

Introduction



Our Daily Bread University
This course was developed by
Our Daily Bread University.



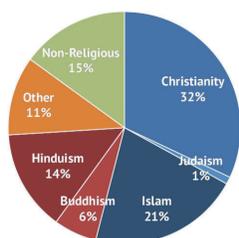
Through the influence of the Internet, satellite television, cell phones, and jet travel, our world has become a global village. This brings very different cultures together in ways never possible before. Central to many cultures are spiritual faiths that have given meaning and moral guidance for millions of adherents over thousands of years. Interestingly, advances in science and technology have not removed the spiritual hunger of the human heart that finds solace in religion. Nonreligious people are a decided minority among the human race. Man is indeed, as someone once said, “incurably religious.” But what do we mean by religion, and how does it evidence itself in the world?

Here is one definition that includes many vital elements of a religious faith:

A **religion** is a set of beliefs and practices, often centered upon specific supernatural and moral claims about reality, the cosmos, and human nature, and often codified as prayer, ritual, or religious law. Religion also encompasses ancestral or cultural traditions, writings, history, and mythology, as well as personal faith and religious experience. The term “religion” refers to both the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RELIGION>

Major World Religions



As the pie chart indicates, the three most obviously large religions are Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. However, because Christianity and Islam are based upon Judaism as a foundation, scholars will often cite Judaism as a major religious faith in the world. (Judaism comprises less than 1 percent of the world population.) Likewise, Buddhism having originated from Hinduism is also deemed as a major influential religion. Yet despite these five major world religions, vast populations have a

Five Most Influential Religions

Judaism
Christianity
Islam
Buddhism
Hinduism

surprisingly diverse number of belief systems.

In view of the diversity of various religious faiths, it will be the purpose of this course to examine the five most influential religions in our world. Based upon number of adherents and pervasive influence, we will examine Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. This will encompass each faith's view of God and creation, acceptance of specific sacred scriptures, and beliefs about salvation. In doing so, we will learn skills of comparison and contrast that can be used in studying other religions.