

The Concept of
GOD
in Major Religions



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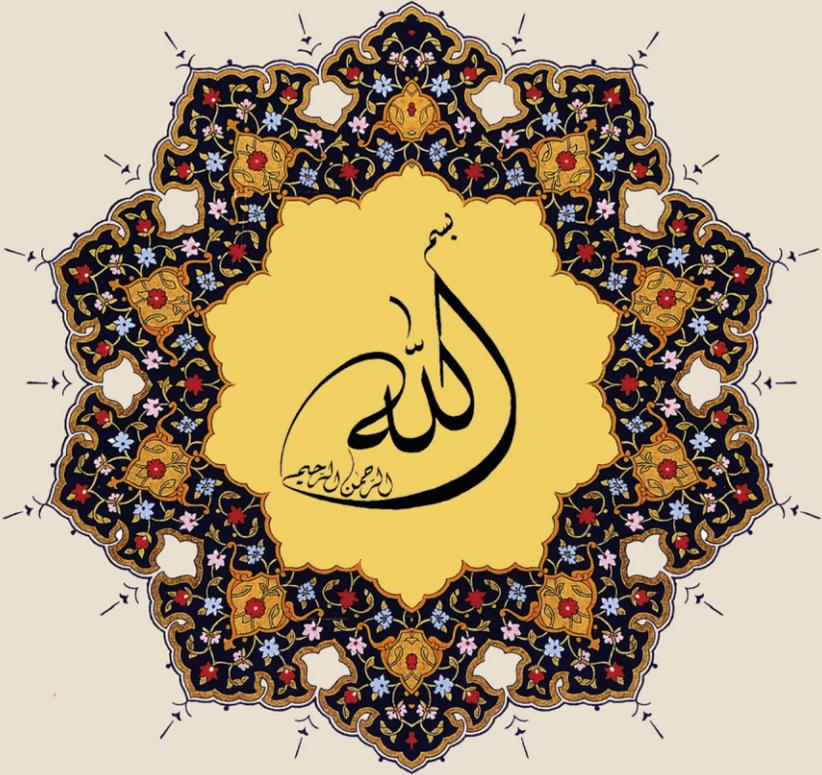
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The Concept of
GOD
in Major Religions

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IRF

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*In the Name of Allah (God),
the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

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INTRODUCTION

One of the distinguishing features of our civilization is the presence of a large number of religions and ethical systems. Humankind has always sought to understand the reasons for creation and his place in the scheme of things.

Arnold Toynbee studied the history of man through the ages and put his findings in a monumental work consisting of ten volumes. He summarized that in the history of man, religion stood at the centre. In an article in *The Observer* on October 24, 1954 he wrote:

“I have come back at the belief that religion holds the key to the mystery of existence.”

Religion, according to the Oxford Dictionary means, “belief in a superhuman controlling power especially in a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship.”

A common feature of all major religions is the belief in a Universal God or Supreme Divine Authority that is Omnipotent and Omniscient. Followers of all major religions believe that the God they worship is the same God for them as well as for others.

Marxism, Freudianism and other ‘non-religious’ beliefs tried to attack the roots of organized religions. But these in turn, developed into belief systems themselves. For instance, when communism was adopted by many countries of the world, it was preached with the same commitment and fervor that characterizes the act of preaching and propagation of religions.

Thus, religion is an integral part of human existence. The Glorious Qur'an says in the following verse:

Say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)."

(Al Qur'an 3:64)

The study of various religions has been an extremely rewarding experience for me. It has reaffirmed the belief that God created every human soul with some knowledge of His existence. The psychological constitution of man is such that he accepts the existence of the Creator, unless he has been conditioned to believe the contrary. In other words, belief in God requires no condition, while a rejection of God does.



CATEGORIZATION OF MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

Religions of the world can be broadly categorized into Semitic religions and non-Semitic religions. Non-Semitic religions can be divided into Aryan religions and non-Aryan religions.

Semitic religions

Semitic religions are the religions that originated among the Semites. According to the Bible, Prophet Noah (pbuh) had a son called Shem. The descendants of Shem are known as Semites. Therefore, Semitic religions are the religions that originated among the Jews, Arabs, Assyrians and Phoenicians. Major Semitic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These religions are Prophetic religions that believe in Divine Guidance sent through prophets of God.

Non-Semitic religions

Non-Semitic religions are further sub-divided into Aryan and non-Aryan religions:

Aryan religions

Aryan religions are the religions that originated among the Aryans, a group of Indo-European speaking people that spread through Iran and Northern India in the first half of the second Millennium BC (2000 to 1500 BC).

Aryan religions are further sub-divided into Vedic and non-Vedic religions. The Vedic religion is given the misnomer of Hinduism or Brahmanism. The non-Vedic religions are

Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. Almost all Aryan religions are non-prophetic religions.

Zoroastrianism is an Aryan, non-Vedic religion, which is not associated with Hinduism. It claims to be a prophetic religion.

Non-Aryan religions

Non-Aryan religions have diverse origins. Confucianism and Taoism are of Chinese origin while Shintoism is of Japanese origin. Many of these non-Aryan religions do not have a concept of God. They are better referred to as ethical systems rather than as religions.

Most authentic definition of God in any religion

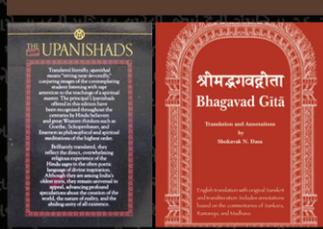
The concept of God espoused by a religion cannot be judged by merely observing the practice of its followers. It is quite common for the followers of many religions to be ignorant of the concept of God in their scriptures. It is therefore better to analyze the concept of God in any religion by referring to its holy scriptures.

Let us understand the concept of God in major world religions by analyzing what their scriptures have to say about it.



Concept of God in Hinduism

The most popular among the Aryan religions is Hinduism. 'Hindu' is actually a Persian word which stands for the inhabitants of the region beyond the Indus Valley. However in common parlance Hinduism is a blanket term for an assortment of religious beliefs, most of whom are based on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.



First we shall discuss the Concept of God in Hinduism.

a. COMMON CONCEPT OF GOD IN HINDUISM

If you ask some persons who are Hindus that how many gods do they believe in, some may say three, some may say thirty-three, some may say a thousand, while some may say thirty-three crores i.e. 330 million. But if you ask this question to a learned Hindu who is well versed with the Hindu Scriptures, he will reply that the Hindus should actually believe and worship the One and Only God Who is the Creator and Sustainer of all.

b. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISLAM AND HINDUISM IS THAT OF ‘S

Everything is ‘God’s’--- Everything is ‘God’

The major difference between the Hindus and the Muslims is that many Hindus believe in the philosophy of Pantheism, i.e. everything is God – the tree is God, the sun is God, the moon is God, the snake is God, the monkey is God and the human being is God.

Muslims believe that everything is God’s. GOD with an apostrophe ‘s’. Everything belongs to the One and Only unique eternal God. The tree belongs to God, the sun belongs to God, the moon belongs to God, the snake belongs to God, the monkey belongs to God and the human beings belong to God.

Thus the major difference between the Hindus and the Muslims is the apostrophe ‘s’. The Hindu says “everything is God”. The Muslim says “everything is God’s” – GOD with an apostrophe ‘s’. If we can solve the difference of the

apostrophe 's', then inshaAllah the Hindus and the Muslims will be united.

The Glorious Qur'an says: **“Come to common terms as between us and you”**

Which is the first term?

“that we worship none but Allah”

(Al Qur'an 3:64)

So let's come to common terms by analyzing the scriptures of the Hindus and of the Muslims.

Upanishads

Upanishads are one of the sacred scriptures of the Hindus.

i. Chandogya Upanishad Chapter 6 Section 2 Verse 1

It is mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad:

“Ekam Evadvityam”

“He is one only; without a second.”

(Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:1)

(The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan Pages 447 - 448)

(Sacred Books of the East Volume 1, The Upanishads Part I Page 93)

ii. Shwetashvatara Upanishad Chapter 6 Verse 9

It is mentioned in the Shwetashvatara Upanishad:

“Na chasya kascij janita na chadipah”

“Of Him there are neither parents nor Lord.”

(Shwetashvatara Upanishad 6:9)

(The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan Page 745)

(Sacred Books of the East Volume 15, The Upanishads Part II Page 263)

iii. Shwetashvatara Upanishad Chapter 4 Verse 19

It is mentioned in Shwetashvatara Upanishad

“Na tasya pratima asti”

“There is no likeness of Him.”

(Shwetashvatara Upanishad 4:19)

(The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan Pages 736 - 737)

(Sacred Books of the East Volume 15, The Upanishads Part II Page 253)

iv. Shwetashvatara Upanishad Chapter 4 Verse 20

It is mentioned in Shwetashvatara Upanishad:

“na samdrse tisthati rupam asya, na chaksusa pasyati kas canainam.”

“His form cannot be seen, no one sees Him with the eye.”

(Shwetashvatara Upanishad 4:20)

(The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan Page 737)

(Sacred Books of the East Volume 15, The Upanishad Part II Page 253)

Bhagavad Gita

The most popular amongst all the Hindu scriptures is the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita mentions:

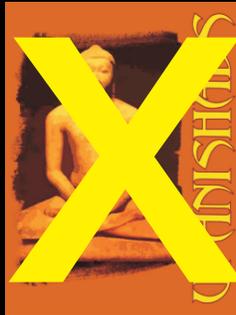
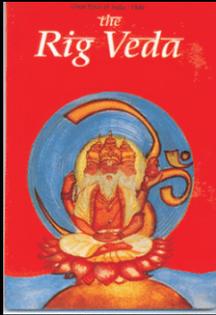
“Those whose intelligence has been stolen by material desires worship demigods” – that is “Those who are materialistic, they worship demigods” – i.e. others as deities besides the True God.

(Bhagavad Gita 7:20)

It is mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita:

“He who knows Me as the unborn, as the beginningless, as the Supreme Lord of all the worlds...”

(Bhagavad Gita 10:3)



Yajurveda

Vedas are the most sacred amongst all the Hindu scriptures. There are principally four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.

i. Yajurveda Chapter 32 Verse 3

It is mentioned in Yajurveda:

“na tasya pratima asti”

“There is no image of Him”

It further says, “As He is unborn, He deserves our worship.”

(Yajurveda 32:3)

(The Yajurveda by Devi Chand Page 377)

ii. Yajurveda Chapter 40 Verse 8

It is mentioned in Yajurveda:

“He is imageless and pure.”

(Yajurveda 40:8)

(Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Griffith Page 538)

iii. Yajurveda Chapter 40 Verse 9

It is mentioned in Yajurveda:

“Andhatama pravishanti ye asambhuti mupaste”

“They enter darkness, those who worship natural things.”

For example worship of natural elements like air, water, fire, etc.

(Yajurveda 40:9) (Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Griffith Page 538)



It further continues and says:

“They sink deeper in darkness those who worship ‘sambhuti’
i.e. created things”

For example, created things such as table, chair, idols, etc.

Atharvaveda

I. Atharvaveda Book 20 Hymn (Chapter) 58 Verse 3

It is mentioned in Atharvaveda:

“Dev Maha Asi”

“God is Verily Great.”

(Atharvaveda 20:58:3)

(Atharvaveda Samhita Vol. 2 William Dwight Whitney Page 910)

Rigveda

The oldest and most sacred amongst all the Vedas is the Rigveda.

i. Rigveda Book 1 Hymn 164 Verse 46

It is mentioned in Rigveda Book 1, Hymn 164, Verse 46:

“Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanty.”

“Sages (learned Priests) call one God by many names.”

(Rigveda 1:164:46)

Truth is one, God is one, sages call it by various names.

A similar message is given in Rigveda, Book 10, Hymn 114, Verse 5.

ii. Rigveda Book 2 Hymn 1

Rigveda gives no less than 33 different attributes to Almighty God. Several of these attributes are mentioned in Rigveda Book 2 Hymn 1.

a. Brahma - Creator - Khaliq – Rigveda Book 2 Hymn 1 Verse 3

Amongst the various attributes given in Rigveda, one of the beautiful attributes for Almighty God is ‘Brahma’. ‘Brahma’ means ‘the Creator’. If you translate into Arabic it means ‘Khaliq’. Islam does not object to anyone calling Almighty God as ‘Khaliq’ or ‘Creator’ or ‘Brahma’, but if someone says that ‘Brahma’ i.e. ‘Almighty God’ has got four heads and on each head is a crown and this Brahma has got four hands, Islam takes strong exception to it because such descriptions give an image to Almighty God. Such descriptions are also against what is taught and propounded in Yajurveda Chapter 32, Verse 3 which says:

“Na tasya pratima asti”
“There is no image of Him.”
(Yajurveda 32:3)



b. Vishnu - Sustainer - Rabb – Rigveda Book 2 Hymn 1 Verse 3

Another beautiful attribute mentioned in the Rigveda Book 2, Hymn 1, Verse 3 is ‘Vishnu’. ‘Vishnu’ means ‘the Sustainer’. If you translate this word into Arabic it means ‘Rabb’. Islam has no objection if anyone calls Almighty God as ‘Rabb’ or ‘Sustainer’ or ‘Vishnu’, but if someone says that Vishnu is Almighty God and this Vishnu has four arms, one of the right arms holds the ‘chakra’ i.e. a discus and one of the left arms holds a ‘conch shell’ and he rides on a bird or reclines on a snake couch, then Islam takes strong exception to this, because such descriptions of Vishnu give an image to Almighty God. Such descriptions are also against what is taught in Shwetashvatara Upanishad Chapter 4 Verse 19 which says:

“There is no likeness of Him”

iii. Rigveda Book 8 Hymn 1 Verse 1

It is mentioned in Rigveda

“Ma Chidanyadvi Shansata”

“Do not worship anybody but Him, the Divine One, Praise Him alone.”

(Rigveda 8:1:1)

(Rigveda Samhita Vol. IX, Pages 1- 2 by Swami Satyaprakash Sarasvati & Satyakam Vidyalankar)

iv. Rigveda Book 5 Hymn 81 Verse 1

It is mentioned in Rigveda

“Verily great is the glory of the Divine Creator.”

(Rigveda 5:81:1)

(Rigveda Samhita Vol. 6 Pages 1802 - 1803 by Swami Satyaprakash Sarasvati & Satyakam Vidhyalankar)

v. Rigveda Book 6 Hymn 45 Verse 16

It is mentioned in Rigveda

“Ya Eka Ittamushtuhi”

“Praise Him who is the matchless and alone.”

(Rigveda 6:45:16)

(Rigveda Samhita Vol. 7 Pages 2108-2109 by Swami Satyaprakash)

BRAHMA SUTRA OF HINDU VEDANTA

The Brahma Sutra of Hindu Vedanta is:

“Ekam Brahm, dvitiya naste neh na naste naste kinchan”

“Bhagwan ek hi hai doosra nahin hai, nahin hai, nahin hai, zara bhi nahin hai.”

“There is only one God, not a second, not at all, not at all, not in the least bit.”

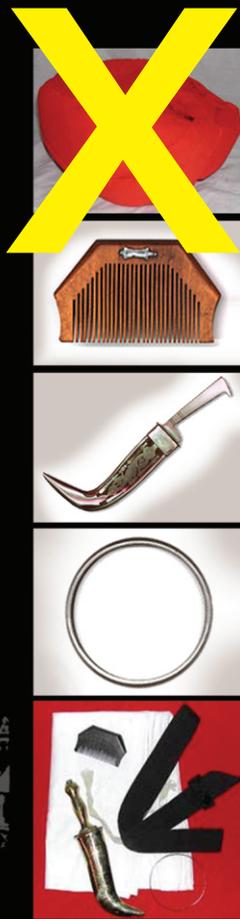
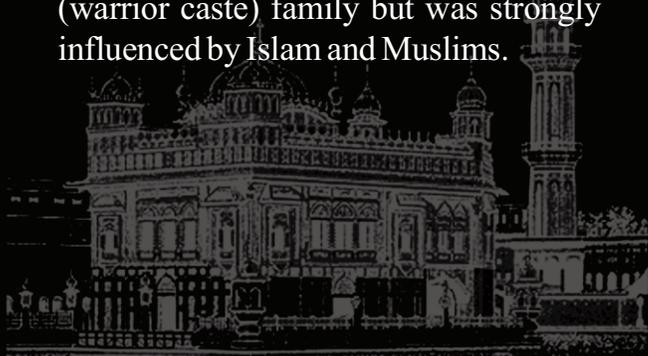
All the above quoted verses and passages from Hindu scriptures clearly amplify the Oneness and Uniqueness of Almighty God, the Creator of all. Furthermore, they negate the existence of any other deity besides the One True God. These verses essentially teach and propound monotheism.

Therefore only if one carefully studies the Hindu scriptures, will one understand and realize the correct concept of God in Hinduism.

Thus we have highlighted similarities between the concept of God in Islam and in Hinduism as mentioned in their respective scriptures.

Concept of God in Sikhism

Sikhism is a non-Semitic, Aryan, non-Vedic religion. Though not a major religion of the world, it is a branch or offshoot of Hinduism founded by Guru Nanak at the end of the 15th Century. It originated in the area of Pakistan and North-West India called Punjab meaning the land of the five rivers. Guru Nanak was born in a Hindu Kshatriya (warrior caste) family but was strongly influenced by Islam and Muslims.



Definition of Sikh and Sikhism

The word 'Sikh' is derived from the word 'Sisya' meaning 'disciple' or 'follower'. Sikhism is a religion of 10 Gurus, the first Guru being Guru Nanak and the 10th and the last being Guru Gobind Singh. The sacred book of Sikhism is Sri Guru Granth Sahib also called as Adi Granth.

The Five 'K's

Every Sikh is supposed to keep the five 'K's which also serve as his identity.

- (i) Kesh - uncut hair
- (ii) Kangha - comb
- (iii) Kada - metal or steel bangle; for strength and self-restraint
- (iv) Kirpan - dagger for self defense
- (v) Kacchha - special knee length underwear or underdrawer for agility

Moolmantra - The Fundamental Creed of Sikhism

The best definition that any Sikh can give regarding the concept of God in Sikhism is to quote the "Moolmantra" - the fundamental creed of Sikhism, which occurs at the beginning of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

It is mentioned in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1, Japuji, the first verse:

"There exists but one God, who is called the True, the Creator, Free from fear and hate, Immortal, not begotten, self-existent, Great and Compassionate."

Sikhism enjoins on its followers strict monotheism. It believes in only One Supreme God who is, in the unmanifest form called 'Ek Omkara'.

In the manifest form He is called as 'Omkara' and has several attributes such as:

Kartar - The Creator

Sahib - The Lord

Akal - The Eternal

Sattanama - The Holy name

Parvardigar - The Cherisher

Rahim - The Merciful

Karim - The Benevolent

He is also called '**Wahe Guru**' - the One true God.





Besides Sikhism being strictly monotheistic, it does not believe in Avataaravada - the doctrine of incarnation. Almighty God does not incarnate Himself in what is known as Avataar. Sikhism is also strongly against idol worship.

Guru Nanak influenced by Kabir

Guru Nanak was influenced by the sayings of Sant Kabir so much that several chapters of Sri Guru Granth Sahib contain couplets of Sant Kabir.

One of the famous couplets of Sant Kabir is

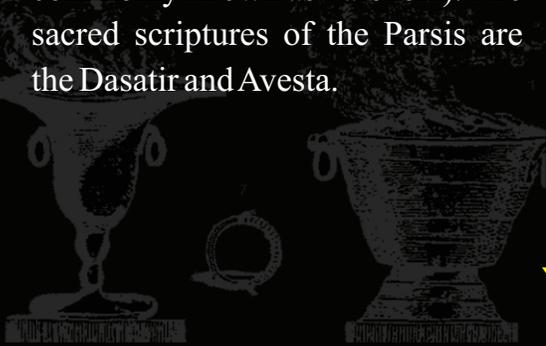
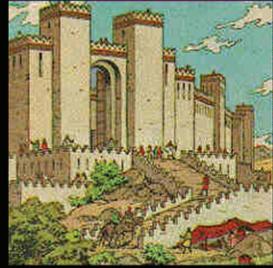
“Dukh mein sumiran sab kare sukh mein kare na koye Jo sukh mein sumiran kare to dukh kahe ko hoye”

“Everyone remembers God during trouble but no one remembers Him during peace and happiness. The one who remembers God during peace and happiness why should he have trouble?”

Compare this with the following verse of the Glorious Qur'an: **“When some trouble toucheth man, he crieth unto his Lord, turning to Him in repentance: But when He bestoweth a favour upon him as from Himself, (man) doth forget what he cried and prayed for before, and he doth set up rivals unto Allah...”** (Al Qur'an 39:8)

Concept of God in Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is an ancient Aryan religion which originated in Persia more than 2500 years ago. Though it has relatively few adherents, less than one hundred and thirty thousand in the whole world, it is one of the oldest religions. The Iranian Prophet Zoroaster was the founder of Zoroastrianism (also commonly known as Parsiism). The sacred scriptures of the Parsis are the Dasatir and Avesta.





God in Zoroastrian religion is known as ‘Ahura Mazda’. ‘Ahura’ means ‘the Lord’ and ‘Mazda’ means ‘the Wise’, hence ‘Ahura Mazda’ means ‘the Wise Lord’ or ‘the Wise God’. ‘Ahura Mazda’ stands for God, in a strictly Monotheistic sense.

Qualities of God according to Dasatir

According to Dasatir, Ahura Mazda has the following qualities:

- (i) He is One.
- (ii) Nothing resembles Him.
- (iii) He is without an origin or end.
- (iv) He has no father or mother, wives or children.
- (v) Without a body or form.
- (vi) Neither the eye can behold Him, nor the power of thinking can conceive Him.
- (vii) He is above all that you can imagine.
- (viii) He is nearer to you than your own self.

Attributes of God according to Avesta

According to Avesta, the Gathas and the Yasna give various characteristics to 'Ahura Mazda' such as:

(i) Creator

(Yasna 31:7 & 11) (Yasna 44:7) (Yasna 50:11) (Yasna 51:7)

(ii) Most Mighty - the Greatest

(Yasna 33:11) (Yasna 45:6)

(iii) Beneficent - 'Hudai'

(Yasna 33:11) (Yasna 48:3)

(iv) Bountiful - 'Spenta'

(Yasna 43:4,5,7,9,11,13,15) (Yasna 44:2) (Yasna 45:5) (Yasna 46:9) (Yasna 48:3)



Concept of God in Judaism

Judaism is one of the important Semitic religions. Its followers are known as Jews and they believe in the prophetic mission of Prophet Moses (pbuh).



(i) The following verse from the book of Deuteronomy contains an exhortation from Moses (pbuh):

“Shama Israelu Adonai Ila Hayno Adonai Ikhad”

It is a Hebrew quotation which means

“Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.”

(Book of Deuteronomy 6:4)

(ii) Consider the following verses from the Book of Isaiah:

“I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.”

(Book of Isaiah 43:11)

(iii) *“I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.”*

(Book of Isaiah 45:5)

(iv) *“...I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.”*

(Book of Isaiah 46:9)



(v) Judaism condemns idol worship in the following verses:

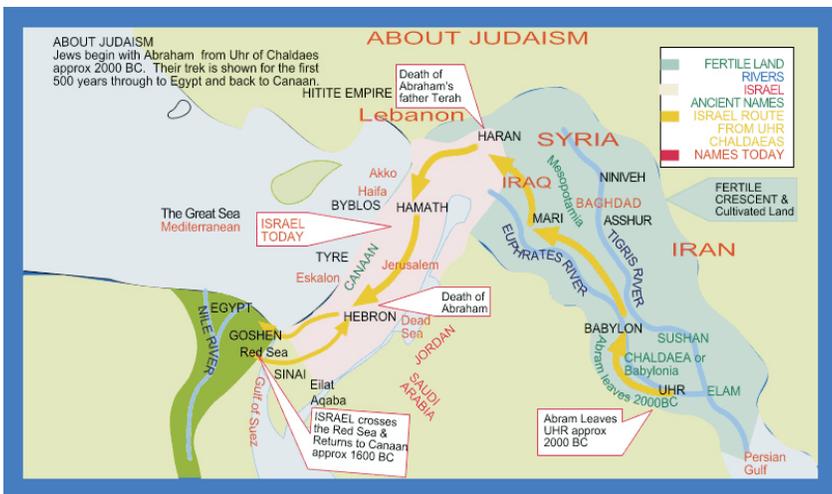
“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”

(Book of Exodus 20:3-5)

(vi) A similar message is repeated in the book of Deuteronomy:

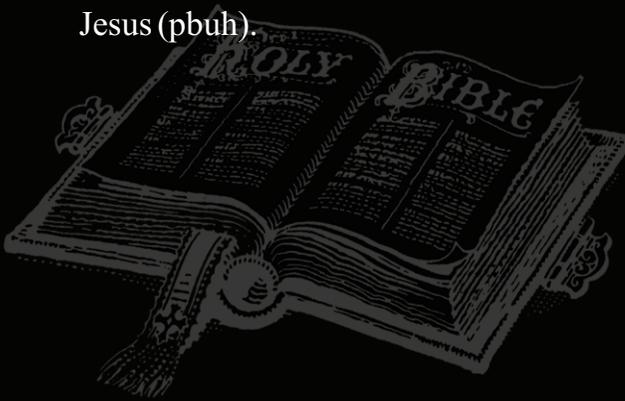
“Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”

(Book of Deuteronomy 5:7-9)



Concept of God in Christianity

Christianity is a Semitic religion, which claims to have nearly two billion adherents all over the world. Christianity owes its name to Jesus Christ (peace be on him). Jesus (pbuh) is also a revered figure in Islam. Islam is the only non-Christian faith that prescribes faith in Jesus (pbuh).



Before we discuss the concept of God in Christianity, let us examine the position of Jesus (pbuh) in Islam:

- (i) Islam is the only non-Christian faith, which makes it an article of faith to believe in Jesus (pbuh). No Muslim is a Muslim if he does not believe in Jesus (pbuh).
- (ii) We believe that Jesus (pbuh) was one of the mightiest messengers of Allah (swt).
- (iii) We believe that he was born miraculously without any male intervention, which many modern day Christians do not believe.
- (iv) We believe that he gave life to the dead with God's permission.
- (v) We believe that he healed those born blind and the lepers with God's permission.

One may ask, if both Muslims and Christians love and respect Jesus (pbuh), where exactly is the parting of ways? The major difference between Islam and Christianity is the Christians' insistence on the supposed divinity of Christ. A study of the Christian scriptures reveals that Jesus (pbuh) never claimed divinity. There is not a single unequivocal statement in the entire Bible where Jesus (pbuh) himself says, 'I am God' or where he says, 'worship me'. The Bible contains statements attributed to Jesus (pbuh) in which he preached quite the contrary. Consider the following statements in the Bible, attributed to Jesus Christ (pbuh):

"...my Father is greater than I."

(Gospel of John 14:28)

"My Father... is greater than all."

(Gospel of John 10:29)

“I cast out devils by the Spirit of God...”

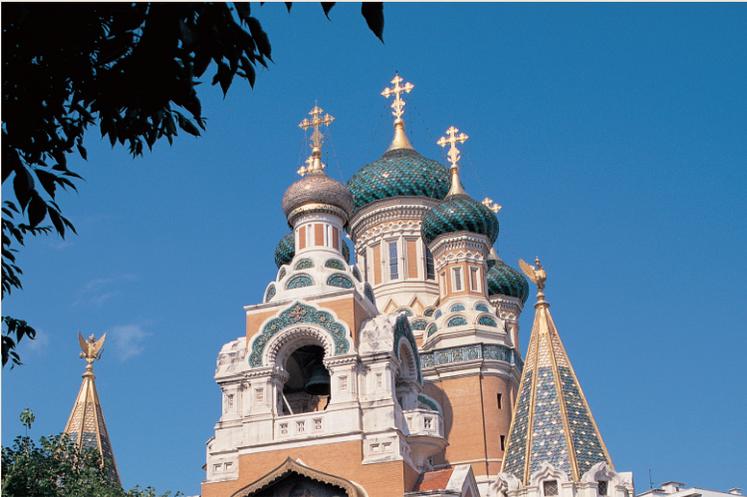
(Gospel of Matthew 12:28)

“...I with the finger of God cast out devils”

(Gospel of Luke 11:20)

“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father, which hath sent me.”

(Gospel of John 5:30)

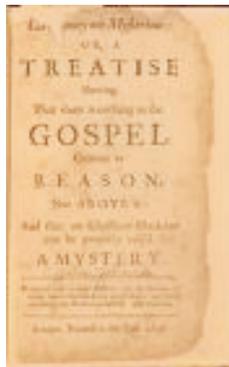
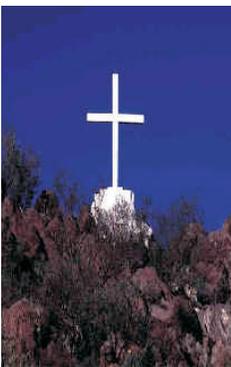


THE MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST (PBUH) - HE CAME TO FULFILL THE LAW

Jesus (pbuh) never claimed divinity for himself. He clearly announced the nature of his mission. Jesus (pbuh) was sent by God to confirm the previous Judaic law. This is clearly evident in the following statements attributed to Jesus (pbuh) in the Gospel of Matthew:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.



For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

(Gospel of Matthew 5: 17-20)

God sent Jesus (pbuh)

The Bible mentions the prophetic nature of Jesus’ (pbuh) mission in the following verses:

“...and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”

(Gospel of John 14:24)

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent.”

(Gospel of John 17:3)

Jesus refuted even a remote suggestion of his divinity. Consider the following incident mentioned in the Bible:

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, ‘Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?’

And he said unto him, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”

(Gospel of Matthew 19:16-17)

The above statements from the Bible refute the Christian dogma of divinity of Jesus (pbuh) and of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus (pbuh). Jesus (pbuh) exhorts keeping the commandments as the means to achieve salvation.

Jesus (pbuh) of Nazareth - a man approved of God

The following statement from the Bible supports the Islamic belief that Jesus (pbuh) was a Prophet of God.

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.” (Book of Acts 2:22)

The First Commandment is that God is One

The Bible does not at all support the Christian belief in trinity. One of the scribes once asked Jesus (pbuh) as to which was the first commandment of all; to which Jesus (pbuh) reiterated what Moses (pbuh) had said, namely:

“Shama Israelu Adonai Ila Hayno Adonai Ikhad”

It is a Hebrew quotation, which means,

“Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.”
(Gospel of Mark 12:29)

