**Introduction**

* In addition to the three monotheistic religions, there are nine other classical world religions —those religions most often included in history of world religion surveys and studied in world religions classes.
* Note: Paul showed the basis for the claim that Christianity is the only religion accepted by God (cf. Acts 17:30-31).

**Baha’i Faith**

* (Offshoot of Islam) Established in the 19th century by *Bahá'u'lláh* (a man who claimed to be a messianic figure of earlier prophecy in 1863) in Persia. Exiled for his teaching to the Ottoman Empire where he died as a prisoner. Today, approximately **3-5 million adherents**, largest minority in Iran, and persecuted.
* Monotheistic and ecumenical with three core doctrines: 1) The unity of God, [one God, source of all creation, unknowable]; 2) The unity of religion [all major religions come from the same God - are true in basic substance]; 3) The unity of man [all humans equal, all races and cultures are worthy of appreciation and acceptance].
* Major religions, (including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.), were established by God to suit the needs and capacities of the people at that time.
* *Bahá'u'lláh* is the final prophet for this age (at least the next 1,000 years), fulfilling all end time prophecy, and the need for this time is peace, justice and unity on a global scale.

**Buddhism**

* Non-theistic religion/philosophy based mainly in the teachings of *Gautama Buddha* (“the awakened one”), believed to have lived between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C. in north India.
* Purpose is to seek Nirvana, thus escaping a cycle of suffering, death and rebirth. (*reincarnation*).
* *Karma* – actions produce seeds that have their fruition either in this life or the next
* Purpose of Buddhist practice and beliefs are to alleviate *dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, unsatisfactoriness).
* Noble eightfold path: RIGHT - 1) view [reality]; 2) intention [harmlessness]; 3) speech [truth, non-harmful]; 4) action [non-harmful]; 5) livelihood [non-harmful]; 6) effort [self-improvement]; 7) mindfulness [self-awareness]; 8) concentration [meditation].
* Approx. **500 million adherents**.

**Confucianism**

* Based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC).
* Humanistic, with an emphasis on family and social harmony rather than a possible afterlife or otherworldly reward.
* Two major concepts: 1) *ren* – humaneness, the main essence of humanity, evidenced in compassion; 2) yi – the upholding of righteousness, and the moral disposition to do good.
* Failure to uphold *ren* or *yi* leads one to be held in contempt by the Confucian.
* Concept of God is nontheistic, more like Heaven/Universe than a person.
* Only **6.3 million adherents**. Though its influence seen in many oriental cultures.

**Hinduism**

* Dominant religion in South Asia (India & Nepal).
* 3rd largest world religion w/ **1 billion adherents**.
* A synthesis of various Indian cultures and traditions, with diverse roots, and no founder.
* Formation began 500 B.C. Basically a family of religious traditions and cultures, bound together by shared concepts, rituals and sacred sites.
* Four aims of human life: 1) *Dharma* (ethics/duties); 2) *Artha* (prosperity/work); 3) *Kama* (emotions/sexuality); 4) *Moksha* (liberation/freedom).
* Hindus, like Buddhists, believe in the concepts of *Karma* and *reincarnation*. In fact, some Hindus include Buddha as one of their gods.
* Major scriptures include the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Agamas*.
* Any concept of god is an oversimplification because the views are so diverse. Many are *henotheistic* (devotion to one among many).
* Views differ as to whether Hinduism gave rise to the *caste system* in India, or whether it simply enables it.
* Most Hindus are vegetarians, those who eat meat avoid beef. A cow is revered as a caretaker and maternal figure.
* A central part of Hindu practice is temple worship, most of which contain multiple idols. Typically, an idol occupies a central place in the temple, with a path around it, allowing the worshipper to ritually circle the “universal essence.”
* Note: *Yoga* (path) is to the Hindu the means of obtaining the goal of life. It contains principles of exercise, diet and philosophy of life. (Be careful, some have been led astray by what they initially thought to be simply stretching exercises.
* Over 80% of Indians are Hindu

**Jainism**

* One of oldest Indian religions, with a main emphasis of non-violence toward all living things.
* Three main principles: non-violence; non-absolutism; non-possessiveness.
* Jainists are *ascetics*. Ghandi was influenced by it.
* Committed Jainists will, for example, escort insects out of their home rather than kill them. They practice *veganism*, contending that dairy products come as a result of violence to animals.
* Believe in a form of *karma*, and the potential of men to become, in a sense, gods.
* Final liberation is defined as omniscience without any activity. Many bizarre beliefs.
* **4-6 million adherents**, different commitment.

**Shinto**

* An action centered religion, originating in Japan, from the 8th century.
* Polytheistic, with gods manifesting in many ways. Divine essence can manifest in rocks, trees, rivers, animals, places, and even people.
* 81,000 shrines and 85,000 shinto priests in Japan. It is practiced in some form by **80% of Japanese people (4 million)**, though not all would formally identify with the religion.
* Purification rites are common (prayers and offerings at shrines), to cleanse impurity, which impacts peace of mind and good fortune.
* *Talismans* and *amulets* (personal items for protection and welfare) are a part of the religion.
* **Note:** Shinto priests are often associated with martial arts. Grace, and physical skill are valued.

**Sikhism**

* A monotheistic religion that originated in South Asia during the 15th century.
* Sikhism is based on the spiritual teachings of *Guru Nanak*, the first Guru, and the ten successive Sikh gurus. **25 million adherents**.
* Fundamental tenets: faith in one Creator God, unity and equality of all humankind, engaging in selfless service, striving for social justice, and honest conduct and livelihood.
* Concept of God: “one constant”, no gender, beyond time and space, no form.
* Knowledge obtained through meditation.
* Two tenets of Sikh life: 1) Service (to God and man); 2) Remembrance (recitation and meditation).
* Cutting hair forbidden by some sects. No intoxicants (including tobacco) are allowed.

**Taoism**

* A philosophical, ethical or religious tradition of Chinese origin. Beginnings attributed to the earliest of Chinese literature. *Tao* means path (the flow of the universe. Force behind all).
* Origin claims cannot be substantiated. Attributed to possibly historical figure (*Laozi*), late 4th century BC.
* Though concerned with ethics like Confucianism, diverges by scornful attitude toward rigid ritual and castes. (Primarily nontheist).
* Emphasis: (three treasures) compassion, moderation, and humility. (As the "practical, political side" of Taoist philosophy, Arthur Waley translated them as "abstention from aggressive war and capital punishment", "absolute simplicity of living", and "refusal to assert active authority")
* Until 17th century, was from time to time considered the state religion of China.
* Adherants practice vegetarianism, and often martial arts.
* **12 million adherants**, though up to 173 million Chinese practice some tenets of the religion.

**Zoroastrianism**

* Adherents claim origin of the religion to the prophet Zoroastra (western Iran) in 1700 – 1300 BC). Critics place the date or origin around 6th century BC.
* Monotheistic – Supreme being *Ahura Mazda*. Described as the old Iranian religion predating Islam. Looking for a messiah to save the world, *Saoshyant*.
* Zoroastrain eschatology reads similarly to the Premillennial interpretations of Christian apocalyptic literature. (Physical battles between good & evil).
* Zoroastrianism revolves around three basic tenets – Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.
* Emphasis on cause and effect. You get what you deserve.
* Fire and water are used in rites of purification. Fire is considered a medium through which spiritual insight and wisdom is gained, and water is considered the source of that wisdom.
* It is believed that only about 200,000 Zoroastrians remain. One major sect of the religion condemns proselytizing. Most today are found in India.

*(Note: All information compiled from Wikipedia entries.)*