

# JOURNEY OF FAITHS

**H**ow was the world created? Why are we here? What happens after we die? Many people turn to religion for the answers to these questions. Religion is a way of understanding our spiritual life—the life of the soul.

Most faiths teach that we are guided by an all-powerful and loving God. We can't fully understand God, but we can learn about Him through His

Messengers, or Prophets. Although the names of some Messengers have been lost in history, we can learn about many of Them.

Exploring the world's religions is an amazing journey. This introduction to some of God's Messengers and the faiths They founded, in chronological order, is a map for beginning that journey.

## HINDUISM

BEGAN ABOUT 1500 B.C.E. IN INDIA

**Prophet:** Krishna

**Number of followers today:** About 850 million

**Sacred Texts:** The Bhagavad Gita (part of the Mahabharata), The Vedas, and others

**H**indus call their religion *sanatana dharma*, which means “eternal teaching.” God, or the eternal spirit, is called *Brahman*. Hinduism is not linked to one Founder. Hindus honor many gods and goddesses. Krishna is the most widely known of these. However, many Hindus consider these gods to be different aspects of Brahman, the one God.

Krishna is often portrayed as a playful, mischievous youth. On the festival of *Holi*, Hindus throw powdered

dyes and water at each other, in part to remember the pranks that Krishna played.

Krishna is also honored as a wise warrior. He is the narrator of an important Hindu text called the Bhagavad Gita. It is a conversation between Krishna and His cousin, Prince Arjuna, in which Krishna gives the prince advice as he prepares for war. The text is a guide to Hindu moral behavior.



## JUDAISM

BEGAN ABOUT 1275 B.C.E. IN THE MIDDLE EAST

**Prophets:** Abraham and Moses

**Number of followers today:** About 15 million

**Sacred Text:** The Tanak, which includes the Torah

**A**braham is honored as the first Leader of the Jewish faith. He taught that there is only one God. Many years later, a Jewish Prophet named Moses transformed the lives of the Jews.

When Moses was born, the Jews were slaves in Egypt. The pharaoh, or king, decided that all male Jewish infants would be killed, to keep the Jewish population from growing. To save Moses, His mother put Him in a basket to float down the Nile River. He was found by the pharaoh's daughter, who raised Him in the palace as her son.

As an adult, Moses left Egypt. He was herding sheep on Mount Sinai when God spoke to Him from a Burning Bush. God told Moses to return to Egypt and tell the pharaoh to free the Jews. He gave Moses the power to persuade the pharaoh through miracles and plagues. Moses led the Jews out of Egypt. He then received from God a key part of Jewish scripture, the Torah. Moses taught people to trust God under any circumstances.





"The peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God." —Bahá'u'lláh

## BUDDHISM

BEGAN ABOUT 528 B.C.E. IN INDIA

Prophet: Buddha

Number of followers today: About 375 million

Sacred Texts: The Tipitaka, the Dhammapada, and others.

**B**uddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, Who was born a prince. He grew up in luxury, with fine clothes and a palace for each season. He was kind to all people and animals.

After He grew up, Siddhartha began to question His comfortable lifestyle. He ventured outside of the palace walls and saw for the first time a sick man, an old man, a dead man, and a monk. He realized that no one can escape suffering in this life. At age 29, He left behind His riches to seek an answer to the problem of suffering.

For six years, Siddhartha studied with Hindu teachers. One evening, He sat in the shade of a fig tree. He meditated deeply throughout the night. At dawn, He understood the meaning of all things—



He achieved *nirvana*, or enlightenment. From then on, He was known as Buddha, which means

"enlightened one." Buddha traveled throughout India, giving talks about His teachings, for the next 45 years.

Buddha taught that all life involves suffering, in big and small ways. People become attached to the way things are, and they suffer when their lives change. Buddha said that people can overcome attachment by following the *Eightfold Path*. These eight teachings include consideration for others, speaking honestly and kindly, and freeing the mind from distraction.



## CHRISTIANITY

BEGAN ABOUT 26 C.E. IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Prophet: Jesus Christ

Number of followers today: About 2.1 billion

Sacred Text: The Bible

**J**esus grew up in the town of Nazareth, in what is now Israel. At the time, the area was ruled by the Romans. When Jesus was about 30 years old, a Jewish man named John the Baptist taught that the promised *Messiah* (meaning "anointed one") would soon appear. John baptized many people by immersing them in the River Jordan, to represent the washing away of sins. Jesus was among those baptized by John.

The Bible relates that when Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Jesus retreated to the wilderness to pray, fast, and meditate for 40



days. When He emerged, He began to teach a new faith.

Jesus taught that love and service to others are extremely important. He became known for healing the sick, performing miracles, and being kind to social outcasts. He had many followers.

Some religious leaders were upset that Jesus was encouraging His followers to break Jewish traditions. After teaching just two or three years, He was arrested and killed. Still, His followers carried on His teachings, and Christianity spread throughout the world.





## ISLAM

BEGAN 622 C.E. IN SAUDI ARABIA

Prophet: **Muhammad**

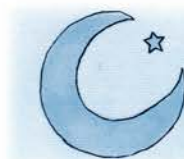
Number of followers today: About 1.3 billion

Sacred Text: The Qur'an

**M**uhammad grew up in what is now Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He was a camel-driver and trader. Who was known for His honesty and trustworthiness. Muhammad often went to the mountains to pray and meditate. He was troubled that the people around Him no longer worshipped one God, as Abraham had taught.

One night, when Muhammad was about 40 years old, He was meditating in a cave. Suddenly, an angel appeared and commanded Him, "Recite!" At first, Muhammad was terrified and did not know what to say. But then He began to speak. His words, recited throughout His life, became part of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam.

He began to teach others to worship one God (*Allah* in Arabic) and submit their will to the will



of God. Most people mocked and persecuted Him. They called Him a madman and threw stones into His house.



After about 10 years, Muhammad went to the city of Medina and established peace among the feuding Arab tribes. In time, He united the tribes throughout Arabia.

Muhammad returned to Mecca and went to the *Kaaba*, a Holy Place that had been honored in the time of Abraham. Today, Muslims visit the Kaaba for *hajj*, or pilgrimage. Muslims also face the Kaaba for prayer five times each day.

## BAHÁ'Í FAITH

BEGAN ABOUT 1844 C.E. IN IRAN

Prophet: **Bahá'u'lláh**

Number of followers today: About 5 million

Sacred Texts: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, and others

**T**he Bahá'í Faith was founded by an Iranian nobleman named Mírzá Husayn-'Alí. He later became known as Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God). When He was 27 years old, Bahá'u'lláh learned of a Prophet called the Báb (the Gate). The Báb announced that a new Messenger of God would soon appear. His many followers were known as Bábís.

The government feared that the Bábí Faith would threaten their power. They persecuted the Bábís, and many were put to death. The Báb Himself was executed. As a Bábí, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in a filthy dungeon in Tíhrán called the *Síyáh-Chál* (the Black Pit). It was here that Bahá'u'lláh saw a vision of a Maiden. She announced that Bahá'u'lláh was "the Mystery of God and His Treasure"—God's Messenger.

Bahá'u'lláh was released from prison and exiled



to Baghdád, Iraq. Over the next 10 years, He became respected for His wisdom and kindness. However, the authorities were still intent on stopping His teachings. He was exiled to Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). Before leaving Iraq, Bahá'u'lláh spent 12 days in the Garden of Ridván. There, He announced that He was the Messenger of God promised by the Báb.

In spite of more exiles and imprisonment, Bahá'u'lláh taught that the time had come for world peace. All nations can decide to end war, poverty, and prejudice. He said that all people have the right to be educated, and that women and men have equal rights. He urged world leaders to practice justice, and counseled all people to live in harmony.

