

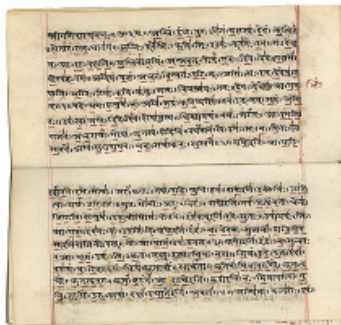
Our Daily Bread Christian University  
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How do followers know about the Ultimate Reality claimed by Hinduism and Buddhism, the Allah of Islam, or the Yahweh of Judeo-Christendom? Where do they go to learn the principles and rules by which to live? Where do they find an authoritative source for answers to their questions about the meaning of life and the mystery of what happens after death? Each religion has its own answers to these questions.

### The Hindu View of Sacred Scriptures

Each Hindu sect has its own sacred books. All of them, however, venerate a collection of four books called the Vedas. These books reflect the developing Hindu belief system during the period from 1400–500 BC. Many Hindus also see as sacred a series of writings composed in Sanskrit during the first century AD.



A Rigveda manuscript

To teach right conduct, Hinduism presents the concept of Dharma. The Sri Lankan scholar Vinoth Ramachandra explains that Dharma “came to be understood as the principle of cosmic harmony that pervaded all things . . . . It thus becomes an all-embracing ideology, encompassing ritual and moral behavior” (*Faiths in Conflict?* p. 65).

Hinduism is not primarily an ethical system. Its main thrust is focused on a set of ritualistic rules drawn from their scriptures. Hindu people are born into a specific social group or caste, and spend their life in this caste. They must adhere to the specific purification rituals prescribed for their social group. Hindu revelation provides different moral standards for different castes. What is immoral for one caste may be permitted for another.

The Hindu scriptures encourage moral behavior through the law of retribution (the principle of karma) combined with the teaching of reincarnation. If a person lives a good life, his next





life will be better than this one. If a person does not live well in this life, the next will be worse. This belief is a driving force that encourages Hindus to live up to their own principles.

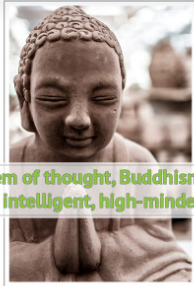
### The Buddhist View of Sacred Scriptures

Buddhism is founded on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who died sometime between 500 and 350 BC at the age of 80. He left no writings, but his teachings were put into written form by various groups of followers in the third and second centuries BC. In the early years after the Buddha's death, most of his followers called themselves Theravada Buddhists. But a new group, the Mahayana, developed during the second century after Christ. They have produced an enormous body of sacred scriptures based on the records of the Buddha's sayings. It follows that no one book or collection of books is considered sacred or authoritative by every branch of Buddhism.

This is not surprising. The Buddha saw meditation as the way to enlightenment. He was silent about the existence of a personal God. Philosophically, Buddhism does not make a sharp distinction between good and evil, because everything that exists and happens is part of the same nonmoral ultimate reality.

Yet Buddhism has developed a high ethical system aimed at minimizing life's inevitable pain called "Four Noble Truths":

1. Life is essentially made up of disappointment and suffering.
2. Most suffering is the result of our desires for pleasure, power, and continued existence.
3. To experience the cessation of suffering and pain, we must abandon our desires.
4. The way to stop desiring is to follow the "Noble Eightfold Path":
  - right views
  - right intention
  - right speech
  - right action
  - right livelihood
  - right effort
  - right awareness
  - right concentration



As a system of thought, Buddhism is valued by many intelligent, high-minded people.



Many of the sayings attributed to the Buddha and recorded in the sacred Dhammadada are praiseworthy. For example, “He who meditates earnestly, he who is pure in conduct and mindful of every action, he who is self-restrained and righteous in his life, the fame of such a one shall increase.” “Whoso seeks his own welfare by devising injury to another, he is entangled in hatred, and does not attain to freedom” (*Handbook of Today’s Religions*, p. 313).

Many of the moral standards attributed to the Buddha have led followers to say that their faith has changed their lives. They believe they have been made better by adhering to a philosophy that helps them avoid personal pain.

As a system of thought, Buddhism is valued by many intelligent, high-minded people. It helps them overlook their dark side—the self-centeredness and pride that afflicts all of us. It motivates such people to exert themselves toward good behavior. Some have given glowing testimonies about deep religious experiences through following the “Four Noble Truths.”

### The Islamic View of Sacred Scriptures

The Muslim faith is based on a series of “revelations” that Muhammad said he began receiving about AD 610. After being assured that these revelations did not come from evil spirits, he began preaching them and his disciples memorized them. He himself did not read or write, but others put the content of these “revelations” into written form after he died.

Muslims believe that these “revelations” were a word-for-word transmission of the heavenly “Mother of the Book.” They see this heavenly original as the template of the earthly Koran. It is written in Arabic, and is not recognized as inspired when translated into another language. They call it a miracle book, believing that God so guided the men who memorized what Muhammad had said and those who compiled it that the Arabic copies are perfect.

Muslims venerate the Koran so highly that they often refer to it as the eternal Word (a biblical term that is applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament Scriptures).



Islam teaches that before Muhammad came on the scene, Allah had made Himself and His will known through prophets. It views many prominent Bible personalities as messengers of Allah. But Muhammad is the greatest, the bearer of Allah's final message.

The Koran is slightly smaller than the New Testament and is divided into 114 chapters called suras. Its teaching often mirrors that of the Bible. It even tells some of the same stories, with some changes. Muslims believe that the Bible as given to Moses and other prophets honored Allah, but that in its present form it is badly marred by Jewish and Christian corruptions.

They present their evidence for the unique inspiration of the Koran by calling attention to its literary beauty, its fulfilled prophecies, its scientific accuracy, and its power to transform the lives of those who read it.

Muslims believe that Allah has established absolute moral standards. These standards are generally high, often almost mirroring biblical revelation.

Muslims believe that whether or not something is right or wrong depends on the will and decisions of Allah. To be consistent with their faith, they try not to ask why something is forbidden or demanded. They believe Allah has the right to decide what is right or wrong, based on His own will. Muslims accordingly emphasize obeying and submitting to Allah more than meditating on a personal relationship with Him. The Muslim views Allah as a master but not as a father.

### The Judeo-Christian View of Sacred Scriptures

Both Jews and Christians believe that God has revealed Himself in the Bible through historically recorded deeds and inspired words. Christians also believe that God has revealed Himself supremely in the person of Jesus Christ, who said, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). If we want to know what God is like, we need only to look at Jesus to see what He did and hear what He said.

The Old Testament record unfolds in a context of real times and places. Its authors and prophets claimed to be men who spoke for God. The Judeo-Christian view is that these were chosen men under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Their messages

### The Old Testament



A piece of the Dead Sea Scrolls

were transmitted through the centuries in handwritten copies. Using such copies, a group of Jewish scholars in the 8th and 9th centuries AD produced “the Masoretic text” of the Old Testament. The accuracy of the replication of these manuscript copies has been unexpectedly confirmed by the well-known Dead Sea Scrolls, which include a copy of Isaiah dated about 125 to 100 BC. It agrees with the Masoretic text. The copying during the 800 plus years from this recently discovered Isaiah manuscript until the production of the Masoretic text was amazingly accurate. This confirmed what many Jewish and Christian scholars had maintained: that the scribes took great pains to maintain a pure text.

## The New Testament



Bodmer Papyrus 72  
A 3rd- or 4th-century text of 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude

The New Testament is also tied to historical people and events and was recorded well before the end of the first century. None of the original manuscripts have been found, but handwritten copies of all or parts of the New Testament number more than 5,300, dating from the 2nd century to the 15th century AD. While some have theorized that the Gospels are compilations produced by church leaders after the apostles had died, there is evidence to the contrary. Eta Linneman, a highly respected biblical scholar who once took this position, now says, “As time passes, I become more and more convinced that to a considerable degree New Testament criticism as practiced by those committed to historical-critical theology does not deserve to be called science. . . . Every Gospel presents a complete, unique testimony. It owes its existence to direct or indirect eyewitnesses” (*Is There A Synoptic Problem?* pp. 9, 194). New Testament scholars and textual experts have studied with painstaking care the thousands of manuscripts that have been discovered. They are convinced that the texts from which the Bible was translated are virtually identical to those written by Matthew, Paul, and the other New Testament writers. There are some minor variations, but none of them change the meaning of the passage in which they are found. Christians believe this evidence gives a high level of credibility to their belief that the Bible as we have it is the inspired Word of God.

Both Jews and Christians believe that rules for worship and conduct are rooted not only in God’s will but also in His nature. According to the Bible, God is “the Holy One.” Therefore, He cannot be dishonest, cruel, or unfair any more than He can make 2 plus 2 equal 5. Nor can He condone such conduct in His moral creatures.



According to both Old and New Testaments, God is good and truthful. The essence of His character assures His people that they can always trust Him to do what He promised and that He always acts in accordance with His inherent integrity.

Many who accept the message of the Bible say that they have experienced God's incomparable love through faith, and that they now can look forward in confidence. They say that God's holy nature is their guarantee that He will be faithful to fulfill every promise He has made. Christians believe that God has become their heavenly Father and lives in them through His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). They say they can relate to Him and love Him with a love that "drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).