

Spirituality for Children

(ages 8 to 14 and all ages everywhere)

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Series I - The Foundation

Unit 2: Religion & Culture

Lesson 2 - **What are the major religions of the world?**

There are five major and literally thousands of minor religions in the world today. These thousands include separate denominations of the major 5 and their further separations and variations and hundreds of smaller religious groups around the world. The five major religions that we will examine are **Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity**. You can check out the major and many minor religions on the **Big Religion Chart** listed in the Reference Materials.

Now look up a World Map in a book (an Atlas) or on-line - e.g.
www.aphgmorey.com/uploads/2/1/1/0/21103464/world_political_map.jpg.

Refer to the map for the placement of the different religions around the world.

Hinduism is primarily found in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Buddhism is found mostly in Asia and grew out of Hinduism: in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, in India, Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, S. Korea, and Mongolia, but is also present everywhere in the world.

Judaism is centered in Israel, but is also found around the world.

Christianity came out of Judaism and is also found everywhere, but especially in Europe, North America, South America, and Australia.

Islam is another world-wide religion that was founded in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, even in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Islam is one of the 3 Abrahamic religions, with stories and rituals and prophets that are shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Many of the countries of the world had or have religions that were founded in that place in ancient times like the Native Americans of North America and all prehistoric peoples of the world. These indigenous religions are usually Nature-based with rituals and stories that have been developed over time to positively influence and win the spirits'/gods'/goddesses'/God's approval and cooperation in assuring peoples' everyday survival doing activities like hunting animals or the gathering of grains, nuts and fruits. Rituals were developed to assure the fertility and birth of animals and people, the healing of illnesses or injuries, and in the idea of life after death. These rituals were often later expanded to include strict marriage customs and the establishment of the paternity of children. They also involved in the raising of crops and domestication of animals, legitimizing control over the lives of the people in an extended family or living groups, guaranteeing political power and the accumulation of personal wealth, the ownership of land, as well as controlling the success of warfare for territory or resources. As the cultures advanced, many of the nature-based spiritual systems also advanced into more formally organized *religions* with complex Laws governing the behavior and thinking of their followers. The idea of an all-powerful, now loving, now vengeful God (or Goddess) developed out of the unpredictable nature-spirits as well. We'll learn more about the individual religions in Unit 3.

The five major religions of the world: Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism all developed out of Nature-based beliefs of a specific group of people living in a specific environment. Successful beliefs developed over time into an organized system of Laws and spread with the sophistication of the

culture and the ability of the religious Laws to insure the successful survival and advancement of that and similar cultural groups.

Reflection For Deeper Understanding

I. Meditation - Listening for the Voice of *God*

So, sit back in your seats comfortably now. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to clear your mind of all the chatter and images it produces. Not attached to anything. Letting all thoughts and images float by. Breathe in through your nose slowly and deeply. Nothing to do ... nowhere to go. Just be present. Breathe out through your mouth. Let yourself drift, completely at rest, blissfully calm. Feel the peace; feel the beautiful peace. Continue to follow your breath - in through your nose, out through your mouth -- Slowly, deeply, at peace, at rest. Continue to breathe and let yourself drift. Allow the Voice of Spirit to speak to you. Listen, no rush, no hurry. Peace.....

2-3 minutes of silence

Return now to your breath and take a few deep breaths to bring you back into the room. Feel your body on the chair, your feet on the floor. Move your arms and legs, and when you feel like it open your eyes. Many Blessings. (ring the bell)

II. Contemplate and Research the following questions - ask yourself, your parents, other adults, your friends, look it up on the internet or find it in a book. Make sure you understand the ideas:

1. What are the 5 major religions? Which one do you belong to?
2. Has this lesson made the idea of *religion* clearer to you? How or why not?
3. What is your cultural heritage? Where did your parents (2), grandparents (4), great-grandparents (8) come from? What were their religious backgrounds?
4. How do your parents describe *religion*? Do you agree or not? What does *religion* mean to you?
5. Look up the following 15 words in a dictionary:
 - a. Denomination
 - b. Founded
 - c. Sophistication
 - e. Environment
 - f. Prehistoric
 - g. Indigenous
 - h. Ritual
 - i. Survival
 - j. Fertility
 - k. Paternity
 - l. Domestication
 - m. Accumulation
 - n. Vengeful
 - o. Unpredictable

III. Activities

1. Find the continents of Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica, and Australia on your world map.
2. Name 2 countries that are part of each continent.
 - a. Asia
 - b. Europe

- c. Africa
- d. North America
- e. South America
- f. Antarctica
- g. Australia

3. What is the climate like in:

- a. Saudi Arabia
- b. Israel
- c. Mexico
- d. India
- e. Tibet

4. What religions were founded in the countries listed in Question 3?

5. How do you think climate effected the beliefs of the indigenous people living in the countries listed in Question 3?

IV. Reference Materials

- 1. The Big Religion Chart: www.RELIGIONFACTS.com
- 2. A map of the world:
www.aphgmorey.com/uploads/2/1/1/0/21103464/world_political_map.jpg.
- 3. World Religion Terminology