

Finding Spiritual Sovereignty

**Moving from
Exclusion to Inclusion
In My Faith**

An All Believers Network Symposium

5 September 2005

Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin
1727 Pali Highway
Honolulu, Hawaii

www.allbelievers.net

All Believers Network

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The All Believers Network, founded in 2003 in Honolulu, is made up of individuals from many faiths, East and West. We are brought together by the conviction that people of faith and goodwill can find and share spiritual and religious common ground. We are committed to human solidarity under the leadership of Divinity as we each understand Divinity – reinforcing the common ground among religions. Board members bring a wealth of wisdom from the following faiths: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hawaiian Spirituality, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Subud, Sufi, Unitarian Universalism, and Zoroastrianism. Followers of other faiths are invited to join us and broaden our perspective.

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Acknowledgements

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- ❖ To Honpa Hongwanji Betsuin Temple and Rev Chikai Yosemite, Bishop for today's venue.
- ❖ To Harris United Methodist Church for hosting the monthly meetings of All Believers Network
- ❖ To Punahou School and Rev Robert Ganung, former chaplain, for hosting the first two All Believers Network symposia

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All Believers Network: Mission

We proclaim

Our belief that all spiritually-based religions are from the One Eternal Being and this Message was brought to us by many inspired spiritual teachers, all of whom we respect equally. We aspire to create a unity of consciousness that all Spiritual Teachings build a loving relationship between us and the Being. In our quest to reach the Being, we do not compete with each other, but only with our own egos and biases.

We affirm

(1) Our intention to respect equally the founders of all spiritual paths, understand their messages, and enrich our lives accordingly. Each founder we have studied together so far also had something complementary and unique to offer. For example, from Zoroaster, we learn of the Spiritual Light; from Hinduism's unnamed founder, the Eternal Being's multiple manifestations; from Abraham, the Being's unity; from Mahavira, pathway for purification of the soul; from Moses, the Ten Commandments; from Shakyamuni Buddha, meditation; from Confucius, living with piety; from Lao Zi, living in harmony with nature; from Jesus, love and forgiveness; from Muhammad, universality of the Being's Message; from Guru Nanak, caste and gender equality; and from Baha'u'llah, equity and justice. (2) Our intention to seek out the founders of other spiritual paths not currently represented by our participants.

We aim

(1) To discover the common thread which runs through the teachings of all spiritual paths, including of indigenous cultures; (2) To respect religious reformers who came in more recent times to help guide humanity back onto the Path from which we got derailed by our own arrogance, ignorance, or closed-mindedness; (3) To understand the differing rituals various religions follow and marvel at this human ingenuity to try to reach the Being; (4) To rise above narrow-mindedness which divides us and embrace the principles which unite us. We cannot undo past injustices in the name of religion but can help prevent new ones; (5) To keep an open mind, visit houses of worship of various religions and try to feel the Divine Presence everywhere; (6) To enhance the experience of our respective path through this common exploration; and (7) To spread the message of unity of religious ideals with love and understanding.

Methods for accomplishing our goal

We try to (a) identify unifying themes, Spiritual principles, and laws in all religions to reinforce the concept of universality of the Eternal Message; (b) learn to apply them in our daily lives; (c) organize educational programs on these themes; (d) help develop curriculum for schools and institutions of higher learning; (e) experience other Paths leading to the same Source; and (f) encourage the formation of chapters around the world and network through the Internet.

Guidelines for respectful and constructive dialogue

In our sharing, we try to (a) neither convert nor ridicule any philosophy of life and/or spirituality; (b) discourage arguments or dogmatic statements; (c) "Keep our cool;" and (d) encourage feedback to help us improve our operational style to make this a more meaningful experience for us all.

All Believers Network: A Short History

Awakening

While researching for his manuscript *Beyond Veil and Holy War: Islamic Teachings and Muslim Practices with Biblical Comparisons*, Saleem read passages such as following in the Koran:

- ❖ To every people was sent a messenger (10:47)
- ❖ God sent messengers among all people with the command “Serve God and shun evil” (16:36)
- ❖ To those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of the Messengers, God will soon give their reward (4:152; 2:285)
- ❖ God did, afore time, send messenger before you (O Muhammad). Of them, there were some whose story God has related to you, and some whose story God has not related to you (40:78)

Finding the common theme of belief in the Eternal Being and righteous living in all spiritually-based religions, Saleem then prayed in Honolulu’s Hindu Temple – and felt the same sacred uplifting he feels in a mosque. He then shared with friends – Ather Dar, Jan Rumi, and Wasim Siddiqui (Muslims) and Inder Kapur (Hindu) – his emerging views on the universality of God’s message and the need to start an organization embracing this view. Getting a positive response from them over the next several meetings, Saleem applied for registration of the Believers All Network (Belnet), in 2003. The organizations name was subsequently changed to All Believers Network.

Public programs

With the enthusiastic support of Rev Robert Ganung, Punahou School’s former chaplain, All Believers Network’s first community program, *Finding Common Ground: An Evening of Spiritual Understanding* was held at the school’s chapel on May 13, 2003. It drew over 300 people. Faiths represented and speakers included:

- ❖ Baha’i (Lynne Ellen Hollinger)
- ❖ Buddhism (Irene Matsumoto)
- ❖ Christianity (George Scott and Gary Barbaree)
- ❖ Daoism (Lillian Chang)
- ❖ Hawaiian Spirituality (Wendy Renee)
- ❖ Hinduism (Raj Kumar)
- ❖ Islam (Saleem Ahmed)
- ❖ Sikhism (Manjit Reddick)
- ❖ Jainism (Harendra Panalal)
- ❖ Judaism (Gregg Kinkley)
- ❖ Zoroastrianism (Meheroo Jussawalla)

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Other similar community programs at the school and the University of Hawaii followed.

Rev Gary Barbaree, former senior pastor at Harris United Methodist Church offered the use of their facilities for monthly Belnet meetings – which we have been holding ever since.

Saleem also introduced All Believers Network at a symposium on *Countering Religiously-Motivated Violence*, which was held at the Council for a World Parliament of Religions, in Barcelona, Spain, in July 2004. It drew enthusiastic support.

Organization

Positive community response led to formal establishment and an application for status as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. (A listing of the members of the Board of Directors may be found on page two, above).

The future

We hope to continue holding monthly public meetings at Harris United Methodist Church. These are currently scheduled for the last Tuesday of every month, 7:00 to 8:30 PM. We also hope to initiate interfaith dialog via the Internet.

Interested persons who would like to speak at one of Belnet's monthly programs should contact Valerie Noor Karima at +1.808.383.2616.

Building upon the warm aloha Hawaii offers to all, we aspire to make Hawaii renowned as the Interfaith Harmony Capital of the World.

Table of Contents

HINDUISM	8
<i>Dharm P S Bhawuk, PhD</i>	
ZOROASTRIANISM.....	12
<i>Meheroo Jussawala, PhD</i>	
JUDAISM	15
<i>Gregg Kinkley, PhD, JD</i>	
BUDDHISM.....	20
<i>Rev Mari Sengoku</i>	
CHRISTIANITY	24
<i>Joan Chatfield, MM, PhD</i>	
ISLAM	27
<i>Saleem Ahmed, PhD and M Jan Rumi, MS</i>	
JAINISM.....	30
<i>Harendra Panalal, MSE, PE</i>	
SIKHISM	33
<i>Manjit Reddick, MEd</i>	
THE SUFI PATH	36
<i>Valerie Noor Karima, MA</i>	
THE BAHA'I FAITH.....	39
<i>Florence Kelley</i>	
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM	42
<i>Mike Young, MDiv</i>	
SUBUD	45
<i>Reynold Feldman, PhD</i>	
ANALYSIS AND INTROSPECTION	48
<i>Saleem Ahmed, PhD</i>	
SPEAKERS' BACKGROUND	52

HINDUISM

By Dharm P S Bhawuk, PhD

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Hinduism is a newer label for this religion, which traces back to the river Indus, i.e., it was the way of life of the people who lived near this river. It is not accredited to one person or a group of people. Among many stories of creation, one states that God created the creator of the universe, who in turn created everything we see, think, and feel.

Primary sacred texts

The *Vedas* are the oldest text, which are also called *apaurusheya*, or “not created by a person or human being.” Other texts include the *Upanishads*, the *Aranyakas*, the *Puranas* (The *Bhagavatam*, *Shiva Purana*, *Markendaya Purana*, etc.), and other popular scriptures like the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, which is a part of the *Mahabharat*, is one of the most popular texts used by Hindus in their daily life, much like the *Bible*. *Durga Shaptasati* and the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali are two other documents that the Hindus hold sacred.

Strengths of these texts

The benefits of yoga and *pranayama* have been upheld in many control group studies, which has led to their acceptance all over the world. The values of other texts have also been claimed by scholars from South Asia. Some Indologists have claimed that Hinduism laid the foundations of modern scientific search in cosmogony, astronomy, meteorology, and psychology (Iyengar, 1997). Vanucci (1994) examined the Vedic perspectives on ecology and its relevance to contemporary worldviews. She may be the first biologist to examine the relevance of the *Vedas* for the ecological perspective. Prasad (1995) attempted to show that mysticism is a corollary to scientific investigation, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi might be credited for starting the process of bridging science and spirituality together by subjecting Transcendental Meditation™ to the Western scientific methods of examination (Hagelin, 1998).

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

The caste system is deeply integrated in the Hindu worldview, and despite many countervailing statements and ideas, and the philosophical depth of the thoughts, most of the scriptures have something insulting to say about the *Shudras*, or the “untouchables,” who are the lowest caste of people in the caste system. Though the Hindus worship Goddesses, and the devotees of Goddess Durga are as many as that of any male God; the scriptures are written mostly for men, from the male perspective, and often refer to women in derogatory terms (e.g., Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that even women and *Shudras* can reach him through devotion). Fortunately, as stated in the *Manusmriti*, they also believe that Gods reside in the house where a woman is worshipped, and where a woman is not treated well nothing bears fruit and all efforts are wasted. Naturally, people quote the good verses to defend the religion, but in behavior there is much discrimination against women, people of lower caste including the untouchables, and others who are not Hindus.

Passages of exclusion

In the *Purusha Sutra*, which is a part of the *Rig Veda*, the *Shudras* are said to be the feet of God, whereas the Brahmins are said to be the head of God, the Kshatriyas the hands, and the Vaishyas the abdomen. Krishna, the incarnation of God, never says in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that he resides in the *Shudras* in any form when he describes how he represents the best in all forms of life. To be fair, we must note that Krishna does say that he takes care of all his devotees, which was exemplified in his many behaviors; and he is also noted to have washed the feet of all the guests at the *Rajsuya Yajna* performed by the Pandavas, thus setting the gold standard for humbleness.

Passages of inclusion

There are three types:

1. Outright assertion of inclusion. For example, Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that all who worship him go to him.
2. There are many verses in the scriptures that categorically state that Brahmins should seek insult, live a simple life, and pursue knowledge; Kshatriyas should protect the meek; everybody should try to lead a spiritual life, rather than a material life. These verses help dilute the rigidity inherent in the caste system.
3. A popular verse, often cited in daily conversations, states that for the liberal and an openhearted person, the world is their family (*udarcharitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam*). This clearly predates the notion of the global village that characterizes our contemporary world.

How Hinduism looks upon people converting into the religion

You are only Hindu by birth and the idea of converting other people to Hinduism does not exist. Hinduism does not have any provision for proselytizing. In the last century, there was a revival of converting Hindus back to Hinduism, if they had been forced to convert to Islam or Christianity. Having said that, anybody can practice yoga and meditation, or can become a *Vaishnava* or “devotee of Krishna,” like ISKCON members have become.

How Hinduism looks upon apostasy

For the most part, the scriptures are silent about it. Within Hinduism, there is tremendous flexibility to choose a formless God, or any one of the many forms of God.

How Hinduism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Marriage is supposed to be taken within the caste system, but men of an upper caste could marry women of a lower caste, and their children would be of the caste of the father, or a lower caste. There is no provision for inter-faith marriage, but because of the general flexibility in Hinduism, interfaith marriages are gaining more acceptance.

How Hinduism views the status of women

In spirit, women are to be respected, revered, and generally treated with respect. However, much discrimination exists against women in Hindu society. A Hindu woman moves into her husband’s household, which includes his parents, and thus is disadvantaged, compared to a man, from the start of the married life. Women do not have equal rights to parental property, and the dowry is all they receive from their parents. The laws have changed in the books, but

women still do not inherit parental property if they have brothers. In the past, women were not allowed to study, though we hear about wise women like Maitreyi, and brave women like Kaikeyi, in the scriptures. But they are few and far in between compared to the men. Manusmriti, the ultimate book for the Hindu code of behavior, states that a woman can leave her husband if he is unfaithful and abusive, but tolerating the abuses of husbands and suffering their atrocities are glorified in the many stories passed on from generation to generation. Thus, many women are still stuck in abusive relationships, and women generally get unfair treatment compared to men even in the contemporary Hindu society.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayer. A Hindu serious about his spiritual journey is likely to wake up early morning around 4AM and do her or his prayer, which could include meditation, chanting of mantras, reading verses from holy texts, making offerings to the deities, singing *bhajans* or holy songs, etc. Lay people often start their day with a short prayer after taking a shower, and before eating their breakfast. Some also pray in the evening; and fewer people pray in the afternoon also. Manu recommended chanting the *Gayatri Mantra* in the morning and in the evening, twice a day, and suggested that such a practice would wash the sins accrued during the night and the day.
- ❖ Holy days. There is no fixed day for going to temple, though there are many special days (full moon, *Ekadashi* or 11th day after no moon or full-moon, etc.) round the week, month, and year that the Hindus can use for special *pooja* or “service.” In Nepal and India many holy days are national holiday, and people celebrate them with much pomp and spirit. *Durga Pooja*, *Diwali*, *Ram Navami*, *Krishnashtami*, *Shivaratri*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, and so forth are some of the popular holy days, but the *Rathyatra* of Lord Jagannath in Orissa, or Lord Machhendranath in Kathmandu, are other equally important days.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. The Hindus do believe in heaven and hell, and it is believed that good karmas lead people to heaven and bad karmas lead them to hell. When people spend the fruits of their good or bad karma, then they return to earth. However, the goal of human life for the Hindus is to attain *Moksha* or liberation from the birth and death cycle. This can be done through various spiritual practices, and the *Bhagavad-Gita* provides a succinct summary of *Jnan* (“knowledge”), *Bhakti* (“devotion”), *Karma* (“work”), and other such paths that people can follow to escape the cycle of life and death.

How Hindus can move from exclusion to inclusion

This requires three complementary approaches:

1. Repeal the divisive laws and practices that do not allow people of other faiths to enter most of the important temples like the Pashupatinath, Lord Jagannath, and so forth.
2. Start accepting other religions as possible paths for leading spiritual lives. Ramakrishna Paramhansa, by practicing Islam, Christianity, and other religious paths, demonstrated in his life that all religions lead to God. We should emulate him.
3. Sing more often the prayer sung by Mahatma Gandhi in which he harmonized Hindus and Muslims (*Ishwar Allah tero nam, sab ko sanmati de bhagavan*). Develop more inclusive prayers like these so that people of different faith can come together.

Finding Spiritual Sovereignty:
Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion in My Faith

Suggested readings

Hagelin, J. *Manual for a Perfect Government*. (Maharishi University of Management Press, Fairfield, Iowa, 1998)

Iyengar, T R. *Hinduism and Scientific Quest*. (D K Printworld, New Delhi, India, 1997)

Prasad, M N. *The Kena Upanishad*. (Explanatory notes by the author). (D K Printworld, New Delhi, India, 1995)

Vanucci, M. *Ecological Readings in the Veda: Matter-Energy-Life*. (D K Printworld, New Delhi, India, 1994)

ZOROASTRIANISM

By Meheroo Jussawalla, PhD

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Zoroastrianism was founded about 3000 years ago. It was the court religion of three Persian Empires: the Achaemenians, the Parthians and the Sassanians. The followers stretched from Greece in the West to the Hindukush in the East, and covered Central Asia.

The founder was Spitaman Zarathushtra, usually known in English as Zoroaster after the Greek version of the name, Ζωροάστρης, who preached monotheism and worship of the one supreme Being – Ahura Mazda – or the “Giver of Light.” It was declared the state religion by Cyrus the Great (559 to 530 BCE).

Primary sacred texts

Zend Avesta and the *Gathas*, or 17 sacred hymns. The *Gathas* bear similarity to the Vedic hymns such as *Rig Veda* in Hinduism.

Strengths of these texts

They give a positive life-affirming message based on both faith and reason. They taught the simple principles of good thought, good word and good deed. It was not based on fear or obedience but on love and personal responsibility. Zoroaster taught that every person must think for one’s self and choose right from wrong. The texts promote respect for the environment and teach the mutual existence of all the elements namely, sun, fire, earth and water. The religion was based on the principles of clean living and science, and did not encourage idolatry.

Zoroastrian rituals are performed in the presence of the eternal flame, which is tended with sandalwood and frankincense. Fire is revered as a symbol of divinity and the inner truth of all human beings. The Magi, who heralded the birth of the infant Jesus, were Zoroastrians.

The Parsis of India are the followers of Zoroaster who fled to India in the 9th century CE, under the onslaught of Islam. Today they are marginalized and need to join the worldwide fellowship of all religions and become more visionary in their practices.

The Parsis and the Jews have similar challenges for survival in changing times. Whereas great nations have appeared on the world stage and gone, the *Torah* and *Avesta* survive on the lips of the faithful. Both religions are linked to ethnicity and both have demonstrated extraordinary achievement in business and professions. Both have survived persecution and both ascribe a special place to fire in their rituals. The Parsis are descendants of refugees from Islamic Iran even as the Jews are survivors of anti-Semitism. Early Christianity demonized Judaism which resulted, in modern times, in the Nazi Holocaust (1938-1945 CE).

A major difference between the Jews and the Parsis is that the Jews recognize the one God as the source of both good and evil; whereas, the Zoroastrians think of God as only the source of good with Ahriman as the spirit of evil, thereby developing the principle of cosmic dualism.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

The ambiguities of these texts lie in the fact that while the *Gathas* extol the glories of nature and spiritualize the universe, they do not explicitly state the rules, for example, by which women are

excluded from most rituals nor do they exemplify the role of the clergy or the priesthood, who function as governors of the lay members of the community. This has caused confusion and animosity between the clergy and the laity.

Passages of exclusion

Both Zoroastrianism and Judaism deplore asceticism and celibacy. Neither approach conversion with the missionary zeal of Christianity or Islam. But, there is nothing in the *Gathas* or in the *Avesta* that persons who intermarry should be excommunicated. Judaism, in the Second Temple period, was more receptive to converts than the Zoroastrians.

Passages of inclusion

The main passages of inclusion appear in the initiation ceremony, which is similar to the confirmation of the young in Christianity. This is called the *Navjote* or “New Beginning” in the life of the newcomer. She or he pledges to lead a life of good thought good word and good deed. In Iran, it is called *Sudreh Pushti*, during which a religious shirt is put on the young entrant and a cord woven out of 71 threads of wool is tied three times round the initiate’s waist. This affirmation ceremony is practiced in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and, now also, in Chicago, Toronto and London.

How Zoroastrianism looks upon people converting into the religion

There is no conversion in the religion. One has to be born into the religion and this is a major flaw. Children of male Parsis under intermarriage are allowed to be members of the church; but, women who marry outside their religious group may not retain church membership. This has led to the dwindling numbers of the group. Some conversions are now taking place in Vancouver and Toronto, where the clergy are more liberal minded than in Bombay. Winds of change are blowing slowly but surely over the Parsis as they move into the 21st century.

How Zoroastrianism looks upon apostasy

This is not a major problem because freedom of choice has always been part of the teaching of Zoroaster, as long as people outlaw evil in their lives and follow the right path.

How Zoroastrianism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Another practice of exclusion is that when a woman marries out of her religion her children are not permitted to become Zarthushtis but that is not so for the children of men. A woman is virtually excommunicated. Even that is now challenged in large cities like Toronto, Chicago and New York. In the past, this was applied to inheritance but, with the advent of the British legal system, it was decreed that both men and women had the same legal rights.

How Zoroastrianism views the status of women

Women are excluded from the *sanctum sanctorum* in Parsi temples not because there is anything in the texts to require this but because the clergy wanted to dominate the rituals and declared that women are unholy during certain periods and, therefore, should be kept out of the temple in case they defile it. Zoroaster himself had five daughters and one son, and did not exclude women from becoming priests; but, the clergy established precedents that were not in the texts or the teachings of the prophet. The worst exclusion is when a woman’s husband dies, she may not follow her husband’s cortege to the “Tower of Silence,” where only men are allowed. This again is a practice not required by the scriptures. In ancient Iran, there were

snow-covered mountains where the dead were laid and the birds or vultures devoured their flesh. But, in Bombay and other cities of India, vultures are trained to eat the flesh and the bones that are dropped into a pre-built tunnel which leads to the earth. This is a gruesome practice that is now challenged by the younger members of the community as well as by neighbors living in high rise buildings adjacent to these tunnels. Therefore, cremation through electric means has now taken its place, but still not among orthodox Parsis.

Prayers, holy days, concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers. *Avesta* and *Gathas*
- ❖ Holy days. The 21st of March – the vernal equinox – considered as the *Navroze* or “New Year.” Of the ten days before the New Year – when ancestors are worshipped – five are reserved for praying or singing the *Gathas*.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. The soul when it leaves the body meets the Angel of Justice or Mercy, who is known as Mithra, and presents his or her bag of good deeds and, depending on these deeds, gets directed to heaven. If not, it is directed to Ahriman, who takes the soul to hell.

How Zarthushtis can move from exclusion to inclusion

It becomes clear that even though Zoroastrians are from an ancient origin, they have adapted to the modern world. They flourish in India and, more recently, in Canada, Britain and America, as bankers, lawyers, doctors, artists musicians, teachers and other professionals. They have built the infrastructure of industrialism in India.

But, Zoroastrians are becoming marginalized because of the conservatism of the clergy, who should become more liberal in their interpretation of the scriptures and allow intermarriage, conversion and gender equality. This is the only way that Zarthushtis can move from exclusion to inclusion. The objections from the clergy need to be overcome.

JUDAISM

By Gregg Kinkley, PhD, JD

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Ironically, there is no single, accepted term in Hebrew for the English word “Judaism.” The term Judaism is a construct developed originally to refer to the religious practices of the Israelites, and is etymologically based on the Hebrew word *Yehudi* (whence the English word “Jew”) meaning “of or related to Judah.” Judah was the fourth son of Leah by Jacob, one of the three patriarchs of the Jewish people, and also was the name for the geographical area in and around Jerusalem, which became the center for the development of Judaism. Since religious practice among observant Jews was never considered separate from living itself, the Jews never developed a single, exclusive term for it.

The founding of Judaism as a monotheistic belief is generally attributed to Abraham, born Avram, who lived in “Ur of the Chaldees” (near the Shatt-al-‘Arab in modern day Iraq) some three thousand years ago. Traditionally, Abraham’s birth is put at around 1800 BCE.

The founder of Judaism as a coherent system of laws for the Jewish people, identified with one land, was Moses, who was born and raised in Egypt approximately 1300 BCE. Moses is traditionally identified as the one who received the tablets of the Law from God and led the House of Israel from Egypt into the “Promised Land” (identified roughly as modern day Israel).

Primary sacred texts

The sacred text par excellence of Judaism is clearly the *Torah* (“instruction”), and is considered the embodiment of the fundamental Laws of Judaism. The *Torah*, often referred to as the *Five Books of Moses*, comprises the first five books of the *Bible* of the Christian “Old Testament” (i.e., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Ezra is credited with redacting and setting the final form, order and wording of the text of the Torah, traditionally given to the Jews from God through Moses, in 444 BCE, some time after the return of the Israelites to the Holy Land from their captivity in Babylon.

With a slightly lesser degree of sanctity, *Nevi'im* (“Prophets”: Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) and *Ketuvim* (“Writings”: Psalms, Job, Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, etc.) supplement the Torah, and comprise all the rest of the books that more or less comprise the Christian “Old Testament.” This compilation of sacred texts is referred to in Judaism by the acronym Tanakh (for *Torah-Nevi'im-Ketuvim*).

Orthodoxy holds other texts developed after *Tanakh* to be based on the revelation of the Law to Moses at Sinai, and thus also sacred texts. These would include the *Talmud* (a compilation of the laws of Judaism as extracted from the *Torah* [*Mishnah*] with a running commentary and critical apparatus discussing and applying the laws in their context [*Gemara*], compiled and finished around 600 CE), the *Shulchan Arukh* (a codex of laws of daily and practical application for the Jew, compiled around the mid-1500’s CE), the *Mishneh Torah* (a more philosophical exegesis of Biblical law by Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides, written in the late 1300’s CE), and various other exegetical and homiletical texts developed by the sages of ancient memory (Midrash).

Strengths of these texts

The abiding strength of the *Torah* is that, rather than being only a dry collection of strict laws or a book of fairy tales with fantastic stories, its moral guidance is woven through a continuing story, giving context and currency to the laws which the *Torah* sets forth. The *Torah*, through relating the story of the family and generations of Abraham, shows how tragedy, cupidity, lust, favoritism, and degeneracy mark the generations that follow, and how love, respect, justice, charity, and reverence for God can reward the practitioner with a better current life.

The strength of the exegetical texts, such as the *Talmud* and the *Midrash*, is that they explain in more concrete terms and with more modern examples the deeper meanings that sometimes the *Torah* will only hint at. Seeing the *Torah* as the unchanging and fundamental law (like the United States Constitution), the *Talmud* interprets those principles to the present day and explains through an involved expository style with a finite number of exegetical principles how to draw more meaning, guidance, and currency from the corpus of existing laws.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

As hinted at by the existence of voluminous editions of exegetical works, the text of the *Torah* itself is often vague, designating practices with no explanation of how they should be done (e.g., “no work on Sabbath,” but what does “work” mean?); contradictory (e.g., two contradictory accounts of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis); and uneven (the redaction of the text has led modern scholars to assert a critical explanation of the *Torah* as the result of the editing and compilation of at least four separate texts, with different authorship, points of view and traditional bases). Ambiguity in the text serves historically as the springboard for the rabbis to promulgate their own interpretations.

Passages of exclusion

There are passages in the *Torah* in which God enjoins the Israelites to kill the native peoples of the Holy Land and its environs (the Jebusites, Aramites, Moabites, Amelikhites among them) because of their pagan practices, down to every man, woman, child and animal. Similarly, the great focus of Leviticus, and the consistent backdrop for much of the *Torah*, revolves around the cult of temple sacrifice, in which the daily dispatch of many animals, with blood being flung around and carcasses being burned as a “pleasing aroma to the Lord” is performed. It is understood that this sacrifice and these laws are for the Jewish people only, a people chosen by God to instruct “the nations” (*goyim* – “Gentiles” – or people other than the House of Israel) about the greatness of the God of Israel, that one day they may lead the Gentiles to the worship of the one true God of Israel.

Passages of inclusion

Inclusion as a concept and religious practice generally entered Judaism only after the final exile of the Jewish people from Judah (beginning in 70 CE and more or less continuing to this day), when after the final destruction of the Temple, Judaism as an exclusive, sacrificial franchise of the Temple priests became impossible. Judaism’s original exclusivity (only one people, only one Temple for only one kind of sacrifice) became its near extinction. It was only through a fundamental recasting of the faith by the rabbis in exile over the next thousand years that a new form, a more portable form, of Judaism evolved. This understanding of the need for more inclusivity is seen more often in the *siddurim* (“prayer books”) and other daily devotional texts, where prayer has been understood to be the replacement for the Temple sacrifice, thus opening

the door for religious commitment through prayer by other seekers, not just Jews who bring sacrificial animals to Jerusalem.

How Judaism looks upon people converting into the religion

Although much is made in the traditional literature about discouraging conversion, in modern times converts are welcomed, if sincere. It is true enough that converts are not sought out, but anyone who comes to the faith with a true conviction and a wish to follow the laws of Abraham will be accepted as one of the family, once the appropriate conversion rites have been administered.

The barrier to conversion lies in the need of the convert to learn about the texts and laws of Judaism so that in the mind of the convert it is clear just what he or she is getting into. This process generally takes years, as the convert will need to learn at least enough Hebrew to read the *Torah* and follow the prayer service, understand how to observe the basic rituals and holy days of the faith, and live a Jewish life, including keeping the Sabbath holy and following the dietary laws. It is also a family-based, community-based profession, so it is very difficult for just one family member to convert. This leads to issues of whether or not the convert is converting simply to get married or have the whole family be accepted as Jews for the sake of some other family member.

How Judaism looks upon followers leaving the religion and adopting some other religion

The simple and well-known adage is “once a Jew, always a Jew.” This means that if your mother is Jewish, or you convert to Judaism, you are a Jew, and no amount of apostasy can change that status: at worst, you can be a “bad Jew.” Naturally, leaving the fold is frowned upon, but it is recognized today, especially in America, as an all-too-common phenomenon. This perceived movement away from Judaism by young Jews is usually blamed on the divisive effects of intermarriage and the inflexibility of ancient laws construed too conservatively for modern American tastes and western culture.

How Judaism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Traditional Jewish law strictly forbids the Jew to marry a non-Jew. If a Jew falls in love with a non-Jew, the non-Jew must convert or marriage cannot be sanctioned. This inflexibility has led to the perception that many conversions were procured for marriage only, and hence were not *kosher* or true, valid and binding conversions. It is easy to understand how intermarriage can dissipate the religious practices of Judaism, as so many of the fundamental rites of the faith (*kashrut*, or the dietary laws; *shomer Shabbat* or keeping the Sabbath holy, etc.) are familial ventures which require quite a bit of preparation and ritual commitment. For instance, it would be virtually impossible for a Jewish man to keep *kosher* in a house occupied by even one non-Jew. Therefore, marrying a non-Jew is often seen as *ipso facto* making a decision to leave the faith.

How Judaism views the status of women

As in many faiths with a long history, the status of women in Judaism has evolved. There are passages in the *Torah* that suggest that women are not co-equal to men in terms of certain legal rights and religious obligations, but after the diaspora (the forced migration of the Jews from the Holy Land after invasions and destruction of the Temple), the culture of Judaism changed to adapt to the cultural milieu in which the Jewish community found itself. Clearly, gender-based religious duties (such as the laws of purity with regard to menstruation) were incumbent only on

women, while women were exempted from certain commandments deemed to be “time-based” (i.e., commandments that could only be performed at certain times). Women were instructed to pray in a different area than men, but the rationale was given that it was because the men would have difficulty keeping their prayerful intent – a weakness of men, not women. From a modern-day, egalitarian perspective, a mixed message on the status of women is received with regard to the orthodox home: while considered intrinsically “purer” than men, and therefore subject to fewer commandments intended to safeguard against the “evil inclination,” the structure of orthodox Jewish home life relegates the woman to staying at home, caring for children and assuming a relatively passive role with respect to the outer (extra-familial) world.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers. Jewish prayer is more of a statutory duty than a spiritually spontaneous outpouring. To be sure, the observant, prayerful Jew puts as much soul and emotion into prayer as the man in the foxhole, and indeed there are instances and occasions for extemporaneous prayer, but generally prayer is a rule-ordered, time-bound, set order of utterances. Jewish liturgy is thus enriched by the catalog of successive generations of rabbinical additions to the prayer service, each generation inspired in the knowledge that all of the House of Israel is reciting the same words of prayer in the same language at the same time: truly a communal feeling.
- ❖ Holy days. Holy days follow the Hebrew year, marked by a lunar-based calendar with seasonal corrections for the solar year (to make sure, for instance, that Passover always occurs during the Spring). The Holy days generally revolve around two main periods: *Rosh Hashana* (Jewish New Year), *Yom Kippur* (the “Day of Atonement”), and *Sukkot* in the Fall, and *Purim* (the Festival of Esther), Passover, and *Shavuot* (“Pentecost”) in the Spring. *Chanukah*, usually falling in December, is a relatively late observance and commemorates the resanctification of the Temple after its pillage by the Syrian Greeks. As with most ancient religious holidays, these holy days by and large started out as agrarian feasts, to which religious significance was added later.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. To be sure, the term *shamayim*, often translated as “heaven” or “heavens”, can be found in the *Torah*, as well as *Gehinnah* and *she’ol*, denoting some dark place under the earth. Orthodox, Torah-based Judaism does not recognize a “heaven and hell” in the sense usually meant by those terms, however. That is to say, “heaven” is not a place where the soul is presumed to go upon death, nor is “hell” a place that exists to punish the sinful. The rabbis have long recognized that we make our own heavens and hells on earth, but assigning a transcendent God to a single place, or a locus for a Satan with independent operating power would be considered apostasy.

Special features

Much has been made about the Jews being the “Chosen People.” Indeed, as part of our *Shabbat* evening service, we make a blessing over wine in part with the words “*asher bachar banu mi kol ha’amim*, (“We praise God”) who has chosen us from amongst all peoples.” This “choice” of the Jewish people by God is not the equivalent of winning a spiritual lottery: it is the vesting of the Jews with the responsibility to show all mankind how God’s laws are to be followed, to affirm God’s holiness and serve as an example. In this sense, the “chosenness” of the Jewish people is no more a conscious or prejudicial exclusion than being the older brother in a family: certain things are expected of us, and we can (and do) fail in that role.

How Jews can move from exclusion to inclusion

Finding Spiritual Sovereignty:
Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion in My Faith

In its current form and practice, Judaism is at once exclusive and inclusive. Although as in many other religions there is a great deal of variation in the practice of Judaism today (the spectrum between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism is overwhelmingly broad, with many in either camp not recognizing the Jewishness of the other), generally a Jew is expected to follow certain normative practices that would tend to exclude him or her from some of the mainstream of modern life. That is the story within Judaism.

Outside of Judaism, however, Jews freely recognize that there are many paths to God, and many can gain salvation, enlightenment, or become closer to God following their own path. The focus of modern Judaism is that the Jew must follow this one path to God; others need not, indeed cannot follow that path – but they can follow other paths. Those paths are not denigrated by the Jew, if they are monotheistic and not harmful to life. This is the essence of the ability for Jews to be inclusive in the present day.

BUDDHISM

Reverend Mari Sengoku

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Buddhism was founded by Shakyamuni Buddha in India around 550 BCE. *Buddha* means “the awakened one.” When someone realizes the true nature of the universe and attains awareness of its truth, that person becomes a Buddha. It is said there are 84,000 *dharma* gates. Therefore, depending upon which *sutra* or teaching you select as the guidance, you choose that way to be enlightened.

During the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there were four social ranks in India: *Brahman* (“priests”), *Kshatriya* (“aristocrats and soldiers”), *Vaishya* (“commoners,” such as farmers and merchants), and *Shudras* (“slaves”). Opposing this caste system, Shakyamuni Buddha said that the quality of a person is decided by his thought and deeds, and not where he was born. He preached that everybody has the potential to become Buddha.

Each nation has developed its unique Buddhist characteristic, since each nation’s culture and traditions are integrated with Buddhism.

Primary sacred texts

- ❖ *The Prajna* (“Wisdom”) *Sutras*. This is not actually a single title, but is the collective name for a group of *sutras* which teach that enlightenment is attained via the perfection of wisdom.
- ❖ *The Lotus Sutra*. This is the shortened name of *The Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law*. It is the *sutra* which stresses that anyone can become a Buddha.
- ❖ *The Triple Pure Land Sutras*. These include: *The Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra*, *The Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra*, and *The Amida Sutra*. These are the fundamental scriptures of Pure Land teachings, which say that one should have faith in Amida Buddha, who is in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss, and entrust everything to his mighty power which can save all sentient beings.
- ❖ *The Kegon* (“Garland”) *Sutra*. This is the *sutra* which is said to explicate the contents of the Buddha’s enlightenment. The *sutra* stresses that any living being is capable of attaining enlightenment.
- ❖ *The Mahavairocana* (“Great Sun”) *Sutra*. This is one of the two major scriptures of esoteric Buddhism. A development from *The Garland Sutra*, this *sutra* stresses the immense compassionate spirit of Mahavairocana, who embodies within himself the entire universe. Representations of the buddhas, *bodhisattvas* and gods that make up the universe are called *mandala*, and the *Matrix-store Realm Mandala*, in which everything is included within the Buddha, is based on this *sutra*.
- ❖ *The Diamond-Peak Sutra*. This is the second great *sutra* of esoteric Buddhism. This emphasizes that one can become a Buddha and it gave birth to the idea of becoming a Buddha with one’s present body. It became the basis for the *Diamond Realm Mandala*, which portrays everything as being included within each one of us.

Strengths of these texts

It is said Shakyamuni Buddha did not write any sutras, but around the beginning of the Christian era, *Mahayanist* believers who sought to return to the starting point of the teachings of the Buddha, wrote scriptures to reconstruct Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha is said to have preached his doctrine according to the mental and spiritual capacities of his listeners. Thus, there are a numerous doctrines within Buddhism and people can choose any scriptures according to their inclination.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

Since Shakyamuni Buddha gave sermons suited for different types of people and according to the abilities of his listeners, and since he introduced numerous means to become enlightened (depending upon individual capacities), some incoherence can be found within the scriptures.

Passages of exclusion

The Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra is one of the three fundamental scriptures of Pure Land Buddhism. It contains forty-eight vows of Amida Buddha to declare a saving of all sentient beings. However, in Buddha's primal vow (the "Eighteenth Vow," see below), it is stated that he excluded the target of salvation from those who commit the five terrible crimes (which are killing one's own father, killing one's own mother, killing a Buddhist saint, hurting the Buddha's body, and disturbing the harmony of the Buddhist community) and slander the Right Dharma.

Eighteenth Vow

I will not accept perfect enlightenment, unless when I attain Buddhahood, people of the ten directions who sincerely believe, rejoice, and wish to be born into my land and who meditate on me or recite my name up to ten times, are able to be born in my land. Only those who commit the five terrible crimes and slander the Right Dharma are excluded.

Passages of inclusion

Amida's primal vow does not discriminate between the young and old, and good and evil. True entrusting alone is essential. This is because the vow is directed to the being burdened with the weight of karmic evil and burning with the flames of blind passion (*Tannisho*, Chapter 1 by Shinran Shonin).

Buddha's compassion is equal toward all people, but it is expressed with special care toward those who, because of their ignorance, have heavier burdens of evil and suffering to bear (*Saddharmapundarika*, *Sutra* 5).

We do not kill, not because our thoughts are good but because we do not have the *karma* to kill even a single person. Yet, even though we do not want to injure anyone, we may be led to kill a hundred or a thousand people (Shinran Shonin).

The gist of this statement is that when we think good thoughts, we think we are good; and when we think evil thoughts, we think we are evil, not realizing fully that it is the inconceivable power of the vow that makes our salvation possible.

Karmic evil committed because of taking pride in the vow is also an effect of past *karma*. Thus, leave everything good and evil to the working of *karma* and, single-heartedly, entrust yourself to the primal vow (*Tannisho*, Chapter 13).

Thus, although it is declared that those who commit the five terrible crimes and slander the Right Dharma are excluded, the Buddha still saves them. And actually, those people who make terrible crimes are the very target of salvation for the Amida Buddha, as the following story in The Meditation Sutra illustrates:

A prince named Ajatasatru killed his father and almost killed his mother. However, he was saved by compassion of Buddha and later became a great king who propagated Buddhism. Also, even though people does not take Amida's vows, they are always embraced by the wish, compassion and wisdom of Amida Buddha regardless who they are.

How does Buddhism looks upon converting, apostasy, inter-marriage

Everyone is free to decide whether to become a Buddhist. Nobody – not even Buddha – can force one's choice. Buddhism teaches that there is no distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist. *Dharma* exists everywhere and for everybody regardless faiths, age, sex, occupation, and so forth. Buddhist teachings accept and respect that differences exist among people. In that sense, there is no conflict in terms of inter-marriage. Actually, there are many inter-marriage couples in Buddhist Sangha. And, they enjoy beauty of different religions and traditions.

How Buddhism views the status of women

Shakyamuni Buddha preached about equality of all beings (men and women, as well as all other creatures, such as animals, insect, plants, etc). However, in the *Sangha* of Shakyamuni Buddha, the rules for nuns are both more numerous and stricter than those for monks, and places nuns in a position of clear subordination to monks. The rules of nun state that a woman who has been a nun for one hundred years must pay respect to a man who was ordained as a monk for one day.

It was believed that to become a holy entity, a woman has to first perform good acts and be reborn as a man. While there may have been a form of sexual discrimination in history of Buddhist Sangha, Shinran (1173-1263 CE), the founder of Jodo Shinshu, was the first monk in Japan who married to show equality of men and women to become a Buddha. In later scriptures (such as *The Lotus Sutra*), there are stories of women who were able to become buddhas before a succession of male bodhisattvas and priests. Thus, there is an historical restitution even in the treatment of women.

How Buddhists can move from exclusion to inclusion

To begin with, Buddhist teaching is inclusive. Everybody and every being has Buddha nature and potential to be enlightened. One always tends to cling to a word, such as "Buddhist." However, Buddhism does not differentiate between Buddhist and non-Buddhist. *Dharma* is for everybody whether you are Buddhist, Christian, Moslem, Jewish, or Hindu, young or old, rich or poor, man or woman, educated or non-educated. This is applicable not only for human beings but also for all beings such as dogs, cats, birds, fish, insects, and trees.

The truth of the universe is one. However, during different time periods, social context and politics would be the factors that give people different perspectives of Buddhist teaching. Also, we always hear of cult groups in society who claim to be Buddhists but their actions are completely different from Buddha's teaching. For example, the Aum – that spread poisonous sarin gas in the subway system in Tokyo, Japan – had stated they were a Buddhist organization

which strictly upheld the teachings of Buddha. Therefore, each one of us should always go back to the words of Shakyamuni Buddha that left as his final words:

Make the self your light, make the Law your light, and reflect yourselves on the Buddha's teaching that unchangeable law regardless of time, nation and effect of political powers.

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CHRISTIANITY

By Joan Chatfield, MM, PhD

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

The founding of Christianity was accomplished by *Y'shua*, "Yhwh saves", (*Jeshua*), son of Miriam, or "Jesus," as the name was transliterated from the Greek *Iesous*, to be written in its Latin form and become the word used through the centuries. The word *Christ* is a designation of status, translated as "the anointed one," a word which would be heard by Jews as *messiah*, "the one who brings salvation." This Jesus – the Christ – was predicted in the Hebrew scriptures; and, when accounts of his origins were recorded the Christian gospels of Matthew and Luke, they included citations from Deuteronomy 18:20, Sirach 39:2b and Isaiah 49:23 and 60:5seq. These prophecies were then re-affirmed in the early Christian community writings of Paul (1 Corinthians 10:11, 15:3-4 and Romans 15:4). Thus Jesus, founder of Christianity, was announced to the world by descriptions surrounding his birth and was affirmed by the early believers as the one who came to fulfill such promises. The chronological date of his physical appearance was documented in a calendar which later marked *Anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord," (abbreviated AD in English) and the previous era was *Ante Christum Natum*, Latin for "before the birth of Christ," which – in English – is noted as BC or "Before Christ." These classifications are now reworked to BCE and CE to document "Before the Common Era" and the "Common Era," to be inclusive yet still to designate the splice of history which the birth of Jesus the Christ attests.

Primary sacred texts

The canon of the Christian scriptures include the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the fifth 'gospel' named the Acts of the Apostles, the letters to the early communities who followed Jesus, and the last writing of John the Evangelist, which is called the *Apocalypse*, or "Revelations."

Strengths of these texts

The books of the Christian scriptures are a library of texts. The "Synoptic Gospels" (those of Matthew, Mark and Luke) are considered the narrative texts with all of the variations crucial to authors and examined by scholars through each subsequent century. They were not historical writings although literalists like to reconstruct them in that form. The Gospel of John and the Apocalypse were theological writings: the first descriptive; the second poetic and mystical. The letters were written as instructive communiqués and need to be read with an understanding of those to whom they were addressed. The writings of the Christian scriptures ranged from probably the years 45-50 CE through 200 CE. By the year 325 CE, the leaders of the Christian community established a "canon," or a list of which writings would be included in the final collection. That became the official Christian scriptures referred to as the New Testament. That decision made all of the other comparable writings "non-canonical" or *apocryphal*. Among these non-canonical books, for example, was the popular *Gospel of Thomas* that, although definitely written during the same time frame as the others, was not included in the canon. The *Dead Sea Scrolls*, scriptural fragments unearthed in the 1940s, opened up new avenues of exegetical analysis for the scholars and the understanding of these texts continues to grow. Never will all

the work be completed within the study of either the Hebrew or Christian scriptures because they were written for a faith community, which remains their greatest strength.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

The greatest strength becomes the greatest short coming! Because of the plethora of sacred writers, the diversity of the recipients and the believed role of inspiration which members of the Hebrew and Christian communities honor for their texts, there is no end to the amount of confusion which can occur with varied interpretations. The primary examples can be grouped into the following:

- ❖ Lifting out one passage and making it confront another
- ❖ Using one portion to prove a point without recognizing its context
- ❖ Overlooking the literary form of the original text and giving that text a literal meaning which was not intended in the original writing
- ❖ Decrying a contemporary position as untenable because it was not written about with specificity in the scripture

Passages of Exclusion

The Internet lists several pages of citations from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures which appear as totally exclusionary. The only disclaimer can be that the original intent was that these words were to be understood by members of the believing community and in that context they had powers of discipline and rectitude. For example, "Only those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved" is often used to proclaim the absolute imperative of the *evangelical dictum*. In reality, the text for the believer can hold the exclusion if one has been given the gift of faith and then repudiates it. When the text is taken outside the believing community, however, it has a completely different tone and is thus mistakenly represented as exclusionary.

How Christianity looks at people converting into the religion

The category of "convert" is well used within Christianity but in varying degrees across the broad spectrum of the centuries. The early Christian community was a defined fellowship which welcomed members who accepted the basic tenets, "One Faith, One Lord, One Baptism." It became more convoluted after Constantine declared Christianity as the "official religion" of the Roman Empire (313 CE) and, as a result, members were not included by a belief statement but a national or familial reality. Consequently, infant baptism, within a family became the pattern, instead of the adult baptism with each person making her or his own profession of faith.

How Christianity looks on believers leaving the religion and following some other religion

Personally, I consider it sad when one leaves one's religious family but usually bear in mind that perhaps the individual has not truly understood or responded to the full richness of that tradition. Unfortunately, some leave because of having been hurt by the religious expressions or actions of others including the leadership. It seems clear that there is such a thing as "church abuse," which is not talked about and not the domain of any one group; yet, it is certainly something needing to be addressed.

How Christianity looks on persons marrying those of another faith

The diversity of the world's population and the dispersion of the religious community has made changes for Christianity. Although preference might still be given to those of similar traditions, the Roman Catholic Church, for example, has developed a program of instruction for the non-Catholic partner and the expectations of the education of the children has been relaxed since its Second Council of the Vatican (1962-1965 CE).

How does Christianity view the role of women?

History documents wonderful stories of valiant and accomplished women but the Christian Church – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical – hardly has a stellar record in this regard. To quote my grandmother, "It's a man's world and a woman's heaven, and the men who don't mind that will enjoy being there with us."

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers. Christian prayer has its first lesson from its founder: "When you pray, pray thus ... Our Father," a prayer that comes down through the twenty centuries in slight variations of translations but preeminently with the same lesson. Accounts of praise, petition, gratitude and mystical prayer abound with individuals learning how best to speak with the God of their heart and how best to pray in community during rituals and celebrations.
- ❖ Holy days. Holy days exist in measures throughout the calendar year, more prominent and celebrated in some Christian families than others. The seasons of preparation for the great feasts – Advent for Christmas and Lent for Easter – reinforce the concept of "getting ready for" the celebrations.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. Heaven and hell have remained as theological realities within Christianity but have undergone a theological revamping as the dimensions of spirituality have been advanced. The reward and the punishment exist in the Christian religion as, they do within the interactions of the human community, but not in the former explanations of my own childhood which had more of an emphasis on fear and loathing. Since the renewal within Christianity that began in the 1960s, the concepts of the mercy of a loving God – as father and friend – is more prevalent.

How Christians can move from exclusion to inclusion

Christians have a history of exclusion, even within the faith tradition itself for many of the reasons already presented. The opportunity for the followers of Christ to move to be inclusionary is truly to follow Jesus' own example of welcoming those who were not among the Hebrews: the Gentiles and persons of who were looked upon as the outcasts of society. Following the wisdom of Saint Francis of Assisi, Christians need to:

Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words.

ISLAM

By Saleem Ahmed, PhD and M Jan Rumi, MS

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Islam means “surrender to God.” The religion was founded centuries ago in Arabia by Abraham, and the first house of worship for God, *Ka’aba* – the center of the annual Muslim pilgrimage, *Haj* – was erected by Abraham and Ishmael at Mecca.

The religion was completed by Muhammad, who was the last in a long line of prophets. While he is called “Seal of Prophets,” God will continue to send messengers periodically to redirect humanity on the “right” path. All prophets and messengers essentially carried the same message: Believe in One God and lead a righteous life.

Primary sacred texts

There are two:

1. *Koran*. The *Koran* is a compilation of God’s guidance to Muhammad, revealed over 23 years, starting in 610 C.E., when Muhammad was 40. He received his last guidance shortly before he died at age 63. The *Koran* was compiled in its present form about 12-16 years after Muhammad died.
2. *Hadeeth*. The *Hadeeth* is a collection of about 14,000 purported sayings and actions of Muhammad, compiled by about six Muslim scholars from Central Asia about 250 years after Muhammad died. For this task, they spent several years traveling through the Muslim world, interviewing people whose ascendants, eight-to-ten generations earlier, had been Muhammad’s companions.

A subset of *Hadeeth* is called *Shariah*. These are a set of rules governing Muslim life, enunciated by three-to-four religious scholars, and compiled about 100 years before hadeeth compilation.

Strengths of these texts

Koran.

1. It is in beautiful, poetic, and classic Arabic. That it was revealed through the lips of an illiterate Muhammad, is considered miraculous.
2. It has remain unchanged from the time of its compilation. However, for the modern analytical minds, the *Koran*’s greatest miracle is that it affirmed, 1,400 years ago, many natural laws, only “discovered” recently by science. These include:
 - a. The “Big Bang” theory of creation
 - b. The “floating” of all heavenly bodies in space in fixed orbits
 - c. The continuing expansion of the universe
 - d. The aquatic beginning of life
3. The *Koran* also asserts that the Day of Judgment will occur when all heavenly bodies will contract into a single mass. Then, God will begin another cycle of expansion and contraction.

Shariah and *Hadeeth*. These clarify many Koranic injunctions. For example, while the *Koran* asks Muslims to pray five times a day, the rituals for each prayer are explained in *Hadeeth*.

Shortcomings of these texts

Koran. Since the book is arranged neither chronologically nor by subject, it is often difficult to determine sequencing of revelations and their contextual background. But, this knowledge is needed in guiding us today as the guidance Muhammad received changed from being “reactive and violence-inciting” in earlier years when he lived as fugitive, to being “pro-active and peace-inspiring” in later years. For example, God’s advice to Muhammad in early years was “do not trust Jews, Christians, and pagans.” Later, this was changed and permitted Muslims to eat and inter-marry with Jews and Christians (now called “People of the Book”). Yet both these apparently “contradictory” injunctions are listed not only in the same Koranic chapter (or *surah*), but in reverse chronological order.

Shariah and *Hadeeth*. The problem here is magnified as many *hadeeth* lack a contextual reference; also, many questionable *hadeeth* may have been fabricated during the more than 200 years between the Prophet’s death and the time they were actually compiled. Additionally, *Shariah*, considered the backbone of Islamic law, was put together about 100 years before the *Hadeeth* compilation. Hence, it is possibly based on incomplete information.

Passages of exclusion

These are of three types:

1. Those affirming only believers will go to Paradise
2. “Precautionary” ones, such as “do not trust Jews and Christians”
3. Violence-inciting ones, such as “Fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them”

Passages of inclusion

These are also of three types:

1. Outright inclusion. The *Koran* affirms “the name of God is commemorated in churches, synagogues, mosques, and monasteries”; and also, “all those who believe in God and do righteous deeds – be they Jews, Christians, Muslims, or Sabeans – will be rewarded.”
2. Replacing earlier passages with inclusionary ones, such as permitting Muslims to eat and inter-marry with Jews and Christians.
3. Inclusion by extrapolation. Several Koranic verses affirm that “God sent prophets to all nations of the world, all of whom are to be respected equally, even those who are not named.” And, one *hadeeth* affirms that God sent 124,000 prophets the world over.

How Islam looks upon people converting into the religion

The *Koran* states: “Invite others to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching.” Hence Muslims are encouraged to convert people of all faiths to Islam.

How Islam looks upon apostasy

The *Koran* declares: “Let there be no compulsion in religion,” but adds those who leave the religion have been instigated “by the Evil One.”

How Islam looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

The *Koran* affirms: "Lawful unto you in marriage are not only chaste women who are believers, but also chaste women among the People of the Book." Interpreted narrowly, it means Muslim men can marry Jewish and Christian women – but not vice versa. Interpreted broadly, Muslim women can also marry among "People of the Book." And, as interpreted in this article, people of all spiritually-based religions are "People of the Book."

How Islam views the status of women

The *Koran* emphasizes equality of sexes and ensures that the interest of women – including of divorcees, orphans, and widows – are safeguarded. It also clarifies that men and women have complementary and essential roles of equal importance.

How Muslims can move from exclusion to inclusion

- ❖ Muslims must follow Koranic affirmation that name of God is commemorated in churches, synagogues, mosques, and monasteries and that righteous among all spiritually-based religions will also be rewarded by God.
- ❖ Muslims should recognize that earlier Koranic verses promoting violence were replaced by later guidance promoting peace. In fact permission to befriend and inter-marry with "People of the Book" was the last guidance Muhammad received. He died shortly thereafter.
- ❖ Since God sent messengers to all nations of the world – all to be respected equally – Muslims must investigate who could be among God's unnamed prophets. We include: (1) the unnamed Hindu Rishi; (2) Mahavira and earlier Jain messengers; (3) Zoroaster; (4) Shakyamuni Buddha; (5) Confucius; and (6) Lao Zi. We can also include recent reformers such as (7) Guru Nanak; (8) Baha'ullah; and (9) Mirza Ahmed. Muslims must also seek out and honor unnamed holy people among Hawaiians, Polynesians, and indigenous people the world over.

Summary

Clerics often try to draw – and retain – adherents by emphasizing exclusionary passages, at the expense of inclusionary passages. To overcome this mindset, objective thinking and information dissemination are urgently needed. For this, Muslims must understand the chronological sequencing of the *Koran* and *Hadeeth*, and the context in which various events took place.

JAINISM

By Harendra Panalal, MSE, PE

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

The traditional Jain greeting is, “*Jai Jinendra*”, which means “victory to *Jinas*.” The word *Jain* or *Jaina* is derived from the word *Jina*, which means “conqueror.” *Jina* is a conqueror of love and hate, pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion, and one who has freed his soul of all *karmas* (or “deeds”). The origin of Jainism dates back to 3000 BCE. It may be older than Hinduism because there is a mention of our first *tirthankara* (“prophet”) Rishabhdev in *Rig Veda*, one of the most ancient Hindu holy scriptures. There are approximately fifteen million Jains in the world, most of them in India.

There were twenty four great sages, whom we call *tirthankaras*, the last of which was Mahavira who lived in the sixth century BCE, and was a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Primary sacred text(s)

Like all great religions, Jains also have their holy books. It is interesting to know that up until 500 BCE, about 1000 years after Mahavira’s nirvana, all knowledge about Jainism was transferred orally, because Jainism discourages possessions, even holy scriptures. At that time, our learned *acharyas* or monks decided to preserve this ancient knowledge in writing, for posterity. Jain holy scriptures are called *sutras* and *agams*, which were written in Prakrit language, which is not in use these days. There is no unanimity among Jains as to whether there are 33, 59 or 102 such *agams*.

Strengths of these texts

The basic principles of Jainism are probably not much different from those of other great religions. They include:

- ❖ *Ahimsa*, reverence for living beings, no matter how small
- ❖ *Satya*, to speak truth
- ❖ *Asteya*, not to steal
- ❖ *Brahmacharya*, not to commit adultery
- ❖ *Aparigraha*, to limit one’s possessions

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

Due to Jainism’s basic tenet of non-violence, Jains would not like to practice certain trades like farming. They have to depend on Hindus to do farming for them. They cannot join even a police force, let alone armed forces. Actually, the Jain religion says that the degree of sin is the same whether one does it, aids or abets someone to do it or thinks about it.

Passages of exclusion

Surprisingly, in spite of all rituals, Jainism shows reverence to all living beings.

Passages of inclusion

Any person can practice Jainism or leave it. Anyone who lives a righteous life can attain nirvana, and end one's cycles of birth and death. Jains have hundreds of rules that one is expected to follow.

How Jainism looks upon people converting into the religion

Since Jainism is an all inclusive religion, it welcomes anyone to join it.

How Jainism looks upon apostasy

Jainism has no bars against people leaving it and embracing another faith.

How Jainism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Jainism has no bars against people marrying other faiths. The spouse may follow his or her own religion, or both.

How Jainism views the status of women

Although men and women have an equal status in religion, in practice, it is a male dominated society. Similar to Hindus, males had rights to inherited property and women were given dowries. A few years ago, laws of the country (i.e., India) have been changed, giving equal rights to both.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers. Jains have their fundamental prayer which is called *Namokar Mantra*. It means that they worship all great souls, such as monks, conquerors, learned men etc. and try to emulate them. Please note that there is no mention of God or any *tirthankaras*.
- ❖ Holy days. Jains' most holy event is *Paryushana*, which lasts eight-to-ten days and involves fasting up to eight days. It literally means monks at rest, which happens during India's monsoon season. During this period, they recite from their holy scriptures called *sutras*. Last day of *Paryushana* is called *Samvatsari*, which is concluded by a three hour prayer called *pratikraman*. After this prayer, they ask for forgiveness from all living creatures by saying "*Micchami ducadam*" to friends, relatives, etc.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. The issue of heaven and hell is quite complex among Jains. There are sixteen levels of heaven, the highest of which is *moksha* where liberated souls, who have attained *nirvana*, reside forever. The middle world is where plants, animals and humans reside. There are seven levels of hell. Souls in heaven and hell get re-incarnated in the middle world again.

Special features

Jain Literature. These days, no discussion in religion can be complete without exposing the audience to the immense literature available on the internet which is accessible to most people. Listed below are a few websites for all to share the inner beauty of Jain religion. Most Jainism values are shared by all religions.

www.jaina.org

www.jainworld.com

Finding Spiritual Sovereignty:
Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion in My Faith

www.yale.edu/yja

www.umich.edu/-umjains

www.cs.colostate.edu/-malaiya/jainclip.html

How Jains can move from exclusion to inclusion

Since Jainism is an all inclusive religion, anyone following those principles, can attain *nirvana*.

Summary

In conclusion, let us remember Dr. Einstein who said,

My religion consists of humble admiration of the illimitable spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our fragile and feeble mind.

SIKHISM

By Manjit Reddick, MEd

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Guru Nanak (1469-1538 CE) started Sikhism as a reform movement in the Punjab area of India during the 15th century CE. It became a formalized religion in 1699 CE, with the institution of baptism and the introduction of the five "Ks" by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. The five Ks:

- ❖ *Kesh*, or unshorn hair and sign of distinction
- ❖ *Kanga*, a wooden comb to keep the hair clean and tidy
- ❖ *Kara*, which is a steel bracelet worn on the dominant wrist as a reminder of endless entity
- ❖ *Kacha*, the wearing of kneelength briefs as a sign of modesty
- ❖ *Kirpan*, which is a saber to be used in the cause of justice.

These are to be worn by every baptized Sikh.

Primary sacred texts

The *Guru Granth Sahib*, (GGS) includes writings by six gurus during their lifetimes and 31 various saints of different castes and beliefs. The completed text was instituted as the sacred scripture in 1604 CE in Amritsar (Punjab). Sikhs look to the scripture for guidance, inspiration and spiritual teaching.

Strengths of these texts

The strength of the GGS lies in the way it is structured and written. All contributors to the GGS focused on the love of One God. The emphasis is on the message and not the individual. The fact that the various saints were from different castes but still had works included in the GGS, is a manifestation of the message of equality and oneness of humanity that is the basic tenet of Sikhism. Moreover, the Gurus themselves took no credit for their contributions to the GGS. Every passage is attributed to *Nanak* regardless of which of the ten Gurus it was written by. The use of the word *Nanak* is meant to signify any human being that is praying with sincerity and is seeking the Truth. The fact that the Gurus chose to write the passages in such a way exemplifies the important tenet of humility in Sikhism.

Furthermore, the GGS is structured in a unique form which adds to its strengths. The very beginning offers a synopsis of God:

There is One God; True is His Name; He is all-giving; fearless; merciful; never ending; without physical life; was never born; will never die.

The GGS then poses the question of how we as human beings are to break away from that which weighs our minds down and achieve oneness with God while still fully participating in a healthy lifestyle. The next 1428 pages are full of passages that discuss this question. It speaks only of that which is established, such as nature, human behavior, and societal norms and includes the perspectives of the devotees. There are no "to do" lists in the GGS. The greatest

strength lies in the fact that its message transcends time and culture. As our greeting says, "*Sat Sri Akaal*" – "Truth is eternal. "

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

Since the GGS is written poetically and about nature, it is sometimes difficult to glean the main message of certain passages without discussion, contemplation, and contextual understanding. Secondly, the text, although written in the Gurmukhi script, containing several languages, including Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian, Marathi, Bengali, Bhojpuri as well as regional dialects. The student of the GGS must be self-motivated to understand the message of some of the passages clearly. It can be challenging to decipher language, figurative poetic stance, context, and how each contributes to the true meaning of a given passage.

There are also ambiguities regarding *karma* ("destiny") and free will.

Passages of exclusion

There are no passages of exclusion in the scriptures. The rituals and some ancient practices are questioned and challenged.

Passages of inclusion

The GGS includes writings of people of different faiths, castes and ages. There are also many positive references to scriptures and writings of other religions

How Sikhism looks upon people converting into the religion

There is no proselytizing and clergy in the Sikh religion. One may want to convert because of one's free will and is accepted openly. Sikhs are not baptized at birth because in Sikhism, being devoted to the religion and way of life, is a conscious choice. When an individual feels inspired and decides to follow the Sikh way of life and hold the GGS as her or his spiritual guide, that individual voluntarily asks to be baptized.

How Sikhism looks upon followers leaving the religion and adopting some other religion

Again, an individual's free will determines the choice. According to Guru Nanak, the main purpose is to recognize and get closer to the ultimate reality. Sikhism preaches that all religions, if practiced with sincerity and truth, can lead to oneness with God. If a person resonates with a different method of achieving that oneness with sincerity and truth, it is not condemned.

How Sikhism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

In Sikhism, the union between two people is likened to that of one of a devotee with God. Such a union can only occur between two people who have the same mission in life. If two people spiritually resonate with each other and seek to follow truth, then they are by basic definition of Sikhism, capable of such a union.

The culture out of which Sikhism is born, however, does not look favorably upon people marrying out of the faith.

How Sikhism views the status of women

There are several passages in the GGS that talk about the greatness of women and their equality to men. In one of Guru Nanak's famous hymns, he describes a woman as a mother,

sister, friend, and a life long companion in her different roles. It says, "How can you call woman inferior, when it is she who gives birth to kings and rulers?" In Sikh prayers, God is both the father and the mother.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers and holy days. No special place, time or day is given importance since God is omnipresent, one can pray anytime, anywhere.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. Heaven and hell are not places but states of mind during the human journey on this earth. One's deeds lead one to experience the different states of mind through life.

Special features

One of Guru Nanak's hymns emphasizes the equality of all humans as follows:

God first created light and then by his omnipotence, made all the mortals. From one light has arisen the entire universe, then who is good and who is bad, stay not in illusion: the Creator is in the creation and in the creation abides the Creator. He is fully filling places. Clay is the same but the Creator has shaped it in innumerable forms. There is no defect in the clay vessel nor is there any fault in the potter, the only True Lord is amidst all and it is in His will that everything is done. Whoever realizes the Lord's will, he alone is privileged to be called human.

How Sikhs can move from exclusion to inclusion

Sikhism, without proselytizing is open to all who want to embrace it and follow its tenets, regardless of any race, color, creed or social status.

Summary

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith based on the following pragmatic concepts:

- ❖ *NAAM JAPO* – meditate on the Name
- ❖ *KIRAT KARO* – earn livelihood by one's honest labor. Religion is not to be lived in isolation away from the world but in the daily life. All of us are parts of society and must work for its betterment
- ❖ *WUND CHHAKO* – share earnings with other fellow beings. Social reform has been a strong point in Sikhism.

References

www.sikhnet.com

www.srigranth.org

www.wikipedia.com

THE SUFI PATH

By Valerie Noor Karima, MA

From a prayer by Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan

*Most Merciful and Compassionate God, give us Thy great Goodness,
Teach us Thy loving Forgiveness,
Raise us above the distinctions and differences which divide,
Send us the Peace of Thy Divine Spirit, and unite us all in Thy Perfect Being.*

Name and founder

According to Postneshin Jelaluddin Loras of the Mevlevi Sufis, religions have laws that make the frame for human goodness. The mystics of all religions look to “the root of the root” of religion. Hazrat Inayat Khan encourages us to look towards “what transpires behind what appears.”

Sufism arose as the mysticism of Islam. The time of the first prophet – Adam – brought the message of God, and mysticism began. Ali, the nephew of the Prophet Muhammad, is a major mystical figure in Islam, and important to Sufis. After the life of Muhammad, there were people who would cluster together for conversation about the inner life. In time, comprehensive spiritual disciplines coalesced through masterful Sufi teachers, with the intention of guiding seekers on the arduous path of becoming a Sufi *dervish*. Although it is difficult to pinpoint its origin, Sufism is said to have begun 1200 years ago in Baghdad.

A *dervish* is one who has reached the station of ripeness as a human being. Aspirants, like myself, call each other *dervish* because of our high hopes for each other.

In the words of Sufi teacher Bawa Muhaiyaddeen:

Sufi is a clear, pure essence that has filtered and settled slowly, deep within. It is a state of stillness when the resplendence of the pure clarity of wisdom has sunk down and settled completely within its ultimate completeness and perfection.

Beliefs

Sufis believe in the beauty and the glory of God. Sufis believe in the mercy and compassion of God. They believe that the major faith traditions share the same truth, and the current which connects the prophets and teachers, who established these traditions comes from one source.

Sufis believe that God can be found in the human heart, that there is a polish for every thing in this world: the polish for the mirror of the heart is remembrance of God.

The saints interpret the teachings of religions and live by them. They love and are loved by God, and so are exemplars for those on the path.

Descriptions from 11th century CE Sufi teachers:

- ❖ “Sufism means kneeling at the door of the Beloved, even if He turns you away.”
- ❖ “Sufism is entry into exemplary behavior and departure from unworthy behavior.”
- ❖ “Sufism is a blazing lightning bolt.”

- ❖ “The sign of the sincere Sufi is that he feels poor when he has wealth, is humble even when he has power, and is hidden when he has fame.”

Sacred texts

Many Sufis highly regard four scriptures: the *Torah*, the *Psalms of David*, the *Bible*, and the *Koran*.

Strengths and shortcomings of sacred texts

The scriptures contain a wealth of teachings for our benefit, yet it can be challenging to make good use of them to help us to come to realize in fullness our relationship to God. Differences in cultural and historical understanding, and our current low level of spiritual realization hamper us. Yet, for those who have set their sights on God-realization, every hint that can be gleaned is a priceless gift that can help us on our way. Many books have been written by Sufi teachers to help us benefit from scripture, e.g., *The Masnavi* of Jalaluddin Rumi and *The Conference of the Birds* by Fariduddin Attar. But, the Sufi understands that, on this path, more is needed than study of books: this is a path of direct experience, and for this we must learn to read God's inscription written in the human heart. It is our responsibility to explore the knowledge in this world, and yet we must look within ourselves to begin on this path in actuality.

The French Sufi, Pierre Eliot, said:

In the spiritual world, there ... are not truths which can be expressed in linguistic formulae. The real spiritual, sacred books of mankind, always find that they are characterized by contradictions. We should really see that this is a way of drawing us to an understanding that is beyond the contradictions, and a warning not to take anything literally in the spiritual world, but always to understand that we must move higher in order to see what it means. We are in front of a great temptation, that when we look at a teaching we take one thing that suits us, and that suits our particular prejudices and ignore all the things that contradict it.

A Sufi school's view of people entering the Sufi Path

In the Mevlevi school, people of all persuasions are welcome to come and go freely, their everyday life imbued with the fragrance of their experience among the dervishes. Newcomers are called *nemniyaz*, or “new gift.” To go deeper into the teachings, one enters the *chille*, or “1001 day training,” under the guidance of a teacher. Students are encouraged to continue the practice of their own religion, and teachings from Islam are often found compatible. The *chille* involves practices such as the turn, or dervish whirling. Students may learn simple gestures of regard, like what hospitality can be. They learn how to give opportunities to others. As Postneshin Jelaluddin Loras has said, “We are sitting in the kitchen, learning to cook. But we are learning to cook ourselves.” The *chille* is only a beginning, and those completing it are still only beginners on a lifelong path, with knowledge of how to work with themselves.

How Sufism views the status of women

Women are respected, however, local gender customs hold sway. Modern women have come to the forefront in Sufi schools both East and West. The new international mission statement for the Mevlevi School (the Whirling Dervishes) asserts that women teachers are to be accepted on a par with men.

Special features

Each Sufi school has its own practices. Pursuit of inner truth is given precedence over outward show of religiosity. Sufis have even been killed by strict proponents of Islamic law. At the same time, mystics from many religions have venerated Sufis, seeing in them their own reflection.

Modern universalist Sufis in America are involved in peace missions in the Middle East, Russia and in America, e.g. in the prison system. Because performing service to others is important in Sufism, Sufis can often be found in areas where human need is great, and while they are striving to be “in it but not of it” they may be frowned upon by others for associating with those people society has rejected.

Suggested readings

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THE BAHAI FAITH

By Florence Kelley

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

The founder of the Baha'i Faith was *Baha'u'llah*, a title meaning the "Glory of God." He was born in Tehran, Persia, in 1817 CE and died in Akka, Palestine, in 1892 CE. His forerunner, whose title was the *Bab*, meaning "Door" or "Gate," was an independent prophet in his own right, born in Shiraz, Persia, in 1819 CE and killed by a firing squad of 750 men in Tabriz in 1850 CE.

Primary sacred texts

Baha'u'llah has written more than 100 volumes which we know are authentic as they were signed and contained his seal. The most holy book is the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the "Book of Laws." Others include the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, the "Book of Certitude"; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, the *Kitab-i-Ahd*, the "Book of the Covenant – His Will and Testament"; the *Hidden Words*, "the inner essence" of what was "revealed unto the Prophets of old ... clothed in the garment of brevity"; the *Seven Valleys*; and the *Four Valleys*.

Strengths of these texts

Unity and oneness – the oneness of God, the Manifestations, and their teachings. "...The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension" The twelve major principles of the faith are a program for what is necessary for the world in this day and age.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

Baha'u'llah's immediate successors interpreted passages of his writings that needed clarification. If anyone currently has questions about them, a query can be sent to the World Centre of the Faith for a response.

Passages of exclusion

Baha'is consider that the spiritual teachings of all religions are the same. The Manifestations come at different times in world history, and so the material teachings they bring differ, progressively awakening humankind to its capacities and responsibilities. Baha'u'llah said:

Beware ... lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation....

Passages of inclusion

Baha'u'llah said:

It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold Them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendour.

Humanity is viewed as a single family whose time has come to unite as one global society.

How Baha'i looks upon people converting into the religion

As one of the teachings of the Faith is that everyone should investigate religion for her or himself, it is inevitable that Baha'is may come from other religious beliefs, as well as from Baha'i backgrounds, to understand and accept the precepts of the faith.

How Baha'i looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

One's marriage partner is an individual choice, and there are many Baha'is whose partners do not share their beliefs.

How Baha'i views the status of women

The equality of men and women is a prerequisite for universal peace. Male and female share the same faculties and are both created by God. The world of humanity has two wings – one male, the other female. If the male wing is strong and the female weak, flight is impossible. If both are strong, flight to the higher dominions of human perfection is possible.

As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest potentiality, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.

If education can be given to only one child and the choice is between a boy and a girl, the girl should be educated, as she is the first teacher of the new generation and, as a mother, can be the primary agent for empowering individuals to transform society.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers. Prayer causes a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turns his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest hope of every soul is “to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate before his Beloved, appeal for His mercy and grace and be immersed in the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity.” Included in the writings of Baha'u'llah are many prayers revealed for general use and for special occasions. Some are to be used daily.
- ❖ Holy days. Holy days are commemorations of specific events connected with the Manifestations – days of their birth, their declarations, their deaths, and the period associated with the declaration of Baha'u'llah prior to leaving Baghdad for further exile. Holy days to be used for charity and gift-giving are the period prior to the fast and the Baha'i New Year.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. Baha'u'llah has given us beautiful teachings about the after-life which give peace both to those who are on their way and those who are left behind. Heaven and hell are not places, but our realization of the station of our souls, our nearness or distance from God, based on what we have wrought upon this earth, the preparation for the worlds beyond.

Special features

For the first time in religious history, the founder of a world religion has, in writing, appointed his successor who, also in writing, appointed a successor and established an administrative order which functions today.

Baha'is are expected to live a chaste and holy life; say daily prayers; work, which, when done in a spirit of service, is considered to be worship; and fast during the nineteenth month of the Baha'i calendar year.

Summary

Central to the Baha'i teaching on the essential unity of religions is the belief that religion is forever evolving and is fundamentally progressive. Each religion comes to take humanity to a higher stage of development, preparing us for the next stage in our spiritual evolution, a process that will continue forever. The Bab and Baha'u'llah are the latest in the line of divine Manifestations from God to humanity.

Each of the Manifestations of God is unique. Each revelation has its own distinctive character. No divine messenger merely replicates the teachings, the station or the mission of any other. Each one is perfect, in each one can be seen the face of God. Each one reveals a new measure of the infinite bestowals of God and each one unlocks yet more of the divine potential inherent in human beings. Each one thus builds on and affirms the one before as part of God's eternal covenant never to abandon the human world. In the words of Baha'u'llah:

This is the changeless faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.

For more information, contact: www.bahai.org or nsahawaii@hawaii.rr.com

Suggested readings

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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

By Mike Young, MDiv

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Unitarian Universalism is, in one sense, a Christian heresy. Its historical roots are in the left wing of the Protestant Reformation. Some date it to the Edict of Torda, 1568 CE, in the Kingdom of Transylvania. That was the first country in recorded history that attempted to guarantee religious freedom. No one, it said, should have their person or property placed in jeopardy because of their religious opinions. The basic idea was that, if God exists then he knows if you are putting him on. The only choice is to be honest about what you do believe. And, if God does not exist, that is the only sane way to live in the world. It is a radical rejection of all attempts to coerce orthodoxy by whatever means.

Several names are associated with its emergence: Michael Servetus, burned at the stake by John Calvin, and Francis David, who died imprisoned by Protestants.

But the basic ideas have "erupted" several times in various places around the world.

Primary sacred texts

None. Or, all. All sacred texts, including especially the Christian Bible, are understood as human products, culturally and temporally conditioned. They are of value; but they must be read in their full cultural and temporal context.

Strengths of these texts

They report the human religious experience, with all its profound elevation and its human limitations.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

They are no substitute for the gift of human intelligence, and they cannot provide certainty. The content of the texts and the experiences they report and evoke must be interpreted in the light of current knowledge and understanding.

Passages of exclusion

. . . Are rejected as reflecting cultural biases of the time.

Passages of inclusion

. . . Are seen as some of the deepest insights of the human religious experience.

How Unitarian Universalism looks upon people converting into the religion

They are welcomed enthusiastically. But they weren't converted. They were Unitarian Universalists and just didn't know it until they found us.

How Unitarian Universalism looks upon apostasy

Unitarian Universalists wish apostates well and encourage them on their journey. If they have found a religious language that feeds their spiritual growth or a community that sustains and supports it, we think that's fine.

How Unitarian Universalism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Unitarian Universalists were among the first to perform interfaith, inter-racial and same-sex marriages. And Unitarian Universalists are often the chosen common ground for mixed marriages. Unitarian Universalists are concerned about the quality of the relationship, not the words used to talk about it.

How Unitarian Universalism views the status of women

Unitarian Universalists practice full equality of the sexes, and of sexual orientations. Unitarian Universalism was the first denomination to ordain women as clergy and fully half our current clergy are female. Unitarian Universalists also ordain and have many gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and trans-gendered clergy.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers. Prayer changes the one who prays. It does not alter the ontological structures of the universe.
- ❖ Holidays. We get to celebrate everyone's holidays; and it is amazing how frequently the symbols and images mesh.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. Most Unitarian Universalists don't find the concepts useful. What happens after death is unknowable, and any God who punished people for holding incorrect opinions would be unworthy of worship.

Special features

Unitarian Universalism is a non-traditional religion. There is no time or style of spirituality to which we hearken back. One must pay attention to her or his own religious experience. Authentic religion comes from nowhere else.

How Unitarian Universalists can move from exclusion to inclusion

Unitarian Universalism inclusion/exclusion issues have more to do with level of intelligence, education and cultural style. Unitarian Universalists actually expect people to think for themselves. Can a person with a 69 IQ be a Unitarian Universalist? How about someone uninterested in intellectual abstractions? Or an honest bigot? These folk are unlikely to be comfortable in or feel fed by Unitarian Universalism communities however much its adherents would wish to welcome them.

Summary

Unitarian Universalists are religious communities designed to keep one another alive and growing; intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Unitarian Universalists do not offer a religious stopping place; a wrapped package to be accepted. Unitarian Universalists strive rather to help one grow her or his own authentic religious identity out of one's own experience and in the light of the best of the human religious heritage. And, Unitarian Universalists assume that they are

Finding Spiritual Sovereignty:
Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion in My Faith

probably wrong, at least to the extent of being incomplete, for there is still more to be experienced.

SUBUD

By Reynold Feldman, PhD

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901-1987), an Indonesian from Central Java, known by his followers as *Bapak* (Indonesian for “father”), is Subud’s founder.

Subud, the word, is an acronym formed from *Susila*, *Budhi* and *Dharma*. Bapak’s interpretation of these Sanskrit words is “right living” (*susila*) based on the “power of the true inner self” (*budhi*) through an individual’s following the “way of submission and surrender” to God (*dharma*). The purpose of regularly practicing the Subud spiritual exercise (*latihan kejiwaan*) is to help the practitioner develop into a fully realized human being able to recognize and follow God’s direction in her or his life.

Primary sacred texts

Subud members make use of the sacred texts of their own religious traditions. To the extent that Subud has a sacred text of its own, however, it is probably *Susila Budhi Dharma*, an extended poem in High Javanese which Bapak “received” and translated into Indonesian. Others have since translated the Indonesian translation, though not the poem, into major world languages.

A more accurate answer may be that each Subud member is his or her own primary sacred text, which the individual must learn to read and understand for her or him self.

Strengths of these texts

If one is talking about Bapak’s poem, the primary strengths are (1) the insights they provide for followers of the spiritual path of Subud and (2) the vibrational quality of the language itself, which Subud members believe can stimulate the growth and development of their highest, best self. As for each individual Subud member as a sacred text apart from all others, the strength here is precisely that God has “written” each one of us and provided us with our own personalized set of instructions, in terms of talents, strengths of character, and intuition. The issues are to learn to “read” and follow these texts or sets of instructions.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

Bapak’s poem is addressed to persons who have already received and follow the spiritual exercise of Subud. Therefore, it may not be easily comprehended by someone who has not. (Since most of us read the text in translation, we miss whatever vibrational qualities the original may have for our development.) As for the shortcomings of each Subud member as sacred text, many of us are not yet grown-up children of God; therefore, our “sacred-textness” is not yet apparent, either to ourselves or others. In everyday language, we are works in progress rather than realized saints. That is why we are encouraged by Bapak’s talks and those of his eldest daughter to continue to do our spiritual exercise regularly for 30 minutes at least twice a week. Work on ourselves through the agency of spiritual training is thus understood by Subud members as an ongoing requirement.

Passages of exclusion

This concept does not apply to Subud, where written texts are not of primary importance. Yet the spiritual exercise is itself exclusive. Only members who have undergone a three-month waiting period may be initiated (“opened”) into Subud. Further, only “opened” people are permitted to practice the spiritual exercise, whether alone or in groups. Finally, men and women carry out the *latihan* (“spiritual training”) separately for reasons both practical and spiritual. In all these regards, Subud is quite exclusivistic.

Passages of inclusion

Not applicable to written texts, except for the fact that Bapak always mentioned a variety of religions, prophets and saints, and made the point that in this democratic, skeptical era of ours, God has now given humankind a way of re-establishing a first-person connection with the Divine Power so that humanity as a whole may realize the promise of fully human personhood. In other words, Bapak implies that in the old days of aristocracy, having a charismatic founder and a few saints was sufficient, but nowadays the great mass of humankind needs to gain and maintain a personal relationship with Divinity. That is what most Subud followers believe they have received through the opening, subsequent *latihans*, and the post-Subud experience of life.

How Subud looks upon people converting into the religion

Subud is not itself a religion but a spiritual path. It deals with inner realities not outward memberships or affiliations. Consequently, Subud members may belong to any religion or none. Some find their way back to their family faith while others convert to new faiths. I myself am a Jew by birth, spent 37 years as a Lutheran, and in January 2004 became Roman Catholic. Subud and religions are as compatible as vitamins and the cuisines of various cultures.

How Subud looks upon apostasy

People come and go in Subud. Whatever they do or don't do is between themselves and God. Consequently, there is no concept of apostasy in Subud.

How Subud looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Not applicable. In Subud such marriage happens all the time. However, the respective faiths may have strictures of their own. For example, Muslims are only permitted to marry “People of the Book,” and Orthodox Jews similarly require the faithful to marry only others of their persuasion. Subud members also marry and remain married to non-Subud practitioners.

How Subud views the status of women

In Subud, men and women are considered spiritual equals. The current head of the Subud World Council is an Austrian woman. The current spiritual guide of the organization is Bapak's 76-year-old daughter, not his living son. Men and women members are each assisted in their Subud life by so-called “helpers” – men for men, women for women. These helpers are more experienced members who can give explanations to newer members as well as perform the opening ceremony.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ❖ Prayers and holy days. Because Subud is not a religion in the usual sense, there are no special prayers or holidays. Practitioners observe the holy days of their own religious traditions and use their prayers.
- ❖ Heaven and hell. Nor is there any set belief about heaven or hell. Members were encouraged by Bapak to develop inwardly to the point where they could receive their own understandings of these concepts, to the extent it was important for them to do so.

Special features

Subud members practice the spiritual exercise twice or three times weekly for roughly 30 minutes. So that the practitioner can be less inhibited when trying to “let go and let God,” groups of men and women exercise separately by gender. Individuals can also do the spiritual exercise alone. During the exercise, members stand relaxed until they feel moved to do or say something. This active form of contemplation trains the practitioner over time to know when she or he is being moved by the Great Life Force versus a lower-than-human force.

To help build inner strength and sensitivity, many Subud members also fast for Ramadan, whether they are Muslim or not, as well as during Jewish, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist occasions for fasting if they are members of those faiths.

How Subud members can move from exclusion to inclusion

For years Bapak advised Subud members not to proselytize. He said in effect that if people saw positive changes in Subud members’ lives, they might be attracted to join themselves. Currently, 50 years after Subud has left Indonesia, there are perhaps 15,000 active Subud members worldwide. More and more of us long-time Subud members, who have found in our spiritual practice an immense blessing, are beginning to become less shy about sharing what we do and why. If Subud is as good as we think it is, it would be sinful not to share it with all of humankind. Let’s hope we are able to find the right way to do this.

Summary

Like other spiritual paths based on submission to God, Subud welcomes all people whatever their religion. Subud is based on the individual’s first-hand experience of inner realities versus the acceptance of ideas and beliefs deriving from the inner experiences of others, including the charismatic founders of the world’s faiths. That is why Subud is compatible with traditional religions. For example, I have practiced Subud for over 44 years and am a daily communicant in the Roman Catholic Church. Subud’s founder was himself an observant Sunni Muslim. Still, many people find it difficult to accept the need for anything religious beyond their religion of origin, and sometimes Subud members put non-members off by a perceived cliquishness. As Subud opens to the world, however, there is a good chance that more people will be willing to try Subud’s spiritual exercise for themselves. As Evelyn Underhill has written, “Mysticism is first-person religion.” If this is so – and I believe it is – Subud is a mystical path beckoning to the inhabitants of an increasingly secular, materialistic, and violent world, with the promise to lead them to God and the blessings that journey may bring.

ANALYSIS AND INTROSPECTION

By Saleem Ahmed, PhD

The first six presentations in this compendium discuss how exclusive passages in some sacred texts could be re-interpreted to highlight the “bottom-line” inclusive nature of all spiritually-based religions. This leads to the question: “Why do passages of exclusion occur in only some holy books?”

Here are some additional points to complement the explanation provided by our speakers.

- ❖ Historical context. Messengers were often sent during periods of extreme human cruelty, pitting the poor against the powerful. Thus, for example, when Abraham and Moses spoke, it was against their respective overlords in West Asia and Egypt; when Jesus spoke, it was against similar overlords and priests pretending to uphold Abrahamic traditions; and, when Muhammad spoke, it was against similar overlords and priests pretending to uphold Abrahamic and Christian traditions. Interestingly, the sacred texts of some ancient religions, such as Jainism, do not have exclusionary passages – because other “competing” religions probably did not exist!
- ❖ Changing circumstances. The Hebrews were told to “slay the Amaleks” because the latter had stopped their march to the Promised Land; and, Muhammad was advised to “slay the pagans” because the latter had created anarchy in Medina when Muhammad was away on extended campaign. Should those passages be considered relevant? We know that Muhammad forgave all those pagans.
- ❖ Possible alteration of the holy texts. In many cases, sacred texts were compiled by devout followers, after the prophet had died. To what extent did the latter redact these texts to reflect their own interpretation – even with good intention? Thus, whenever we see passages which appear questionable, shouldn’t we pause to reflect on their currency, accuracy, and applicability today?

Three additional points of reflection

I offer three additional points for reflection:

1. *Similarities in perceptions of the Eternal Being*

Last year, an informal survey among Belnet members from 12 faiths on their perception of the Eternal Being highlighted some remarkable similarities (see Table 1, below). All surveyed considered the Eternal Being to be unknowable. And, except for our Unitarian Universalist member (who felt that since the Eternal Being is unknowable, we cannot describe His attributes), followers of the other 11 religions also described the Being as eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, all-knowing, compassionate, non-violent, and within us. Isn’t this similarity striking? The blank cells in Table 1 indicate aspects not discussed in these sacred texts; it may not mean denial. For example, Buddhist and Jain scriptures do not discuss whether the Eternal Being is also the creator – as the universe is considered by them to have no beginning and no end.

For introspection: How could these holy men, separated spatially by thousands of miles and temporally by thousands of years (Table 2) come up with such similar

descriptions of the Eternal Being? Can we not assume they were inspired by the same Eternal Being?

Looking from another angle, these similarities also underscore the oneness of humans – as we all describe the Eternal Being in similar terms. Messengers in every age, receiving inspirations from something significantly beyond our limited ego, were compelled to interpret these in terms humans can understand. This also underscores how little we know about what transcends us.

2. Complementary nature of messages

Another interesting point: each messenger also had something complementary to offer: For example, from the unnamed founder of Hinduism, we learn of God's multiple manifestations; from Zoroaster, God's spiritual light; from Mahavira, sacredness of life; from Abraham, unity of God; from Moses, the Ten Commandments; from Buddha, meditation and peace; from Lao Zi, living in harmony with nature; from Jesus, love and forgiveness; from Muhammad, universality of God's message and equal respect for all messengers; from Guru Nanak, equality of sexes; and from Baha'ullah, democratic values. They all complement each other; none competes with others.

3. Have there been other messengers?

Some scriptural texts also refer to unnamed messengers. The *Koran*, for example, proclaims that God sent prophets all over the world and throughout human history with the same message of belief and righteous living. And, while many messengers are unnamed, Muslims must respect all equally. Muhammad also clarified that God has sent 124,000 messengers the world over, and throughout human history.

For introspection: *Why are they all not mentioned in the Koran? If 100 names are listed on one page, it will take 1,240 pages just to list these messengers. Besides, how could the desert Arabs 1,400 years ago comprehend messengers in places not yet "discovered"?*

Another example of a possibly "unnamed messenger" may be as follows:

Last year, a young lady from the Lakota tribe of North America, informed Belnet participants about their prophetess, White Buffalo Calf Woman, whose message – belief in the Eternal Being and righteous living – appears no different from the preaching of the above-mentioned messengers. What about similar holy men and women among indigenous people the world over – the Polynesians and others? Often, oral traditions inform us of kind and holy people who asked people to believe in One Supreme Being and lead righteous lives. Were they not also inspired by the same Being? Unfortunately, often their messages may have been altered and practices such as human sacrifice, class distinctions, and slavery included by followers. But should these negate the preaching of these holy men and women?

4. What cultural practices are "holy"?

If God sent messengers the world over, and these holy people lived in their normal surroundings, then consider the following:

- ❖ All places are holy. The entire world is sacred, over which the Eternal Being has entrusted upon us its stewardship, to nurture and beautify.
- ❖ All houses of worship are holy – be they temples or monasteries, churches or synagogues, mosques or mandirs. The Eternal Being’s name is commemorated everywhere
- ❖ All languages are holy as these were spoken by various messengers to praise the Eternal Being. These include not only Aramaic and Hebrew, Arabic and Persian, Mandarin and Japanese, Sanskrit and Pali, but also, Hawaiian, and Chamorro; Telugu and Ilocano; Pushto and Mararathi; and hundreds of others. One can only marvel at how humans around the world have utilized their God-given faculties to develop effective communication methods.
- ❖ All food is holy. Our messengers could only talk about animal and vegetative life found in their respective environments – such as camel and dates in the Middle East, cow and milk in South Asia, fish and shrimp in East Asia, and bison and corn in America. But, this does not make some food “holier” than others.
- ❖ All dresses are holy – whether it is yarmulke or topi, habit or sarong, turban or kimono.
- ❖ All art is holy (except what is considered “obscene”)
- ❖ All architectural designs are holy
- ❖ All music styles are holy
- ❖ All cultural songs and dances are holy
- ❖ All local customs are holy (except those, such as human sacrifice, which were added later by followers to suit their individual idiosyncrasies)

Summary

We have been conditioned to believe our prophet is God’s only true prophet and that our religion offers the only path to Eternal Bliss. The resulting “us versus them” attitude has caused many wars; indeed, some of the worst cruelty by humans on other humans has been in the name of religion. While many of us in Hawaii have developed a significant degree of respect and tolerance for other religions, this is, unfortunately, not true for many other parts of our spaceship. And with increasingly more sophisticated technology being developed daily, zealots can cause major destruction by just the push of button.

While rounding up these zealots might be a possible way to minimize danger, it might have only short-term advantage. A longer-term and possibly more effective solution lies in our clearing cobwebs in our minds, formed with centuries of myopic viewing. The only person we control is ourselves. Let us strengthen the foundation already laid in Hawaii and help make our beautiful state renowned as the interfaith harmony capital of the world. Let us not get bogged down by narrow-minded rules which divide us, but embrace the underlying principles which unite us. We cannot undo past injustices in the name of religion – but we can help prevent new injustices.

Isn’t it fascinating and re-assuring to learn of the similarities among messages of all religions? Don’t they all enjoin followers to believe in the One Universal Truth and lead a righteous life? Thus, instead of tearing ourselves apart based on ritualistic differences, shouldn’t we unite on the basis of the common message they all bring?

Table I
Description of the Eternal Being in Various Religions

Eternal Being's Attributes	Religions												
	Bai	Bud	Chr	Dao	Hin	Isl	Jai	Jud	Skh	Sbd	Suf	Zor	Uu
Unknowable	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Eternal	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
Inside us	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
External	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
Creator	Y	ND	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
Truth	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
Wisdom	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
Compassion	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND
Judge	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND	Y	Y	Y	ND
Violent	ND	ND	Y	ND	Y	Y	ND	Y	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Non-violent	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	ND

Y= Yes (the Eternal Being is believed to possess this attribute)

ND=Not discussed (there is no mention of this attribute)

Bai=Baha'i; **Bud**=Buddhism; **Chr**=Christianity; **Dao**= Daoism; **Hin**=Hinduism; **Isl**=Islam;
Jai=Jainism; **Jud**=Judaism; **Skh**=Sikhism; **Sbd**=Subud; **Suf**=Sufi; **Zor**=Zoroastrianism; **Uu**=
Unitarian Universalist

Table II
Where and when did the founders of ancient religions (before Christ) live?

Year	Holy Person	Location	Religion
5,000 BCE	Unnamed Rishi	India	Hindusim
3,000 BCE	Zoroaster	Iran/Central Asia	Zoroastrianism
2,500 BCE	Abraham	West Asia	Judaism,
2,000 BCE	Rushabdev	India	Jainism
500 BCE	Lao Zi	China	Daoism
500 BCE	Guatama Siddharta	Nepal	Buddhism
400 BCE	Kong Zi	China	Confucianism

Note: Table II excludes founders of "more recent" religions – such as Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Guru Nanak, and Baha'ullah – as it may be argued these founders built upon the foundation of one or more of earlier prophets.

SPEAKERS' BACKGROUND

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Dr Ahmed is the author of *Beyond Veil and Holy War: Islamic Teachings and Muslim Practices with Biblical Comparisons* (2002) and spiritual founder of All Believers Network. His aspiration is to appreciate the beauties of all religions and make Hawaii renowned as the "Inter-Faith Harmony Capital of the World." His forthcoming book, *Koranic Verses on War and Peace*, is being reviewed. He is also founder of Milun (Association for Promoting South Asian Culture) which shares the region's common cultural heritage with others. After retiring from the East-West Center in 1995 (where he led their botanical pest control initiative and introduced the neem tree to Hawaii), he currently has a "reincarnated career" as financial planner.

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Dr Bhawuk, a citizen of Nepal, is a professor of management and culture and community psychology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His vision – world peace through Intercultural understanding – is grounded in his research in cross-cultural management, especially in the area of cross-cultural training, diversity management, and indigenous psychology. His academic presentation and publication list runs over a hundred, and has written many papers on the psychology of spirituality. He practices yoga and meditation, and conducts the monthly *pooja* (service) at the Waahiwa temple on third Sundays for LOTUS, an organization dedicated to South Asian culture and spiritual activities in Honolulu.

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Dr Chatfield is the Executive Director of the Institute for Religion and Social Change. Her activities span numerous interfaith and inter-religious groups and she is a member of the Assembly of the Parliament for the World's Religions and the Executive Committee of the United States Religions for Peace. From 1999-2003 she was one of the representatives for the Maryknoll Sisters as an NGO with the United Nations in New York.

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Originally from New York City, Dr Feldman has lived and taught at universities in Europe, Asia and the United States, including the East-West Center and the University of Hawaii Manoa. He has been a regular practitioner of the Subud Spiritual Exercise since 1961. Born into a Jewish family, he became a Christian in 1967 and is an active Roman Catholic. He is author of numerous books, including *Wisdom: Daily Reflections for a New Era* (St. Mary's Press, 2000). Dr Feldman is currently president of Blue Sky Associates: Catalysts for Educational Change, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Wisdom Factors International, Honolulu.

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Dr Jussawalla is Emerita Senior Fellow East-West Center at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She is the author of fifteen books and many journal articles in the field of economics. She has been a life-long student of religion and studied the *Acts of the Apostles* for the A Levels of Cambridge University. Dr Jussawalla's festschrift is entitled, *Communications and Trade: Articles in Honor of Meheroo Jussawalla* (Hampton Press, 1989).

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Ms Kelley is director of the Office of External Relations of the Hawaii Baha'i Community. A graduate of DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, she was a Baha'i pioneer to Monaco and has served on many Baha'i administrative bodies and committees, including the National Spiritual Assembly in both Hawaii and South Korea. She is former chair of the Community Council of the Spark Matsunaga Institute for Peace at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and is involved in various Interfaith activities and international friendship societies.

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Dr Kinkley is currently serving as a State of Hawaii Deputy Attorney General. He holds doctorates in Linguistics, with specialties in Sino-Tibetan historical-comparative linguistics, and Law. Dr Kinkley has been trained as a lay leader by the Union of Conservative Jewish Synagogues, and is currently the chair of the Ritual Committee at Sof Ma'arav, Hawaii's only Conservative Jewish congregation.

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Ms Noor Karima is Center leader of the Mevlevi Order of America on Oahu and has studied with Sufis from Konya, Istanbul, the US, South America and Sri Lanka, and with Postneshin Jelaluddin Loras of the Mevlevi School (the Whirling Dervishes.) She is a counselor with background in clinical psychology and leads the Dances of Universal Peace.

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Dr Pai is a teacher of meditation and has studied the traditions of both Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism and, since the late 1980s, has been practicing *Vipassana* or Insight ("Mindfulness") Meditation in the Burmese tradition. He is a graduate of the Community Dharma Leadership training program at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center in the United States. He began the teaching of meditation in the late nineties by initiating a public meditation program at the Broken Ridge Korean Temple in Honolulu. Since then, his teaching activities have expanded to include working with the mentally disabled at the Hawaii State Hospital and with retired veterans at the Veterans Administration Hospital. He also works with homeless veterans in a federal Veterans Administration program in Kalaeloa.

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Born and raised in Mumbai, Mr Panalal received his BSE and MSE degrees in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan. He was also enrolled in the MBA program at the University of Chicago. He works for a mechanical contractor. He also serves on the Boards of several condominiums. All of his and his wife's ancestors for the past hundred years were born and raised as Jains. He is well versed in Jain literature.

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Manjit Reddick was born and reared in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Living among a polyglot community of Africans, Ismailies, Isthnashries, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians and so called "non-believers," and her daily interaction with them at school, fed her curiosity and need for understanding of their various cultural and faith traditions. Currently, she conducts monthly Sikh religious services in Honolulu.

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Mr Rumi is co-author of *Wising Up: A Youth Guide to Good Living* (Wisdom Foundation Publishing, 2005). He is a prominent business and community leader with over 22 years of diverse advisory, management consulting and industry experience focusing especially on serving the needs of health care. He is a principal of Consulting Factors International, LLC.

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Reverend Mari Sengoku is from a temple family in Japan. She came to Hawaii in 1994 as the first Japanese woman minister dispatched from the headquarters of Honpa Hongwanji Japan. She is currently serving as the resident minister of Mililani Hongwanji where she and dharma school teachers emphasize peace education for the children. She is the former director of the Office of Buddhist Education of Honpa Hongwanji Mission and serves as a chaplain at the Queen's Medical Center and Hospice Hawaii. She also sees members and non-members as a marriage and family therapist and, periodically, holds *Naikan* ("Introspection") Retreats to aid people's self-discovery journey.

Mike Young, MDiv

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Reverend Mike Young is minister of the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu. He has spent 40 years in ministry, all of it working interfaith to turn our common commitments into tangible spiritual growth. Before moving to Hawaii, Rev Young was UU Campus Minister at Stanford University and Assistant Minister of the Palo Alto Unitarian Church, served the Unitarian Society of Los Angeles-West and was a Juvenile Probation Officer in a unique Police/Probation Unit that he helped design for Los Angeles County. Rev Young is a graduate of Andover Newton Theological School and has also been trained in Soto Zen.

Let there be Peace on Earth, And Let it begin with me

Let there be peace on earth,
and let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on Earth,
the peace that was meant to be.

With God as our Father,
brothers all are we,
Let me walk with my brother,
in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,
let this be the moment now.
With every step I take,
let this be my solemn vow,

To take each moment and live each moment
in peace, eternally.
Let there be Peace on Earth,
and let it begin with me.

Aloha 'Oe

Ha`aheo ka ua i nâ pali
Proudly by the rain in the cliff
Ke nihi a`e la i kanahele
The creeping silently and softly up the forest
E uhai ana paha i ka liko
Seeking perhaps the bud
Pua `âhihi lehua a o uka,
Flower âhihi lehua of inland.

Aloha `oe, aloha `oe
Farewell to Thee, farewell to Thee
E ke onaona noho i ka lipo
Sweet fragrance dwelling in the dark forest
"One fond embrace", a ho`i a`e au
One fond embrace, before I now leave
"Until we meet again."