

PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS. Perennial philosophy endorses the tenet of universal wisdom, in which one Truth underlies all beliefs. Two principal strands of religious belief systems exist. Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity, Islam - span the West. Dharmic faiths - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism - dominate the Orient, i.e. India and East Asia (while Indonesia is Islamic). The former are monotheistic, with reverence of one godhead; the latter believe in dharma as the essential nature of being. Sikhism teaches the wisdom of the saints; in the Sant movement a living saint, the satguru (true teacher), awakens the disciple. Perennial wisdom unites most faiths with the assertion that overarching the material reality is spirituality, in which humanity is one. Humans can realise this Truth*. This realisation - in spiritual terms - is the goal of humanity; its pursuit the crowning of our existence.

* see also THE TRUTH 1, 2

Besides the Abrahamic religions and dharmic faiths exist folk religions of America, Africa and Asia. In China Confucianism and Taoism (related to Buddhism) espouse virtue and ethics.

Dharmic faiths or folk religions are sometimes regarded not as religions, but as ethical systems or life philosophies; dharmic faiths are the oldest of religions (see also JAINISM).

The term perennial philosophy, or rather the Latin phrase, had been used in the 16th century by Agostino Steuco and was taken up by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz.

According to this notion people in many cultures had comparable perceptions about the nature of reality, self, views on ethics or the meaning of existence (see also AXIAL AGE).

Ju·da·ism

The religion of the Jews that has its basis in the Bible and the Talmud, where authority is vested in sacred texts and traditions. The history of Judaism begins with the Covenant between God and Abraham (1400 BCE). In Judaism an omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, transcendent God created the universe and governs it.

Chris·ti·an·i·ty

The religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus to be the Son of God and the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. They see in the New Testament the Gospel as revealed by Jesus. Christianity began as an offshoot of Judaism and it includes the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament).

Is·lam

The religion with the teachings of Muhammad, a 7th-century Arab religious and political figure. The word Islam means 'submission'. An adherent of Islam is known as a Muslim, meaning 'one who submits to God (Allah).' Islamic law (sharia) is a tradition of rulings that touch on virtually all aspects of life and society.

Hin·du·ism

The religion of India and the oldest of the worldwide religions, characterised by a belief in reincarnation. Hindus hold that the soul, the 'true self', is eternal. Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs are: Dharma (ethics), samsara (cycle of birth, life, death and re-birth), karma (action and reaction), yogas (practices).

Bud·dhism

The world religion or philosophy based on the teachings of the Buddha, Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama. It holds that a state of enlightenment can be attained by conquering worldly desires. In Buddhism, any person who has awakened from the 'sleep of ignorance' (by realising the true nature of reality), is a buddha.

Sikh·ism

A religion that began in fifteenth century Northern India with the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive human gurus. Sikhism advocates the pursuit of salvation through disciplined meditation. The Sikhs' holy scripture - the Guru Granth Sahib - includes works of many authors from diverse religious backgrounds.

PHILOSOPHY. Chiefly five strands of philosophy interest me: Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, Eclecticism, Stoicism and Taoism. Along with Krishnamurti's teachings and Einstein's and Hawking's insights, they account for my interests and inform my belief systems.