**Fact Sheet: World Religions**

Although religion is a personal issue and may not form the basis of conversation, the following information covers briefly some fundamental differences between beliefs.

**Buddhism**

Buddhism was founded on the Four Noble Truths and was founded in the northern part of India, and spread to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, China and Japan. Meditation is used to cleanse the mind and thought channels.[Buddhists believe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism) that life continues after death in another form and the cycle of birth and death can only be broken by achieving Enlightenment.  The Eightfold Path leads to liberation and this involves Perfect Wisdom, Perfect Attitude, Perfect Speech, Perfect Action, Perfect Livelihood, Perfect Effort, Perfect Awareness and Perfect Absorption.

**Hinduism**

Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world.  The majority of [Hindus believe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism) in reincarnation and that the Divine is present in all things with nothing being permanent.  Belief is that the eternal soul is reborn millions of times in many forms and ultimately merges with the Universal Soul.  This is Nirvana.

**Taoism**

The emphasis in [Taoism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoism) is on the lightness of being and freedom from the demands of state on Confucianism.  Nothingness and emptiness are ultimate goals in the search for physical immortality.  The aim is to nourish the soul with meditation, yoga, alchemy and mind and body exercises.  Followers are taught to understand the harmony of fundamental energies which will lead to personal and social wisdom. Tao is indifferent to creation but is the driving force of nature and teaches its followers how to blend in to nature rather than to struggle against the inevitable.

**Confucianism**

[Confucianists believe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism) that heaven is a vast, infinite space composed of yin and yang forces and that the soul divides into yin and yang and reconfigures to be reborn.  Some followers believe in immortality and that time cannot be defined.  The philosophy of doing unto others what you would like for yourself comes from Confucianism.  Focus is on respect for teachers, ancestors and traditions including birth, maturity, marriage and death where relatives and friends mourn aloud.

**Judaism**

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the founders of Judaism. [Jews believe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism) that God made a contract with Abraham to lead Jews to the Promised Land.  Later dispersed and exiled many retained their culture and religious identity.  Followers believe that there is only one life and that the Soul is immortal and will face the day of judgement immediately after death.  The diet that is followed ‘kosher’ is similar to that followed in the Islamic religion.  The menorah, a seven branch candlestick, is a symbol of this faith.

**Christianity**

Christianity is centered on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the New Testament. [Christians believe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah (or Christ) prophesied in the Old Testament. To Christians, Jesus Christ is a teacher, the model of a pious life, the revealer of God, the mediator of salvation and the saviour who suffered, died and was resurrected in order to bring about salvation from sin for all.  Most Christian denominations teach that Jesus will judge the living and the dead, granting everlasting life to his followers.

**Islam**

Similar to Christianity, Islam is based on the Old Testament and follows the teachings up until the birth of Jesus Christ.  [Muslims believe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) that God creates, guides and directs all things and that there is one life only. Individuals have to face the Day of Judgment on death when some will enter heaven and some will enter hell.  Mohammed is the founder of Islam.  Little is known about his life but at 40 he was visited by the Angel Gabriel, became a prophet and began converting people to a new religion.