**Religion and Beliefs:**

* Religion is humanity’s way of **explaining the unexplainable**.
* God/The gods were and are seen as the provider and sustainer of life.
* All cultures have a religion of sorts.
* All religions seek to answer how we got here and what is our purpose

**Judaism:**

**Jewish Holy Book:**

* The origins and history of the Jewish people is contained an a document called the Torah.
* The Torah is NOT one book, but a collection of books that were written between the years 2000 B.C.E. and 400 B.C.E.
* Sometimes the Torah is referred to as the Five Books of Moses.

**Jewish Creation Story:**

* The Jewish creation story described in Genesis is also believed by both Christians and Muslims.
* God created the universe in 6 days; and on the seventh God rested. For Jews, the 7th day represents the Sabbath or Shabbat.
* God creates the universe out of nothing.
* For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, God is the One—perfect unity and pure essence in whom all goodness, justice, and beauty derives.

**History:**

* Judaism began circa 1800 B.C.E. in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) with a man named Abraham.
* One day, Abraham was called by God to take his family and travel to the land of Canaan, where he would become the father of a great nation. They eventually migrated to Egypt and were enslaved.

**General Timeline:**

* 1250B.C.E. Moses led Hebrews from Egypt
  + According to tradition, he heard the voice of God and made a holy, binding agreement that if the Hebrews would accept God as ruler of Heaven and earth, God would make Hebrews the chosen people
* By 1025B.C.E. Kingdom of Israel is formed.
* United Israel only had three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon.
  + David unified Israel, made it a Middle East power
  + Solomon’s reign was peaceful, built great temple

**The End of United Israel:**

* When Solomon died, his sons disputed who would rule the kingdom. There was a war, which was resolved by the kingdom of Israel being divided into two separate kingdoms:
  + Judah: Southern Israel encompassing the tribes of Judah (David’s tribe) and the small tribe of Benjamin.
  + Israel: Northern Israel encompassing the remaining ten tribes.

**Babylonian Captivity:**

* Solomon died in 931 B.C.E. at which time his kingdom was divided between two of his sons.
* Between the years of 700 B.C.E. and 600 B.C.E. both kingdoms were attacked and destroyed by the Babylonians, a strong empire to the east of Israel.
* During this time, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (580s B.C.E.) and Jews were forced leave their homes in Israel and were resettled in Babylonia.

**The Second Temple:**

* In 539 B.C.E., the Persian Empire, under King Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonians and allowed exiled Jews to return to Israel and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.

**Persians, Greeks, and Romans (580 B.C.E.-70 C.E.):**

* Although Jews were allowed to live in Israel and worship their God, they were controlled remotely by foreign empires.
* The Persians were the kindest to the Jews, allowing them to practice their culture and religion freely.
* Under the Persians, Jews began to speak Aramaic, the common language of the Middle East. Hebrew was only used in religious settings.
* In 332 B.C.E. the Greeks, under Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire.
* From 332-63 B.C.E., Israel was controlled by Greek governors.
* Under the Greeks, Israel became very metropolitan and Greek became as widely spoken as Aramaic. Most Jews at this time became trilingual in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew.
* In 63 B.C.E., the Romans conquered the province of Israel and sent a legion of troops and a governor to keep order in the province.
* The Romans ruled as harshly as the Greeks and imposed Roman ways and customs on the Jews, which greatly angered the Jews.

**New Ideas:**

* There is only one God
* God chooses to behave in a way that is both just and fair.
* Jews combine two different sounding ideas of God in their beliefs:
  + God is an all-powerful being who is quite beyond human ability to understand or imagine.
  + God is right here with us, caring about each individual as a parent does their child.

**Beliefs:**

* God exists; There is only one God; There are no other gods
* God can't be subdivided into different persons
* Jews should worship only the one God
* God is Transcendent: God is above and beyond all earthly things.
* God doesn't have a body, which means that God is neither female nor male.

**Beliefs: (Continued)**

* God created the universe without help
* God is omnipresent: God is everywhere, all the time.
* God is omnipotent: God can do anything at all.
* God is beyond time: God has always existed
* God will always exist.
* God is just, but God is also merciful God punishes the bad
* God rewards the good
* God is forgiving towards those who mess things up.
* God is personal and accessible.

**Important Holidays:**

* Rosh Hashanah- Jewish New Year
* Yom Kippur- Day of Atonement
* Hanukkah- celebrates the ending of persecution of Syrian laws ~170 B.C.E.
* Passover- celebrates the libration of the children of Israel out of Egypt by Moses

**Hinduism**

**Background:**

* No founder
* Aryans, settlers of northern India ~2500B.C.E.
  + Social organization of caste
  + Many Hindu texts written at this time
* Interaction with other cultures leads to spread of ideals
* No central religious authority 🡪 different practices developed

**Basic Hindu Beliefs:**

* Salvation is achieved through a spiritual oneness of the soul with the ultimate reality of the universe, Brahman, by breaking the cycle of reincarnation by doing good deeds and fulfilling one's duty in life
* All things have souls so all life is sacred.
* Cycle of death and rebirth continues until moksha (release from the cycle) is achieved.
* Patriarchal
* Usually non violent to avoid bad or negative karma that will prevent you from growing closer to moksha.
* Polytheistic? Monotheistic? Something else?

**Deities:**

* Brahman: Creator of Life
* Gods and goddesses are manifestation of Brahman:
  + Brahma, the Creator
  + Vishnu, the Preserver
  + Shiva, the Destroyer
* The three are known as Trimurti, the three deities who represent absolute reality

**Significant Writings:**

* Vedas: literature of religious professionals
  + Upanishads: mystical writings
* Agamas: literature of the people
  + Ramayana and Mahabharata: epic poems
  + Bhagavad Gita: considered the epitome of the religion

**Caste System:**

* The Caste System is a rigid class structure
* Dharma and Karma: If you lead a good life, you will be rewarded by being reincarnated as a person belonging to the next highest level in the Caste System.
* However, if you are wicked, you will be demoted, and possibly even removed from the Caste System altogether.
* Outcasts, or Untouchables, are members of Hindu society thought to have been removed from the Caste System, with no hope of returning to it, due to their misdeeds in previous lives. Work that is deemed unclean for all other Hindus is reserved for these Outcasts.
* A person who followed the rules of their caste (dharma) would be reborn to a higher form in the next life. A Hindu who neglected their duties would be reborn in a lower form, perhaps as an animal or insect. The goal of Hinduism is to escape the cycle of rebirth by reaching moksha.

**Buddhism**

**Beginnings:**

* Founder-Siddartha Gautama, or Buddha, which means "enlightened one.”
* In 6th c. B.C.E., Brahmin caste was very powerful. Reformers tried to limit their power.
* Gautama was a prince who had a luxurious life.
* Seers predicted he would be a great ruler OR a world redeemer🡪 father wanted the former
* Very shielded from unpleasantness of life
* Married a princess at age 16; had a son
* In time he witnessed an old man, a man suffering with disease, and a corpse outside of his palace.
* He left his wife and son and wandered for years until he achieved Enlightenment.
* The Buddha said that it didn’t matter what a person’s status in the world was, their gender, or what their background or wealth or nationality might be.  All were capable of enlightenment, and all were welcome.
* This was radically different from what society was like.

**Beginnings: (Continued)**

* Upon reflection, Gautama deduced that desire was the root cause of all suffering. This idea has been recorded as the Four Noble Truths.

**Four Noble Truths:**

1. Life is full of pain and suffering; suffering is universal
2. Human desire causes this suffering.
3. By putting an end to desire, humans can end suffering
4. Humans can end desire by following the Eightfold Path

**Impact of Buddhism:**

* Geographic Origin-Developed in India and spread through Asia and especially Southeast Asia.
* Today- Most common in Southeast Asia and Japan.
* Significant Writings-Tripitka, or Three Baskets of Wisdom.

**Main Sects of Buddhism:**

* Theravada Buddhism
  + Stresses the monastic life
  + Respects Buddha as teacher, but not a god
  + Spread to Southeast Asia
* Mahayana Buddhism
  + Worships Buddha as a god
  + Spread to China, Tibet, Japan, Korea

**Tenets:**

* Buddhism is more of a guide on how to morally and ethically live one’s life away from suffering. Many become monks or nuns, living an ascetic lifestyle.
* There is no belief in a personal God. It is not centered on the relationship between humanity and God
* Buddhists believe that nothing is fixed or permanent - change is always possible
* Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple

**Buddha preached a religion…**

* Devoid of authority
* Devoid of ritual
* Devoid of tradition
* Devoid of the supernatural
* Of intense self-effort