

Other Eastern Religions

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson gives a brief look at some of the other religions found in the East. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Jainism
2. Sikhism
3. Taoism
4. Shinto

1. Jainism

Some of the religions originated in India that you might be familiar with include Hinduism and Buddhism, but there's another religion that is traced back to the same roots. It's called Jainism. Like Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism has roots in the Shramana movement, which was a spiritual movement and discipline that combined an emphasis on mastering sacred text with certain ascetic practices.

A follower of Jainism believes in spiritual independence and universal equality among all life forms. The practitioner upholds the principles of nonviolence and self-control as the primary means of liberation from the endless cycle of reincarnation.



DID YOU KNOW

From Buddhism and Hinduism, you may be familiar with the term Samsara. This is the Sanskrit word that refers to the potentially endless cycle of suffering and reincarnation into other life forms of different varieties.

The Jainist refers to the state of freedom as Moksha. If one attains true Moksha and complete karma-less perfection, one enters a realm known as Siddha. Siddha is characterized by the perfections of the eight Gunas, a Sanskrit word that means "thread" and "quality." There are approximately four million practicing Jainists in the world today.

2. Sikhism

Another more recent religion from India, specifically from the Punjab region of the Northwest, is called Sikhism. It was founded by a man known as Guru Nanak in the 15th century. It's different from other traditions of India because it is monotheistic. A Sikh refers to the supreme creator being as Waheguru. Waheguru is considered to be God, the supreme creator being.

The focus of a Sikh is to overcome personal imperfections and weaknesses through meditation, self-control, and worship of God (Waheguru), as well as the pursuit of social equality and justice. There are approximately 30 million practicing Sikhs in the world today.

3. Taoism

If you go to China in the sixth century before the common era, you'll find a man named Lao Tzu. He was a philosopher and sage whose ideas and writings became known as Taoism. Its foundational concepts and spiritual principles inspired its own movement as well as finding common ground with other traditions, including many martial arts and certain schools of Buddhism.

The main **tenet** of Taoism is the Tao itself. This is a Chinese word that means the “way” or the “path.” The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. This is the first line of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu's primary text on which the Taoist tradition in philosophy is based.

Taoism offers a follower the possibility of attaining spiritual balance, which is symbolized in the principles of yin and yang. It directs one on a path toward full awareness of self, the cosmos, and the interpenetration of being and becoming. The follower of the Tao seeks harmony with the Tao. They seek harmony with the source of all.



HINT

Taoism is also referred to as Daoism.



TERM TO KNOW

Tenet

A fundamental belief (often confused with “tenant,” which is something else entirely).

4. Shinto

Most of the religions that we've mentioned so far have made it to Japan in one way or another through a particular religion or a philosophy, but the indigenous ancient religion of Japan is called Shinto. It emerged in the eighth century. Its main feature is to offer a way of maintaining a link with the past. The word Shinto itself means “the way of the gods.” One of its core beliefs is that everything contains a spiritual essence, or Kami.

In Japan, many people recognize both Buddhism and Shinto today. Buddhism is recognized more for things related to this life, and Shinto is used and recognized for things related to the past, such as death and the remembrance of things prior. Shinto has many creation stories and myths that emphasize the importance of nature. Harvest festivals are a very common feature of Shinto. Many of their shrines are natural structures, such as hills, sacred groves, and waterfalls.



SUMMARY

Jainism had common roots with some of the other religions in India, notably Hinduism and Buddhism. **Sikhism** is a religion also originating in India, but very unlike the other religions in that it is monotheistic. **Taoism** in China was founded by Lao Tzu, and its main principle is the Tao. Lastly, in Japan, the indigenous religion is **Shinto**.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Tenet

A fundamental belief (often confused with "tenant").