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## Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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# World Religions

## Do all religions lead to God?

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### III. Buddhism

#### A. *What is Buddhism?*

Though a wide variety of beliefs fall under the umbrella of Buddhism, all Buddhists draw their teachings from those of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha. There are approximately 330 million Buddhists worldwide.

#### 2. *How did Buddhism originate?*

Siddhartha Gautama was born to a wealthy family near Benares, India, about 563 B.C. His father sought to protect him from the cruel realities of life. But venturing into the world, he saw the "four passing sights": an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a calm ascetic. The sight of suffering launched him on his search for peace through asceticism. After six years, he came to "enlightenment" under the "Bodhi" tree. He thenceforth became known as Buddha ("enlightened one"). He spent the remainder of his life spreading the message of enlightenment. His final words were: "All the constituents of being are transitory; work out your salvation with diligence."

Buddhism remained in India until King Ashoka sent missionaries throughout the east in the third century B.C. It is now prevalent throughout Asia, though not so much in India.

#### 3. *What are Buddhism's basic teachings?*

##### 1. The Four Noble Truths

- a. To exist is to encounter suffering.

2. The cause of suffering is desire. (Why? Because all things are impermanent.)
3. Suffering ceases when desire ceases.
4. Desire is extinguished by following the eight-fold path.

## 2. The Eight-fold Path

- a. Panna ("wisdom")
  1. Right understanding
  2. Right thought
2. Sila ("ethical conduct")
  1. Right speech
  2. Right action
  3. Right livelihood
3. Smadhi ("mental discipline")
  1. Right effort
  2. Right awareness
  3. Right meditation

## 3. Other Important Concepts

- a. Anatha. There is no self. There is no permanent entity called the soul; only transitory functions.
2. Samsara. There is a cycle of birth and rebirth.
3. Karma. Experiences are the consequences of past actions.
4. Nirvana ("extinction"). There is a release from *samsara*, and the extinction of suffering and desire. *Nirvana* is, however, indescribable. It is neither existence nor non-existence.

## 4. *How did Buddhism develop?*

There are two main streams of Buddhism:

1. Hinayana Buddhism ("The Lesser Vehicle")

This is also called *Theravada Buddhism* ("Teaching of the Elders"). Its major distinctive is that the goal of life is to attain personal enlightenment through individual effort, ultimately as a monk. They conceive of Buddha as only a man.

## 2. Mahayana Buddhism ("The Greater Vehicle")

This is by far the more popular form. Assistance can be sought from *bodhisattvas* in attaining salvation. These are persons beyond this world who have achieved enlightenment but who have postponed entrance to *Nirvana* in order to help others still on the way. Buddha is conceived as a divine being, an incarnation of an eternal "Buddha essence" that pervades all things.

Zen (from *ch'an* the Chinese word for "meditation") Buddhism is a popular teaching in Japan and the West.

Followers of Zen claim that its essence cannot be reduced to words, but can only be passed on by experience. Its primary aim, however, is to help its disciples experience the futility of reason and the "oneness" of all reality. A Zen devotee must engage in *zazen* (meditation seated in the lotus position), while contemplating a *koan* (a problem or riddle with no rational solution). He also must participate in *sanzen*, which is periodic consultation with a Zen master. His goal is to experience *satori*, the intuitive enlightenment that transcends reason and affirms the oneness of all things.

## 5. *What is the Christian response to Buddhism?*

It is true that desire for transitory things is a cause of much suffering. But the ultimate cause of suffering is our sin against the will of God. Only Jesus, through His atonement, can deliver us from this cycle of sin and death.

## 4. Judaism

### A. *What is Judaism?*

Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people, based originally on the Hebrew scriptures (Torah) and tradition (Talmud). Though there are only about 16 million Jews in the world, Judaism has played a very important role in the history of religions, giving rise to Christianity and Islam. There are about 6 million Jews in the U.S.

### 2. *How did Judaism develop?*

1. From the exile to the dispersion (586 B.C.--A.D. 132)
  - a. Origin of the synagogue in place of the temple

Study of the Torah began to replace temple worship, and the rabbis began to replace the priests.

## 2. Formulation of the "Oral Torah"

The "Oral Torah" was supposedly revealed to Moses at Sinai, (in addition to the written Torah), and was transmitted orally from one generation to the next.

## 2. From the dispersion to the rise of Islam (A.D. 132--634)

### a. Christianity severed from Judaism

Hadrian proscribed the Jewish religion in 135. By 425, Persia was the center of Jewry.

## 2. Authoritative literature solidified

In addition to the Tanakh (Torah, Nebiim, Kethubim), the "Oral Tradition" (Talmud) was compiled:

1. The Mishnah ("review") was compiled c. 220 by Rabbi ben Judah. The Mishnah contains legal opinions of the rabbis based on the Torah.
2. The Gemara ("completion, addition") was composed of commentary on the Mishnah. A Palestinian and (later) Babylonian Gemara emerged. The Mishnah and Gemara constitute the Talmud.

## 3. The Middle Ages (A.D. 634--1517)

### a. Controversy over revelation and reason

The Karaites said only the Torah (revelation) is authoritative. Saadiah ben Joseph (882--934) defended the Talmud and the role of reason.

## 2. Moses Maimonides (1135--1204)

Maimonides was a Spanish Jew (and the greatest Jewish philosopher) who integrated reason and revelation.

## 3. The Kabbalists

The Kabbalists rejected Maimonides' rationalism. Moses ben Leon (13th cent.) wrote Zohar, proposing a mystical approach to scripture and spirituality.

## 4. Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040--1105)

Rabbi Isaac wrote a commentary on the Torah and Talmud. His comments appear on inside margin of every edition of the Talmud.

## 5. Separation of Ashkenasic ("German") and Sefardic ("Spanish") Jews

1. The Ashkenasic (from whom most present day Jews are descended) initially fared well as merchants in central and eastern Europe. After the Crusades, they became increasingly persecuted and isolated in ghettos. Many settled in England after 1655.
2. The Sefardic initially settled in W. Africa and Spain (from which they were expelled in 1492). They ended up in Holland, Turkey, Palestine, and the Americas.

## 4. From the Reformation to the present (1517--present)

## a. Development of ghetto life

1. Study of Torah and Talmud became central
2. Rise of Hasidism in S. Poland and Ukraine

Baal Shem Tob ("Master of the Good Name") is considered the founder (1700--1760). He stressed experience of God over study of Torah and Talmud.

## 3. Rise of messianic hope

Sabbatai Zevi (1626--1676) claimed to be the messiah.

## 2. Release from ghetto life

1. Enlightenment leaders, such as Moses Mendelssohn (1729--1786) stressed sufficiency of reason to know God.
2. Democracy granted Jews citizenship rights in most states during 19th century. Assimilation now became a real option.

## 3. Formation of denominations

1. Old Orthodoxy: Jews from E. Europe came to U.S. from 1880 to 1925 and after WWII. They held tenaciously to

old ways.

2. New Orthodoxy: Samuel Hirsch (1808--1888) sought to relate traditional orthodoxy to modern life.
  3. Conservative: Zacharias Frankel (1801--1875) attempted to introduce moderate change in evolutionary fashion.
  4. Reform: Abraham Geiger (1810--1874) saw reason and science as authoritative. There is no revelation and no messiah. Said the genius of the Jewish people is their ethics and monotheism.
  5. Reconstruction: Mordecai Kaplan (b. 1881) was a naturalist. He denied God entirely.
4. Revival of anti-semitism

Willhelm Marr (1873) introduced the idea that Jews were "racially determined" to corrupt the Aryan race.

5. Rise of Zionism
1. Zionism was inspired by Zevi Hirsch and Moses Hess in 1860s, who argued for Palestinian homeland, and by Theodor Herzl who wrote *The Jewish State* in 1896.
  2. Israel was created in 1948 by U.N.
  3. Anti-zionism has replaced older anti-semitism.

### 3. *Common Jewish practices*

#### 1. Shabbat

This is the day of rest and worship. Thirty-nine categories of "creative work" are prohibited.

2. Festivals of the year
- a. Pilgrim holidays: Passover and Unleavened Bread (beginning of religious year), Pentecost (giving of Torah), Tabernacles (harvest).
  2. High holy days: Rosh Hashanah (secular new year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).
  3. Minor holidays: Purim (Esther's deliverance), Hannukah (cleansing of temple), Fast days (siege of Jerusalem in A.D).

70).

3. Life cycle
  - a. Birth: circumcision for boys on 8th day, welcoming ceremony for girls.
  2. Bar Mitzvah ("son of the commandment") for boys at 13, Bat Mitzvah ("daughter of the commandment") for girls at 12.
4. Synagogue service
 

Led by cantor (prayers) and rabbi (teacher)
5. Kosher diet
  - a. Permitted foods are kosher ("fit"), others are teref (e.g., pork).
  2. Meat must be slaughtered and prepared by a shochet (an officially approved preparer of meat), and not mixed with milk. (Separate utensils are used for each.)

#### 4. *Basic Jewish beliefs*

1. God: Biblical monotheism is embraced by most, though more liberal views are held by Reform and Reconstruction groups. The Trinity is rejected. The Holocaust has had a profound effect on many, leading to skepticism and even atheism.
2. Revelation: Orthodox and Conservative view the Pentateuch as the most inspired, the prophets and writings as less so. The Talmud is also authoritative for them (but not for Reform or Reconstruction).
3. Man: Man is created in the image of God, without original sin. Study of Torah can overcome our inclination to evil.
4. Salvation: Repentance, prayer and good works are sufficient for salvation. The initiative in providing "atonement" is always with man, not with God. Many hold to the "two covenant" concept: Jews relate to God through the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, while Gentiles relate to God through the Noahic covenant (basic morality).
5. Messiah: Orthodox Jews anticipate a personal messiah. Reform Jews view the messianic concept as the ideal of establishing justice by human effort. Until the Middle Ages, most rabbis held the "two messiah" idea: Messiah ben Joseph was suffering messiah, Messiah ben David was reigning messiah. To counter Christian claims, Israel was thereafter viewed as the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53.
6. Future life: Orthodox affirm bodily resurrection. Conservative hold

to the immortality of soul.

7. Views of Jesus:
  - a. Initially rejected: set Himself up as authority over Moses and tradition, criticized religious leaders, claimed to be God, threatened political stability, accepted Gentiles, failed to establish kingdom. The Talmud attributes His miracles to "sorcery."
  2. Hardening in Middle Ages: "two Messiah" view rejected, trinity viewed as "idolatry."
  3. Modern times: many recognize Jesus as moral teacher, but reject His claims to deity as creations of the early church.

### 5. *Witnessing to Jews*

1. Understand the Jewish perception of Christians and of Christianity. For many Jews, to become a "Christian" is to reject their Jewishness (i.e., to become a Gentile). Many harbor resentment over mistreatment by Christians and by Gentile nations.
2. Prove your love for them by befriending them unconditionally. Be a learner.
3. Encourage them to read their own Scriptures, particularly messianic passages. Many have come to faith in Christ through study of prophetic passages, and particularly of Isaiah 53.
4. Encourage them to read the Gospels, particularly Matthew which was written for a Jewish audience. Focus on the need for an atonement for sin, and on God's provision of an atonement through Jesus.

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