! make not your alms void by reproaches and injury, like him who spendeth his substance to be seen of men, and believeth not in God and in the latter day. The likeness of such an one is that of a rock with a thin soil upon it, on which a heavy rain falleth, but leaveth it hard: no profit from their works shall they be able to gain; for God guideth not the unbelieving people. And the likeness of those who expend their substance from a desire to please God, and through their own steadfastness, is as a garden on a hill, on which the heavy rain falleth, and it yieldeth its fruits twofold; and even if a heavy rain fall not on it, yet is there a dew. and God beholdeth your actions...God will not burden any soul beyond its power. It shall enjoy the good which it hath acquired, and shall bear the evil for the acquirement of which it laboured. O our Lord! punish us not if we forget, or fall into sin; O our Lord! and lay not on us a load like that which Thou hast laid on those who have been before us; O our Lord! and lay not on us that for which we have not strength: but blot out our sins and forgive us, and have pity on us. Thou art our protector: help us then against the unbelievers (*Qur. 2, 59, 104, 106, 130, 176, 179-82, 256-7, 266-7, 286*).

ISLAMIC WORSHIP

Organization

Let us note once more some of the differences between the Sunnis and Shi'ites.

Sunnis believe that any suitable believer is eligible for leadership. According to Sunni teaching an Imam is simply one who has greater knowledge and understanding of theology and law. An Imam will teach, preach and lead the worship.

Shi'ites differ on both these points. Shi'ites believe that only Muhammad's descendants, through his daughter Fatima, can be legitimate rulers or Caliphs. For the Shi'ite, a legitimate Caliph is also known as an Imam. Such an one, they believe, is divinely appointed and supernaturally guided.

That's it! There are no priests, vicars, pastors, etc. The Sunni Imam and the Shi'ite equivalent resemble a Christian preacher, somewhat.

Prayer

Ask the average person to tell you something about Muslims and one of the top five answers will be "they pray five times a day." This is true but a lot more is involved in this than we might think.

Times Of Prayer:

Morning (Fajr)	After dawn - it can be made until sunrise
Noonday (Zuhr)	As soon as the sun has passed its zenith and until an object throws a shadow twice its length this prayer may be said
Midafternoon ('Asr)	From the end of the zuhr prayer until the sun sets, but preferably before it loses its brilliance
Sunset	Between sunset and the end of twilight
Night	Anytime during the hours of darkness, but preferably before midnight.

Ritual Washing

Before a Muslim can pray he must prepare himself by a ritual washing as directed by the Koran (4:43; 5:6). The ritual means washing the hands and arms up to the elbows, the feet and ankles, the face and the throat by gargling. Ritual impurities are thus removed.

Once the ritual washing is completed prayer may begin. Praying involves a sequence of positions; described below.

The sequence of prayer positions in Islam

The full sequence of prayer involves twelve positions, starting with the Declaration of Intent. From the standing posture the worshipper proceeds to the bending, stands once again and there follow two sitting postures alternating with two prostrations and two salams in a kneeling position. The pictures above show Position 2: God is very great ; Position 4: Bending - Praise of God's majesty: Position 6 and 8: First and Second Prostrations and Position 11: Second salam - Peace and mercy to you .

Friday is the Muslim holy day and so all will go to the mosque to pray. The Muslim must always face Mecca whenever and wherever he prays.

The Mosque

The mosque is the Muslim place of worship. Mosques are usually rectangular in shape; at the entrance or in the courtyard there is a place for washing; each mosque has a tower called a minaret, from which the faithful are summoned to prayer; each mosque has one wall which differs from the others - being higher or having a niche in the wall; this wall points to Mecca, so aiding the worshippers when they pray. Mosques are very plain inside as the emphasis is on worship.

Pilgrimage

The pilgrimage to Mecca is, as we have seen, one of the five pillars of Islam and all Muslims are obligated to make this pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime, if possible. Once reaching Mecca the pilgrim walks around the Ka'ba seven times in an anti-clockwise direction; as he passes the sacred stone he may kiss or touch it. From here the pilgrim goes to As-Safa and Al-Marwa, these are two hills where Abram left Hagar and Ishmael at God's command. Hagar, it is said, ran between these two hills searching for water, believers will imitate this action. From here the pilgrim travels to Mount Arafat, it is here that Adam and Eve met after being separated when they were expelled from paradise. Prayers, then, are offered on this Mount. The pilgrim now turns back, heading for Muzdalifah where they spend the night. The next day, coming to Mina, they throw stones at three stone pillars! These stone pillars supposedly mark the spot where Satan tried to persuade Ishmael to rebel and refuse to be an offering. He is said to have driven off Satan with stones. Following this, an animal sacrifice is offered in remembrance of Abraham's sacrifice of a ram instead of his son. Returning to Mecca, the pilgrim circles the Ka'ba once more. He is now free to return home.

Festivals

There are five Muslim festivals which we will describe only briefly.

Muslim Month	Festival
Muharram	Hijra (flight) to Medina. This festival commemorates Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina, and the founding of the first Muslim community. It is also a new year celebration, as the Islamic calendar begins at this point.
Safar	----
Rabi' al-Awwal	Muhammad's birthday. The whole month is a time for remembering the prophet's ministry.
Rabi'ath-Thani	----
Jamadal-Awwal	----
Jamadi al-Akhir	----
Rajab	----
Sha'ban	----
Ramadan	During this month Muslims fast every day from dawn until dusk. Ramadan commemorates the first revelation of the Koran. It also serves as a reminder that all are equal. (One source also suggests that fasting at this time atones for one's venial sins!)
Shawwal	Eid-ul-Fitr. This festival comes at the end of Ramadan and begins with special congregational prayers in the morning, usually in the mosque. This is followed by family and friends celebrating together in their homes. Each one wears new clothes and presents are exchanged, cards may also be sent.
Dhul-Oa'da	----
Dhul-Hijja	Eid-ul-Adha. This celebrates the time when Abraham showed his willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael to God. An animal is usually sacrificed.

Part Four
Sikhism
“To learn”

THE EMERGENCE OF SIKHISM

By the 1400's the Muslims had invaded India and the Islamic faith had become established, mainly in the northeast (see p.30). There were now two religions in India - Hinduism and Islam. Because these two religions are opposed to each other doctrinally, it would naturally be confusing and perhaps lead to dissatisfaction; such feelings are the seeds that sects are made of. Sikhism is an example of a religion that arose from such feelings of confusion and dissatisfaction and is the result of one man's attempt to harmonize these two religions. The religion of Sikhism evolved and emerged over a period of about 250 years; its scriptures, teachings and practises being revealed by a succession of ten Gurus, who lived between 1469 and 1709. These Gurus came from the Hindu caste, Kshatriya, the warrior class (see p.15). Those belonging to this caste were allowed to read and study the Vedas but not to teach them. However, each of the Gurus claimed that their authority and teachings came directly from God. Each Guru might add to and build upon his predecessor's teaching or introduce a new practise. All this helped Sikhism to emerge as an independent religion.

The First Guru And Founder

The first Guru was called Nanak. He was born in a village called Talwandi, in the Punjab region of North India. Talwandi is now in Pakistan. Nanak's parents raised him in the Hindu beliefs but as he grew up he became dissatisfied with both Hinduism and Islam, but continued to seek after "truth." One morning after bathing in the river he disappeared into the forest. At first it was thought that he had drowned and the river was dragged. Three days later Nanak appeared but remained silent for one day; then he said, "There is no Hindu and no Musalman!" One can, perhaps, see Nanak's intention from this statement to blend Hinduism and Islam? Nanak announced that he had been taken up to God's court where he was commissioned by God to teach people to rejoice in His name. The experience of Nanak is summed up in this hymn which he penned.

*"I was a minstrel out of work,
The Lord gave me employment.
The mighty One instructed me,
Night and day, sing my praise.
The Lord summoned the minstrel
To His high Court.
On me He bestowed the robe of honouring
Him and singing His praise.

On me He bestowed the Nectar in a cup,
The nectar of His true and holy name.
Those who at the bidding of the Guru
Feast and take their fill of the Lord's holiness
Attain peace and joy.
Your minstrel spreads your glory
by singing your word.
Nanak, through adoring the truth
We attain to the all-highest."*

At about 33 years of age, Nanak left his secular job to become a full time preacher. His message was that there was only one God, the creator and sustainer of all life, and that people of all classes may worship Him and receive enlightenment and spiritual liberation in this life (This teaching may have appealed to many dissatisfied Hindus). Nanak equated God with truth and reality but that He was far less ruthless and violent as Islam's God (This may have appealed to many sensitive Muslims). Nanak travelled and preached for about 22 years before he settled down in Kartarpur, where he established the first Sikh community. Nanak died when he was 70 years old but not before appointing his successor.

The Ten Gurus

Nanak had begun to spread his own brand of religion, a mixture of Hinduism and Islam, and he had established the first Sikh community in Kartarpur. Before his death he appointed Lahina to be his successor. Altogether there were ten Gurus, each of whom contributed to the development of Sikhism. From the listing below you can see the contributions each made.

Angad (Lahina) [1539-1552] - Consolidated the Sikh community and gathered together the hymns of Guru Nanak, these were to be included as part of the Sikh scriptures.

Amar Das [1552-1574] - Called the Sikhs to a village called Goindwal three times a year, which coincided with three Hindu festivals (Magha, Diwali and Baisakhi. see p.13). This meant that one had to choose between the two - you were either Sikh or Hindu. Angad also introduced the doctrine of Nanak's equality with God.

Ram Das [1574-1581] - Began building the town of Amritsar, which would later become the home of the world famous golden temple.

Arjan [1581-1606] - Completed building Amritsar. Produced the first version of the Sikh scriptures. These included poems of his four predecessors and some Hindu and Muslim holy men.

Hargobind [1606-1644] - Under this Guru's leadership Sikhs began to arm themselves to join in uprisings against the Mughal rule.

Har Rai [1644-1661] - An uneventful reign.

Har Krishan [1661-1664] - This Guru was only five years old when he came to power. He spent his short reign under house arrest and died of smallpox at only eight years old.

Tegh Bahadur [1664-1675] - Composed hymns, fought against Mughal rule and died a martyr in prison.

Gobind Singh [1675-1708] - Revised and installed the final version of scripture. He also introduced a new rite of initiation into the Sikh faith. He gave men and women who joined the surname Kaur (princess) or Singh (lion) respectively. A uniform was also introduced, part of which, for men, was the turban. He also brought to an end the line of Gurus. The only Guru would be the Granth Sahib.

First came Nanak claiming a divine commission to preach. Then, each successive Guru built upon his predecessor's teaching and sometimes introduced some new practise. Thus, there emerged their own scriptures, festivals, initiations and doctrines. It will become evident that Sikhism is a blend of Hinduism and Islam.

Readings From The Scriptures

The *Fapji* is considered by the Sikhs a key to their sacred volume and an epitome of its doctrines. It is silently repeated by the Sikhs early in the morning. Every Sikh must have it by heart otherwise he is not deemed orthodox. It is the duty of all Sikhs, even if they cannot read, to have themselves taught this great morning divine service. The composition appears to have been the work of Guru Nanak in advanced age.

There is but one God whose name is true, the Creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self-existent; by the favour of the Guru.

The True One was in the beginning; the True One was in the primal age. The True One is now also, O Nanak; the True One also shall be.

By thinking I cannot obtain a conception of Him, even though I think hundreds of thousands of times.

Even though I be silent and keep my attention firmly fixed on Him, I cannot preserve silence.

The hunger of the hungry for God subsideth not though they obtain the load of the worlds.

If man should have thousands and hundreds of thousands of devices, even one would not assist him in obtaining God.

How shall man become true before God? How shall the veil of falsehood be rent? By walking, O Nanak, according to the will of the Commander as preordained.

By His order bodies are produced; His order cannot be described. By His order souls are infused into them; greatness is obtained.

Men are high or low; they obtain preordained pain or pleasure.

Some obtain their reward; others must ever wander in transmigration.

All are subject to His order; one is exempt from it.

He who understandeth God's order, O Nanak, is never guilty of egoism.

Who can sing His power? Who hath power to sing it?

Who can sing His gifts or know His signs? Who can sing His attributes, His greatness, and His deeds?

His knowledge whose study is arduous?

Who fashioneth the body and again destroyeth it?

Who taketh away life and again restoreth it?

Who appeareth to be far, but is known to be near? Who is all-seeing and omnipresent?

In describing Him there would never be an end.

Millions of men give millions upon millions of descriptions of Him, but they fail to describe Him.

The Giver giveth; the receiver groweth weary of receiving.

In every age man subsisteth by His bounty. Japji 1-3; M.1, 195-7.

Religion consisteth not in a patched coat, or a Jogi's staff, or in ashes smeared over the body; religion consisteth not in earrings worn or a shaven head, or in the blowing of horns. Abide pure amid the impurities of the world; thus shalt thou find the way of religion. Religion consisteth not in mere words; he who looketh on all men as equal is religious. Religion consisteth not in wandering to tombs or places of cremation, or sitting in attitudes of contemplation; religion consisteth not in wandering in foreign countries, or in bathing at places of pilgrimage. Abide pure amid the impurities of the world; thus shalt thou find the way of religion. Nanak M.1,60.

THE SIKH SCRIPTURES

The sacred writings are contained in two books - the first being the Granth Sahib (Lord's book), which is given the most honour and respect and is regarded as the word of God. The second book of the Sikhs is called the Dasam Granth. This book is of less importance and receives little attention by comparison.

The History Of The Granth Sahib

The Granth Sahib is, basically, a collection of poems composed by several dozen authors, some of these living prior to Nanak (Kabir and Sheikh being two examples). The authors were not all Sikhs; some were Hindu and others Muslim. (These may have been included to show the open nature of Sikhism and the oneness of all religions that was desired.) The Granth Sahib is written in six different languages and several dialects, which makes it near impossible to study in its entirety. It was the fifth Guru, Arjan, who first had an authorized collection of these poems compiled between 1581-1606. The Granth Sahib came to be in its final form when the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1675-1708), made a final revision and declared the scriptures to be the new Guru.

The Contents Of The Granth Sahib

The Granth Sahib contains hundreds of poems, 974 of these written by Nanak. These poems are of various lengths and have a total of 29,480 rhymed verses. There are no narrative passages. The Granth Sahib is, then, similar to our own book of Psalms. Most of the Hymns are poems in praise of God, and exhortations to hear His voice speaking in one's heart; other poems speak of God's concern for mankind and the concern we ought to have for one another. Below are some examples:

The Majesty of God

“Endless is the praise to be offered him, endless what may be said about him. Endless his actions, endless the gifts he bestows. Sight cannot reach his limit or sound a point where his voice does not reach. His will and his created universe both seem limitless. He has no end, no limit, no bounds whatsoever. Many sigh with exhaustion trying to discover his limits, but they cannot comprehend them. No one can discern the limits of the one who is infinite. However great we say he is, he is greater still. The Lord is great, his dwelling place is exalted, his name is still more exalted. If one rises to that height one may have some idea of his greatness, though it is fully known to God alone. Nanak says, grace comes only by his grace and bounty” (AG 5)

God's Concern for Mankind

“When a man is in extreme difficulties and there is no one to offer him help, when his friends turn into enemies and even his kinsfolk desert him, when all hope and support is lost, then let him remember the Lord and no harm shall befall him. The Lord is the strength of the weak; he is unborn, undying, and eternal. By the Guru's teaching we know him as the true Lord. When a man is weak with the pangs of poverty and hunger, has no money and no one to offer him consolation, when he has no one to help him in his need and all his work comes to nothing, let him remember the Supreme Lord and he will have an everlasting kingdom” (AG70)

Caring for Others

“Live amid the hurly-burly of life, but remain alert. Do not covet your neighbors' possessions. Without being devoted to God's name we cannot attain inner peace or still our inner hunger. The Guru has shown me the true way of living in the city, the real life of its shops, the inner life; our trading must be in truth, we must be moderate in everything.” (AG 939)

Attitudes Toward The Granth Sahib

There are not many Sikhs that own a copy of the Granth Sahib. This is because of the great respect they have for it. The Granth Sahib is now the Sikhs only Guru and it is honoured by being put in a room of its own, and the owner must rise early, bath, and then read from it; reading and meditating is repeated in the evening. Many Sikhs are not able to fulfill such a responsibility. However, it is common for Sikhs to own a Gutka, which is a small book containing 18 of the more important hymns. Sikhs will often commit vast amounts of scripture to memory.

The Dasam Granth

This is a book of 1,428 pages which contains poems written by Guru Gobind Singh. The poems were assembled about 30 years after his death in 1734 A.D. Some of his poems are included in the Gutka. Though widely read, the Dasam Granth is never given the honour and respect as is the Granth Sahib.

BASIC SIKH BELIEFS

Nanak sought to blend together the teachings of Hinduism and Islam, this is evidenced by several things: Nanak's first words after returning from God's court were, “*There is no Hindu and no Musalman!*” The Guru's dress also “*spoke.*” Consider the following: “*In order perhaps to show that he desired to blend the two religions, he wore a remarkable mixture of Muslim and Hindu dress...*” (Readings from World Religions. Champion & Short). Much Sikh doctrine, then, is a reflection of this desire.

God

“There is but one God whose name is true, the creator, immortal, unborn, self-existent”

“It is the one God who created our understanding; It is from the one God the mountains and the ages of the world emanated; It is the one God who bestoweth knowledge. It is by the word of God man is saved. It is by the name of the one God the pious are saved”

The Sikh God, then, is the ONE eternal, all powerful creator. This idea of God agrees with the Islamic concept of God but does not totally satisfy the Hindu who seeks the experience of a union with God. However, there is evidence of such a teaching in the Granth Sahib: *“...all who exist shall be absorbed in Him”* (Amar Das M.p1). Pantheism also features in Sikh teaching, considering the following...

“God is in the water, God is in the dry land, God is in the heart, God is in the forest, God is in the mountain, God is in the cave. God is in the earth. God is in heaven...thou art in the tree, thou art in its leaves, thou art in the earth, thou art in the firmament”

“God though ever apart dwelleth everywhere, and is contained even in thee.”

The polytheism of the Hindus is rejected in favour of the Islamic concept of one God, however, the Hindu doctrines of pantheism and absorption into God are retained. The doctrines concerning God are so different in Hinduism and Islam that an attempt to merge such divergent concepts seem futile. Sikhism has succeeded in creating a new God.

Equality

Nanak taught his followers that all men are equal, including women and outcasts:

“Under the Guru's instruction regard all men as equal, since God's light is contained in the heart of each”

This teaching is concordant with Islamic doctrine but the concept of the Hindu caste system is totally rejected.

Gurus

Sikhs believe that each of the Gurus were perfect men in previous lives and so had no need to return to earth, but they came back because God wanted them to be His messengers. It was the second Guru, Angad, who went as far as to declare that Nanak was equal with God. Later, not wishing to hide his modesty, Guru Gobind Singh claimed, *“I am the Son of God, who has sent me into the world to restore religion...I did not desire to come, for my attention was fixed on God's feet...God remonstrated earnestly with me.”* The Gurus are greatly respected and honoured and their pictures may be found in many Sikh homes and temples. Such pictures are not worshipped as Sikhs have a strong aversion to all form of idolatry.

Jesus

Sikhs claim to have a high regard for other messengers of God such as Buddha, Moses, Muhummad, Jesus and Gandhi. However, they reject, for instance, the Moslem and Christian scriptures. So, although Sikhs accept Jesus as a great prophet and messenger of God, at the same time they reject all His teachings found in the New Testament. They certainly reject the concept of the incarnation of Jesus.

“Some in their hearts accept incarnations of God, but I have renounced all vain religion”
(Gobind Singh)

Scripture Revered

The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, failed to appoint a successor; instead, after a final revision, the Granth Sahib was declared to be the new Guru, so ending the line of human gurus. Therefore, Sikhs give great honour, respect and reverence to the Granth Sahib. So much so that it may be mistaken for idolatry. But the reverence paid to the Granth Sahib is intended to remind the Sikh that its words are divine revelations (See lesson 15).

Salvation

Sikhism has retained many Hindu doctrines including the repetition of God's name, karma, maya and reincarnation, to name but a few. The way of salvation is also taken from Hinduism involving a pantheistic merging of self with the supreme being (see "Salvation" p.19). Should this mystical union with the supreme being be achieved then one will be freed from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, and "...all who exist shall be absorbed in Him" (Amar Das). Forgiveness of sin is obtained through the repetition of God's name.

"So when the mind is defiled by sin, it is cleansed by love of The Name"

"If a man depart with the brand of sin on his face, he will not be allowed to sit in God's court. If he meet thy favour, O God, he repeateth Thy Name. By attaching himself to it he is saved; he hath no other resource"

COMPARISONS

The chart below shows some comparisons of Hinduism and Islam with that of Sikhism (Chart from "Concise Guide to Today's Religions").

A COMPARISON OF SIKHISM WITH HINDUISM**(1) Points of Agreement**

Theoretically, belief in a mystical Supreme Unity.

Practically, great variety of designations for deity.

A certain theistic application of pantheism, even as in some of the Hindu *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Salvation by faith in the grace of God.

The doctrine of Karma.

Transmigration of souls.

(2) Points of Disagreement

Hindu polytheism repudiated, in favour of a monistic pantheism.

Hindu pilgrimages, ritualism, and hermit asceticism repudiated, in favour of pure worship of the Pure One.

Hindu scriptures repudiated, in favour of the Sikh scriptures.

Hindu degradation of women repudiated, in favour of a higher regard for women.

Hindu infanticide repudiated, in favour of a more vigorous populating.

Hindu vegetarianism repudiated, in favour of a more vigorous meat-eating.

COMPARISON OF SIKHISM WITH ISLAM**(1) Points of Agreement**

Unity of the Supreme Personal Being.

Sovereignty of the Supreme Absolute Ruler.

A certain mercifulness attributed to the inscrutable deity, along with an uncomplaining arbitrariness.

Salvation through repetition of the name of the deity.

Great importance in repeating prescribed prayers.

Devotion to the founder as God's prophet.

Extreme reverence for sacred scripture.

The first section in the sacred scripture, a kind of Lord's Prayer, composed by the founder at a crisis in his early life when seeking for God, and subsequently prescribed for daily repetition by all his followers.

A series of subsequent leaders after the original founder.

A long, powerful, militaristic church state.

Unity among believer, despite subsequent sects.

A very important central shrine - Mecca and Amritsar.

Vehement denunciation of idolatry.

(2) Points of Disagreement

Sikhism's founder not so ruthless or violent as Islam's.

Sikhism's deity not so ruthless or violent as Islam's.

Sikhism's sacred scriptures ascribed to many teachers, at least 37; not to one, as in Islam.

No fasting prescribed to Sikhs, as to Muslims in month of Ramadan.

No decisive judgment-day in Sikhism, as in Islam (Ibid., pp. 108-110).

From the very beginning Sikhism sought to bring together two religions, Hinduism and Islam. Nanak's first words on returning from God's court were, "*There is no Hindu and no Musalman.*" Nanak's dress was a mixture of Hindu and Muslim attire, showing his desire to blend these two religions. When Nanak was asked whether he was a Hindu or Muslim, he would reply that he worshipped the one God, who took no account of either religion. Examining the teachings of Sikhism we can see that it has more in common with Hinduism than with Muhammadism, but we can also see the Islamic influence upon Sikhism. Nanak did not merge two religions, he began a new one.

"There is no Hindu and no Musalman and no Sikh"

Are these the words of the next messenger from God ?

A Brief Note On The Khalsa

For almost a hundred years some Sikhs had taken arms in an independence struggle against the Mughal rulers of India. Now the Guru was bringing the war bands under his control. To those men who were initiated into the organisation, which came to be called the Khalsa (the pure, or dedicated ones), he gave the common name Singh, lion, and the women came to be called Kaur, princess. The men adopted a common uniform, based on five elements known as the five Ks, for the Punjabi words for them each begin with that letter; they are uncut hair, a comb to keep it tidy, a wrist band on the right arm, (probably to protect it in battle), a sword, and trousers (instead of the loose skirt of dhoti often worn in North India). To these they also added the turban, which has become the most important distinguishing mark of the Sikh. Women, too, have adopted the five Ks and some, especially American converts, are beginning to wear the turban.

SIKH WORSHIP, PILGRIMAGES AND FESTIVALS

The Gurdwara

The word Gurdwara literally means 'The guru's door' but the most usual translation is God's house. The Gurdwara, then, is the Sikh place of worship. Sikhs, like Christians, do not place any importance on the outward appearance of their meeting houses; they are plain on the outside and inside, being either purpose built or a room in someone's house.

Inside The Gurdwara

On the whole Gurdwaras are plain and simple on the inside, and there are only two common features to all: there is a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib. The Gurus of old, when they taught, sat on a raised platform and someone stood holding a canopy over his head as a sign of honour and respect. The Granth Sahib is now the Guru and is shown the same honour and given the same respect. The Granth Sahib is placed on a raised platform with an overhead canopy (see diagram). The other feature common to all Gurdwaras is the absence of chairs! The whole congregation sits on the floor. This is to emphasize the unique status of the scriptures and to demonstrate the equality that exists between all Sikhs.

The Gurdwara's Role

The purpose built Gurwara is comparable to a community center, for as well as being a place of worship the Gurdwara is used for other social activities: youth clubs, women's meetings, etc. Children will also go to the Gurdwara to learn Punjabi, that they might be able to properly read from the Granth Sahib. Also, wedding and funeral services are held there.

Worship In The Gurdwara

Sikhs do not have any special holy day on which they must worship. This flexibility allows easy assimilation into any society in which they are living. Many British Sikhs visit the Gurdwara on weekday evenings, but all will go to the Sunday morning service, this being convenient. There is no set time to begin the worship period, which may last up to five hours. Throughout the service people will always be coming and going. The service will begin with the reading of a single verse of scripture followed by one of the poems of the Gurus or it may be sung; someone may then expound on its meaning. The end of the service is marked by a special prayer called ardas, which consists of three parts: a call to remember God and the ten Gurus, an exhortation to keep the teachings of the Granth Sahib, and lastly, God's blessing is sought for all. After ardas something called Karah Parshad (made of flour or semolina, butter, sugar and water) is distributed to each member, including visitors. This meal demonstrates their equality and symbolises the belief that God seeks to bless all mankind. After services a meal is served and eaten in the building.

Sikh Attitudes Toward Pilgrimages

Generally speaking, Sikhs tend to reject outward displays of faith, such as flowing robes, fancy meeting houses, all forms of idolatry and pilgrimages, which to Sikhs is nothing but superstition. The following passage, and others like it, have shaped Sikh attitudes:

“Religion consisteth not in a patched coat, or a Jogi's staff, or in ashes smeared over the body; religion consisteth not in earrings worn or shaven head, or in the blowing of horns. Abide pure amid the impurities of the world; thus shalt thou find the way of religion. Religion consisteth not in mere words; he who looketh on all men as equal is religious. Religion consisteth not in wandering to tombs or places of cremation, or sitting in attitudes of contemplation; religion consisteth not in wandering in foreign countries, or in bathing at places of pilgrimage. Abide pure amid the impurities of the world; thus shalt thou find the way of religion” (Nanak M. 1, 60).

Nanak was once asked, “Should I go and bathe at pilgrimage places?” and he replied:

“God's name is the real pilgrimage place which consists of contemplation of the word of God, and the cultivation of inner knowledge” (AG. 687).

The Goindwal Pilgrimage?

The third Guru Amar Das (1552-74) made his headquarters at Goindwal and it was here that he summoned all Sikhs three times a year, which coincided with three Hindu festivals. This was a challenge to the Sikhs' faith who had to decide whether he was a Hindu or Sikh (see p.45). At Goindwal, Amar Das had a pool built for Sikhs to bathe in - such pools are common throughout India at sacred places which are used for purification purposes. However, Sikhs insist that the pool at Goindwal is used only for hygienic purposes.

The Amristar Pilgrimage?

Guru Ram Das (1574-1581) had begun the building of a town called Amristar and was completed by Guru Arjan (1581-1606). It is in this city that the famous Golden Temple stands, which is visited by many Sikhs each year. Some Sikhs visit the temple with such a spirit of devotion that it truly is a pilgrimage, while to others it is nothing more than another sight on the list to be seen.

Festivals

There are three Sikh festivals: Baisakhi, Diwali and Hola Mohalla, called Melas, which are meetings or fairs. There is also another type of festival called a Gurpurb (guru holiday) celebrating the anniversaries of the birth or death of one of the ten gurus. The chart overleaf shows how these festivals coincide with the Hindu festivals.

Hindu Month	Gregorian Equivalent	Hindu Festival	Sikh Festival
Chaitra	March/April	Ugadi (first day)	Ram Navami (ninth day)
Vaisakha	April/May		Baisakhi mela
Jyestha	May/June		Martyrdom of Guru Arjan
Ashadha	June/July		
Sravana	July/Aug	Raksha Bandan (full moon)	Krishna Janamashtami (eighth dark day)
Bhadrapada	Aug./Sept		
Asvina	Sept./Oct	Navaratri (first nine days)	Dussehra (tenth day)
		Diwali (last three of dark part and first two of light in next month)	Diwali mela
Karttika	Oct./Nov	Diwali ends	birth of Guru Nanak
Margasirsha	Nov./Dec		
Pausa	Dec./Jan		Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur
Magha	Jan./Feb	Mahashivaratri (day before new moon)	Birth of Guru Gobind Singh
Phalguna	Feb./March	Holi (full moon)	Hola Mohalla mela

Baisakhi. This festival marks the beginning of the Sikh year. This is also one of three annual festivals on which Sikhs were required to appear before the Guru at Goindwal. Also, back in 1699 the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, taught his followers the meaning of self sacrifice in a rather dramatic way (This will be resounded in class). This is also the time of year when new members are initiated into the Khalsa (see p.55).

Diwali. Hindus describe this festival as "*our Christmas*" but for Sikhs this time of year commemorates the safe and triumphant return of Guru Hargobind who had been imprisoned by Mughul authorities.

Hola Mohalla. Guru Gobind Singh introduced this assembly in 1880 to divert Sikhs from the Hindu Holi festival, usually dedicated to Krishna.

Part Five

Buddhism

“Enlightened Ones”

THE BIRTH OF BUDDHISM

Family Background

King Suddhodana (pure rice) and his wife Mahamaya ruled over an area called Magadha (see map). This was an area of approximately 900 square miles. They were of an Aryan tribe called Sakyas. Mahamaya was the elder of two sisters whom the king had married, and only she became pregnant at 45 years of age. At the time of her conception she dreamt that a white elephant (white elephants being rare) entered her side! This was interpreted to mean that the child would be great.

When the child was born he was named Siddhattha Gotama (Siddhattha means desire accomplished). Shortly after his birth Mahamaya died. The wise men and soothsayers of the king's court said that the boy would be either an emperor or a great religious teacher. Also, a brahman warned that if the boy saw the "four signs" he would abandon his right to the throne. So his father made every effort to ensure that he only knew joy, comfort and peace. At the age of 16 Siddhattha married his cousin Yasodhara, the daughter of the rajah of Koli.

The Four Signs

One day Siddhattha persuaded his charioteer, Channa, to take him outside the palace gates, and though efforts were made to remove anything or anyone that represented suffering, Siddhattha still saw the four signs. As they travelled along the road they came across an *old man* sorrowfully trudging his burdened way along the path. A little way on they came across a *sick man* huddled, bowed down with disease. Then a little further on they saw a *corpse* being carried to a funeral pyre. Lastly, they saw a *wandering ascetic*. These signs caused Siddhattha great personal distress, and he decided he wanted to find a peace and joy that was not dependant upon youth and wealth. Siddhattha returned to the palace and related these things to his father. His father, determined to take his son's mind off the suffering he had seen, put on plays and provided other amusements. But by the age of 29, soon after the birth of his son, Ruhula, he left the kingdom to become a wandering ascetic in search of a joy and peace that transcended universal suffering. This event is known as "The Great Renunciation".

Siddhattha The Ascetic

Siddhattha had renounced everything - wealth, power, comfort and his family. He withdrew into the jungles of Uruvela, 50 miles north of Patna, and he began to practise severe forms of self mortification. There were various Hindu brahman teachers who taught him all the wisdom and philosophy of Hinduism. The most prominent of these teachers were Alara Kalama and Udraka Rama Putra, who offered forms of mystical ecstasy as the means of emancipation. After a number of years he came to realize that enlightenment was not to be found in extremes of wealth or hardship. Thus, he gave up many ascetic practises. His five companions, supposing he had given up his search, abandoned him. Now he was alone. It is said that at this time he was tempted by the evil one to give up his quest.

The Enlightenment

After six years living as a wandering ascetic, in the valley of the Ganges, he had not found that for which he sought. Then he came to the bank of the river Neranjara at Buddha-Gaya (near Gaya in modern Bihar). Here he found a Bodhi tree and decided to meditate beneath it until he found enlightenment. It was during the last watch of the night that it came to him. He saw the meaning of existence, the cause of sorrow and the way of release. He saw things as they really are. Siddhattha describes his enlightenment...

"When this knowledge, this insight had arisen within me, my heart was set free from intoxication of lusts, set free from the intoxication of becomings, set free from the intoxication of ignorance. In me, thus emancipated, there arose the certainty of that emancipation. And I came to know: Rebirth is at an end. The higher life has been fulfilled. What had to be done has been accomplished. After this present life there will be no beyond. This last insight did I attain to in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was beaten down, inasmuch as I was there strenuous, aglow, master of myself" (Mahasaccaka Sutta, from early Buddhism).

Siddhattha Gotama was about 35 years old when he became enlightened. It is now, then, appropriate to refer to him as the Buddha (Enlightened).

The Spread Of Buddhism

Shortly after his enlightenment the Buddha went through a period of hesitation. His teaching was difficult to understand and went against the grain of much Hindu teaching. So he wondered whether he ought to preach his message to others or keep it to himself. Eventually the Buddha decided, out of love and pity for mankind, to bring his message to the world. The Buddha preached his first sermon in a deer park at Isipatana, near Benares. He then travelled throughout Northeast India enlightening other souls. Those who received his teachings might become Bhikkhus or world renouncers, usually translated monk. Another common name for these world renouncers is Sangha. Otherwise one might remain an Upasikas or householder. The advantage of being a Sangha is that one is more likely to attain Nirvana, because an ordinary householder has too many distractions. Though the Buddha taught only in India his teachings have been embraced world-wide.

WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT

Is Buddhism A Religion?

Buddhism, strictly speaking, is not a religion but a humanistic philosophy. It is a set of humanistic ideas that the Buddha tried to introduce into Hinduism. The teaching of the Buddha came at a time when many people had become dissatisfied with many of the teachings of Hinduism: Liberation from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth seemed hard to attain. There was much disillusionment with the caste system, which had become very complicated. The Buddha's teaching was popular because it rejected the authority of the scriptures, taught that caste was irrelevant, and he taught that liberation was possible in this life through one's own effort. In connection with liberation the Buddha redefined the meaning of Karma. So, although Buddhism is not a religion as such, we will see that despite what the Buddha taught it has all the marks of a religious system.

A Humanistic Attitude Of Mind

The Buddha did not claim to be God, neither did he claim to be inspired by any god. He admitted that his enlightenment and achievements were all down to human endeavour and human intelligence. The Buddha taught that man is supreme, his own master, and is not answerable for his actions to any god. He taught that it is through a person's own effort that liberation is attained. Buddhists, then, do not believe in God, they do not believe in or feel the need for any saviour. They claim to follow no religious texts, and there are no articles of faith. Buddhists ridicule the idea of faith, having a "*seeing is believing*" attitude. It is surprising then that the Buddha believed in reincarnation!

The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's first sermon was at Isipatana near Benares, and it was in this sermon that the Buddha taught and expounded the four noble truths, which are:

1. The truth of suffering (DUKKHA)
2. The cause of suffering (SAMUDAYA)
3. The cessation of suffering (NIRODHA)
4. The path that leads to the cessation of suffering (MAGGA)

The Truth Of Suffering

According to the first of the noble truths, all life is suffering: being born is suffering, growing old is suffering and death is suffering. But Dukkha (usually translated suffering) has deeper ideas such as imperfection, impermanence, emptiness and insubstantiality. The conception of Dukkha may be viewed from three aspects, which are as follows:

1. DUKKHA as ordinary suffering - birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant conditions, not getting one's desires, etc. - are common sufferings of mankind.
2. DUKKHA as produced by change - feelings and conditions are not permanent; when such feelings and conditions change - pain, suffering and unhappiness are produced.

3. DUKKHA as conditioning states - are the Five Aggregates (separate units) that constitute what we call “*Being*” or an individual. The Five Aggregates are:

- (1) The aggregate of matter.
- (2) The aggregate of sensations.
- (3) The aggregate of perceptions.
- (4) The aggregate of mental formations.
- (5) The aggregate of consciousness.

What we have, then, is a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies that constitute an individual. It is an attachment to these Five Aggregates that cause DUKKHA.

The Cause Of Suffering

The second noble truth discusses the origin of DUKKHA. The cause of all suffering, according to the Buddha, is Thirst or craving, i.e., the craving and attachment to the Five Aggregates. This includes attachment to sense-pleasures, wealth and power, ideas and ideals, views, opinions and theories, conceptions and beliefs. Craving for such things is the cause of all evil, suffering and rebirth! But desire itself is not evil as long as one's desire is not self-centered, e.g., desiring another's happiness.

The Cessation Of Suffering

The third truth teaches that it is possible in this life to be free from suffering (This suffering includes freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth). This emancipation comes when thirst in an individual is quenched or blown out. When a person has eliminated all thirst, desire, craving and attachment to the Five Aggregates one has realized Nirvana. Nirvana is not a state or place; it is a realization of the absolute truth.

The Path That Leads To Nirvana

The fourth noble truth is also known as The middle path because two extremes are avoided. These are: (1) a search for happiness through pleasures and wealth and (2) seeking happiness through the practise of self-mortification. The Buddha himself went to these two extremes but found them to be useless. The middle path is usually called the noble eight-fold path since it is composed of eight divisions each of which is preceded by right. Further, these may be arranged into three groups:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Right understanding | } WISDOM |
| 2. Right thought | |
| 3. Right speech | } ETHICAL CONDUCT |
| 4. Right action | |
| 5. Right livelihood | |
| 6. Right effort | } MENTAL DISCIPLINE |
| 7. Right mindfulness | |
| 8. Right concentration | |

Ethical Conduct

Right speech, right action and right livelihood (3, 4, 5), constitute ethical conduct. Right speech involves not lying, cursing, backbiting, slander, foolish talk, etc. This means that one's speech will be truthful, pleasant, meaningful, etc. Right action means not stealing and abstaining from violence, etc. Therefore, a person will work honestly for a living and help others. Right livelihood dictates that one should not make a living from a profession that is morally suspect. Right speech, action and livelihood constitute an ethical conduct that all Christians would agree with.

Mental Discipline

Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (6, 7, 8), constitute mental discipline. Right effort refers to states of mind that need to be quenched (evil states) and states of mind that need to be developed (good states). Right mindfulness is being aware of one's bodily activities - breathing, sensations, etc. and also one's mental activities: thoughts and ideas, noting how they (bodily and mental) arise and disappear. Right concentration leads to different states of trance. By right effort, mindfulness and concentration the mind is trained, disciplined and developed.

Wisdom

The remaining two factors - right understanding and right thought (1, 2) constitute wisdom. Right thoughts mean thoughts of selfless renunciation or detachment and thoughts of love and non-violence. Right understanding means to understand things as they really are.

By means of this eightfold path one is carried to Nirvana. The Buddhist will emphasize that Nirvana is not a result of following this path, rather it only brings one to realize Nirvana, e.g., a raft is used to transport a person from one bank to the other. In a like manner the path transports a person to Nirvana. But the bank to which one is carried to is not a result of the raft is it? In the same way Nirvana is not a result. Nirvana is to be realized.

The Doctrine Of No-Soul

Some of the Buddha's teachings are difficult to understand. These teachings often raise more questions to which there are no satisfactory answers.

Where do we get the idea that we have a self? The Buddha taught that man is made up or composed of the Five Aggregates (see p.62) and when each of these aggregates is examined it is seen that they are constantly changing, and that no self can be found. But these aggregates together give us a feeling of *I am*, but this is just a feeling, a delusion.

Believing in a self produces harmful thoughts, and a man becomes weak and fearful, and desires arise - the need for self-protection and self-preservation. Thus, from his own imagination, man creates God or a god who watches over him and protects him. In order to preserve self the idea of an immortal soul has been conceived. Man tends to cling to these two ideas, which are psychologically deep-rooted. Such ideas are false and empty.

What is so difficult about this teaching? The Buddha taught that we have no soul, right? Wrong! According to the Buddha it is just as wrong to hold to the view of no-self (which is the annihilationist view) as it is to hold to a belief in a self (the eternalist view). Both views are fetters as they arise from the false idea I am.

Nirvana

Nirvana is absolute truth. Many tend to think of nirvana as a complete annihilation, usually because of the negative language used to describe it, such as: extinction of thirst, absence of desire, blowing out. But there are some positive terms also, such as, freedom and immortality. Nirvana is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, life nor death. Nirvana is "*the destruction of thirst, the abandoning of attachment to the five aggregates.*" It is taught that the happiest person in the world is the one who has realized the absolute truth, nirvana. But isn't happiness a sensation (one of the five aggregates to be blown out)? The reply of Sariputta, the chief disciple of Buddha, to such a question was, "*that there is no sensation itself in happiness.*"

It must again be stressed that nirvana is neither a place nor is it annihilation. This is shown by the fact that the Buddha, and many others, realized nirvana in this life.

Karma And Reincarnation

We have already studied the Hindu teaching of Karma (p.16), and we learnt that, basically, one reaps what one sows. All that a man suffers in this life is the result of bad karma "*collected*" in the previous life. However, the Buddha redefined karma to mean only volition of will, i.e., the only action that results after death is rebirth (This is because one's thirst has not been extinguished). Karma, according to Buddha, is a natural law. A being, we remember, is nothing more than a combination of Five Aggregates (see p.62), and when the physical body dies the remaining forces and energies, will, volition; and one's desire, thirst to exist.

These continue, manifesting themselves or itself in another form. But such a reincarnation does not mean that YOU have been reborn, neither does it mean that YOU have not been reborn? To illustrate: A fire that burns through the night is not the same flame in the morning, yet it is not different. Again, an old man of 66 is not the same as he was at 6; neither is he a different person. Things still foggy? That's Buddhism!

The Buddha's Attitude Toward Origins, Gods And Religion Origin Of The Universe

One day a disciple of the Buddha named Malunkya-putta, asked the Buddha ten questions about the universe, the soul and the after-life. The Buddha insinuated that he knew the answers to such questions, relating to their origin and nature, but would not tell! The reason being that they were not useful, they were not fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life; such information is not conducive to aversion, detachment, nirvana. This is why he did not answer such questions. However, in another place the Buddha said that the universe had no beginning.

God And Religion

The Buddha did not believe in a God or gods. He taught that the idea of God arose because of a false idea of self (see p.64). The Buddha consequently did not believe in any inspired scriptures. He said, "*Be not led by the authority of religious texts.*" The Buddha did believe in reincarnation and taught that freedom from the cycle of rebirth and suffering could be realized in this life, but not by faith, prayer, rituals, etc., but through one's own effort.

Can one be a Buddhist and be a devotee in another religion? Yes! As we have already discussed, Buddhism is not a religion, as such, but a humanistic philosophy. That is what Buddhists may teach, though it is difficult, if one really understands the Buddha's teaching, to see how Buddhism can be compatible with any religion. The Buddha taught that there are many men and women at different levels of spiritual development, and so it is expected that some will cling to false ideas of a God or gods and worship them. However, as one follows the eight-fold path of enlightenment such beliefs and practices will be put away.

A Buddhist Creed

In 1981, Colonel H. S. Olcott, one of the founding presidents of the Theosophical Society, proposed a common platform for all Buddhist schools of thought. Various representatives of different Buddhist persuasions reviewed his work and found it to be satisfactory. It was published as an appendix to his *Buddhism Catechism*. The fundamental Buddhist beliefs are:

1. Buddhists are taught to show the same tolerance, forbearance and brotherly love to all men, without distinction; and an unswerving kindness towards the members of the animal kingdom.
2. The universe evolved, it wasn't created; it functions according to law, not according to the caprice of any god.
3. The truths upon which Buddhism is founded are natural. They have, we believe, been taught in successive kalpas, or world periods, by certain illuminated beings called Buddhas, the name Buddha meaning "*enlightened.*"
4. The fourth teacher in the present kalpa was Sakya Muni, or Gautama Buddha, who was born in a royal family in India about 2,500 years ago. He is an historical personage and his name was Siddhartha Gautama.
5. Sakya Muni taught that ignorance produces desire, unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth, and rebirth the cause of sorrow. To get rid of sorrow, therefore, it is necessary to escape rebirth; to escape rebirth, it is necessary to extinguish desire; and to extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance.
6. Ignorance fosters the belief that rebirth is a necessary thing. When ignorance is destroyed the worthlessness of every such rebirth, considered as an end in itself, is perceived as well as the paramount need of adopting a course of life by which the necessity for such repeated births can be abolished. Ignorance also begets the illusive and illogical idea that there is only one existence for men, and the other illusion that this one life is followed by states of unchangeable pleasure or torment.
7. The dispersion of all this ignorance can be attained by the persevering practice of an all-embracing altruism in conduct, development of intelligence, wisdom in thought, and destruction of desire for the lower personal pleasures.

8. The desire to live being the cause of rebirth, when that is extinguished rebirths cease and the perfected individual attains by meditation that highest state of peace called nirvana.
9. Sakya Muni taught that ignorance can be dispelled and sorrow removed by the knowledge of the four Noble Truths, viz:
 - (1) The miseries of existence.
 - (2) The cause productive of misery, which is the desire ever renewed of satisfying oneself without being able ever to secure that end.
 - (3) The destruction of that desire, or the estranging of oneself from it.
 - (4) The means of obtaining this destruction of desire. The means which he pointed out is called the Noble Eightfold Path, viz: Right Belief; Right Thought; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Means of Livelihood; Right Exertion; Right Remembrance; Right Meditation.
10. Right Meditation leads to spiritual enlightenment, or the development of that Buddha-like faculty which is latent in every man.
11. The essence of Buddhism as summed up by the Tathagata (Buddha) himself is:

To cease from all sin.
To get virtue,
To purify the heart
12. The universe is subject to a natural causation known as "*karma*". The merits and demerits of a being in past existence determine his condition in the present one. Each man, therefore, has prepared the causes of the effects which he now experiences.
13. The obstacles to the attainment of good karma may be removed by the observance of the following precepts, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism, viz: (1) Kill not, (2) Steal not, (3) Indulge in no forbidden sexual pleasure, (4) Lie not, (5) Take no intoxicating or stupefying drug or liquor. Five other precepts, which need not here be enumerated, should be observed by those who would attain more quickly than the average layman the release from misery and rebirth.
14. Buddhism discourages superstitious credulity. Gautama Buddha taught it to be the duty of a parent to have his child educated in science and literature. He also taught that no one should believe what is spoken by any sage, written in any book, or affirmed by a tradition, unless it accord with reason.

Drafted as a common platform upon which all Buddhists can agree (Cited by Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* London: Penguin Books, 1951, pp. 71-73).

BUDDHIST SECTS

There are many different forms of Buddhism throughout the world today but it is not possible to look at each one here. Instead we will mention just five. The five sects we will mention are: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, Zen and Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism

Buddhism in India died out after the Islamic invasion in the thirteenth century but survives in many other parts of the world in various forms. The most prominent and dominant sect of Buddhism is Theravada. This form of Buddhism is found mainly in Srilanka, Burma, Thailand, Kampuchea and other parts of Southeast Asia. This form of Buddhism adheres closely to the original teachings of the Buddha and emphasises the monastic order of the Sangha. These sanghas were those who received the Buddha's teaching and renounced the world and became wandering beggars.

Mahayana Buddhism

This form of Buddhism may be found in northern India, China, Korea and Japan. These Buddhists do not adhere as closely to the original teachings of the Buddha, and offer a greater variety of paths and practices which, so they say, grows naturally from the seeds of the Buddha's teaching. The Mahayana are much more liberal in their interpretations. Mahayanas believe that there are celestial Buddhas in addition to the terrestrial ones. These celestial Buddhas are said to have their own realms or pure lands, in which it is possible to be reborn. This is achieved by calling on the name of one such Buddha in faith. The following chart outlines some of the differences between the conservative (Theravada) and liberal (Mahayana) sects:

Thereva	Damahayana
Man as an individual.	Man as involved with others.
Man on his own in the universe (emancipation by self effort).	Man not alone (salvation by grace).
Key virtue: wisdom.	Key virtue: compassion.
Religion: a full time job (primarily for monks).	Religion: relevant to live in the world (for laymen also).
Ideal: the Arhat.	Ideal: the Bodhisattva (see glossary).
Buddha: a saint.	Buddha: a savior.
Eschews metaphysics.	Elaborates metaphysics.
Eschews ritual.	Includes ritual.
Confines prayer to meditation	Includes petitionary prayer.
Conservative.	Liberal

(Chart copied from *Today's Religions*, p.293)

Vajrayana Buddhism

This sect, found mainly in Tibet, aims at attaining success and power in this world, rather than Nirvana in the far distant future. It concentrates on magic, miracles and occult knowledge. This form of Buddhism seems to have little to do with the Buddha's teachings.

Zen Buddhism

Development. Zen (meditation) Buddhism developed about 1000 years after the Buddha's death (Zen appeared 517 AD). Today practitioners of Zen are in the millions and may be found in all parts of the world. In Japan, Eisai and Dogen were the two great pioneers of this "religion." They were also the founders of the two sects of Zen Buddhism: Eisa founded the Rinzai sect (1191 AD), which emphasized the protection of the Japanese nation. Dogen founded the Soto sect (1227 AD), which emphasized the centralization of power in the emperor.

Origins. Like most sects within a religion, Zenists trace their origins to the founder of their religion - in this case, the Buddha. Zenists claim that the Buddha once said, "Look within, you are the Buddha.", and so they spend much of their time doing just that. There is also a legend that says the Buddha once picked a flower, did not say a word, and then someone took the flower from him because he understood! They claim that the Buddha had transmitted his teaching to this disciple without words! Zenists say that such teaching can be passed on in the same way today.

Beliefs. The ultimate goal of Zen Buddhism is the freeing of the will. This is achieved through meditation. This may lead to satori (or enlightenment) - the nonrational, clear and intuitive understanding of reality. For the Zenists, reality is not objective correlative truth, but subjective, egocentric reflection, which becomes reality if they deign to participate in its manifestation. Zenists deny the realities of pain and suffering, only we are real! Zen seeks to take us to an absolute realm wherein there are no antitheses of any sort. Zenists do not believe in God, sacred scriptures, dogmatic tenets or doctrines which are imposed on its followers for acceptance. Thus, there are no forms of worship, no ceremonial rites to observe, and no heaven and hell. These are all viewed as encumbrances. Zenists, themselves, claim to believe in nothing! But, as author Richard Mathison says, "Zen is a paradox within a paradox, a mystical doctrine which laughs at all doctrines and dogma, and becomes a doctrine and dogma in the doing."

"The true nature of Zen is, in reality, that of ego-absorption, to the extent that one becomes obsessed with himself, not with his sins and the desperate need for their erasure" (Kingdom of the Cults. Walter Martin)

Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism

Founder. This form of Buddhism is really a sect of Mahayana Buddhism, and its founder was Shoshu Nichiren. He was born in Japan in 1222 AD (1222-1282), the son of a fisherman. *“When he was twelve, his family placed him under the care of Seichoji Temple of the Tendai sect. Later he journeyed to Mount Hiei near Kyoto where he pursued his studies of the Sutras. Driven out of Mount Hiei because of his radicalism, he moved on to Mount Koya to study the ¹Esoteric teachings of ²Shingon. He finally came to the conviction that the only true faith was taught by Dengyo Daishi, who had introduced Tendai Buddhism to Japan and taught the ultimate superiority of the Lotus Sutra over all others”* (Concise Dictionary of Religion). Japan was in a state of turmoil at this time and Nichiren believed his country could be saved if he could get his people back to the Lotus Sutra. But Nichiren was not well received; in fact, he was persecuted and narrowly escaped death on many occasions.

Beliefs. As taught by Nichiren, Shoshu Buddhists believe that the Lotus Sutra is supreme, the only authoritative scripture, which was given by the Buddha to replace all other sutras. Shoshus also believe the Buddha to be the God! The Lotus Sutra describes the Buddha as eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent; creator-destroyer, re-creator of all worlds, etc. These concepts, I think we can see, are borrowed from Hinduism. The central teaching of Nichirenism is that all people have within them the potentiality of Buddhahood.

Evangelism. In 1970 there were sixteen million Nichiren Buddhists; however, the current figure is unknown. The goal of this sect is to convert the world to the true faith but the following quote is disturbing:

“...it regards itself as not only the one true Buddhist religion, but the one true religion on earth. Its principle aims are the propagation of its gospel throughout the world, by force if necessary, and the denunciation and destruction of all other faiths as false religions...” (R. Okamoto, “Japan,” Look).

This attitude is similar to that of militant Muslims.

All of these sects claim to be able to trace their beginning back to the Buddha. The Hindus teach that Buddha was the ninth incarnation of Vishnu, who came into the world to delude the wicked by leading them away from the Vedas (See Intro. II).

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

Theravada Scriptures

At first the teachings of the Buddha were remembered and transmitted orally, and only put into writing years after his death (in 483 BC). The Buddha did not object to his teachings being taught in a peoples own language; in fact, he encouraged it. The consequence of this was that many texts in different languages and dialects appeared. It is the collection of texts in the Pali dialect which claims to be the most complete, and its three sections together are known as the Pali Cannon. The three sections of the Pali Cannon are comprised of the (1) Sutra Pitaka, (2) Vinaya Pitaka, and (3) Abhidharma Pitaka. Another name for this collection of texts is the TRIPITAKA (tri means three and pitaka means basket). All these scriptures first appeared in written form in the first century BC, about 400 years after Buddha's death (see chart). Let us now examine each section of the Tripitaka in more detail.

The Sutra Pitaka

The Sutra (a thread) Pitaka is a collection of discourses of the Buddha and his foremost disciples, addressed to both monks and lay followers. The Sutra is sub-divided into five sections:

1. Digha Nikaya. This contains long narrative discourses.
2. Majjhima Nikaya. This consists of medium length discourses of the Buddha discussing the practical application of his teaching (contains: Five Aggregates).
3. Samyutta Nikaya. Detailed teaching (Dharma) prescriptions arranged in subject order (contains: Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path).

¹ ‘Inner’ or ‘hidden’ – referring to secret teachings which either belong to secret societies or lie behind the official beliefs of a religious group.

² Highly mystical and syncretic sect of Buddhism.

4. Anguttara Nikaya. Compressed narrative discourses which expound the Dhamma in numerical sequences.
5. Khuddaka Nikaya. This is comprised of 15 books. One of the most influential of these is the Sutta-Nipata.

EXTRACTS

The most important discourse given on mental development is called the Satipatthana-Sutta (the setting up of mindfulness).

“This is the only way, Bhikkhus, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbana, namely the Four Foundations (four forms of presence) of Mindfulness. What are the four? Here a bhikkhu, ardent, clearly comprehending things and lives observing (the activities of) the body, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of body); observing feelings, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of feelings)...observing (the activities of) the mind, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of mind); observing mental objects, having overcome covetousness and repugnance towards the world (of mental objects)” (From the Digha Nikaya).

The following is called the parable of the piece of cloth, and deals with the cleansing of the mind.

Thus have I heard. The Blessed One was once living at the monastery of Anathapindika in Jeta's grove near Savatthi. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus saying: Bhikkhus, and they replied to him: Venerable Sir. The Blessed One then spoke as follows: If a soiled and dirty (piece of) cloth is dipped by the fuller in any dye at all - blue, yellow, red or pink - it will still be of bad and dirty colour. Why? Because the cloth is not clean. Even so, Bhikkhus, when the mind is impure, a bad future life must be expected. If a perfectly clean (piece of cloth) is dipped by the fuller in any dye at all - blue, yellow, red or pink - it will be of beautiful and clean colour. Why? Because the cloth is clean. Even so, Bhikkhus, when the mind is pure, a good future must be expected. Now, what are the mind's impurities? Cupidity - excessive desire - is an impurity of the mind; enmity...anger...rancour...hypocrisy...malice...jealousy...avarice...trickery...deceit...obduracy...haughtiness...pride...arrogance...inflation...indolence is an impurity of the mind. Bhikkhus, that bhikkhu, who recognizes cupidity - excessive desire - as an impurity of the mind, abandons it; who recognizes enmity...anger...rancour...hypocrisy...malice...jealousy...avarice...trickery...deceit...obduracy...haughtiness...price...arrogance...inflation...indolence as an impurity of the mind, abandons it. Bhikkhus, when that bhikkhu has abandoned cupidity - excessive desire - recognizing it as an impurity of the mind; when he has abandoned enmity...anger...rancour...hypocrisy...malice...jealousy...avarice...trickery...deceit...obduracy...haughtiness...price...arrogance...inflation...indolence recognizing it as an impurity of the mind, he finds serene joy (satisfaction) in the Enlightened One: (knowing that) “The Blessed One is Worthy, Perfectly Enlightened, Endowed with knowledge and virtue, Happy, Knower of worlds, Matchless tamer of men, Teacher of gods and men, Awakened and Blessed.” He finds serene joy (satisfaction) in the Dhamma: (knowing that) “The Dhamma is excellently expounded by the Blessed One; it can be realized here in this life; it produces immediate results; it invites people to come and see (investigate); it leads to the goal (Nibbana); it has to be comprehended by the wise, each for himself.” He finds serene joy (satisfaction) in the Community of the Disciples: (knowing that) “The Community of the Disciples of the Blessed One is of good conduct, upright, wise, dutiful. The Community of the Disciples of the Blessed One: namely, the Four Pairs of persons, the Eight kinds of Individuals, is worthy of offerings, of hospitality, of gifts, of reverential salutation, it is an incomparable field of merit to the world.” Finally, with impurities renounced, spewed out, discharged, abandoned, and with the thought that he is endowed with serene joy in the Enlightened One - in his Teaching (*Dhamma*)- in the Community - he is touched with a feeling of the Sense and the Truth, and he received the gladness associated with Truth; when one is glad, joy arises; when relaxed, one feels content: the mind of the contented man is concentrated. A bhikkhu who has reached this state in virtue, in mental discipline and in wisdom, may, without impediment (to his spiritual life), partake of the choicest rice with all manner of sauces and curries. Just as a soiled and dirty cloth, plunged in clear water, becomes pure and clean; even so, a bhikkhu who has reached this state in virtue, in mental discipline and in wisdom may partake of the choicest rice with all manner of sauces and curries, and it will not be an impediment (harm) to him (to his spiritual life).

With thoughts of love - of compassion - of sympathetic joy - of equanimity - he pervades one quarter of the world, so too the second, the third and the fourth quarters, above, below, across, everywhere; the whole length and breadth of the wide world is pervaded by the radiant thoughts of a mind all-embracing, vast and boundless, without hate, without ill-will. Then he knows: "There is this; there is a lower and there is yet a higher stage; Deliverance lies beyond this realm of perceptions." When he knows and sees this, his mind becomes liberated from the impurities of sense-pleasure, of (the desire for) continuing existence, of ignorance. When liberated, there is knowledge that he is liberated. Then he knows: "Birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, what has to be done is done, there is no more left to be done on this account." Bhikkhus, such a bhikkhu can be said to have bathed internally. Now at this time there was sitting close by the Brahmin Sundarika-Bharadvaja who asked the Blessed One thus: Does the Venerable Gotama go to bathe in the river Bahuka? What does the river Bahuka matter, Brahmin? What (good) does it do? Venerable Gotama, the river Bahuka is considered by many people as purifying, as holy. Many people wash away their sins in the river Bahuka.

Thereupon the Blessed One addressed the Brahmin Sundarika-Bharadvaja in these lines:

In Bahuka and in Adhikakka,
Gaya, Sundarika, Srassati,
Payaga, Bahumati - there is the fool of black deeds
May daily plunge, yet is never purified.
What can Sundarika, Payaga or Bahumati do?
They cleanse not the man guilty of hate and evil.
For him who is pure (in mind) any day is auspicious, any day is hallowed.
Cleansed, pure in deeds,
He always fulfils observances.
So, Brahmin, come and bathe here.
Love all that lives. If you neither lie, nor slay, nor steal,
And are no greedy miser but live in trust,
What use going to Gaya? Your well at home in Gaya.

[From the Majjhima Nikaya]

The following is the Dhammacakkappavattana-Sutta (The first sermon of the Buddha).

Thus have I heard. The Blessed One was once living in the Deer Park at Isipatana (the Resort of Seers) near Baranasi (Benares). There he addressed the group of five bhikkhus: Bhikkhus, these two extremes ought not to be practised by one who has gone forth from the household life. What are the two? There is devotion to the indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, common, the way of ordinary people, unworthy and unprofitable; and there is devotion to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and unprofitable. Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata has realized the Middle Path: it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. And what is that Middle Path...? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the Middle Path realized by the Tathagata, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

The Noble Truth of suffering (Dukkha) is this: Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering - in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering. The Noble Truth of the origin of suffering is this: It is this thirst (craving), which produces re-existence and re-becoming, bound up with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, thirst for sense-pleasures; thirst for existence and becoming; and thirst for non-existence (self-annihilation). The Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very thirst, giving it up, renouncing it, emancipating oneself from it, detaching oneself from it. The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of suffering is this: It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely right view; right thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right concentration.

“This is the Noble Truth of Suffering (Dukkha)”: such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light, that arose in me with regard to things not heard before. “This suffering, as a noble truth, should be fully understood”: such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light, that arose in me with regard to things not heard before. “This suffering, as a noble truth, has been fully understood”: such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light, that arose in me with regard to things not heard before. “This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of suffering”: such was the vision... “This Origin of suffering, as a noble truth, should be abandoned”: such was the vision... “This Origin of suffering, as a noble truth has been abandoned”: such was the vision... with regard to things not heard before. “This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering”: such was the vision... “This Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, should be realized”: such was the vision... “This Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been realized”: such was the vision... with regard to things not heard before. “This is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of suffering”: such was the vision... This Path leading to the Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, should be followed (cultivated)”: such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light, that arose in me with regard to things not heard before.

As long as my vision of true knowledge was not fully clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, regarding the Four Noble Truths, I did not have claim to have realized the perfect Enlightenment that is supreme in the world with its gods, with its Maras and Brahmas, in this world with its recluses and brahmanas, with its princes and men. But when my vision of true knowledge was fully clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, regarding the Four Noble Truths, then I claimed to have realized the perfect Enlightenment that is supreme in the world with its gods, its Maras and Brahmas, in this world with its recluses and brahmanas, with its princes and men. And a vision of true knowledge arose in me thus: My heart's deliverance is unassailable. This is the last birth. Now there is no more rebecoming (rebirth).

[From the Samyutta Nikaya]

I have no extracts from the Anguttara Sutra.

The following is from the Sutta-Nipata, one of the books contained in the Khuddaka Nikaya.

1. Master of Wisdom, descendant of the Sun, said a questioner to the Buddha, I wish to question you about the state of peace, the state of solitude and quiet detachment. With what manner of insight does a monk become calm, cooled and no longer grasps at anything? (915)
2. He achieves this, replied the Master, by cutting out the root obstacle, the delusion: he eradicates all thought of “I am”. By being mindful all the time he trains himself to let go of all the cravings that arise in him. (916)
3. Whatever he may understand inwardly or outwardly, he has to avoid becoming proud of his convictions. For good men have said that this is not the state of calm. (917)
4. He has to avoid thinking of himself as better or worse than, or equal to anyone. Coming into contact with various things, he should not embellish the self. (918)
5. The monk must look for peace within himself and not in any other place. For when a person is inwardly quiet, there is nowhere a self can be found; where, then, could a non-self be found? (919)
6. There are no waves in the depths of the sea; it is still, unbroken. It is the same with the monk. He is still, without any quiver of desire, without a remnant on which to build pride and desire. (920)
7. Sir, said the questioner, you have explained with clear words and with open eyes the way that removes all dangers. Could you please tell me now about the practices of the path, the rules that must be kept and also about the development of concentration? (921)
8. The Mater replied: “A monk keeps his eyes from wandering restlessly with desire and his ears are deaf to the chatter and gossip. He has no longing for new sweets to taste; nor has he any desire to possess things in the world as his own. (922)
9. Where he is in contact with sense impressions he should not become sorrowful or sad. He should not begin to wish for some other kind of life or tremble when confronted with fearful things. (923)
10. When he is given rice and other food to eat, or milk to drink, or clothes to wear, then, as a monk, he should not begin to store them up. And he should not be anxious if he does not get any of them. (924)

11. He has to become a man of meditation, not a loiterer, and a man without any regrets or laziness. He is a monk, and, sitting or lying down, he spends his time in his quiet living-place. (925)
12. He should not sleep too much and he should make constant effort to be watchful whilst he is awake. Laziness, deception, laughter, games, sexual intercourse, ornaments: all these he has to give up. (926)
13. He does not study the practice of magic and spells. He does not analyze dreams and signs in sleep and movements in the Zodiac. As one of my followers, he should not spend time interpreting bird-songs or curing infertility or selling medicines and cures. (927)
14. The monk should not be perturbed by criticism or impressed by praise. There is no place for greed in him; hoarding, anger and slander are emotions he has to discard. (928)
15. He should not get involved in buying and selling, and he should learn not to blame anything on other people. When he meets people in the village he must not speak to them in the hope of getting some reward. (929)
16. He should not boast, should not speak carelessly, should not train himself in impudence or utter quarrelsome talk. (930)
17. The monk should not speak falsehood. He should not willfully commit dishonest deeds. He should not look down upon another, feeling proud of his livelihood, wisdom or observance of rule and rite. (931)
18. And when he hears other wanderers and ordinary people using angry words, he does not retort with harsh speech; for men of goodness do not answer back. (932)
19. Understanding this norm, the inquiring monk should train himself being constantly mindful. When the realization comes that peace can be found in the state of calm, then he should apply himself completely to the teaching of Gotama. (933)
20. He is the undefeated conqueror: he saw with his own eyes the Way Things Are; he did not borrow it from tradition. So, with constant diligence and respect, the monk should apply himself to the teaching of this Master. (934)

The Vinaya Pitaka

The second group of scriptures in the Pali canon is known as the Vinaya (discipline) Pitaka, and is basically a collection of rules, and explanation of them for the monks (Bhikkhus or Sangha) and nuns (Bhikkhunis).

EXTRACTS

The following describes the ordination of monks:

“I grant you, monks, this permission: Confer henceforth in the different regions and in the different countries both modes of ordination yourselves on those who desire to receive them. And you ought, monks, to confer them in this way: Let him who desires to receive ordination first have his hair and beard cut off, let him put on yellow robes, adjust his upper robe so as to cover one shoulder, salute the feet of the monks with his head, and sit down squatting; then let them raise his joined hands and tell him to say “I take my refuge in the Buddha, I take my refuge in the Dharma, I take my refuge in the Sangha...three times...I prescribe, O monks, that the world be left and ordination given by the three times repeated declaration of taking refuge.”

The following discourse is on passion:

“Everything, brethren, is on fire. How, brethren, is everything on fire? The eye, brethren, is on fire, visible objects are on fire, the faculty of the eye is on fire, the sense of the eye is on fire, and also the sensation, whether pleasant or unpleasant or both, which arises from the sense of sight, is on fire. With what is it on fire? With the fire of passion, of hate, of illusion is it on fire, with birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, sorrow, and despair. Thus I declare. The ear is on fire, sounds are on fire (etc.)...The nose is on fire, scents are on fire, the tongue is on fire, tastes are on fire, the body is on fire, objects of touch are on fire, the mind is on fire, mental objects are on fire, the faculty of the mind is on fire, the perception of the mind is on fire, the sensation, whether pleasant or unpleasant or both, which arises from the inner sense is on fire. With what is it on fire? With the fire of passion, of hate, or illusion is it on fire, with birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, sorrow, and despair.

Thus I declare. The wise and noble disciple, brethren, perceiving this, is indifferent to the eyes, indifferent to visible objects, indifferent to the faculty of the eye, indifferent to visible objects, indifferent to the faculty of the eye, indifferent to sensation, whether pleasant or unpleasant or both, which arises from the sense of sight. He is indifferent to the ear, indifferent to sounds, indifferent to the nose, indifferent to scents, indifferent to the tongue, indifferent to tastes, indifferent to the body, indifferent to objects of touch, indifferent to the mind, indifferent to mental objects, indifferent to the faculty of the mind, indifferent to the perception of the mind, indifferent to the sensation, whether pleasant or unpleasant or both, which arises from the inner sense. And being indifferent he becomes free from passion, by absence of passion is he liberated, and when he is liberated the knowledge "I am liberated" arises. Re-birth is destroyed, a religious life is lived, duty is done, and he knows there is nothing more for him in this state."

The following lists the three refuges and the ten commandments.

The Three Refuges

I go for Refuge to the Buddha,
I go for Refuge to the Law (Dhamma),
I go for Refuge to the Order.

The Ten Commandments

These ten are binding upon members of the order (These members may at any time return unquestioned to lay life). The laity are bound by the first five and on fast days keep them all except the last.

1. Not to destroy life.
2. Not to take what is not given.
3. To abstain from unchastity.
4. Not to lie or deceive.
5. To abstain from intoxicants.
6. To eat temperately and not after noon.
7. Not to behold dancing, singing, or plays.
8. Not to wear garlands, perfumes, or adornments.
9. Not to use high or luxurious beds.
10. Not to accept gold or silver.

The Abhidharma Pitaka

The Abhidharma (high doctrine) is in the sense of being more analytic and systematic in its approach to the teaching. In many ways it is a commentary on the preceding texts (sutra, vinaya) expounding on words, passages and ideas. For example, the Buddha taught that right speech was necessary to attain enlightenment but it is the Adhidharma that defines right speech: (1) abstaining from false speech, (2) abstaining from slanderous speech, (3) abstaining from harsh speech, (4) abstaining from frivolous speech.

Mahayana Scriptures

Mahayana Buddhists are less conservative in their beliefs, practices and view of scripture. Mahayanas accept the scriptures of the Pali cannon (Tripataka), and in addition to these they accept many more sutras. The two basic collections of the texts are in Tibetan and Chinese. The volume of texts would amount to 55 western-style volumes, with a supplement of 45 books. This collection is known as the great scripture store. Texts include, the Vimalikirti Nirdesa Sutra, the Prajnaparamita Sutras, the Saddharmapundarika, the Sukhauati Sutra and the Lankavatara Sutra.

The Vimalikirti Nirdesa Sutra

This Sutra tells of Vimalikirti, a layman, whose knowledge of the Dharma (truth) was greater than that of the monks! This gives encouragement to all laymen. Vimalikirti lives a full life in the world while using:

“...countless expedient methods to teach for the benefit of living beings...”

“While walking in the street he never failed to convert others (to the Dharma). When he entered a government office, he always protected others (from injustice)...When visiting a school he enlightened the students. When entering a house of prostitution he revealed the sin of sexual intercourse. When going to a tavern he stuck to his determination (to abstain from drinking).”

Once when ill...

“Thus the elder Vimalikirti expounded the Dharma to all those who came to enquire after his health, urging countless visitors to seek supreme enlightenment.”

“...if living beings listening to the Dharma of this sutra, believe, understand, receive, uphold, read and recite it, they will surely realise this Dharma.”

“Whoever after hearing this sutra of inconceivable liberation, believes, understands, receives, keeps, reads, recites and practises this sutra his or her merits will surpass those of the former man or woman. Why? Because the enlightenment of all the Buddhas originates from this Dharma, and since enlightenment is beyond all measuring, the merit of this sutra cannot be estimated.”

(All quotes from Vimalikirti Nirdeśa Sūtra, translated by C. Luk, p.16-17, 19, 128, 129; respectively).

The Prajnaparamita Sutras

These are mainly discourses on the perfection of wisdom. The focus is on the understanding of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas that the true nature and reality of all things is one, and can be described thus: “*own being*,” “*suchness*” or “*thatness*.”

“Avalokita, the holy lord and bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of wisdom which had gone beyond. He looked down from on high, he beheld but five heaps (the five aggregates), and he saw that in their own being they were empty.”

“It is because of his indifference to any kind of personal attainment that a bodhisattva, through having relied on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.”

“Someone who has set out in the vehicle of a Bodhisattva should think in this manner: As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, all these I must lead to Nirvana, into that realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind.”

The Saddharmapundarika

Called the true Lotus Law, this sutra teaches many truths through the use of allegories. The allegory below shows how we might take temporary refuge in things that are not real!

“There is a steep, difficult, very bad road, five hundred yojanas in length, empty and devoid of human beings - a frightful place. There is a great multitude wishing to traverse this road to arrive at a cache of precious jewels. There is a guide, perceptive and wise, of penetrating clarity, who knows the hard road, its passable and impassable features, and who, wishing to get through these hardships, leads the multitude. The multitude being led get disgusted midway and say to the guide, ‘We are exhausted, and also frightened; we cannot go on. It is still a long way off, and we now wish to turn back.’ The guide, being a man of many skillful devices, thinks: ‘These wretches are to be pitied! How can they throw away a fortune in jewels and wish instead to turn back?’ When he has had this thought, with his power of devising expedients he conjures up on that steep road, three hundred yojanas away, a city, then he declares to the multitude, ‘Have no fear! There is no need to turn back! Here is this great city. You may stop in it and do as you please. If you enter the city, you can quickly regain your composure. If you then feel able to proceed to the jewel cache, you will also be free to leave.’”

“At that time, the exhausted multitude, overjoyed at heart, sigh as at something they have never had before, saying, ‘We have escaped that bad road, and shall quickly regain our composure.’ Thereupon the multitude proceed to enter the conjured city, having the notion that they are saved and evincing a feeling of composure. At that time, the guide knowing that the multitude have rested and are no longer fatigued, straightway dissolves the conjured city and says to the multitude, ‘Come away! The jewel cache is near. The great city of a while ago was conjured up by me for the purpose of giving you a rest, nothing more.’”

[Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma, translated by L. Hurvitz, p. 148]

The Sukhavati Sutra

This is the sutra of happiness, and describes the path of devotion to Buddha. It is believed that by calling on the Buddha one will be reborn into paradise or “*pure land*.” Once here the Buddha guides the devotee into Nirvana. The extract below describes, in part, this pure land.

“That world system Sukhavati, Ananda, ... is rich in a great variety of flowers and fruits, adorned with jewel trees, which are frequented by flocks of birds with sweet voices, which the Tathagata's miraculous power has conjured up... Such jewel trees, and clusters of banana trees and rows of palm trees, all made of precious things, grow everywhere in this Buddha field. On all sides it is... covered with lotus flowers made of all the precious things...and from each jewel lotus issue thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of rays. And at the end of each ray there issue thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas, with golden-coloured bodies, and who go into countless world systems, and there demonstrate Dharma...And all the beings who are born...in this Buddha-field, they are all fixed on the right method of salvation, until they have won Nirvana. For this reason that world system is called the ‘Happy Land’”.

[E. Conze, Buddhist Scriptures, pp. 232, 235]

The Lankavatara Sutra

The title means Descent to the island of Lanka. Tradition says the Buddha visited Lanka during his lifetime. This sutra contains conversations of the Buddha which are said to represent the orthodox teaching of Buddhism. The text contains a strong critique of Hindu philosophy. The sutra emphasises inner enlightenment and the realization that the Buddha-Nature is in all of us.

The Vajrayana Scriptures

The Vajrayana or Tibetan scriptures are voluminous. Texts include the Tripitaka, the Mahayana scriptures, and in addition the teachings of the Lamas (teachers) were added. Even today new teachings are added to the collection. These texts were organised into two pairs: the Kanjur and Tenjur, by Burton (1290-1354 AD). The Kanjur consists of scripture, numbering 100 volumes. The Tenjur comprises 255 volumes of commentaries on the Kanjur material. The most well known Tebetan scripture is the Book of the Dead, a book of magical texts.

IMPORTANT SCRIPTURES FROM THE TIME OF GAUTAMA BUDDHA

BCE		
600	Birth of Gautama Buddha Enlightenment of Gautama Buddha	
500	Death of Gautama Buddha First Council of Rajagriha	SUTRA and VINAYA fixed orally
400		ABHIDHARMA continued to develop
300	Buddhism to Sri Lanka	
200	MILINDAPANHA	PALI TRIPITAKA written down
100		
0	PRAINAPARAMITA SUTRAS	

CE	
100	VIMALIKIRTI NIRDESA SUTRA
200	SADDHARMAPUNDARIKA and LANKAVATARA SUTRAS
300	
400	
500	VISUDDHIMAGGA
600	SUKHAVATI SUTRAS
1300	Buton fixed the form of the Tibetan KANJUR and TENJUR

BUDDHIST WORSHIP, PILGRIMAGES AND FESTIVALS

We have already seen that there is a vast array of Buddhist scriptures, but not all Buddhists accept all the texts as scriptures. As a result of this different sects of Buddhism arose, each adhering to those particular texts which they favored. Each sect, then, evolved on its own, developing its own peculiar beliefs and practices. The Theravada sect teaches that the Buddha was a saint but was not God or a god, and they eschew all ritual. While the Mahayana sect teaches the Buddha to be a saviour, and they embrace ritual. Whereas Shoshu Buddhists believe that Buddha is God and worship him accordingly.

All this makes it difficult to give a comprehensive and general summation of Buddhist worship, even the word worship may offend some Buddhists, preferring the word honouring. But after watching these Buddhist “*honouring*” the Buddha in the temple, I find it difficult to see it as anything but worship.

The Vihara

The Vihara is the Buddhist monastery, temple or shrine and is made up of more than one building. The features of the Viharas are common among all sects of Buddhism.

The Shrine Room

In the Theravada tradition, the shrine room will contain images of the Buddha, usually in placed in the highest position, as a sign of honour. There will also be a raised platform on which the monks sit and teach, chant and recite the sutras. There are no other items of furniture. Any devotee who comes to the temple will sit crossed legged in front of the platform.

The shrines of the Mahayana sect, in addition to the images of the Buddha, also contain images of other Buddhas or Bodhisattus (those on their way to enlightenment). There is also a greater variety of offerings. The walls are decorated with pictures of the Buddha, stupas and centres of pilgrimages.

All shrines are very colourful and every effort is made to create a beautiful environment.

The Meditation Room

This room is usually very plain, though there may be a picture and a chair. The atmosphere is very quiet and calm, being ideal for meditation or one-to-one teaching.

Living Quarters

Living Quarters are provided for the monks who perform the daily rituals, and who are responsible for the temple's general upkeep. The sangha are supported by the laity, who bring food daily. Food and other gifts, blankets, razors, etc., are also given at festivals.

The Stupa

The Stupa, relic mound or relic chamber, was originally an earth burial mound over the cremated remains of a king or great spiritual teacher. The Buddha's remains were, at first, placed in the eighth such stupas. Over the years the number of stupas has greatly multiplied. Stupas today will contain a relic of the Buddha or some other important Bodhisattu, or an ancient sutra. A Vihara may have a miniature relic chamber in the shrine room, or one outside.

Natural Features

The natural features around the temple include a Bodhi tree, a Lotus pond, a flower garden and a Zen meditation garden. These features may not all be present around the temple. The features we have mentioned have a symbolic spiritual meaning:

- The Bodhi tree is a reminder of truth, and of the enlightenment to which all beings are moving.
- The Lotus pond puts the devotee in mind of the ultimate reality, Nirvana. The Lotus that has risen above the water is symbolic of those who have risen above the waters of desire. Those Lotus still under water remind the devotee that some are at different stages of development.
- The flower garden is a reminder of the cycle of life.
- The Zen garden. Looking at this garden reminds Buddhists both of the expanse of the ocean and the ranges of the earth's mountains. He sees common forms underlying all life, and notices how his mind deals with the forms he sees.

Worship

There are no demands on Buddhists to attend services, indeed it is a true saying, *"You don't have to go to the Vihara to be a Buddhist."* Consequently, people come and go as they please, while others have their own shrine or meditation room at home. But when a Buddhist does come to the Vihara, the first thing he does is remove his shoes - this is done as a sign of respect. Inside the temple offerings of light and flowers are made - the flowers usually being lotus buds symbolising purity. Such offerings, in the Theravada tradition, are accompanied with the following words...

Reverencing the Buddha we offer flowers,
Flowers that today are fresh and sweetly blooming,
Flowers that tomorrow are faded and fallen.
Our bodies too like flowers will pass away.

Reverencing the Buddha we offer candles.
To Him who is the light, we offer light.
From his greater lamp a lesser lamp we light within us.
The lamp of Bodhi shining within our hearts.

Then, after the offerings, confession is made of unhelpful or unwholesome thoughts or actions, and then petitions are made of the Buddhas to remain active in the world. Mantras may also be used to help focus the worshippers thoughts. Prayer beads are also used to aid in the counting of mantras.

Pilgrimages

There are many famous pilgrimage centres, but we will mention just four: The Lumbini Grove, Bodh Gaya, the deer park at Sarnath and Kushinara.

Lumbini Grove is near Kapilavath in Nepal and is the birth place of the Buddha. There is a pillar at the site, erected by the emperor Ashoka, with these words inscribed on it: "HERE THE BUDDHA WAS BORN."

Bodh Gaya near Gaya in Bihar is the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. A descendant of the original Bodhi tree, under which the Buddha sat, still stands there. Next to this tree is the Mahabodhi, or great enlightenment temple, which dates from the second century. Worshippers enter the temple and make offerings of light, incense and flowers, then they might meditate for a time on the meaning of enlightenment.

The Deer Park is where the Buddha preached his first sermon. The focus for pilgrims is the statue of the Buddha preaching, which stands in the Mulaganghakatī Temple.

Kushinara is the site of the Buddha's death. Here you will find a commemorative temple and many ancient stupas.

Buddhists are not obliged to go on pilgrimages but believe they receive a blessing by doing so. The Buddha himself encouraged pilgrimages if such would help to understand or practise their religion better.

Festivals

The Buddha told his disciples to teach in the language of the people, and so the great variety of Buddhist festivals and practises at such festivals is in keeping with the way Buddhism adapts itself. Also, many countries have developed their own distinctive set of festivals because all the Buddhist countries have a slightly different calendar. However, whatever and whenever the festival, monks and lay Buddhists are involved.

Buddha Festivals

Wesak - This festival, in the Theravada tradition, takes place in April/May and is a celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. All Buddhists will visit the temple, bringing gifts of food for the monks and making offerings of light, incense and flowers. Wesak is also a time for meditation and renewing vows.

The Mahayana Buddhists, in Japan, celebrate the same events in the Buddha's life but on separate dates: Hana Matsuri, marking the birth of the Buddha, falls in April. Jodo-E is in December and commemorates the enlightenment of the Buddha. Nehan-E is in February and is in remembrance of the Buddha's death. Everybody enjoys themselves on these festive occasions, and there are usually many things to see - folk-dancing, acrobatics, story telling and stalls set up for buying and selling.

New Year Festivals

The Buddhist New Year, in Burma and Thailand, falls in April, and is a time of ritual cleansing and recommitment. As in many faiths, water is symbolic of cleansing, and so Buddha images are bathed in water, as are the monks. Water is also thrown over people in the streets. These acts of purification prepare people for the New Year. And, as in the case with most festivals, people will come to the temple to worship and offer provisions to the monks - blankets, razors, begging bowls and food. This New Year celebration lasts for three days.

The Japanese observe the same calendar as the west, which means New Year's day is on the 1st of January. However, the emphasis is more on the 31st of December as they reflect on the past year - thinking of all the evils that are passing away and of all the blessings the New Year might bring.

Japanese Festivals

Higan - This is celebrated twice - 21 March and 23 September. These are the times of year when the seasons change. At these times of the year one is meant to meditate upon harmony and naturalness, which is realized both in nature and within ourselves - it is another way of talking about Nirvana. This is also the time of year when the graves of loved ones are visited - water is poured over the graves in the belief that they are transferring merit to them, helping them on their way to the "*other shore*" (Nirvana). Offerings are made at the temple.

Obon - This festival has its origin in a story of the Buddha, in which he releases the mother of one of his followers from hell. The woman's son Moggollana, had the power to visit other worlds (or spiritual realms), and he saw his mother suffering in hell and asked the Buddha to help. The Buddha threw her a rope and pulled her out of hell. This event is remembered by having a tug-o-war match. Also, offerings of flowers and fruits are made to the Buddha, as they ask him to have compassion on themselves and their ancestors in future lives. Everyone is joyful, and there are fetes, side shows, dancing, etc.

The Tooth Relic Festival

This festival is in honour of a tooth relic of the Buddha, brought to Kandy, Srilanka, from India in the 4th century. This tooth relic is kept in a miniature stupa in the temple in Kandy. This festival lasts 15 days.

The Rainy Season Retreat

This is not a festival as such but is an important time of the year for Buddhist. It is marked with special celebrations at the beginning and end of the rainy season. When the rainy season begins (July) the monks cease from travelling and remain together in a monastery until the end of the season (October). The time is spent meditating and studying. Also at this time young boys and girls are initiated - a special coming-of-age ceremony. The ceremony is really an enactment of the Buddha's birth as a prince and his renunciation of this life to take up a spiritual quest. Children are dressed in the appropriate apparel and paraded through the streets until they reach the monastery. Upon reaching the monastery, their attire is discarded, their heads are shaved, and they stay with the monks for a day or two.

This is the first step to full ordination. Full ordination is not allowed until the age of 20, but one may become a novice. The beginning of the rainy season is also a time to renew one's vows - to not kill, steal, drink, indulge in forbidden sexual pleasure, and lie. At the end of the rainy season there is a special celebration involving the whole village, who brings gifts for the monks. After the celebrations those who have been staying with the monks return home and the monks resume their wandering.

The Buddhist Calendar - Two Examples

Note: The names of the months are different in each Buddhist country and not used universally, so the English month which approximates to the time of the year is given instead.

Month	Burma	Japan
April	New Year three days with water festival on first two. Washing away sins. Making merit.	Hana Matsuri Flower Festival marking Birth of Buddha Sakyamuni
May	Buddha day, usually called Wesak: birth/enlightenment/death of Gautama Buddha	
July	Rainy Season Retreat begins, usually called Vassa	Obon Helping Remembering the souls of the dead Way lit with lanterns
September		Autumn Higan 'Other-shore' Ceremony
October	Rainy Season Retreat ends Gifts to Sangha Festival of Lights	
December		Jodo-e Enlightenment of Buddha
January		Joyo no Kane New Year
February		Nehan-e Nirvana of Sakyamuni Buddha
March		Spring Higan 'Other-Shore' Ceremony

Glossary

Hinduism

Advaita	The school of Indian philosophy based upon non-duality and associated with the philosopher Sankara.
Agni	The Vedic Aryan god of fire.
Agnicayana	The great Vedic fire festival.
Agnishtoma	The popular Vedic sacrifice involving the crushing of the soma plant.
Ahinsa	Non-violence.
Arthna	One of the four aims of life: making money by honest means.
Arya	Noble.
Aryan	Indo-European-language group of people who invaded and conquered India.
Ashrama	One of the four stages of life of a man.
Astika	The six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy.
Asvamedha	The Vedic horse sacrifice.
Atharva Veda	The fourth Veda.
Atman	The animating energy in any creature, usually referred to as the soul (Self).
Aum	The sacred syllable. It is believed to contain the sound of all reality. Used during meditation.
Avatar	The earthly incarnation of the god Vishnu.
Avidya	Ignorance.
Bhagavad Gita	A classic Hindu text contained in the Mahabharata.
Bhakti	Hindu devotion.
Bharat	A name for India. It was probably the name of an Aryan tribe or chief.
Bhut	A ghost that causes misfortune.
Brahma	The creator aspect of Brahman in the Hindu Trimurti (Trinity).
Brahma Sutras	Texts in concise verse containing Hindu philosophy.
Brahmacharya	The student stage of life of a twice-born Hindu.
Brahman	The ultimate reality.
Brahmanas	Religious texts composed for the guidance of priests in the performance of Vedic sacrifices.
Brahmin	A member of the highest social castes.
Chakra	Seven spiritual-energy centres believed by exponents of yoga to exist along the spinal chord.
Darsan	The meritorious viewing of a holy image or a person.
Dasa	A slave, initially pre-Aryan (literally, dark-skinned one).
Deva	Aryan Vedic god, shining one.
Devata	A minor deity (a godling).
Devi	A Sankrit word for mother goddess.
Dharma	The religious and moral duty of a Hindu.
Dharma Shastra	A text containing the customary law relating to social conduct.
Diksha	The initiation of a sannyasi by a guru.
Durga	The female goddess Devi in her fierce aspect.
Dvaita	The school of Hindu philosophy based upon the theistic teaching of duality.
Ganesa	The elephant-headed son of Siva and Parvati. God of prosperity and wisdom.
Ganga	Indian name for the River Ganges, often personified as a goddess.
Grama	Village.
Grihastha	The second stage of life: the householder.
Gunas	The three strands or qualities of which all matter is composed in various proportions, interwoven like strands of a rope.
Guru	Teacher, spiritual guide.
Hara	Another name for Siva (the remover).
Hari	Another name for Vishnu.
Harijan	A name used by Mahatma Gandhi for the untouchable class (literally child of god).
Indra	The Vedic god of war.
Indus	A holy river whose Hindu name is Sindhu.
Ishtadeveta	A personal deity.
Ishwara	An individual's chosen deity.
Jati	The Indian term for a social class usually determined by occupation. There are many jati within a caste (see chart).
Jnana	Philosophical knowledge of God, man and man's position in the cosmos.
Kali	A fearful black goddess.
Kalkin	The final avatar of Vishnu that will come at the end of the age.
Kalpas	Cosmic periods of time.
Kama	The third aim of life; enjoyment of sensual pleasures.
Karma	The total effect of one's action.
Karma Yoga	The discipline of action as a method of salvation expounded in the Bhagavad Gita.

Krishna	An avatar of Vishnu and hero of the Mahabharata (literally, black).
Kshatriya	A member of the second highest caste, traditionally warriors.
Laksmi	Goddess of good fortune, wife of Vishnu.
Lila	Divine play, sport.
Linga	The sacred phallus of Siva.
Mahabharata	The great Hindu epic (Great Bharata).
Mahadevi	The supreme reality in feminine form.
Maharaja	Great king.
Mahatma	Great souled one , an honorific title.
Mandala	Religious diagram used for special worship.
Mantra	Sacred formula, or sound used in meditation.
Maya	Illusionary nature of the everyday reality.
Meru	Golden mountain at the centre of the world.
Moksha	The liberation of the soul from the successive series of births and deaths.
Murti	The image of a deity in a temple.
Nandi	The mount on which Siva rides.
Nataraja	One of Siva's names, the Lord of the dance.
Nyasa	Identification of the worshipper with the deity.
Oja	A healer who becomes possessed by a spirit.
Panchayat	A council of elders ruling a Hindu village.
Parvati	A female goddess, wife of Siva.
Prasad	A blessed offering distributed among the worshippers at the end of a ritual (puja).
Puja	A common form of Hindu worship.
Puranas	Ancient texts containing many Hindu myths, etc.
Raja	A ruler, a king.
Rama	Son of King Dasaratha, an incarnation of Vishnu.
Ramayana	Hindu epic telling the story of Rama.
Rig Vedas	The first and most ancient of the Vedic texts.
Rishi	A Vedic sage.
Sama Veda	The third Veda, intended to be chanted.
Samadhi	State of pure consciousness of oneness with God.
Samsara	The cycle of birth, death and rebirths.
Shudra	A member of the fourth caste division.
Siva	A member of the Hindu trinity.
Trimurti	The trinity of gods: Siva, Vishnu and Brahma.
Upanishad	Holy texts of philosophy and religion (literally to sit down in front of).
Vaishya	A member of the third caste division.
Varuna	One of the most important deities in the Vedas.
Vedanta	System of philosophy associated with the scholar Sankara (literally end of the Vedas).
Vishnu	A member of the Hindu trinity.
Yama	The Vedic god of death.
Yoga	A system of philosophy combining physical exercises and meditation.
Yogi	A practitioner of yoga.

Krishnaism

ISKCON	Acronym for the official name for the Hare Krishna movement: The International Society for Krishna Consciousness.
Prabhupada	(A.C. Bhaktivedanta) The late founder and spiritual head of ISKCON, a religious philosophy of self-denial where devotees stress asceticism to attain God-consciousness. Born in India in 1869, he came to America in 1965 with the message of Krishna.
Bhakti Yoga	The type of yoga, or exercise to spirituality, practised by Hare Krishnas.
Karma	The Hindu idea of one's accumulated debts (bad deeds). Karma must be paid for during an individual's succession of lives (reincarnation).
Mantra	The Hindu prayer chant, specialised for each Hindu sect, including Hare Krishna's.
Nirvana	The Hindu concept of heaven or bliss.

Islam

Abu Bakr	(632-634) The first Moslem caliph, according to Sunni Muslims. The Shi'ite Muslims reject this and instead consider the fourth caliph, 'Ali, as the first true successor to the prophet Muhammad.
Allah	The Supreme Being. The name of God, derived from the Arabic Al-Ilah.
Caliph	The title given to office of the spiritual and political leadership which took over after Muhammad's death.
Fatima	The daughter of Muhammad and his first wife; and the wife of 'Ali, the fourth Caliph.
Hadith	The sacred sayings of Muhammad, handed down by oral tradition, for generations after the prophet's death until finally transcribed.
Hajj	A pilgrimage to Mecca. One of the five pillars of faith.
Hegira	Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina (622).
Imam	A Moslem who is considered by Sunnis to be an authority in Islamic law and theology or the man who leads the prayers. Also refers to a legitimate caliph as defined by the Shi'ite sect.
Islam	Literally, "Submission to Allah."
Ka'aba	A small stone building located in the court of the great mosque at Mecca containing the black stone (a meteorite) supposedly given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel.
Koran	The word of God revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. The Koran is the final and complete word of God, superseding all other messages.
Mecca	The birthplace of Muhammad. Located in Saudi Arabia it is considered the most holy city by Moslems.
Medina	This is the city to which Muhammad fled in 622 A.D.
Muhammad	(Praised One) The prophet and founder of the Islamic faith. The original name given to Muhammad was Abu'l Kassim.
Moslem	A follower of Muhammad. Literally, "one who submits."
Mosque	An Islamic place of worship.
Muezzin	A Moslem crier who calls the faithful to prayer.
Ramadan	The ninth month of the Moslem year, when Muhammad received the Koran.
Salat	The Moslem daily prayer ritual.
Shi'ites	A Moslem sect which rejects the first three caliphs, insisting that the only rightful caliphs are those who are direct descendants of the prophet through his daughter Fatima.
Sufis	Philosophical mystics who have largely adapted and reinterpreted Islam for themselves.
Sunnites	The largest Moslem sect which acknowledges the first four caliphs as Muhammad's rightful successors.
Surahs	The name given to the chapters of the Koran.

Sikhism

Amristar	City founded by Amar Das. This is where the famous Golden Temple situated.
Angad	A disciple of Nanak who became the first in a line of ten successors as the leaders of Sikhism.
Angad	introduced the teaching that Nanak was equal to God.
Ardas	Prayer marking the end of worship, consisting of three parts.
Dasam Granth	A book of 1428 pages containing the poems of Guru Gobind Singh.
Goindwal	City. Headquarters of Guru Amar Das. Sikhs were summoned here three times a year.
Granth Sahib	The Lord's book . The sacred scripture of Sikhism.
Gurdwara	Sikh place of worship. All Gurdwaras contain the Granth Sahib.
Gurpurb	Guru holiday . Commemorating the birth or death of one of the ten gurus.
Guru	Teacher, spiritual guide.
Guru Arjan	The compiler of the Granth Sahib.
Gutka	A small book containing 18 of the more important poems of the Granth Sahib.
Karah Parshad	(Made of flour or semolina, butter, sugar and water) It is distributed to the congregation after the Ardas.
Khalsa	Dedicated ones . Sikh army (see p. 52).
Mardana	A minstrel who was Nanak's friend and companion in the years of spreading Sikhism.
Melas	Sikh festivals (meetings or fairs).
Nanak	(1469-1539) Founder of Sikhism in 1499.
Sat Nam	The true name , designation of God.
Sikh	Root word sikhna meaning to learn ; a disciple.

Buddhism

Acariya	Teacher.
Acariya-mutthi	Closed fist of the teacher , i.e., esoteric doctrine, secret teaching.
Adhamma	Evil, wrong, unjust, immoral.
Ajjava	Honesty, integrity.
Amata	Immortality, synonym for Nirvana.
Anatta	No-Soul, No-Self.
Arahant	One who is free from all fetters, defilements and impurities through the realisation of Nirvana in the fourth and final stage, and who is free from rebirth.
Ariya magga	Noble path.
Atman	Soul, self, ego.
Avihimsa	Non-violence.
Avijja	Ignorance, illusion, delusion.
Ayasma	Venerable.
Bhava	Becoming, existence, continuity.
Bhavana	Meditation, mental culture.
Bhikkhu	Buddhist monk.
Bodhi, Bo-tree	The Tree of wisdom, the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment.
Buddha	Enlightened one, awakened one.
Dana	Charity.
Dhamma	Truth, teaching, doctrine, righteousness, piety, morality, justice, nature, etc.
Dhamma-cakka	Wheel of truth.
Dhamma-vicaya	Search of truth.
Dhyana	Trance , a state of mind achieved through higher meditation.
Dukka	Suffering, conflict, unsatisfactoriness, unsubstantiality, emptiness.
Karma	Volitional action.
Mahayana	Great vehicle , form of Buddhism of later development.
Metta	Universal love, friendship.
Nairatmya	Soullessness, the fact that there is no soul.
Nirodha	Cessation.
Nirvana	Ultimate reality, absolute truth; blowing out, extinction .
Nissarana	Freedom, liberation.
Pancakkhandha	The five aggregates.
Piti	Joy.
Raga	Lust, desire.
Sacca	Truth.
Saddha	Confidence (faith, belief).
Samsara	The cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
Sangha	Community of Buddhist monks.
Sati	Mindfulness, awareness.
Sattha	Teacher, master.
Sutta	Discourse, sermon.
Tanha	Thirst , desire, craving.
Tanhakkhaya	Extinction of thirst , synonym for Nirvana.
Tathagata	One who has found the truth , synonym for Buddha. Literally truth arrived .
Theravada	The system or school of the elders , considered to be the orthodox and original form of Buddhism.
Tipitaka	(Or Tripitaka), three books, usually called Three baskets . The three main canonical divisions of the Buddha's teaching into Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma.
Tisarana	Three refuges: The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.
Upasaka	A lay Buddhist.
Viraga	Detachment, freedom from desire.
Yatha-bhuta	In reality, as things are.