

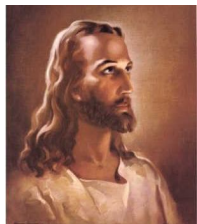






## Seek, and Ye Shall Find:

Who believes what -- how they worship, celebrate, mourn, feast, live, die, and treat women

		<b>God</b>	<b>What They Believe</b>	<b>How They Practice</b>
<p><b>Christianity</b></p> <p>World: 2 billion U.S. 220 million</p>		A single, all-powerful, all-knowing God who created the earth from nothing. The Christian God is also known as the Holy Trinity – the Father, Jesus (the son), and the Holy Spirit. Sacred texts: the Old and New Testaments.	Jesus Christ came to earth to redeem a sinful humanity. He was born of Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried; on the third day, he rose from the dead. Christians who follow the Ten Commandments and live by Jesus' example win eternal salvation and are spared the torments of hell.	Christ's message was simple and revolutionary: Love God, love thy neighbor, love thy enemy, pray for those who persecute you. Christians have been variously living it, distorting it, failing to live up to it, and rediscovering it ever since.
<p><b>Catholicism</b></p> <p>World: 1 billion U.S. 65 million</p> <p>(does not include Eastern Orthodox, 1.2 million)</p>		The body of Catholic doctrine is based on the Old and New Testaments, as interpreted by the Church fathers over the centuries.	All humans except Jesus and Mary are born with original sin, the stain of Adam and Eve. Catholics believe the bread and wine consecrated by the priest during mass to be the literal body and blood of Christ, and the pope to be free of error on matters of faith and morals.	Officially, Catholics must attend Mass on Sunday (or, since the 1970's, Saturday evening) and on eight holy days of obligation, as well as perform their "Easter duty" (confess their sins and receive Communion once a year). In the U.S., about 37 percent of Catholics attend weekly Mass.
<p><b>Protestantism</b></p> <p>World: 316 million U.S.: 154 million</p>		The Word of God as revealed in the Bible is paramount. Some Protestants claim that every Christian has the right to interpret scripture for herself.	Protestants subscribe to the "priesthood of believers" and consider sacraments the symbols, not the means, of God's grace.	Sunday services tend to be simple; most include readings from scripture, preaching, and hymn singing. Communion is optional and occasional (except for Episcopal and Anglican churches, whose rites more closely resemble Roman Catholic ones.)
<p><b>Judaism</b></p> <p>World: 14 million U.S.: 154 million</p>		A single, all-powerful, all-knowing God who created the earth from nothing. So awesome is he that he cannot be represented in human form, nor can his real name be spoken aloud. Jewish scripture is known as the Torah.	God's covenant with the Jewish people promised protection and a messiah to redeem the world from evil. In return, the Jews are to worship no other gods and to live by the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the Torah.	Orthodox Jews and some other branches observe strict dietary laws, and forbid marriage outside of the faith and physical exertion on the Sabbath. A Jew is traditionally defined as someone born of a Jewish mother, but conversion is increasingly welcome, given intermarriage and declining numbers.
<p><b>Islam</b></p> <p>World: 1.3 billion U.S.: 5.6 million</p>		A single, all-powerful, and all-knowing God who created the earth from nothing. He is also the God of the Jews and of Christians, both of whom are revered as the People of the Book.	The Koran (Qur'an) is the word of God, transmitted through his prophet Muhammad. It is both an explicit guide for living and a holy thing in and of itself, memorized in its entirety by many Muslims. Its recitation a source of spiritual and aesthetic delight.	Devout Muslims live by the Five Pillars of Faith: declaration, prayer five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, alms giving, and making a Hajj, or a pilgrimage, to Mecca (Makkah) once in a lifetime, if possible. Dietary restrictions include no alcohol and no pork.
<p><b>Hinduism</b></p> <p>World: 850 million U.S.: 1 million</p>		The indefinable One, whose primary incarnations are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. There are hundreds of deities in all, of whom Ganesh—remover of obstacles, he who brings forth success in new undertakings—is one of the most popular.	One of the world's oldest religions, Hinduism can be understood not as a single theology, but as a broad stream of belief and observance. The task of living is to move toward moksha, the emancipation from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. What you do in this life affects your next life (karma).	Hindu worship is rich, varied, and deeply ingrained in daily life, from appeals to Shiva for fertility, to the incense and offerings of small gifts or mantras at the household altar, to communal ritual ablution in the great sacred rivers to celebrate an eclipse, birth, or death.
<p><b>Buddhism</b></p> <p>World: 355 million U.S.: 1.5 million</p>		None. Buddhism is a religious path rather than a creed. The Buddha is a teacher, not a deity. Buddhists are encouraged to seek enlightenment through the practice of meditation.	Life is transitory and full of suffering. The Four Noble Truths hold that suffering is part of life, it has a cause, it can be overcome, and happiness is possible. The purpose of life is to achieve the state of enlightenment known as Nirvana, a release from worldly attachment and illusion.	The Fourth Noble Truth is the Eightfold (or Middle) path to end suffering—right understanding, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and meditation. It was revealed to Buddha as he sat beneath a tree after failing to achieve enlightenment through years of ascetic practice.

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	<b>The Big Rituals</b>	<b>A Woman's Place</b>	<b>The Lowdown</b>	<b>Inspiring Words</b>
<b>Christianity</b>	A multibillion-dollar toy industry aside, Christmas is not the most important feast day in the Christian calendar – Easter is. This solemn yet jubilant celebration comes in the spring, following the 40 penitential days of Lent, and commemorating the Resurrection of Christ.	Christ's radical example of respect for women was buried beneath St. Paul's misogyny. Though crucial to the survival of the early Church, women were accorded a paternalistic respect but no place in the power structure. In modern practice, they fill the pews and committees but seldom the pulpit.	There are hundreds of Christian denominations in the U.S.— from storefront evangelicals to incense-scented High Anglicans. If you can't find one to suit your needs, try another, or do what Americans have a special talent for and start your own.	"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in his glory was arrayed like one of these." – Matthew 6:28-29
<b>Catholicism</b>	The central rite is the Mass, a symbolically rich reenactment of the Last Supper that culminates in the mystery of the Eucharist. It is celebrated daily and on special occasions (weddings, funerals). Other important devotions include the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, and Benediction.	Birth control and abortion are condemned, as is all discussion of women becoming priests. Unofficially, many Catholics go their own way on issues of conscience, and the Church includes many influential female dissenters and leaders. Divorce is forbidden, annulment is increasingly easy to obtain.	Scandals aside, contemporary Catholics find more to love than reject in their 2,000-year-old tradition. Unlike earlier generations, they tend to choose parishes that embrace their concerns, but they remain the most observant weekly worshippers in the nation, as well as among the most active in social causes.	"And sooner or later, if we follow Christ, we have to risk everything in order to gain everything." – Thomas Merton, <i>Thoughts in Solitude</i>
<b>Protestant</b>	Rites of passage vary by congregation. Infant Baptism is the rule among many Protestant denominations, while Baptists and other sects reserve it for those who have come to God in maturity. Protestant churches tend to be plainly decorated, with crosses instead of a crucifix, a visible legacy of reformation.	The Congregationalist Church ordained its first woman in 1852; Episcopalians were the first to ordain an openly gay woman, in 1978. Most main stream churches no include a small number of woman ministers; more conservative churches allow female deacons. Views on birth control and abortion vary by denomination.	Mainline churches tend to be similar in liturgy, social outlook, and organization, so pick your church for its choir, its soup kitchen, or its preacher. Within the conservative and fundamentalist branches, doctrinal and stylistic differences are many.	"If he have faith, the believer cannot be restrained. He betrays himself. He breaks out. He confesses and teaches this gospel to the people at the risk of himself." – Martin Luther
<b>Judaism</b>	Jewish holidays, both tragic and triumphant, are celebrated at home and in temple services. Rites of passage include the Bris (circumcision of infant males) and Bar and Bat Mitzvahs (coming of age). Jewish burial usually occurs within 24 hours of death; a week's mourning, called shivah, follows.	Most branches of Judaism are supportive of women. All but the orthodox branch ordain women as rabbis, and a history of progressiveness on social issues has yielded a large number of woman scholars, judges and activists.	Whether or not belief in God is present—and many Jews are non-believers—the Jewish people shoulder a sense of duty based on Moses' covenant with God and a 3,000-year-plus history of persecution. A commitment to philanthropy, a reverence for learning, and a tradition of intellectual discourse are hallmarks of Jewish life.	"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary; go and learn it." – Hillel, Talmud
<b>Islam</b>	The month of Ramadan commemorates the revelation of the Koran to Muhammad. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset and are encouraged to devote themselves to acts of charity and forgiveness. It ends with Eid al-Fitr, one of the most important festivals.	Islam's stand on women is less severe than practices current in some places suggest. Polygamy is permitted by the Koran, but is rare even in Islamic countries; it's illegal in the U.S. Like men, women have the right to divorce; unlike men, they are forbidden to marry non-Muslims. Outside Saudi Arabia and Iran, veiling is optional.	Like Judaism, Islam is a religion in which consciousness of God's law is ever present in daily life. One fifth of the world's population is Muslim, and most live outside the Middle east. The earliest U.S. mosques were in Maine (1915), North Dakota (1920), and New York (1928).	"We created man: and we know what his soul whispereth to him; and we are closer to him than his neck-vein." –Koran
<b>Hinduism</b>	Festivals abound in Hinduism, and hardly a day passes without a ritual observed or a celebration. Among the most popular are the seasonal holidays of Holi, Diwali, and Navratri. Hindu weddings are elaborate and usually last several days.	Alone among the major religions, Hinduism elevates the feminine to godly status. Millions of Hindus worship the divine in one of its many goddess forms. This makes such persistent practices as bride burning and infanticide as contradictory as they are cruel.	Americans have been drawn to Hindu practice and mysticism since Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, after reading the Bhagavad-Gita, "It was the first of books large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence." Thanks to the influx of Indian immigrants to the U.S. over the last 40 years, devotees can now worship in most states.	"Truth is one; the wise call it many names." – Rig Veda (the oldest and most important of Hindu sacred texts)
<b>Buddhism</b>	Buddhists believe in rebirth, and death is an important passage and ritual. Since the thoughts held by a dying person are of essential importance for rebirth, sacred texts are read and monks sometimes pray the dying into the next life. Cremation or simple burial follows.	Although Buddha himself saw no difference between men and women, the culture in which Buddhism took root did. In the U.S. today, nuns and monks perform the same duties, and men and woman seek to achieve the state of enlightenment with equal dedication.	First embraced by Transcendentalists in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism has won an increasingly large American following. Meditation centers can now be found in every part of the U.S. Although the community, or sangha, is revered, the essence of Buddhism is self-realization.	"Embrace your suffering, and let it reveal to you the way to peace." – Thich Nhat Hanh, <i>The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching</i>