

ReligionFacts Just the facts on the world's religions.


The Big Religion Chart







The ReligionFacts "**Big Religion Chart**" is an attempt to summarize all the complexities of religions and belief systems into tiny little boxes on a single, quick-reference **comparison chart**. Yes, of course this is impossible. As we always warn with our comparison charts, this is no substitute for reading about religions in greater detail, talking with religious adherents, etc. But this religion comparison chart can (hopefully) be a useful and accessible way to "get the gist" of some unfamiliar groups and compare basic beliefs and practices of the world's religions and belief systems.









Despite the chart's simplistic title, we have been very inclusive with what is regarded as a "**religion**" for purposes of this comparison chart. Basically, the grounds for a group's inclusion are that it provides a set of teachings and/or rituals that deal with the traditionally "religious" issues of ultimate reality, the meaning of life, and/or how to find fulfillment, spiritual health or salvation. Also, all the groups listed below can be found in dictionaries of religion.







Inclusion of a group on this list does not mean that the group is a "religion" *per se* (note that atheism is listed) or a "true religion" or that "[one listed group] is just as much a religion as [another listed group]." Similarly, if a group does not appear on this chart it doesn't mean it's not a religion or doesn't matter; the chart is **not comprehensive** and is continually growing. In addition, listing groups separately does not mean they are mutually exclusive, nor does grouping them together mean that they are basically the same thing. This is not an authoritative list of religions, simply a resource on some worldviews and ways of life that hopefully some will find useful.






Links in the left column go to ReligionFacts articles where available (see also the [A-Z Religion Index](#)). For more information on numbers of adherents, please see [Adherents.com](#), from which most of the stats are taken. Last updated: 12/4/07.







Religion/Sect/ Belief System	Origins & History	Adherents Worldwide (approx.)	God(s) and Universe	Human Situation and Life's Purpose	Afterlife	Practices	Texts	More Info
Aladura	Various prophet-healing churches founded since c.1918, West Nigeria.	1 million	Generally monotheistic; a mix of Anglican, Pentecostal and traditional African beliefs.	Strong emphasis on healing and salvation in this life through prayer, fasting and other rituals.	Not emphasized; views vary.	Spiritual healing is central. Mix of Anglican and African rituals; a prophet plays a prominent role.	None	ReligionFacts article
Asatru 	Revival of Norse and Germanic paganism, 1970s Scandinavia and USA.	unknown	Polytheistic, Norse gods and goddesses, Norse creation myths.	Salvation or redemption not emphasized. Fatalistic view of universe.	Valhalla (heaven) for death in battle; Hel (peaceful place) for most; Hifhel (hell) for the very evil.	Sacrifice of food or drink, toast to the gods, shamanism (less frequently), celebration of solstice holidays. Nine Noble Virtues is moral code.	<i>Eddas</i> (Norse epics); the Havamal (proverbs attributed to Odin)	ReligionFacts article Asatru Alliance Wikipedia
Atheism	Appears in history, but especially after the Enlightenment (19th cent).	1.1 billion (this figure includes agnostic and non-religious, which tend to be grouped on surveys)	There is no God or divine being. Beliefs about the universe generally based on latest scientific	Only humans can help themselves and each other solve the world's problems.	none	none	Influential works include those by Marx, Freud, Feuerbach, and Voltaire.	The Secular Web BBC Religion Wikipedia




			findings.					
Baha'i Faith 	Founded by Bahá'u'lláh, 1863, Tehran, Iran.	5-7 million	One God, who has revealed himself progressively through major world religions.	The soul is eternal and essentially good. Purpose of life is to develop spiritually and draw closer to God.	Soul separates from the body and begins a journey towards or away from God. Heaven and hell are states of being.	Daily prayer, avoidance of intoxicants, scripture reading, hard work, education, work for social justice and equality.	Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and other Bahá'í leaders	ReligionFacts section The Baha'i World
Bön	Indigenous religion of Tibet.	100,000	Nontheistic Buddhism, but meditation on peaceful and wrathful deities.	Purpose is to gain enlightenment.	Reincarnation until gain enlightenment	Meditation on mandalas and Tibetan deities, astrology, monastic life.	Bonpo canon	ReligionFacts article Tibet.com
Buddhism 	Founded by Siddharta Gautama (the Buddha) in c. 520 BC, NE India.	360 million	Varies: Theravada atheistic; Mahayana more polytheistic. Buddha taught nothing is permanent.	Purpose is to avoid suffering and gain enlightenment and release from cycle of rebirth, or at least attain a better rebirth by gaining merit.	Reincarnation (understood differently than in Hinduism, with no surviving soul) until gain enlightenment	Meditation, mantras, devotion to deities (in some sects), mandalas (Tibetan)	Tripitaka (Pali Canon); Mahayana sutras like the Lotus Sutra; others.	ReligionFacts section BuddhaNet
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Cao Dai 	Founded in 1926, Vietnam by Ngo Van Chieu and others based on a séance.	4-6 million	God represented by Divine Eye. Founders of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity venerated, and saints including Victor Hugo.	Goal is peace and harmony in each person and in the world. Salvation by "cultivating self and finding God in self."	Reincarnation. Bad karma can lead to rebirth on a darker planet; good karma to better life on earth. Eventual attainment of nirvana or heaven.	Hierarchy similar to Roman Catholicism. Daily prayer. Meditation. Communication with spirit world (now outlawed in Vietnam).	Caodai canon	ReligionFacts article CaoDai.org
Chinese Religion 	Indigenous folk religion of China.	394 million	Dualistic yin and yang; mythological beings and folk deities.	Purpose is a favorable life and peaceful afterlife, attained through rituals and honoring of ancestors.	Judgment, then reincarnation or temporary hell until gain a Buddhist-type paradise.	Ancestor worship, prayer, longevity practices, divination, prophecy and astrology, feng shui.	None	ReligionFacts section Chinese Cultural Studies
Chopra Center 	Founded by Deepak Chopra in 1991, California	unknown	monism - God or Supreme Reality pervades all things; all is unity	Humans have limitless potential, but do not recognize this. Health and success can be had by focusing on whole self (mind, body, spirit).	Reincarnation	Yoga, meditation, massage, nutrition, mindfulness, detox sessions, positive thinking.	Deepak Chopra's many books, such as the <i>Seven Spiritual Laws of Success</i>	ReligionFacts article Official Website
Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox) 	Founded by Jesus Christ in c. 30 AD, Israel.	2 billion	One God who is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	All have sinned and are thereby separated from God. Salvation is through faith in Christ and, for some, sacraments and good works.	Eternal heaven or hell (or temporary purgatory).	Prayer, Bible study, baptism, Eucharist, church on Sundays, numerous holidays.	The Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments)	ReligionFacts section Wikipedia BBC Religion
Christian Science	Founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879, Massachusetts.	150,000 - 400,000	One God. No Trinity (in traditional sense). Matter and evil do not exist.	Salvation is "Life, Truth, and Love understood and demonstrated as supreme over	Heaven is "not a locality, but a divine state of Mind in which all the manifestations	Spiritual healing through prayer and knowledge, Sunday services, daily Bible and <i>Science & Health</i>	Christian Bible, <i>Science & Health with Key to the Scriptures</i>	ReligionFacts article Official Website

				all; sin, sickness and death destroyed."	of Mind are harmonious and immortal."	reading.		
Confucianism 	Founded by Confucius (551–479 BC), China	5-6 million	Not addressed	Purpose of life is to fulfill one's role in society with propriety, honor, and loyalty.	Not addressed	Honesty, politeness, propriety, humaneness, perform correct role in society, loyalty to family, nation	<i>Analects</i>	ReligionFacts article Wikipedia
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Deism 	Especially popularized in the 18th-cent. Enlightenment under Kant, Voltaire, Paine, Jefferson, and others	unknown	One Creator God who is uninterested in the world. Reason is basis for all knowledge.	Not addressed	Not addressed	None prescribed, although some deists practice prayer.	Thomas Paine's <i>The Age of Reason</i> and similar texts	World Union of Deists Wikipedia
Druze 	Al-Darazi in 11th century, Cairo, Egypt. Roots in the Isma'iliyya sect of Shia Islam.	500,000	Universal Intelligence (<i>al-Aql al-Kullī</i>) or Divine Essence (akin to Neoplatonism), of which al-Hakim is believed to be an incarnation.	Live a good life for a favorable reincarnation. Await the re-appearance of al-Hakim (a Fatimid caliph who disappeared in 1021), who will usher in a Golden Age for true believers.	Reincarnation. Heaven is a spiritual existence when one has escaped reincarnation. Hell is distance from God in lifetime after lifetime.	Modest lifestyles, fasting before Eid al-Adha. Beliefs and practices are hidden for protection from persecution. Special group of initiates called <i>uqqal</i> .	<i>Al-Naqq al-Khafi</i> (Copy of the Secret); <i>Al-Juz' al-Awwal</i> (Essence of the First)	Wikipedia Lexicorient
Eckankar 	John Paul Twitchell in 1965, Las Vegas.	50-500,000	The Divine Spirit, called "ECK"	"Each of us is Soul, a spark of God sent to this world to gain spiritual experience." Salvation is liberation and God-realization.	Reincarnation. The Soul is eternal by nature and on a spiritual journey. Liberation possible in a single lifetime.	Spiritual Exercises of ECK: mantras, meditation, and dreams. These enable Soul travel and spiritual growth.	<i>Shariyat-Ki-Sugmad</i> and books by Harold Klemp	ReligionFacts article Official Website
Epicureanism 	Epicurus in c.300 BC, Athens.	unknown	A deistic sort of polytheism: the gods exist, but take no notice of humans.	Materialism: everything is made of atoms, including gods and the soul.	No afterlife. The soul dissolves when the body dies.	Pursue the highest pleasures (friendship and tranquility) and avoid pain.	Letters and <i>Principal Doctrines</i> of Epicurus	ReligionFacts article Epicurus.net
Falun Gong 	Li Hongzhi in 1992 in China	10 million	Countless gods and spiritual beings. Demonic aliens.	The Falun (wheel) is an energy source located in the navel. Goal is spiritual transcendence, achieved by practicing Falun Gong.	Not addressed	Five exercises to strengthen the Falun. Cultivation of truthfulness, benevolence and forbearance. Meat eating discouraged.	<i>Zhuan Falun</i> and other writings by Master Li	ReligionFacts article Falundafa.org
Gnosticism 	Various teachers including Valentinus, 1st-2nd cents. AD	ancient form extinct; small modern revival groups	The supreme God is unknowable; the creator god is evil and matter is evil.	Humans can return to the spiritual world through secret knowledge of the universe.	Return to the spiritual world.	Asceticism, celibacy	Gnostic scriptures including various <i>Gospels</i> and <i>Acts</i> attributed to apostles.	Wikipedia Gnosis.org

Greek Religion 	Variety of religions of ancient Greeks	ancient form extinct	Olympic pantheon (Zeus, etc.) mixed with eastern deities like Isis and Cybele	Human life is subject to the whim of the gods and to Fate; these can be controlled through sacrifice and divination.	Beliefs varied from no afterlife to shadowy existence in the underworld to a paradise-like afterlife (mainly in mystery religions).	Animal sacrifice, harvest offerings, festivals, games, processions, dance, plays, in honor of the gods. Secret initiations and rituals in mystery religions.	Epic poems of Homer and Hesiod.	ReligionFacts section Wikipedia Ancient Greek Religion
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Hare Krishna 	Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, 1966, USA (with roots in 15th-century Hindu movement)	250,000-1 million	Krishna is the Supreme God.	Salvation from this Age of Kali is by a return to Godhead, accomplished through Krishna-Consciousness.	Reincarnation until unite with the Godhead.	Chanting, dancing, evangelism, vegetarianism, temple worship, monastic-style living.	<i>The Bhagavad-Gita As It Is</i>	ReligionFacts article ISKCON.com Krishna.com
Hinduism 	Indigenous religion of India as developed to present day.	900 million	One Supreme Reality (Brahman) manifested in many gods and goddesses	Humans are in bondage to ignorance and illusion, but are able to escape. Purpose is to gain release from rebirth, or at least a better rebirth.	Reincarnation until gain enlightenment.	Yoga, meditation, worship (puja), devotion to a god or goddess, pilgrimage to holy cities, live according to one's dharma (purpose/ role).	<i>The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, etc.</i>	ReligionFacts section BBC Religion
Islam 	Muhammad, 622 AD, Saudi Arabia	1.3 billion (Sunni: 940 million)	One God (Allah in Arabic)	Humans must submit (<i>islam</i>) to the will of God to gain Paradise after death.	Paradise or Hell.	Five Pillars: Faith, Prayer, Alms, Pilgrimage, Fasting. Mosque services on Fridays. Ablutions before prayer. No alcohol or pork. Holidays related to the pilgrimage and fast of Ramadan.	<i>Qur'an</i> (Scripture); <i>Hadith</i> (tradition)	ReligionFacts section BBC Religion IslamicCity
Jainism 	Mahavira, c. 550 BC, eastern India	4 million	The universe is eternal; many gods exist. Gods, humans and all living things are classified in a complex hierarchy.	The soul is uncreated and eternal and can attain perfect divinity. Purpose is to gain liberation from cycle of rebirth, by avoiding all bad karma, especially by causing no harm to any sentient being.	Reincarnation until liberation.	Monasticism under the Five Great Vows (Non-Violence, Truth, Celibacy, Non-Stealing, Non-Possessiveness); worship at temples and at home. Meditation and mantras.	The teachings of Mahavira in various collections.	ReligionFacts section BBC Religion Jainworld.com
Jehovah's Witnesses 	Charles Taze Russell, 1879, Pittsburgh	6.5 million	One God, Jehovah. No Trinity - Christ is the first creation of God; the Holy Spirit is a force.	Salvation is through faith in Christ and obeying Jehovah's laws. The End of the World is soon.	Heaven for 144,000 chosen Witnesses, eternity on new earth for other Witnesses. All others annihilated. No hell.	No blood transfusions, no celebration of holidays, no use of crosses or religious images. Baptism, Sunday service at Kingdom Hall, strong emphasis on evangelism.	<i>New World Translation of the Scriptures</i>	ReligionFacts section Official Website BBC Religion
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Judaism	The religion of	14 million	One God,	Obey God's	Not historically	Circumcision at	Bible	ReligionFacts

	the Hebrews (c. 1300 BC), especially after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD.		Yahweh.	commandments, live ethically. Focus is more on this life than the next.	emphasized. Beliefs vary from no afterlife to shadowy existence to the World to Come (similar to heaven).	birth, bar/bat mitzvah at adulthood. Synagogue services on Saturdays. No pork or other non-kosher foods. Holidays related to historical events.	(Tanakh), Talmud	section Judaism 101 BBC Religion
Mayan Religion 	c.250 AD (rise of the Mayan civilization)	Historically, up to 2 million. Some survival today.	Many gods, including Itzamná, Bolon Tzacab, and Chac	Appease and nourish the gods; determine luckiest dates for various activities.	The soul journeys through dark and threatening underworld; but sacrificial victims and women who die in childbirth go to heaven.	Astronomy, divination, human sacrifice, elaborate burial for royalty, worship in stone pyramid-temples	Dresden, Madrid, and Paris codices; <i>Books of Chilam Balam</i> ; <i>Popol Vuh</i> ; <i>The Ritual of the Bacabs</i>	ReligionFacts article
Mormonism (LDS) 	Joseph Smith, 1830, New York	12.2 million	God the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate individual beings	Humans existed as spirits before this life, salvation is returning to God. Salvation by faith in Christ, good works, ordinances, and evangelism.	All return to spirit world for period of instruction before resurrection. Mormons to heaven with God and families; others rewarded but not with God; hell for those who reject God after death.	Abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea; baptism for the dead; eternal marriage; temple garments under daily clothes; active evangelism.	Christian Bible, <i>Book of Mormon</i> , <i>Doctrine and Covenants</i> , and <i>Pearl of Great Price</i>	ReligionFacts section Official Website BBC Religion
New Age	Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Annie Besant in the 19th C, Alice A. Bailey (1880-1949), flourished in 1970s and 80s	5 million (very approximate)	The Divine is an impersonal life force that pervades all things	Dawning of a New Age of heightened consciousness and international peace. Individuals can obtain a foretaste of the New Age through spiritual transformation ("Ascension"). More emphasis on the latter now. Evil comes from ignorance.	Reincarnation based on karma	Astrology; mysticism; use of crystals; yoga; tarot readings; holistic medicine; psychic abilities; angelic communications; channeling; amulets; fortune-telling	Works of a variety of New Age writers	Beliefnet Religious Movements Homepage
New Thought 	Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-66) and others, late 19th century, USA.	160,000	Generally monism (all is One), but members might be theists, pantheists or panentheists. God is immanent; the universe is essentially spiritual.	Man is divine, essentially spirit, and has infinite possibility. Mind can control the body. Sin and sickness caused by incorrect thinking. Man can live in oneness with God in love, truth, peace, health, and prosperity.	"Life is eternal in the invisible kingdom of God."	Emphasis on spiritual and mental healing, but without rejection of modern medicine. Worship services; prayer for the sick; discussion of New Thought authors and ideas.	Writings of Quimby (such as the <i>The Quimby Manuscripts</i>) and other New Thought authors	ReligionFacts article International New Thought Alliance Religious Movements Homepage
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Rastafari 	Teachings of Marcus Garvey (1920s, Jamaica) and coronation of	1 million	God is Jah, who became incarnate in Jesus (who was black) and	Humans are temples of Jah. Salvation is primarily in this world and	Some Rastas will experience "everliving" (physical immortality).	Many practices based on Jewish biblical Law. Abstinence from most or all meat,	Holy Piby (the "Blackman's Bible). The Ethiopian	ReligionFacts article The Afrocentric Experience

	Haile Selassie (1930, Ethiopia)		Haile Selassie.	consists of liberation from oppression and return to Africa.	Heaven is a return to Eden, which is in Africa.	artificial foods, and alcohol. Use of marijuana in religious rituals and for medicine. Wearing of dreadlocks.	epic Kebra Negast also revered.	Jamaicans.com
Scientology 	L. Ron Hubbard, 1954, California	70,000 or several million, depending on the source	God(s) not specified; reality explained in the Eight Dynamics	Human consists of body, mind and thetan; capable of great things. Gain spiritual freedom by ridding mind of engrams.	Reincarnation	Auditing, progressing up various levels until "clear". Focus on education and drug recovery programs.	Writings of Hubbard, such as <i>Dianetics</i> and <i>Scientology</i>	ReligionFacts section Official Website Beliefnet
Seventh-day Adventists 	Rooted in Millerite movement; Ellen White was main leader; founded 1863 in New England	10 million [source]	One God who is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	Second Coming of Christ is imminent; salvation is by faith in Christ; emphasis on quality of life both now and in afterlife	A "peaceful pause" after death until the coming of Christ, then resurrection to judgment and eternity in heaven or hell	Sabbath observance on Saturdays; healthful lifestyle; baptism by immersion	Bible only; but later prophets like Ellen White are authoritative when tested against Scriptures	ReligionFacts article Official Website Beliefnet
Shinto 	Indigenous religion of Japan.	3-4 million	Polytheism based on the <i>kami</i> , ancient gods or spirits.	Humans are pure by nature and can keep away evil through purification rituals and attain good things by calling on the kami.	Death is bad and impure. Some humans become kami after death.	Worship and offerings to kami at shrines and at home. Purification rituals.	Important texts are <i>Kojiki</i> or 'Records of Ancient Matters' and <i>Nihon-gi</i> or 'Chronicles of Japan'	ReligionFacts article Wikipedia Japan Guide BBC Religion
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Sikhism 	Guru Nanak, c. 1500 AD, Punjab, India.	23 million	One God (Ik Onkar, Nam)	Overcome the self, align life with will of God, and become a "saint soldier," fighting for good.	Reincarnation until resolve karma and merge with God.	Prayer and meditation on God's name, services at temple (gurdwara), turban and five Ks. Balance work, worship, and charity. No monasticism or asceticism.	<i>Adi Granth</i> (<i>Sri Guru Granth Sahib</i>)	ReligionFacts section Sikhs.org SikhNet.com
Stoicism	Zeno in c.313 BC, Athens.	unknown	Pantheism: the logos pervades the universe.	Purpose is happiness, achieved by virtue, i.e., living reasonably.	Possible continued existence of the Soul, but not a personal existence.	Ethical and philosophical training, self-reflection, careful judgment and inner calm.	Fragments of founders plus later writers like Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius.	ReligionFacts article Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Taoism 	Lao-Tzu, c. 550 BC, China.	20 million (394 million adherents of Chinese religion)	Pantheism - the Tao pervades all. Yin-yang - opposites make up a unity.	Purpose is inner harmony, peace, and longevity. Achieved by living in accordance with the Tao.	Revert back to state of non-being, which is simply the other side of being.	General attitude of detachment and non-struggle, "go with the flow" of the Tao. Tai-chi, acupuncture, and alchemy to help longevity.	<i>Tao Te Ching</i> , <i>Chuang-Tzu</i>	ReligionFacts section Taopage.org Beliefnet
Unification Church 	Sun Myung Moon, 1954, South Korea.	Over 1 million (3 million acc. to official sources)	Monotheism, with the duality of God (esp. masculine and feminine) emphasized. No Trinity doctrine.	Purpose is true love and world peace instead of selfish love. True love and the kingdom of God on earth will be restored by the creation of "true	Eternal life in a spirit world.	Blessing Ceremony	<i>The Divine Principle</i> (1954) by Rev. Moon.	ReligionFacts article Official website

				families."				
Unitarian Universalism 	Formal merger of Unitarians and Universalists in 1961, USA.	800,000	Not specified. Members might believe in one God, many gods, or no God.	Salvation is "spiritual health or wholeness." Members seek "inner and outer peace," insight, health, compassion and strength.	Not specified. Some believe in an afterlife, some do not. Very few believe in hell - "Universalism" indicates the belief that all will be saved.	Ceremonies for marriages, funerals, etc. Church services have elements from various religions. Emphasis on civil rights, social justice, equality and environment. Most UUs are anti-death penalty and pro-gay rights.	Many sacred texts are revered by various members; some none at all. The Bible is the most commonly used text.	ReligionFacts article UUA.org
Wicca 	Based on ancient pagan beliefs, but modern form founded early 1900s. Founder generally said to be Gerald Gardner.	1-3 million	Polytheism, centered on the Goddess and God, each in various forms; also a belief in a Supreme Being over all	"If it harms none, do what you will."	Reincarnation until reach the Summerland	Prayer, casting a circle, Drawing Down the Moon, reciting spells, dancing, singing, sharing cakes and wine or beer	No sacred text; foundational texts include <i>The Witch Cult in Western Europe</i> and <i>The God of the Witches</i>	ReligionFacts article Wicca.org Wikipedia
Zoroastrianism 	Zoroaster in c.6th cent. BC, Persia. Official religion of ancient Persia. May have influenced Judaism and Vedic religion.	c. 200,000	One God, Ahura Mazda, but a dualistic worldview in which an evil spirit, Angra Mainyu, is almost as powerful.	Humans are free to do good or evil, must choose the side of good.	Judgement followed by heaven or hell. Hell is temporary until final purgation and return to Ahura Mazda.	Good deeds, charity, equality, hard work.	<i>Zend Avesta</i>	ReligionFacts article BBC Religion WZO
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comparison of world religions, religion chart, chart of religions, table of religions, compare beliefs and practices
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