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Major Classical Religions

AP World History: Modern – Unit 0

Hinduism in The Indian Subcontinent

In India, **Indo-Aryan invaders** from the Eurasia steppe chased out the Indus civilizations, bringing their social and religious systems through the Vedic religions between 2000 and 1500 BCE

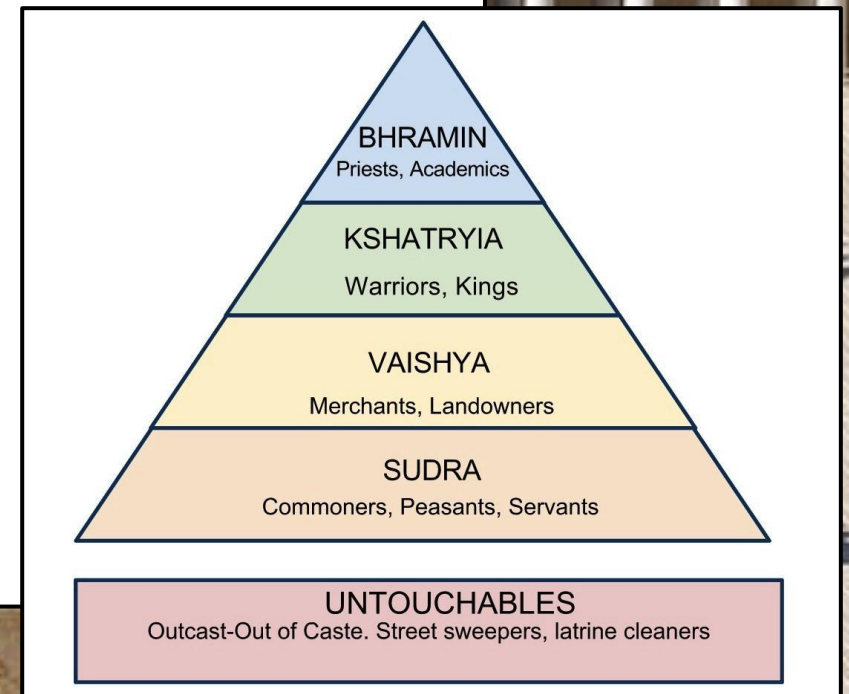
These oral beliefs were eventually codified into writing known as the **Vedas** by 700 BCE, and the ensuing belief system would become known as **Hinduism**—possibly the oldest organized religion in the world

Hinduism essentially believes in a cycle of rebirth and **reincarnation** with the overall goal of transcending human life and uniting with Brahma—the universe

To do this, one would live their life fulfilling their caste task, even if they were bad at it; the fulfillment of their caste duty was referred to as **dharma**

If they fulfilled their task throughout their lifetime, they received good **karma** and were reborn in the next life as a higher caste until finally unifying with Brahma

As a consequence of these beliefs, a rigid socio-religious system emerged in the Indian subcontinent that would later become known as the **caste system**



Buddhism and the Maurya Empire

While providing a stable model for society, many were unhappy with the rigid caste system that offered no lifetime opportunity for caste advancement or equality

As a response to the rigid and fixed castes of Hinduism in which one was locked hierarchically, **Siddhartha Gautama** in northeast India formulated a rival belief system known today as **Buddhism**

In Buddhism, **life is defined by one's suffering**; to Buddhists, we suffer due to our desire and greed for material wealth and social advancement, thus causing us anxiety and pain

As a remedy, Buddhism suggests ridding yourself of such desires by leading a simple, meditated life in which any person could achieve *nirvana*—transcendence from greed and material desires, and an ending of suffering in the cycle of rebirth

Buddhism was unappealing to most rulers as it taught against their lifestyles and power, however, it would spread throughout South, Central, Southeast, and eventually East Asia in the coming centuries

While short-lived in India itself, it was able to gain prominence and spread under the centralized **Mauryan Empire** (322 BC – 187 BC) once its beliefs had been adopted by the Maurya Emperor **Ashoka the Great**

Ashoka encouraged its spread through state policy, the building of Buddhist stupa, and the support of Buddhist missionaries, monks, and merchants throughout the region



Zoroastrianism

Throughout most of human history, religions had been polytheistic—predicated on the existence of multiple gods

With roots as far back as perhaps the 2nd millennia BCE, the teachings of the Iranian-speaking **Zoroaster** enter written history in the 5th-century BCE

Known as **Zoroastrianism**, the religion that came to dominate Persia for more than 1200 years was a **monotheistic** religion—one that believed in a single, all-powerful deity

Zoroastrianism would set several world-first precedents for later large-scale, organized religions in the region, including the following themes and ideals:

- **Monotheism** (Ahura Mazda as the supreme creator)
- **The concept of a universal 'Good' and 'Evil'**
- **A universal battle between the forces of Good and Evil**
- Human **free will** and the ability to orient towards Good or Evil
- The coming of a **future messiah** to tip the universal fight in the favor of the 'Good'

Zoroaster taught that humans should pursue a life oriented towards being 'good' for the sake of Good, spiritual gender equality & duty, and charity

The religion itself was profoundly influential on Persian emperors throughout the centuries, and is largely attributed to Persian pursuits of bettering their Empire and its services for the sake of all peoples within it



Second-Temple Judaism

Zoroastrianism would profoundly influence the previously-existent Hebrew religion known as **Judaism**

With oral roots dating back further, Judaism itself has written roots dating back to the 6th-century BCE, and whose beliefs are codified today in the **Tanakh**

Prior to its exposure to the Persian Empire and Zoroastrianism, Judaism contained elements of polytheism, and other regional religious characteristics of the Mesopotamian region

Following their exile to Babylon and return to their traditional kingdom of Israel and Judah at the hands of the Persian Empire, Judaism shifted to a more Zoroastrian model

Known as **Second-Temple Judaism** (named for its shift in theology following Cyrus the Great's funding of a second temple in Jerusalem), the Jewish faith more or less adopted the following features:

- **Monotheism** (the emphasis on **Yahweh** as the supreme creator)
- **An eternal battle between Good and Evil**
- The ability or **free will** to choose to live oriented towards Good or Evil
- The promise of a future messiah to tip the battle in the favor of the Good



Christianity

While still a major religion with more than 14 million worldwide adherents, Judaism laid the foundation of another influential world religion: **Christianity**

The teachings of Christianity began around 20-33 CE when disciples in Israel began cataloging & following the miracles and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth

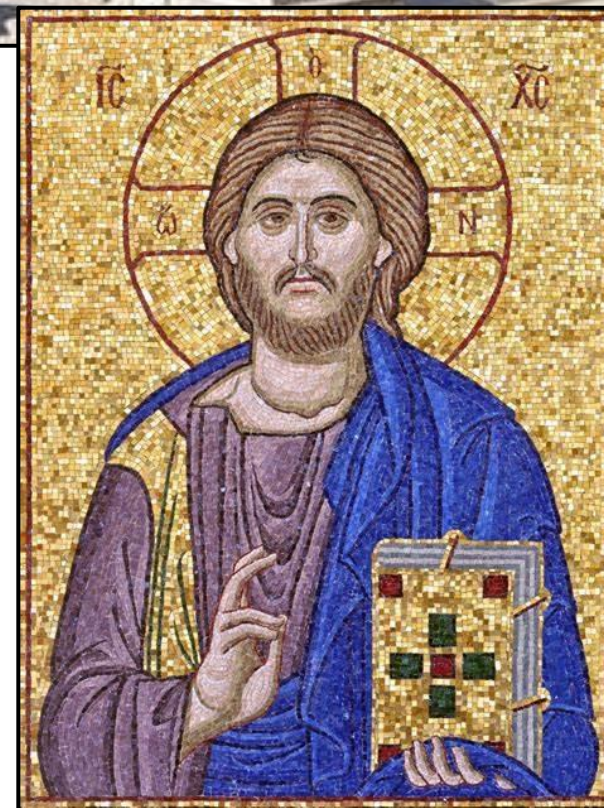
According to Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnation of the messiah promised in the Jewish faith (although most had hoped he was a military savior)

The promise of a messiah was particularly appealing to many of the Jewish people at the time who were currently occupied by the Roman Empire

Noting the popular appeal of Jesus of Nazareth as a messiah, and possibly figure to lead a revolt, the Roman Empire quickly opposed Christianity and its adherents

While Rome attempted to stop Christianity, missionaries such as Paul of Tarsus engaged in extensive missionary work and traveling to keep the religion alive despite Roman persecution

As such, missionaries and merchants continued to spread the young religion throughout the Roman empire into the Middle East, Northern Africa, Central Asia, and Europe



Legacy of the Greeks and Persians

The lasting legacy of Greece and Persia lays in the philosophy and state administration—both of which would impact the cultures of Greece, Persia, Rome, the Muslim world, India, Central Asia, and Western Civilization

Administratively, the Hellenistic states divided amongst Alexander's generals following his death adopted the centralized model of government implemented by the Persians

This governmental form formed the foundation of nearly all major states and powers following the Persian and Greeks, including the Romans, Arabs, and other states in Africa, Asia, and Europe

Regarding knowledge, the Greek approach to knowledge, and its emphasis on **skepticism**, to pursue answers through the use of **logic** and **observation**—the early seeds of empirical scientific thought

Lastly, the writings and concepts of **Socrates, Plato, Aristotle**, and other Greek philosophers would profoundly influence later Arab, Persian, Indian, and Western mathematicians who synthesized Greek science and math to enhance and spur their own innovations in math, science, and medicine



Confucianism

Among the list of philosophies and ideals suppressed by the short-lived Qin Dynasty was the increasingly-popular teachings of the Chinese philosopher **Confucius** (551-479 BCE)

In response to the chaos of China Confucius worked to develop a solution to the disorder from the warring states and promote unity under the state; this philosophy is known today as **Confucianism**

Codified in a series of writings known as the **Analects**, Confucianism laid out three fundamental levels to maintain **social harmony** that transitioned first from the individual, to the family, and finally to the state

Individually, Confucianism expects that people pursue education, honest, integrity, morality, and, perhaps most importantly, remain loyal to their duties and hierarchical superiors

With these personal guidelines, they were to unquestionably adhere to the rigid patriarchal family; the [male] leaders were then, in turn, expected to respect, protect, and support their family members

These individual and family models were intended to emulate and prime members of society to maintain social harmony, and honor the patriarchal authority of the emperor and his administration

