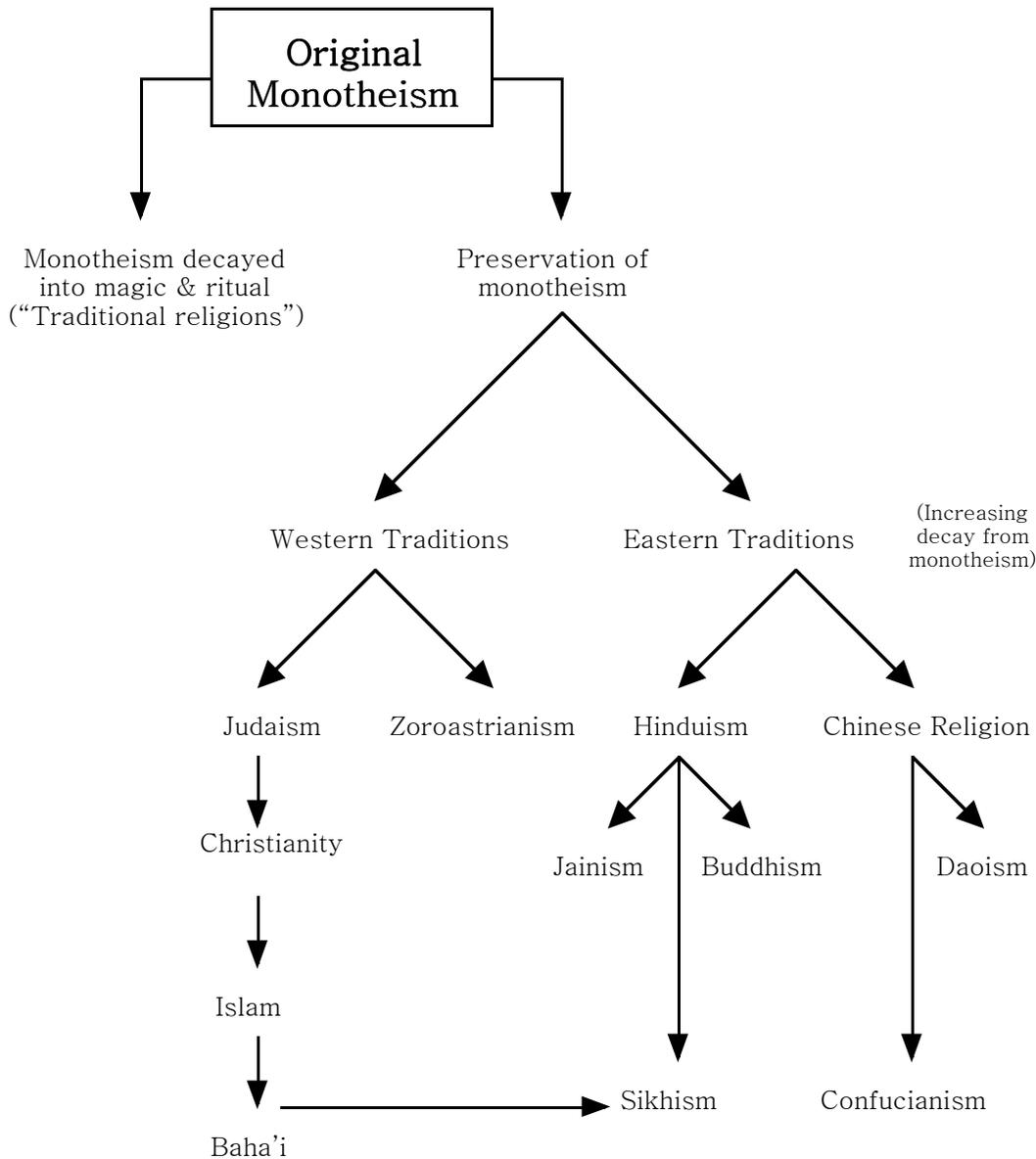


The Development of World's Religions: 1



- Judaism:** Origin: Formally with Moses, 15th B.C. Essential beliefs & practices: Monotheism, obedience to a divinely revealed law. Scriptures: The Hebrew Scriptures, containing the Law, Prophets, & Writings; collections of interpretations of the law, part, the Talmud. Major contemporary divisions: Orthodox, who obey the law literally; Conservative, who obey the law, but adapt it; Reform, who do not consider the law binding.
- Zoroastrianism:** Origin: Zoroaster, circa sixth century B.C. Essential beliefs & practices: Monotheism. Conflict between God (Ahura Mazda) & the lesser evil spirit (Angra Mainyu) who opposes him. Adherents side with God through practices of ethical purity (truth & goodness) & ritual cleanliness. Scripture: The Avesta, the oldest part of which (Gathas) may contain writings of Zoroaster himself. Major contemporary divisions: Although there are some minor distinctions in practice between some groups, based on their geographic location (Iran vs. India primarily), none are significant.
- Christianity:** Origin: Jesus, first century A.D. Essential beliefs & practices: Trinitarian Monotheism. Jesus Christ is the Messiah—He is both undiminished deity, perfect humanity united in one person forever. Salvation: As the predicted Messiah Son of God, Jesus was the only one who could make atonement for sin (Romans 5:12; Isaiah 52:13–53:12) which was done by his crucifixion, & authenticated by bodily resurrection (Gospel of John). Faith: The means of salvation is by placing one's faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is typically defined as the reliance upon that which or has good reasons to believe is true & trustworthy. Major contemporary divisions: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, & Protestant.
- Islam:** Origin: Muhammad (A.D. 570–632). Essential beliefs & practices: Monotheism, revelation of God (Allah) through prophets & their books (the final one of whom is Muhammad), judgment of human beings based on their obedience to God's requirements. Scriptures: The Qur'an & further teachings of Muhammad (Hadith). Major contemporary divisions: Sunnite (the majority), who based their authority on the consensus of the Muslims after Muhammad's death, and various groups of Shi'ites, who trace their origin to Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law.
- Baha'i:** Baha'ullah, initially a follower of nineteenth-century man, "the Bab," who proclaimed himself the new gateway to God. Essential beliefs & practices: The writings of Baha'ullah, including *The Most Holy Book* and *The Book of Certitudes*. Major contemporary divisions: None, some early attempts at division were eliminated.
- Hinduism:** Circa 1,500 B.C., religion of the Aryan who invaded the Indian subcontinent; numerous subsequent developments. Essential beliefs & practices: Extremely diverse; many different conceptions of deities with approximately equal divisions between theists & pantheists; most forms of Hinduism center on release from the endless cycle of reincarnation (samsara), which is propelled by the law of karma (present actions have consequences for the next incarnation). Scriptures: The Vedas, followed by the Upanishads (Vedanta). Epic myths, part, the Ramayana & the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita). Numerous Brahmanas, Sutras, & Puranas. Major contemporary divisions: Monistic groups, who follow the pantheistic doctrines of the Vedanta; personalistic Bhakti groups, who devote themselves to a deity or the deity's various manifestations. Of the latter there are three major divisions: Vaishnavites, who associated themselves in various ways with the god Vishnu; Shaivites, who focus on the god Shiva & his associates; Shaktites, who worship a goddess (known by many names) in her various expressions. There are uncountable other schools & subschools as well.
- Buddhism:** Origin: Gautama Buddha, circa 600 B.C. Essential beliefs & practices: Salvation consists of, first, deliverance from the cycle of reincarnations, and second, entering the state of Nirvana. Scriptures: The Tripitaka, "Three Baskets" (also known as the Pali canon: a large tripartite collection of writings in the Pali language), the Lotus Sutra, numerous other sutras. Major contemporary divisions: Theravada (also known as Hinayana), the most traditional form of Buddhism, centering on Monks; Mahayana, a collection of many adaptive schools of Buddhism that make provisions for the laity, including the schools known as Zen, Pure Land (Jodo Shinshu), Nichiren Shoshu (Soka Gakkai), Vajrayana (Tibetan), and numerous others.
- Jainism:** Origin: Mahavira, circa 600 B.C. Essential beliefs & practices: Redemption by elimination of solid karma matter from one's soul, part, the avoidance of any harm to living beings. Worship of Mahavira & his producers, known as Tirthankaras. Scriptures: Diverse writings, including the Angas, a collection that allegedly contains Mahavira's own writings. Major contemporary divisions: Digambaras (in which the monks wear no clothes) & Svetambaras (in which the monks wear white loincloths & have a few other distinctive beliefs, such as a female Tirthankara).
- Sikhism:** Origin: Guru Nanak, 16th century A.D. Essential beliefs & practices: An apparent fusion between Islam & Hinduism. There is one God (the "True Name"), who is represented on earth through the holy book, the Adi Granth. There will be a state of bliss after one escapes from the cycle of reincarnations & karma. Scriptures: Adi Granth. Major contemporary divisions: No divisions per se. Most Sikhs identify with the Khalsa, the military society in which all men carry the surname Singh, "Lion," and women are called Kaur, "Princess."
- Daoism:** Origin: Based on the philosophy of the legendary Laozi, many transformations turned a quietist philosophy into a religion that stresses magic & the worship of personal gods. Essential beliefs & practices: There is an essential harmony of yin & yang in the world, which needs to be kept in balance through correct spiritual practices. Scriptures: Daodejing. Major contemporary divisions: By its very nature, religious Daoism has tended to attach itself to other religious forms, particularly Buddhism & Confucianism.
- Confucianism:** Origin: Confucius, circa 16th Century B.C. Essential beliefs & practices: An ethical system ordering one's duties & obligations in society; includes certain religious observances but does not directly address gods or rituals. Scriptures: Analects, other Confucian writings. Major contemporary divisions: None. Confucianism has made itself an underpinning of traditional Chinese, Japanese, & Korean societies.
- Shinto:** Origin: Japanese traditional religion with no definite point of origin, codified in the 8th cent. B.C. Essential beliefs & practices: A system of practices, not doctrines, for the regular veneration of the Kami (spiritual reality that may assume the form of personal beings). Scriptures: the Kojiki & Nihongi are collection of prayers. Major contemporary divisions: Traditionally divided into State, Shrine & Domestic Shinto, these are merely dimensions of the basic orientation toward the Kami. Shinto exists more often than not in fusion with Buddhist beliefs & practices; many so-called new religions in Japan incorporate Shinto concepts, & the collection of these cultlike groups is called Sectarian Shinto.

~ Adapted from Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths*, 19–23.

¹Adapted from Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths: The Common Threads Between Christianity & World Religions* (Downer's Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2002), 18.