



Dear Readers,

Recently a bunch of my friends and I got together, just because, well, we haven't seen each other for a while. In the course of discussion we knew what we had in common, but the differences were a surprise. We all have differences. Among my friends there are different levels of education, jobs and a huge difference on the choice of music. Yet we are all friends with common hopes such as "a better tomorrow" or even deep questions such as: What is religion? Why do religious beliefs differ so much from one another, even when one might not expect them to? After all there is only one God.

The faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a common source - Abraham, still they are different from one another. What separates the eastern faiths from the western faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? What kinds of factors separate the beliefs of Hindu or Buddhist?

Every day religion affects your life whether indirectly or directly.

1. It forms the foundation for a wide range of moral codes.
2. It is a driving force behind the conduct of many individuals.
3. It can influence the actions of nations around the world.
4. It can affect the public and private lives of citizens through religiously based acts of government.

Currently religion and religiously based issues are prevalent in the public and private sectors of society. It is difficult to understand the importance of this powerful force as it impacts so many people daily. Despite similar ideas within the different faiths, it is difficult to understand the reason for the division of these beliefs. Even within these five different faiths there are differences that divide and at times unite the individuals. Yet to understand the world one must look at the perspective views from the other side of our belief system. These five faiths address the same core issues yet differ on how it is achieved.

To explore different faiths can enhance your perspective view of events in the world and expand the depth of you own faith and traditions.

There are five basic traits in religions

1. Creation and sacred stories.
2. Concepts of the divine.
3. Various sacred people, texts, objects and spaces.

4. Life cycle and calendar based rituals.
5. Religion's ultimate goals - why they are important to people.

Many religions espouse the idea of an afterlife and the ways of achieving it by conducting oneself according to specific rules. Still the eastern religions such as Hindu and Buddhism have cynical concepts of life, which differ from the linear approach, which is seen in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The idea of sin or the straying from the laws or commandments of God is seen differently in each faith. Each one acknowledges that people have the tendency to do this regularly, but again how sin is presented differs greatly.

Judaism and Christianity present sin as the center as a fundamental fault of people. It is within the very core of them to sin. Yet the Judaic tradition sees people born as innocents, where as Christian tradition sees "original sin". Still another difference is that reconciliation with God occurs with personal sacrificial tradition in Judaism, and with Christianity it is seen through the sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of the human race.

The Islamic tradition considers sin as a problem of being forgetful. People are born with the knowledge of God but life's temptations make it easy to forget the knowledge of God. This leads to the ritual of devotion known as "The Five Pillars of Islam." It is designed to remind and guard the devoted with constant reminders of God. This involves the five times a day daily prayers.

Hinduism and Buddhism see the major problem of sin as an essence of the world. These complex religions pierce this essence through the cycles of death and rebirth. When one achieves higher evolvment the soul moves on. These ideas show how different faiths address the same questions.

Again variations need not be confined to separate faiths. The differences of practice that are seen in the same faith are startling. Many Christians have a 40 day Lenten Period. This involves small symbolic sacrifices such as giving up dessert or meat one or two days a week. In some parts of the Philippines, a few Roman Catholic faithful allow themselves to be briefly crucified to show identification with Christ's suffering.

Religious differences in rituals are more than a mere sacrifice. At times they can indicate communality and divergence. Birth rituals are a good example. In Judaism, a circumcision ceremony is used to welcome a male child into the community. In many Christian churches a baptism serves the same purpose for the infant. Other Christian churches have a dedication ceremony to welcome the child into the church, reserving the baptism for a later time in life when a mature profession of faith can be made. Sacred rituals are meant to accomplish something. For instance during the Christian wedding rehearsal the vows are not spoken; they are reserved for the actual wedding ritual.

All of our prayers, sacred practices and traditions share a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge of God as the heart of the religious experience and the very core of desire to experience the divine.

May God bless you abundantly,

Jerry, Jan and Elfriede

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Mohandis Gandhi