

Sadhana

Climbing the Slopes of Human Existence

Introduction

Throughout the years of human history religion has taken on several forms. Spirits, gods, and other deities have been worshiped, defined, dissected and even despised as philosophers and theologians have debated the very essence of our human soul. Of those forms, twelve major sects have endured to present day and continue to strive throughout society (each with over three million followers world-wide). Although some of these religions do not acknowledge the existence of a god or some other kind of divine presence throughout the universe, they all share a definition and a guideline of moral obligations that all of us should hold to both ourselves and to our fellow neighbors. While I will not, and cannot, discredit any of these religious orders, this essay will present my own views -- what I've come to believe after my own research and studies into the mass diversity of our planet's faiths, rituals, and ethical codes of honor.

To begin, I will briefly describe some of the diverse religious orders of the world. History has proven time and time again that people tend to condemn the faiths or beliefs of others, of which they may know little or nothing about, just because they think that their own views, thoughts, and religious principles are the only "God-given" truths to be followed. We must look beneath the superficial surface of our own opinions however, for beyond those biased opinions lies a spiritual reality that embraces ALL people in a love forever binding. Understanding the beliefs and viewpoints of ourselves AND of our neighbors is the first step to finding and ultimately sharing that eternal love with everyone -- red or yellow, black or white, rich or poor, and great or small. Although this essay only scrapes the surface of that spiritual reality, I hope that it will at least get its readers to rethink their own particular views and opinions that they may have on the topics presented.

World Religions Briefly Defined

In the West, the Abramic religions dominate. Worshipers of **Judaism** believe that God is the creator of all that exists; he is one, incorporeal (without a body), and he alone is to be worshiped as absolute ruler of the universe. Jewish followers study the Tanakh and the Talmud. The Tanakh corresponds to the Jewish Scriptures which is composed of three groups of books:

Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Nevi'im - the Prophetic books of Isaiah, Amos, etc.

Ketuvim - the "Writings" including Kings, Chronicles, etc.

The Talmud contains stories, laws, medical knowledge, debates about moral choices, etc., comprised of material which comes mainly from two sources:

Mishnah - six "orders" containing hundreds of chapters, including series of laws from the Hebrew Scriptures. It was compiled about 200 CE¹.

Gemara (one Babylonian and one Palestinian) - encyclopedic in scope, it includes comments from hundreds of Rabbis from 200 - 500 CE, explaining the Mishnah with additional historical, religious, legal, sociological, etc. material.

Those devoted to **Christianity** follow the teachings of and about Yeshua of Nazareth, commonly referred to as Jesus Christ (Jesus is the Greek form of Yeshua; Christ is Greek for "the Messiah" or the "anointed" one). Most Christians regard him as the Son of God. They further believe that he is God, the second person in the Trinity (the Trinity consisting of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; three separate persons, all eternal, all omnipresent, who form a single, unified deity). Christians use the Bible as their spiritual guide, concentrating particularly on the books of the New Testament and the teachings of Christ. **Islam** practitioners (Muslims) believe absolutely that "There is no God but God and Mohammed is his Prophet (the last of the prophets)." All Muslims surrender to the will of Allah (Arabic for "God"). That will is made known through the sacred scriptures, the Qur'an, which Allah revealed to his messenger, Mohammed. Followers of the **Bahá'í Faith** belong to the fourth largest theology in the West. The Bahá'í Faith arose from Islam, similar to the way Christianity arose from Judaism. Its followers believe that God is transcendent and unknowable; however, they also believe that He has sent, and will continue to send, great prophets to mankind, through which the Holy Spirit has revealed the "Word of God." Bahá'í scripture comprises the writings of the Bab (founder of the Bahá'í Faith) and Baha'u'llah (considered a prophet of the Bahá'í Faith), together with the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha (Baha'u'llah's son). Among the better known writings of Baha'u'llah are, The Most Holy Book, The Book of Certitude, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, and The Seven Valleys. There are many other books of Bahá'í scripture.

1 **CE** stands for "Common Era." It is a new term that is eventually expected to replace **AD**, which stands for "Anno Domini" in Latin or "the year of the Lord" in English. The latter refers to the approximate birth year of Yeshua ben Nazareth (a.k.a. Jesus Christ). CE and AD have the same definition and value. 2000 CE = 2000 AD.

BCE stands for "Before the common era." It is expected to replace **BC**, which means "Before Christ." BC and BCE are also identical in value.

The term "common" simply means that this is the most frequently used calendar system. There are many religious calendars in existence, but these are normally in use in only a small geographic area of the world.

In Eastern thought, **Taoism** refers to a power that envelops, surrounds, and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe. It embodies the harmony of opposites (i.e. there would be no love without hate, no light without dark, no male without female). Taoists follow the art of "wu wei," which is to achieve action through minimal action. Taoists believe that development of virtue is one's chief task. The "Three Jewels" to be sought are: compassion, moderation and humility. Tao-te-Ching ("The Way of Power" or "The Book of the Way") is believed to have been written by Lao-Tse (the founder of Taoism, a contemporary of Confucius). It describes the nature of life, the way to peace and how a ruler should lead his life. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was the founder of **Buddhism** in Northern India. He promoted "The Middle Way," rejecting both extremes of the mortification of the flesh and of hedonism as paths toward the state of Nirvana (spiritual completeness). Buddhists believe in reincarnation: the concept that one must go through many cycles of birth, living, and death. After many such cycles, if a person releases their attachment to desire and self, and they have led a pure, ethical life, they can attain Nirvana. Buddhists study the teachings and oral traditions of Buddha which were collected by a council of Buddhist monks into written form, called the Tripitaka. This included a very large collection of commentaries and traditions; most of which are called Sutras. The Buddha's "Four Noble Truths" may be described (somewhat simplistically) as:

- 1) to be fully understood: the universality of suffering.
- 2) to be abandoned: the desire to have and control things which causes suffering.
- 3) to be made visible: the supreme truth and final liberation of nirvana which is achieved as the cause of suffering is eliminated. The mind experiences complete freedom and liberation.
- 4) to be brought into being: the truth of the eight-fold ariya path leading to the cessation of suffering. The eight-fold path consists of:

1. right understanding.
2. right thinking.
3. right speech.
4. right conduct.
5. right livelihood.
6. right effort.
7. right mindfulness.
8. right concentration.

The most common forms of Buddhism today are Theravada Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and Southern Buddhism. **Confucianism** is considered primarily an ethical system to which rituals at important times during one's lifetime have been added. The social ethics and moral teachings of K'ung Fu Tzu (commonly pronounced Confucius in English) are a blend of the Taoist communion with

nature and Buddhist concepts of the afterlife, to form a set of complementary, peacefully co-existent and ecumenical religions. Confucian ethical teachings include the following values:

Li: includes ritual, propriety, etiquette, etc.

Hsiao: love within the family: love of parents for their children and of children for their parents.

Yi: righteousness.

Xin: honesty and trustworthiness.

Jen: benevolence, humaneness towards others; the highest Confucian virtue.

Chung: loyalty to the state, etc.

In Japan, most citizens practice two religions: both **Shinto** and Buddhism. The two religions share a basic optimism about human nature and for the world. Within Shinto, however, Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, is regarded as their chief deity. There are numerous other nature deities (Kami) who are conceptualized in many forms. They are seen as benign, however, as they sustain and protect. Shinto believers revere "musuhi", the Kamis' creative and harmonizing powers. They aspire to have "makoto", sincerity or true heart. This is regarded as the way or will of Kami. There are "Four Affirmations" in Shinto:

1) Tradition and the family: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.

2) Love of nature: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the Gods. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.

3) Physical cleanliness: They take baths, wash their hands, and rinse out their mouth often.

4) "Matsuri": To worship and honor gods and ancestral spirits.

Vaidika Dharma, "religion of the Vedas," (commonly known as **Hinduism**) is the panentheistic principle of Brahman, that all reality is a unity. The entire universe is one divine entity who is simultaneously at one with the universe and who transcends it as well. That deity is visualized as a triad:

Brahma - the Creator, who is continuing to create new realities;

Vishnu (Krishna) - the Preserver, who preserves these new creations;

Siva - the Destroyer, who is at times compassionate, erotic, and destructive.

Concurrently, many hundreds of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are worshiped as various aspects of that one unity. Depending upon your viewpoint, Hinduism can be looked upon as monotheistic, trinitarian, or polytheistic. Hindus also believe in reincarnation (samsara), perceived as a meaningless cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. To escape samsara and achieve enlightenment, one must acquire positive Karma. Karma is the accumulated sum of one's good and bad deeds.

Karma determines how you will live your next life. Through pure acts, thoughts and devotion, one can be reborn at a higher level. Eventually, enlightenment is achieved. Bad deeds can cause a person to be reborn at a lower level, or even as an animal. The unequal distribution of wealth, prestige, and suffering are thus seen as natural consequences for one's previous acts, both in this life and in previous lives. Meditation is often practiced in Hinduism, with Yoga being the most common. Other activities include daily devotions, public rituals, and puja: a ceremonial dinner for a God. The most important of all Hindu texts is the Bhagavad Gita which is a poem describing a conversation between a warrior Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna. Vedism (an early "Aryan" Indo-European influence on Hinduism) survives in the Rigveda, (a.k.a. Rg Veda) a collection of over a thousand hymns. Other texts include the Brahmanas, the Sutras, and the Aranyakas. Those devoted to **Sikhism**, which means "learner," believe in a single, Formless God, with many names, who can be known through meditation. This concept is similar to Islam whose followers also believe in a single God, who has 99 names. Unlike Islam, however, Sikh worshipers do not deny the existence of the countless Hindu deities. They consider God as having made many lesser gods and to be superior to them, but only one God can be worshiped; lesser gods are not. Sikhs also believe in the Hindu concepts of samsara (reincarnation) and Karma. Sikhs strongly believe that everyone has equal status in the eyes of God, which is considered a very important principle that permeates all Sikh belief and behavior. The tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh compiled the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. It consists of hymns and writings of the first 10 Gurus, along with religious text from different Muslim and Hindu saints like: Kabir Ji, Baba Sheik Farid Ji, Bhagat Namdev, Bhagat Rav Dass Ji, etc. The Shri Guru Granth is considered the 11th and final Guru and the Sikh's holiest religious text. Some Sikh scholars regard The Khalsa Consensus Translation [of the Guru Granth Sahib] as being among the finest and most accurate English translation currently available. A final notable religion in Eastern ideologies is Jain Dharma, or **Jainism**. Practitioners of Jainism believe that the universe exists as a series of layers, both heavens and hells. It had no beginning and will have no ending. It consists of:

The supreme abode: This is located at the top of the universe and is where Siddha, the liberated souls, live;

The upper world: 30 heavens where celestial beings live;

Middle world: the earth and the rest of the universe;

Nether world: 7 hells with various levels of misery and punishment;

The Nigoda, or base: where the lowest forms of life reside;

Universe space: layers of clouds which surround the upper world;

Space beyond: an infinite volume without soul, matter, time, medium of motion or medium of rest.

Like Sikhs and Hindus, Jains also believe in Karma and Moksha (liberation from an endless succession of lives through reincarnation). To reach enlightenment, followers are expected to follow five principles of living:

Ahimsa: "non violence in all parts of a person -- mental, verbal and physical." Committing an act of violence against a human, animal, or even vegetable generates negative karma which in turn adversely affects one's next life.

Satya: speaking truth; avoiding falsehood.

Asteya: to not steal from others.

Brahma-charya: (soul conduct); remaining sexually monogamous to one's spouse only.

Aparigraha: detach from people, places and material things.

Avoiding the collection of excessive material possessions, abstaining from over-indulgence, restricting one's needs, etc.

Jainism followers also practice fruititarianism, the practice of only eating that which will not kill the plant or animal from which it is taken. e.g. milk, fruit, nuts.

There are two secular groups of Jains:

The Digambaras (literally "sky clad" or naked): Their monks carry asceticism to the point of rejecting even clothing (even when they appear in public).

The Shvetambaras (literally "white clad"): their monks wear simple white robes. The laity are permitted to wear clothes of any color.

In addition to the eleven major Western and Eastern religious sects, **Vodun** (often mistaken as Voodoo) continues to hold a world presence with over sixty million people practicing each year. Vodun, like Christianity, is a religion of many traditions. Each group or denomination follows a different spiritual path and worships a slightly different pantheon of spirits, called Loa; but traditional belief includes a chief God, Olorun, who is both remote and unknowable. Vodun is a ritual religion with the purpose to make contact with a spirit or spirits, to gain their favor by offering them animal sacrifices and gifts, to obtain help in the form of more abundant food, higher standard of living, and improved health.

There are also several minor religious orders in the world today that maintain a steady fellowship and are worth mentioning. The religious traditions of **aboriginal peoples** around the world tend to be heavily influenced by their methods of acquiring food, whether by hunting wild animals or by agriculture. **Native American** spirituality is no exception. Their rituals and beliefs show a blending of interest in promoting and preserving their hunting and horticulture. **Inuit** religious belief is grounded in the belief that anua (souls) exist in all people and animals. Individuals, families, and the tribe must avoid a complex system of taboos to assure that animals will continue to make themselves available to the hunters. Many rituals and ceremonies are performed before and after hunting expeditions to appease the Keepers, Masters, Gods or Goddesses and to assure hunting success. **Asatru** is a polytheistic religion that worships three races of Deities in the Norse pantheon. They are all regarded as living beings who are involved in human life:

The Aesir: These are the Gods of the tribe or clan, representing Kingship, order, craft, etc.

The Vanir: These represent the fertility of the earth and forces of nature. They are associated with the clan but are not part of it.

The Jotnar: These are giants who are in a constant state of war with the Aesir. They represent chaos and destruction. At the battle of Ragnarok, many of the Gods will die; the world will come to an end and be reborn.

Asatru is often considered a Neopagan religion; however, many followers of Asatru prefer the term "Heathen" to "Neopagan" and look upon their tradition as "not just a branch on the Neopagan tree" but as a different tree altogether. Unlike some of the other Neopagan religions, which have gradually evolved into many different traditions, the reconstruction of Asatru has been based on the surviving historical record; it has been maintained as closely as possible to the original religion of the Norse people. Other Neopagan religions include **Wicca** and **Druidism**, both based largely on symbols, seasonal days of celebration and deities from ancient Celtic society, supplemented with Masonic and ceremonial magical components. Druidry tends to be solar oriented, while Wicca is lunar oriented; Wiccans tend to work at intuitive and instinctive levels, while Druidry is more philosophical and intellectual - concerning itself, for example, with numerology and geomancy. In common with most generalizations, however, these suggested distinctions mask a far more complex relationship in terms of theory and practice between the two groupings. Recreations of **Egyptian** (worshippers of Amen, Isis, Osiris, Re, etc.), **Greek** (praises to Zeus and the gods of Olympia), **Roman** (exaltation of Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, Mercury, etc.) and other ancient Pagan religions also fall into the Neopagan family of religious orders. Neopagan religions are currently experiencing a rapid growth as many people are attempting to rediscover their ancestral heritage.

Finally, to round out world theologies, there are those who do not believe in any god or deity and do not follow any specific religious organization at all. **Atheists** deny the existence of a deity outright, while **Agnostics** require physical proof of God's existence before they will "believe." **Humanists** are either atheists or agnostics who also follow some specific ethical or moral code throughout their daily lives. All three place their faith in science and the physical, tangible truths of the universe.

World religions are as diverse as the people who live in our world. Hopefully the readers of this essay will now have a somewhat deeper understanding of those people who we call our neighbors. I believe, on a personal level, that I am a much better person for at least attempting to understand all the sects and religious denominations that I have studied over the years.

Personal Ideology

Personally, I perceive myself as a Christian. I walk the path that Yeshua has shown me, for he clearly set the standard for living a moral and just life. Of course that does not make me any more righteous than a Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Inuit, or Jew; it just means that I have chosen Jesus Christ as my moral mentor. I was raised in a Christian home and brought up through the Methodist church denomination, but I have found that my current theological beliefs are most similar to those held by followers of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship. The **Universal Religion** believes that since all is God, then only one reality exists, and all virtuous religions are simply different paths to that ultimate reality. Religion can therefore be visualized as a mountain, with many spiritual paths (sadhanas) to the summit. Some are hard; others easy. There is no correct path, for all paths eventually reach the top. I believe in a simple, yet profound panentheistic principle that all reality is a single unity; that the entire universe is one divine entity [God] who is simultaneously at one with the universe and who transcends it as well.

I came to this belief after countless study sessions on theology and philosophy. After each session I found that I was always walking away with a feeling that what I had just read could not be "absolute" truth. In every text I read I found holes or large gaps and pieces that were missing from each underlying principle and belief structure. At times those texts even conflicted with my innate human instincts. I often found entire sections of religious tomes devoted to anti-human rights issues such as slavery, murder, genocide, and human sacrifice. In the end, I concluded that none of those theologies that I studied were indeed "absolute." Once I stepped back from all of the texts and took a breath, I was finally able to see every one of those religions together, as a whole. I was at last able to see the true, complete mountain. I finally saw that all those different religious paths ended at the same mountain summit. Some wound back and forth, others dropped down before climbing up once again; some crossed each other at mutual points of interest, and still others moved widely apart; but still, they all climbed steadily upward, and eventually they all reached the top. Today I follow my own footpath to God, and it fills my soul with overwhelming happiness and joy. Every day I travel the winding path upward, climbing further and further, coming ever so closer to the summit; and, as I climb that great mountain of human existence, my heart sings to the great diversity of paths that surround me!

God

As I stated previously, I share a panentheistic viewpoint of God with the Universal Religion that describes just one reality, and God is that reality; therefore, God must consist of the entire physical realm of the universe. All matter, everything that ever was and everything that ever will be, is a part or a division of God. Just as a single blood cell, or even a single hemoglobin molecule is part of the human body, all the comets, stars, galaxies, and planets

are each a part of God's inestimably large body. As blood flows through our bodies, every piece of matter (and anti-matter) in the universe flows through God's body. "For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me." (Bhagavad-gita 6.30) To know God is to know all that is around us -- who we are, what we are -- our very existence.

Creation/Existence

Creation stories and explanations of our existence appear in numerous religious tomes and writings. In the Bible, Genesis states, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (1:1) And then goes on, "So God created Man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." (1:27) In the Rg Veda we read, "From fervor kindled to its height Eternal Law and Truth were born; Thence was the night produced, and thence the billowy flood of sea arose. From that same billowy flood of sea the year was afterwards produced, Ordainer of the days nights [sic], Lord over all who close the eye." Creation stories are also told by the Yoruba peoples in Africa. Their Ifa religion tells of Odumare: "Odumare then created Itself...Being the Primal cause... we call Odumare the only wise one on earth." He created human beings. He had no companion. Odumare pondered how to create more living entities in the universe. He realized that he could not act directly, because he was so charged with energy that if he came into contact with any living thing, it would not survive. So he created Agbon (wisdom), Imo (knowledge), and Oye (understanding) to act as intermediaries. He released them to fly to earth and look for a suitable place to settle. Of course stories of Creation aren't always exclusive to one god or deity, as ancient Mayan religion reflects. Mayans believed that Tepeu and Gucamatz, a feathered serpent, together created the earth, mountains, trees, animals, etc. by speaking them into existence. They asked the animals to praise the deities, but they could not, so the gods made the first humans. The Dinè (Navajo people) tell how the Insect People passed through four separate worlds, but in each world they displeased the gods and were forced to flee through a hole in the sky into the next world. In the Fourth World they met up with the Kisani people (the Pueblo Indians) and the Insect People created the first man & first woman of the Dinè. The Navajo live today in the Fifth World.

No matter what religion you study, there's always some underlying questions of Creation and being, "Where did all this come from? How did we human beings come into existence? What really is existence?" With my panentheistic views, if we, as human beings, could step outside of our universe, or step outside of God's body, then we would find ourselves on another plane of existence, one which includes our own reality (our own universe), yet harbors many others as well. On this higher plane we would be able to see God face-to-face. We would be able to witness the incredible reality that God Himself travels across each and every day (of course that place is and always will be indescribable, even unimaginable, by our limited human awareness). But if, as we traveled across

God's higher plane of existence, we also had the opportunity to travel back in time as well, then we would be able to turn the hands of time backward to a point where we could view God's own birth in that indescribable reality where He resides. Of course, along with getting the chance to view God's miraculous birth, we'd also get the chance to see the wondrous creation of our own universe since God is simultaneously at one with our universe, yet transcends it as well. Creation would have been a wondrous vision indeed. Most scientists tell us that the universe began with a BANG -- a tremendous explosion that scattered all matter throughout the universe. I can only imagine what God's birth would have been like, but I for one would not be a bit surprised by the Big Bang theory.

Evolution and the origins of Earth have been debated over and over and over. That debate is often mis-presented as a two-way conflict between naturalistic evolution and creation science. Actually, this is an incorrect view. The dozen or so of belief systems that are active in North America can mostly be divided into three groups: Creation Science (God created the universe during 6 consecutive 24 hour days, less than 10,000 years ago), Theistic Evolution (The universe is over 10 billion years old; the earth's crust developed almost 4 billion years ago. Humans evolved out of lower forms of life under the direct guidance of God), and Naturalistic Evolution (Basically the same beliefs as for theistic evolution, except that God is assumed to have played no part in the processes). Personally, I believe in theistic evolution. Science is not exactly forthright about answering really hard questions about our universe, and sometimes their theories are altogether wrong, but in most cases scientists have been able to "observe" our universe and extract at least some of its secrets. For example, scientists can actually observe evolution occurring (they've done it in the laboratory with fruit flies and in nature with the Talapia fish in East African lakes); however, there is no way to determine if God (or a god) is steering the process or whether it is caused by natural forces that are currently beyond our knowledge. Science will never be able to prove absolutely that the world is over 10,000 years old. Collecting countless pieces of evidence for an "old earth", is supportive of their theory, but is not proof. Creationists can simply counter scientists' arguments with one of their own: that when God created the universe 6 to 10 thousand years ago, he created everything as if it had a history -- i.e. when God created trees, he made them with tree rings to look as if they been growing naturally for many years before creation. When he created the Appalachian Mountains, they were formed to look as if they were the remains of tall mountains, which had been eroded for millions of years. When he created the world, say 8,000 years ago, it was fashioned to appear 4.5 billion years old. And so, the debate will continue forever without any possibility of resolution. Either way, I ask, "What does it matter?" We were created one way or another. We exist in the here and now. So let's all do the hokey pokey, turn ourselves around, and try to make the best of life while there's life to be had.

Life & Death

(Full section coming soon. Watch for future updates)

The cycle of life and death can sometimes be cruel.

Some believe in a form of reincarnation called "transmigration of the soul." After death the soul is believed to leave the body, and to live again in another human body. This is/was a common belief among:

- present day Eastern religions, and in the early Christian Church prior to the Council of Constantinople in 533 CE, and among the Essenes, one of the three major Jewish sects in existence while Jesus was alive. They cite references from the Christian Scriptures which show that the concept of reincarnation was common.
- during Jesus' time. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, John the Baptist is referred to as the reincarnation of Elija. In Matthew, some of the populace guessed that Jesus was a reincarnation of John the Baptist; others guessed Elija; still others guessed Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. Jesus neither criticized the people for their beliefs, nor declared reincarnation to be heresy.

Christ will eventually judge everyone upon their deaths based on how they lived their lives (Karma). The result of that judgement will determine if a soul is thrust back into the cycle of life to get a second chance at living virtuously and morally (transmigration of the soul), or if that soul is ready for entry into Heaven.

If the soul is ready for Heaven then Jesus will appear to that soul as its own personal savior or messiah (whether it be in the form of the Trinity, an angel, an arhat, a bodhisatva, a prophet, god, goddess, etc.). If the soul accepts him as its savior, and allows him to bear its earthly sins, then it will be allowed into Heaven to live in the presence of God.

If the soul denounces Christ and refuses his sacrifice, even though it led a virtuous life to raise its Karma, it will be turned away from Heaven and forced back onto the wheel of life.

Heaven

(Full section coming soon. Watch for future updates)

Heaven is . . . eternal bliss.

Hell & Satan

(Full section coming soon. Watch for future updates)

Hell has three states and all are transitional. Many times, after death, a soul will be unable to tear itself away from material things. It will deny that it is dead and cling to the here and now. These souls do not go forth to Christ and are stuck

between the physical world and the afterlife until they let go of their earthly ties. These souls live in the first state of Hell, wanting desperately to cling to life but unable to do so without a physical body. It is these souls that make up the small number of poltergeists, hauntings, and demonic possessions. Once they are able to come to terms with their deaths then they are able to see the light of Christ and go to him for judgement. The second and third states of Hell come after judgement. Souls that have not lived virtuous lives on earth will be cast back to life for another chance at doing things right. If a soul refuses transmigration (or reincarnation) then it becomes trapped between the light of Christ and earth. They remain trapped in this state of Hell until they accept their fate and return to earth for another learning cycle of life. Souls that have been judged righteously and have been granted access to Heaven, but deny Christ also often refuse to go back to an earthly life. These souls reside in the third state of Hell, and are tortured even more than those trapped in the first two states of Hell. This is primarily because they have seen the gates of Heaven and thus, a personal Hell manifests itself around them in which they can not enter Heaven, because they have refused redemption, yet they do not willingly go through with soul transmigration (or reincarnation). They remain trapped between Heaven and earth, continuously torturing themselves with the magnificent view of Heaven, just out of their reach, until they accept their fate and return to earth for another learning cycle of life.

Satan is not a physical entity to be dealt with, but rather a symbolic creation. Satan represents the temptations we have in the back of our minds. He is man's justification for the evils that we do. Battling Satan doesn't take physical strength or stamina, but rather the moral fortitude to do the right thing when you have a choice between good and evil.

Miracles, Angels, & Prophets **(Full section coming soon. Watch for future updates)**

Look around once in a while, you might be lucky enough to see one. Just ask yourself if you'd recognize one if you saw one!

Climbing a Footpath of Your Own

Beginning on a footpath of your own is very easy. If you're already following some moral or ethical code throughout your daily life, or if you're practicing some type of virtuous religion, then you've already taken the first steps. None of the opinions or viewpoints that I've expressed in this essay are meant to replace your current religious beliefs or practices. The mountain of human existence is high and wide, with plenty of room for new paths as well as old ones. The only suggestion I will make is to consider adding the following five guidelines of happiness and success to your climb:

- 1) Always seek and practice the truth (it will surely set you free).

- 2) Do everything in your power to make wise decisions and choices (deny the temptations of evils that men do).
- 3) Count your blessings every single day (there are always many who are worse off than you).
- 4) Always work twice as hard as you are expected (raise that Karma as often as you can).
- 5) Above all else, do all things with love (for it truly conquers all).

The Golden Rule

"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Zoroastrianism: *"That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself."* Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5
"Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others." Shayast-na-Shayast 13:29

Judaism: *"...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*, Leviticus 19:18
"What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. This is the law: all the rest is commentary." Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Christianity: *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."* Matthew 7:12
"...and don't do what you hate...", Gospel of Thomas 6

Islam: *"Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself"* Fourth Hadith of an-Nawawi 13

Bahá'í World Faith: *"Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself."* Baha'u'llah
"And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou chooseth for thyself." Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

Taoism: *"Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss."* T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien.
"I am good to the man who is good to me, likewise, I am also good to the bad man." Tao Te Ching

Buddhism: *"a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?"* Samyutta Nikaya v. 353
"Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." Udana-Varga 5:18

Confucianism: *"Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you"*
Analects 15:23

"Tse-kung asked, 'Is there one word that can serve as a principle of conduct for life?' Confucius replied, 'It is the word 'shu' -- reciprocity. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.'" Doctrine of the Mean 13.3

Shinto: *"The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form"*

Hinduism: *"One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself"* Mencius VII.A.4

Brahmanism: *"This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you."* Mahabharata, 5:1517

Sikhism: *"Compassion-mercy and religion are the support of the entire world."* Japji Sahib

"Don't create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone." Guru Arjan Devji 259

Jainism: *"Therefore, neither does he [, a sage,] cause violence to others nor does he make others do so."* Acarangasutra 5.101-2.

"In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self." Lord Mahavira, 24th Tirthankara

"A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated." Suttrakritanga 1.11.33

Sufism: *"The basis of Sufism is consideration of the hearts and feelings of others. If you haven't the will to gladden someone's heart, then at least beware lest you hurt someone's heart, for on our path, no sin exists but this."* Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, Master of the Nimatullahi Sufi Order.

Yoruba: (Nigeria): *"One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts."*

Native American Spirituality: *"Respect for all life is the foundation."* The Great Law of Peace

Wicca: *"A'in it harm no one, do what thou wilt"* (i.e., do what ever you want to, as long as it harms nobody, including yourself). The Wiccan Rede

Roman Pagan Religion: *"The law imprinted on the hearts of all men is to love the members of society as themselves."*

Humanism: *"...critical intelligence, infused by a sense of human caring, is the best method that humanity has for resolving problems. Reason should be balanced with compassion and empathy and the whole person fulfilled."* Humanist Manifesto II; Ethics section.

Socrates: *"Do not do to others that which would anger you if others did it to you."* (Greece; 5th century BCE)

Seneca: *"Treat your inferiors as you would be treated by your superiors,"* Epistle 47:11 (Rome; 1st century CE)

Meditating

Meditation is very personal and should be used as a tool of calming -- a stress reliever that will grant you a moment away from the world and its pressures. Not all techniques will work for all people, so you should experiment until you find something that truly relaxes your physical needs, replenishes your mental capability, and empowers you spiritually.

Try to find someplace quiet where you can relax completely without any fear of being interrupted. First, attempt to focus all your thoughts and senses on one thing. This can be a spot on the wall or ceiling, a flickering candle flame, the soft chant of a mantra, or even just soothing music (close your eyes and try to block out all surrounding noises and outside distractions besides the chant or music itself). Let go of any stress that you may have built up during the day. Try to relax all your muscles one at a time, beginning with the top of your head and then moving to your ears, eyes, and neck. Move slowly downward to your shoulders, back, arms, hands, fingers, stomach, legs, feet and finally your toes. The goal is to eventually lose your physical senses all. Like hypnosis, you'll want to try and focus all your thoughts on one thing until nothing exists around you except the object of your concentration. You will eventually hear, see, smell, taste, and feel nothing but the one thing you're concentrating on. Once that stage is reached, attempt to block out that one remaining object. It's very difficult to ignore all your senses, but when that is finally accomplished you will no longer see, hear, smell, taste, or feel anything at all. Even your thoughts will eventually fade.

At this point your soul will be freed of its bodily constraints. Try not to be afraid, for your soul will remain tethered to your physical body. Only death (the destruction of your physical body) can release a soul completely. In this state of mind, however, your soul will be free to move about anywhere it chooses, much like a disembodied spirit (a soul still clinging to its earthly body). Still, your spirit can and will reenter your body at any point to reclaim physical control if you just think the slightest thought or attempt to use any of your body's physical senses. Once you try to use one of those senses, or if you attempt to think with the physical gray-matter of your brain, then your soul will immediately return to your body where you will instantly become aware of your physical surroundings once again. When you do return to your body you should feel refreshed and at quiet peace with everything around you.

May you find a path worth walking, and may God speed you on your way.

"If I wanted to doubt, then I could doubt endlessly . . . But at some point a person has to stop questioning and act, and at that point you have to trust something to be true, and so you choose the thing you have the most reason to believe in, you have to live in the world you have the most hope in. I follow [God], I believe in [God], because I want to live in the world that [God] has shown me." – Orson Scott Card; Homecoming: Vol. 2, "The Call of Earth"

"But he, verily, speaks superiorly who speaks with truth . . . But one must . . . desire to understand the truth." – The Upanishads, VII.XVI.1

The Pope delivered a Wednesday address in St. Peter's Square on 1998-SEP-9 on the topic of: "The Spirit of God and the 'Seeds of Truth' in non-Christian Religions." He said in part:

"Through the practice of what is good in their own religious traditions, and following the dictates of their consciences, members of other religions positively respond to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even though they may not recognize Him as their Savior."

"Ekam Sataha Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti" (The truth is One, but sages call it by different names) – ancient Hindu saying

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all are one in Christ Jesus." – Bible (Galatians 3:28)

"8. All the races and tribes in the world are like the different colored flowers of one meadow. All are beautiful. As children of the Creator they must all be respected." – Anonymous (taken from the Native American Indian Traditional Code of Ethics. Inter-Tribal Times, 1994-OCT)

"God is everywhere all at one moment." – Bible (Psalms 139; Matthew 10:29, 30)

"Let us have love and more love; a love that melts all opposition, a love that conquers all foes, a love that sweeps away all barriers, a love that aboundeth in charity, a large-heartedness, tolerance, forgiveness and noble striving, a love that triumphs over all obstacles." – Abdul Baha, "I Heard Him Say"

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." – Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"At that day ye shall know that I [am] in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." – Bible (John 14:20)

"Live long and prosper." – Spock, Star Trek