

## A Comparison of Four Major World Religions

	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Islam</b>	<b>Hinduism</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>
Nature of the religious ultimate	God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Loving, personal, sovereign, just, holy. Omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient. Eternal, created universe but not a part of it—above it.	God (Allah). He is gracious, merciful, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and perhaps above all just and sovereign. Eternal, created universe but not a part of it—above it. To Muslims, the Trinity is idolatrous polytheism. God is worthy of utmost respect, worship, and obedience. The love of God is not a major theme.	Brahman, the ultimate (though impersonal) reality pervading everything. Shiva and Vishnu are personal manifestations of Brahman. Hindus believe there are many equally valid ways of perceiving and approaching the supreme being. Think of the “parable of the elephant.”	Buddhism has roots in the Hindu tradition, but is a different religion because it rejects the authority of the Hindu scriptures and denies the existence of souls that transmigrate in a cycle of rebirths. In Buddhist thought, everything except <i>nirvana</i> (the spiritual goal of Buddhists) is impermanent and an illusion.
Nature of the human predicament	Adam’s sin introduced corruption into God’s perfect world. As a result, humans are intrinsically flawed and selfish, willfully disobeying God. Their disobedience separates them from God’s holy presence and condemns them to God’s just, terrible punishment. They are incapable of rescuing themselves.	Suffering and pain in the world result from people’s disobedience to His will. “Whatever good befalls you, man, it is from Allah; and whatever ill from yourself” (Surah 4:79). Idolatry—worshipping anything but Allah—is the greatest sin. Muslims reject the notion of original sin; people can do the will of Allah if they are disciplined enough.	In this world there is suffering, and people, trapped into a cycle of rebirths, cannot escape it. This is viewed pessimistically, not as getting a second chance. The main problem is that humans lack proper insight into reality. Three major views exist regarding the reality of individual souls: illusions (only Brahman is real); unique, differentiated parts of Brahman; separate from Brahman.	The first 2 of the Four Noble Truths: suffering and discontent pervade human existence, desire and craving (for anything, not just pleasure) cause suffering. Humans have desires largely because they incorrectly perceive themselves to exist as enduring, substantial individuals
Nature of salvation, liberation, and/or enlightenment	Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and died in our place, in effect paying the penalty for our disobedience. Through submitting to and trusting in Him, humans can have a relationship with God, avoid the punishment that they otherwise would receive, and be with God eternally in heaven after death.	During life, are most blessed when they faithfully obey God. The Five Pillars of Islam: witness to the basic creed, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage to Mecca. At the day of judgment, Allah will weigh each person’s deeds—those with more good than bad enjoy sensual delights in Paradise, and those with more bad than good are tormented in Hell. Whether one will enter Paradise after death cannot be known in this life.	Three major ways to escape the cycle of rebirth: <b>1</b> rigorous discipline or proper action, <b>2</b> meditation and acquiring higher knowledge and insight, and <b>3</b> exclusive devotion to God (as manifested as Shiva or Vishnu, or Vishnu’s earthly manifestations, Krishna or Rama). All are equally valid, though each different school of Hinduism tends to favor one above the others.	Second 2 of the Four Noble Truths: suffering ceases when desire ceases, the way to eliminate desire and pain is following the Eightfold Path (right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration). Theravada Buddhists (S&SE Asia) emphasize release through Eightfold Path; Mahayana Buddhists (E Asia, Vietnam) focus on enlightenment in the present life.