

Do All Paths Lead to God?

Here's a brief look at what some world religions teach about Jesus, salvation and heaven.

HINDUISM can be traced back to 1500 B.C. in India with no single founder. It spawned Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism and comprises a body of religion based on the *Vedas*, or Hindu scriptures. It teaches that the true self of each person is continuously being extended from the supreme soul, Brahman. Achieving an awareness of one's divine identity and becoming one with Brahman brings liberation. *Samsara* (reincarnation) is needed until a soul has become liberated. The soul may be reborn in human or animal form. Hindus see their gods and goddesses and the incarnations of them (*avatars*) as manifestations of the impersonal Brahman. Some see Brahman as a supreme being, as Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva or Shakti. Some worship Krishna as the supreme being; others says he is an *avatar* of Vishnu. Jesus is viewed as an *avatar*. The Hindu path of completion goes from humanity to oneness with the divine, based on self-effort.

BUDDHISM began in India with a tribal sage named Siddhartha in the fifth century B.C. While meditating, he reached *nirvana*, the highest God-consciousness, and was called Buddha ("enlightened one"). Buddhism asserts that the world operates by natural power and law without divine command. Neither main branch of Buddhism, Theravada or Mahayana, accepts the existence of a personal God or the deity of Jesus. There is no such thing in Buddhism as sin against a supreme being. Salvation is based on the path a person takes in life and an emphasis on human effort. "Heaven" means to enter *nirvana* where the ego is extinguished.

MORMONISM is the beliefs held by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). It began with Joseph Smith of Palmyra, New York in the 1820s and mirrors Christian ideals

such as free will, repentance and a belief in God's providence over history. Jesus is the firstborn of God's "spirit children" but is not the unique Son of God. Smith's successor, Brigham Young, wrote in the *LDS Journal of Discourses*: " If you will believe in your hearts and confess with your mouth Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph was a prophet, and that Brigham is his successor, you shall be saved in the kingdom of God." After death every person goes to one of three levels of glory, depending on how they lived.

SCIENTOLOGY was founded in 1952 by American science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard as a successor to his popular self-help system, Dianetics. Life experience is recorded in the brain as "engrams" that may cause self-defeating behavior. Exposing the engrams enables the person, or "thetan" (immortal soul), to "go clear" and gain liberation from MEST (matter, energy, space, time). The ultimate quest is enlightened freedom from the MEST body and universe. Hubbard rejected Christ's deity and mission as figments of unenlightened minds. Salvation occurs progressively to arrive at the highest level, "'Operating Thetan.'" The Church of Scientology is the global entity for promoting the group's beliefs.

ISLAM Muhammad, born around A.D. 570, founded Islam in Saudi Arabia after receiving visions and revelations from an angel named Gabriel. These disclosures are recorded in the Quran, the religion's infallible scriptures. "Islam" means "submission"; "Muslim" means "one who submits to Allah"—the only supreme being. Jesus is believed to be one of the major prophets, but to call Him the Son of God is blasphemy. Islam is a religion of works in which sin does not require atonement and can be forgiven through repentance. For salvation, good deeds must outweigh bad deeds, though Allah will decide a Muslim's eternal fate. Entrance into Paradise can be guaranteed only if a Muslim dies while fighting the enemies of Islam—in jihad, which is similar to a contract between Allah and a Muslim (see Surah 4:74; 9:89, The Noble Quran).

BAHA'I Founded in Iran in the mid-19th century, Baha'i spread to Europe, America and elsewhere under the successors of its founder Bah?' Allah. The principal center today is in Haifa, Israel. Its main tenets are the unity of all religions and of all humanity. Bah?' Allah is seen as the most recent manifestation of God. Baha'i is monotheistic; God is Creator, and Jesus is a manifestation of God, but His death and resurrection are not addressed. His second coming has occurred in Bah?' Allah. Salvation comes through divine revelation. A good afterlife leads to increasing nearness to God and a bad one to increasing distance from God.

JUDAISM began about 2000 B.C. with a covenant between God and Abraham, the patriarch and progenitor of the Jewish nation. Most adherents believe God also established a covenant with the Israelites and their descendants and revealed His laws to Moses on Mount Sinai. Today it is divided into four primary movements: Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist. The dual foundation for most practice is the Talmud (a record of rabbinic commentaries on biblical texts) and the Torah (books and laws of Moses). Judaism believes in a single God who created the universe and governs it. Jesus isn't the Messiah foretold by Jewish prophets; neither is there acceptance of His substitutionary atonement for sin. The existence of sin and God's abhorrence for it is recognized, but atonement is accomplished by sacrifices, penitence, good deeds and God's grace. It teaches a concept of reward and punishment in the afterlife.

CHRISTIANITY began with Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew who lived in Israel 2,000 years ago. It is rooted in biblical Judaism and holds that Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) is God's Son, sent from God out of love for all people to be the atonement for humanity's sin against God. The Christian Bible states that God made all people for Himself, as well as the world, the heavens and everything in them. It says He is enthroned in heaven, not in buildings. God commands all people to repent of

sin and accept eternal life by faith as a gift from God, through Jesus. This is needed because God will judge each person through Jesus. In raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrated that He alone is His Son among those who claim deity.