

BUDDHISM

Historical Origins

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha or “enlightened one.” He was born a prince in India in the 400s or 500s B.C. Siddhartha was protected from seeing sickness, death, poverty, or old age until he was 29. However, after he learned about suffering, he left his palace to lead a religious life. While he was meditating several years later, Buddhists believe he received enlightenment about the meaning of life.



A 14th-century painting of Buddha

Central Beliefs

Buddhists believe that a law of cause and effect called karma controls the universe. Buddhists teach that suffering occurs because people desire what they do not have. A person who gives up desire and other negative emotions will achieve a state called nirvana, or the end of suffering. The basic beliefs of Buddhism are summarized in the Four Noble Truths. The actions that help people achieve nirvana are called the Eightfold Path.

Spread of Buddhism

During its first century, Buddhism spread across northern India. Over time, missionaries and travelers carried it to the Himalayas, Central Asia, and China. China spread Buddhism to Japan and Korea. In the 1800s, immigrants introduced Buddhism to the United States. In the late 20th century, the religion gained popularity in the United States and other Western countries.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

- Suffering is a part of life.
- Selfishness is the cause of suffering.
- It is possible to move beyond suffering.
- There is a path that leads to the end of suffering.

Buddhist monks in Siem Reap, Cambodia, celebrate the birthday of Buddha.

ॐ HINDUISM

Historical Origins

Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions, originated in India in about 1500 B.C. Scholars believe that it developed from the beliefs of a group of Indo-European people who spoke Sanskrit. The sacred writings of Hindus include the Vedas, which are poems and hymns, and the Puranas, which are sacred stories. Other Hindu texts such as the *Mahabharata*, of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part, teach Hindu beliefs in the form of epic poems.



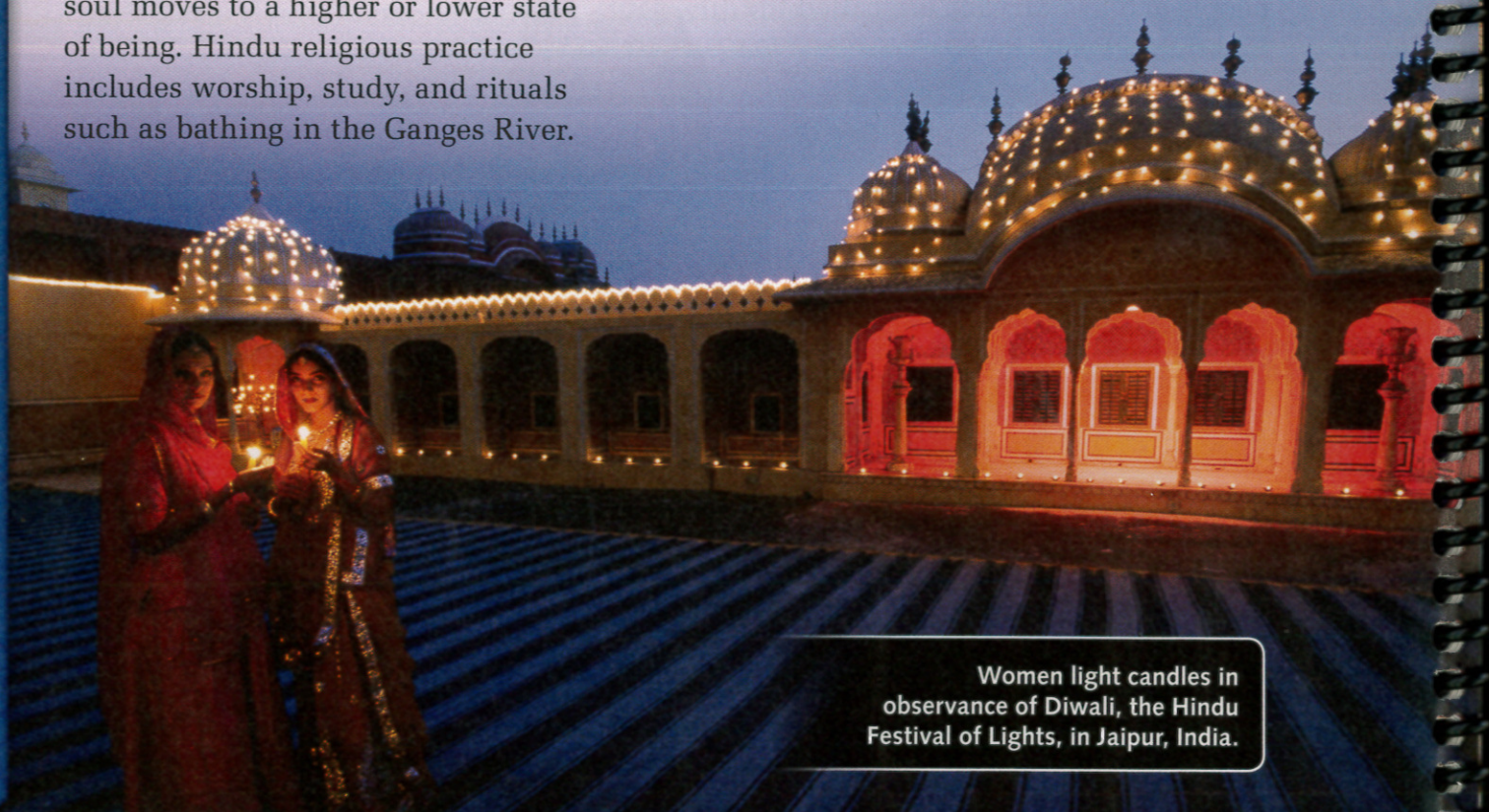
Scene from the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Hindu text

Central Beliefs

In general, Hindus believe in one eternal force called Brahman. This divine spirit takes the form of many gods and goddesses. The most important deities are Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer. Hindus believe that souls are constantly being reborn. Karma, the negative or positive effect of one's actions, determines if the soul moves to a higher or lower state of being. Hindu religious practice includes worship, study, and rituals such as bathing in the Ganges River.

Spread of Hinduism

Hinduism spread from India through parts of Southeast Asia, but now is practiced by few people in that region. In general, Hinduism has remained mainly a religion of the Indian people. Nearly 80 percent of Indians are Hindus. Indian immigrants have brought Hinduism to the United States.



Women light candles in observance of Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, in Jaipur, India.

Historical Origins

Followers of Sikhism are called Sikhs, which means “learner.” A teacher named Guru Nanak established the religion in India in the late 1400s. After his death, a line of nine other teachers, or gurus, followed him. Sikhs believe that all ten gurus were inspired by a single spirit. They also believe that after the tenth guru died, this spirit inhabited the Sikhs’ sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth.



Detail of fresco depicting Guru Nanak Sikh

Central Beliefs

Sikhs believe in one god who does not take physical form. Like Hindus, they believe in reincarnation—the rebirth of the soul. The goal of Sikhism is to form a close, loving relationship with God. Sikh practices include prayer several times a day, worship, and meditation. Sikhs do not use tobacco or alcohol, and they often follow a strict dress code, which includes never cutting their hair.

Spread of Sikhism

Sikhism is practiced by nearly 25 million people, most of whom live in the Punjab region of northwest India. However, immigrants have introduced the religion to Western countries, including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.



A Sikh pilgrim visits the Golden Temple—Sikhism’s holiest site—in Amritsar, India.