

Religion

Beliefs and worship: people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life

Microsoft® Encarta® 2008. © 1993-2007 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the world's major religions, with more than 350 million followers. Buddhism originated in India and has since spread throughout the subcontinent and into central and southeast Asia. Buddhism follows the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. Gautama lived from 620 to 540 BC. The Buddha ("enlightened one") sought to teach his followers to search for "Dharma," the truth. By doing so, they too would become enlightened and thus achieve "Nirvana," the perfect peace that would free one's soul from the unending cycle of death and rebirth that all men suffer. Three major schools of Buddhism survive today. Vajrayana believes that people can "speed up" enlightenment through "tantric" techniques such as yoga, mantras (chants), and various other rituals. Theravada and Mahayana are sutric schools that believe that one achieves enlightenment primarily through study of the Buddha's teachings.

Buddhist Shrine

Located near Patna, in Bihar state, India, the Mahabodhi is a Buddhist temple in Bodhi Gaya, the place where, according to Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama gained enlightenment and became the Buddha while meditating under a Bodhi (Peepal) tree. The Emperor Asoka constructed the "Golden Throne" sometime around 250 BC, and over time many other buildings and statues were added. In the 12th century the area was overrun by Muslims, and the temple sacked and largely destroyed. In the 16th century a Hindu monastery was established, and the monastery's abbot was given control over the temple grounds. Eventually the area came under British control. In the 1880s they began a major restoration of the temple, much against the wishes of the Hindu abbot. In the 1940s control over the site was given to the state, which manages the site with the advice of a committee containing Buddhists from the world over. A building of remarkable beauty and grandeur, the Mahabodhi is one of the oldest surviving brick buildings in India. Standing on the ruins of an even older "stupa," the temple consists of a high central tower surrounded by four smaller towers. The central tower rises some 60 feet in height. The edifice is covered by ornate and colorful molding, pilasters (pseudo columns), and arches, many of which contain bas relief sculptures. Inside sits a very large gilded statue of the Buddha. The statue sits where, legend has it, Buddha was sitting when he achieved enlightenment. Near to the building stands a mighty Bodhi tree, a descendant of the one under which Buddha found enlightenment. The temple stands within an extensive complex of smaller temples, statues, and pathways running through beautiful parklands and alongside peaceful lakes. The temple and its surroundings remain a focus of Buddhist worship, and people from across the world come every year to honor the Buddha and to marvel at the beauty of the Mahabodhi.

Buddhist Stupa

Buddhist stupas are monuments holding holy relics. The first eight stupas were created to hold the Buddha's remains. During his reign, the Emperor Asoka took portions of the Buddha's ashes and spread them among the thousands of stupas he created. Stupas can now be found across Asia and the world. The oldest surviving stupa can be found in Sanchi, India. The "Great Stupa" was constructed by Emperor Asoka sometime in the third century BC.

Christian Cathedral

In Civilization IV, a cathedral is defined as an especially large and ornate religious building where the faithful worship. Only the most prosperous cities can afford to create cathedrals, as they require huge amounts of raw material and years of dedicated labor by skilled craftsmen. For example, the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, took over two centuries to complete.

Christian cathedrals are considered among the most beautiful buildings in the world. Many of the most imposing were built during the Middle Ages. Lofty buildings with beautiful stained glass, the early Christian cathedrals tended to collapse suddenly, with unfortunate results for those inside, until the invention of the flying buttress.

Facing Roman persecution, the earliest Christians worshiped in secret in private homes, catacombs, and the like. The Emperor Constantine I legalized Christianity in 325 AD. Constantine I built many Christian churches across Roman territory, including the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which many Christians believe is on the site where Jesus was born.

Christian Shrine

The Church of the Nativity was built in Bethlehem, atop the place where Jesus was born. Constructed in 325 AD, burnt during the Samaritan Revolt in 529 and then rebuilt over the next 50 years, the Church is one of the oldest continuously operating Christian churches in the world. It is also one of the most fought over. Over time the Church has been held by Crusaders, Muslims, and various Christian sects. Externally, the Church represents more a fortress than it does a house of worship. It is surrounded by a thick stone wall with few windows or entrances. The Church is laid out in the typical Roman basilica design, with three aisles leading to a semicircular apse containing the altar. The main room once featured walls covered with golden mosaics, but is now somewhat fallen into decay. Beneath the Basilica lies the "Grotto of the Nativity," an underground cave covering the place where Jesus is said to have been born. The exact spot of Jesus' birth is marked by a silver star and surrounded by silver lamps. The compound containing the church is approximately 14,000 square yards in size. In addition to the Basilica, it contains a number of other important religious sites and three convents. Since its inception, Christianity has fragmented into a number of distinct sects. For many years these different groups have fought for control of the Church, and much blood has been shed on the sacred grounds. In recent years it has been administered by a coalition of Roman Catholic, Armenian and Greek Orthodox clerics,

who in uneasy alliance make the Church available to all who wish to enter. Each year the Church is visited by thousands of Christian pilgrims. The Church's recent history has been as turbulent as it's past. The town of Bethlehem is in the West Bank of Palestine, which is periodically under Israeli occupation, and in 2002 the Church itself was occupied by 50 Palestinian fighters seeking refuge from Israeli defense forces. Somewhat miraculously the Church itself has suffered no damage in the recent conflicts, although the turmoil has greatly diminished the number of visitors to the site, which in turn limits the money available for its upkeep. Still, the Church remains one of Christianity's holiest of places, where God's only Son and the Savior of mankind entered the world.

Christianity

Christianity is the world's largest religion. It is the dominant religion in Europe, North, Central and South America, and has made significant inroads in all other parts of the world. Christianity is based upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, whom Christians believe to have been the "son of God made flesh," brought to the world to teach men the way of salvation. Jesus lived from approximately 6 BC to 30 AD. Jesus' life and teachings are recorded in the New Testament. Born of the Virgin Mary, a Jew, the Christ lived and taught in and around present-day Palestine and Israel. According to the New Testament, he performed many miracles during his lifetime, and he taught men how to cleanse themselves from sin and thus achieve eternal happiness after death. Jesus was betrayed and crucified, but he rose from death after three days and ascended into heaven. After Christ's death, Christianity spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The Romans tried unsuccessfully to suppress it, but eventually they adopted Christianity as the state religion. With the might of Rome behind it, Christianity spread rapidly through the known world. When the Roman Empire fell, Christianity broke into two branches. Since then it has continued to fragment, with a number of the branches quite hostile to others. Today, the major Christian branches include Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity, and Mormonism.

Confucian Shrine

The Kong Miao, or Temple of Confucius, is located in the city Qufu in China's Shandong province. The origins of the temple date back to 478 BC, when a local ruler built a temple to honor Confucius (who had only recently passed away and was relatively unknown in most of China). As time passed and the fame of Confucius began to spread, the Kong Miao grew in stature and importance as well. The Han Emperor Wu Di offered sacrifices at the site in 205 BC, and the Kong Miao continued to be patronized by various emperors across the centuries. The actual buildings that make up the Kong Miao have been torn down and rebuilt many times over the centuries. The present layout dates to the early 16th century, when the temple was rebuilt following a massive conflagration in 1499 sparked by lightning. Since this construction took place at the same time as Beijing's Forbidden Palace, there are many design similarities between the two complexes. The Kong Miao is known not only for its size (it comprises some 466 rooms), but also for its stone sculptures and calligraphy dating back to many different dynasties. Today it is both a holy Confucian shrine and a popular tourist attraction.

Confucian Temple and Academy

Though Confucius himself was a philosopher rather than a religious leader, over time he was accorded the status of a god and worshipped across Asia. Many temples to Confucius were constructed, some small and private, others more extensive where hundreds of worshippers could attend services. Many Confucian temples were constructed in the pagoda style of architecture.

Many of the early Confucian religious buildings were destroyed during the Qin Dynasty. When the Emperor Wu (156-87 BC) adopted Confucianism as the state religion of China, he placed many Confucian scholars in positions of power; eventually, knowledge of Confucianism became a prerequisite for anyone hoping to gain employment in the Imperial government. Private and public Confucian Academies sprung up across China, where families sent their sons to study for the civil service examinations.

Confucianism

Confucianism is an East Asian religion based upon the teachings of Confucius. Confucius (known in Chinese as Kong Fu Zi) lived between 552 and 479 BC. Confucius lived in China during an especially turbulent period, when the country lacked central leadership and various small states fought constantly for dominance. As much a philosopher and political theorist as a religious leader, Confucius sought to teach others the correct behavior for man in society. His philosophy emphasized personal and governmental morality and strong family loyalty. He believed that each man had a place in society, and that each should behave righteously and correctly according to that place. This included the ruler, who needed to be devoted to the people rather than to personal aggrandizement. Confucianism grew in influence for the two centuries following Confucius' death, until it was rigidly suppressed during the Qin Dynasty, whose leaders saw it as a threat to their power. The Qin systematically destroyed the Confucian temples and burned all the Confucian books, including most of Confucius' writings. Virtually everything was lost, except for a cache of important books hidden in the walls of a believer's home. When these were discovered, the few remaining believers were able to rebuild and spread their religion. Eventually Confucianism became the state religion of China. It remained so until the Communists came into power in the 20th Century. Today, Confucianism is enjoying something of a revival, and many Chinese students (and students from around the world) study the great philosopher and his teachings. However, in modern times Confucianism is mostly studied as a philosophy rather than a religion (though it should be pointed out that there is no clear distinction between the two in Eastern thought).

Hindu Mandir

A "mandir" is the name used to describe all Hindu places of worship; used here it refers only to the larger and more important temples. Typically, a mandir is dedicated to a primary Hindu deity and other deities associated with that particular god, though in the US many different gods are worshiped in each mandir. The earliest mention of a mandir appears in

the fifth century BC. The Angkor Wat, a Hindu temple built in the 12th Century AD, is one of the finest surviving Hindu mandirs in the world.

Hindu Shrine

Kashi Vishwanath was a temple located in Varanasi, "the oldest living city in the world," and the place most sacred to Hinduism. The origins of Varanasi are shrouded in history, but it is believed that the city is more than 3000 years old. After visiting the city, Mark Twain wrote that Varanasi "is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together." According to Hindu tradition Varanasi is the home of Lord Shiva and his consort, Parvati. Known as the Destroyer, Lord Shiva is part of the "trimurti" - the three aspects of God - creation, preservation, and destruction. Shiva's consort Parvati is seen as Earth Mother, and, according to tradition, the two are the parents of all living creatures. The city is also held sacred because it is here that the Ganges River gained the power to wash away sins. The Kashi Vishwanath is a golden temple standing at the city's center. The date of construction of the original temple is not known. It was destroyed in 1669 by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who built a mosque atop the ruins. The present Kashi Vishwanath was built in 1776, across the street from its original location. The newer building's spire is about 50 feet in height and covered with over one ton of gold plating, donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The temple's interior consists of a mandapa (pillared hall) and a sanctum containing a silver altar. According to Hindu tradition, it was here that the first jyotirlinga, the fiery pillar of light by which Shiva manifested his supremacy over other Gods, broke through the earth's crust and flared towards the heavens. The altar contains a Shivalinga (an ancient symbol of Shiva) in its center to commemorate this event. It is believed that viewing the temple can transform a worshipper's life and put him on the path of knowledge and devotion, and each year the temple is visited by tens of thousands of Hindu faithful seeking enlightenment.

Hinduism

Hinduism is considered to be the oldest religion still in practice. Its roots can be traced back to the Rig-Veda, a collection of over 1000 religious hymns written about 3500 years ago in Sanskrit. Today Hinduism has approximately one billion followers, most concentrated in the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism believes that man needs to strive for self-realization in order to once again become part of the Ultimate Reality, which is God. All things are God - each man suffers only because he has forgotten that. Until he remembers, his soul remains in bondage, and he must suffer the eternal cycle of death and rebirth into this world. Perhaps the most interesting part of Hindu thought is that there is no one true path to self-realization. Any kind of spiritual practice followed with faith and love will lead one to this enlightenment. Hindus have a rich pantheon of deities, all of whom are but a different aspect of the one God. Many contemporary Hindus believe in a Holy Trinity, consisting of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer - all are equal, all are faces of the One. Other Hindus have different interpretations, some citing one god as God and others as subordinates. Despite these differences, there is little conflict

between the various schools of thought. For, as Krishna, avatar of Vishnu, said, "Whatever deity or form a devotee worships, I make his faith steady."

Islam

"Islam" means "the submission to God." It is the world's second largest religion. Most adherents can be found in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, but Islam has a strong presence in Europe as well. Muslims - followers of Islam - believe that there is only one God ("Allah" in Arabic), and that over the years he has revealed his desires to a number of great prophets: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The last and greatest of prophets, Muhammad has written down God's direct words in the Koran, which is the only true guide to a holy life. Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca (which is now part of Saudi Arabia). He lived from 570 to 632. He began life as a merchant, but during his 40th year he experienced a series of visions from God, who commanded him to memorize the verses that would later make up the Koran. Muhammad revealed his visions to others and he gained followers. He and his followers were reviled and attacked by those who did not believe, but they were following the path that God had set for them and emerged triumphant, eventually unifying all of Arabia under one rule. After Muhammad's death, his words spread throughout the Middle East and far beyond. Since Muhammad, Islam has broken into a number of branches, the three most prominent being the Sunni, Shi'ite and Kharijite. These schools disagree on the correct succession of authority after Muhammad's death - a matter of great religious and political importance to Islam. All Muslims believe in the "Five Pillars of Islam," which state that one must do the following to achieve salvation: acknowledge that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet; pray daily to God at the five established times; give a portion of one's wealth to the poor; fast from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan; and make a pilgrimage to Mecca during the holy month of Dhul Hijjah.

Islamic Mosque

In common usage, the term "mosque" is used to describe any Islamic house of worship. In this game that term is reserved for the more important and impressive structures; common mosques are called "Islamic temples. There are Islamic temples across the world. Many contain towers from which the worshippers are called to perform "salah," the five daily prayers each Muslim must perform.

Islamic Shrine

The Masjid al-Haram is an Islamic mosque in the center of the holy city of Mecca, which is located in western Saudi Arabia. The mosque contains the Kaaba, an ancient cube-shaped building which is said to have been built by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son, Ishmael, at the orders of Allah, and which is believed to be the holiest place on Earth. The Kaaba in turn houses the "Black Stone," which it is said has fallen from heaven and has the power to cleanse worshippers of their sins. The Kaaba has always been revered as a holy place. Before the rise of Islam, the Kaaba was filled with idols, and Arabs from miles around came to worship there. Upon his return from exile, the Prophet Muhammad smashed the

idols and rededicated the mosque to Allah and Islam. It has remained an Islamic holy place ever since and non-Muslims are forbidden to enter Mecca. The Masjid al-Haram is the focal point of the "hajj," a religious pilgrimage to Mecca required of all able-bodied Muslims (at least according to the Sunni sect). Every year during the holy month of Dhu'l-Hijjah, upwards of three million people visit the holy city and the most holy mosque within, thus fulfilling one of the "five pillars of Islam." The mosque has been enlarged and modernized to handle the extraordinary influx of faithful, but both the city and the mosque can barely handle the traffic. The mosque is in the form of a huge sprawling building surrounding a mighty courtyard with the Kaaba in the center. The building is extraordinarily beautiful and constructed of marble and porcelain and gold and bedecked with graceful minarets (towers). The interior is a wonder of columned halls filled with tapestries and other marvelous decorations. The courtyard itself is paved with marble. Truly a magnificent place of worship, Masjid al-Haram is said by some to surpass the Taj Mahal in glory and wonder.

Jewish Shrine

According to Jewish tradition, Solomon's Temple was the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and, as the "dwelling place of God," the single most important building in the Jewish religion. Construction was begun by King David and completed by his son, Solomon. The temple was built by Phoenician workers using the finest materials available - stones quarried from beneath the city, wood from Lebanon, and 3000 tons of gold and 30,000 tons of silver. The result was an astonishingly beautiful edifice standing some 30 yards long by 10 yards wide by 16 yards in height. It took seven years to complete the Temple. The Temple consisted of three main rooms surrounded by smaller chambers. Upon climbing a set of stairs, the visitor would enter the vestibule, which was topped with two enormous pillars given the names of Jachin and Boaz. From there the visitor would proceed into the "Greater House" or "Holy Place," wherein important religious services were performed. Beyond the Greater House lay the "Holy of Holies," a square, cedar-lined room which held the "Ark of the Covenant." The Ark of the Covenant was a sacred container which held the stone tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses. The building was surrounded by a courtyard in which the people worshipped. The Temple was pillaged many times over the years, and it was finally looted and burned to the ground by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon sometime around 580 BC, during the time of the "Babylonian Captivity." Years later, many of the Temple's treasures were returned to the Jews by King of Persia, but the Ark was missing. Some believe that the Ark was removed and hidden before the Babylonian attack, while others believe that the Ark was captured by Babylon and then destroyed or lost. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims to possess the Ark, it having been brought there by one of Solomon's sons. In any case, the destruction of the Temple was total, and there is much controversy and debate about where it originally stood. The "Second Temple" was constructed in Jerusalem in approximately 500 BC. It in turn was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. All that remains of this building is the "Western Wall," also known as the "Wailing Wall."

Jewish Synagogue/Temple

In Civilization IV, a temple is defined as a building where the faithful come to worship. Christians call their temples "churches," while Muslims call theirs "mosques," and Jews call theirs, simply, "temples." Temples are far more common than cathedrals, but much less large and ornate. Even the smallest village can possess a temple. Traditionally, the term "synagogue" is used to describe all Jewish houses of worship. Temples are places of prayer and study. Worshipers attend services on the "Shabbat" (or Sabbath), the day of rest which begins at sundown on Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday. Jewish temples are often the center of Jewish life in a community, and may serve as schools, meeting places, libraries, and so forth.

Judaism

Born perhaps 4000 years ago, Judaism is one of the oldest religious traditions practiced today, the first known religion to embrace monotheism and one of the most influential in history. Born in the "cradle of religions," the Middle East, Judaism provided the foundations for Christianity and Islam, two other "Abrahamic" religions. Judaism is the religion of the Jews, originally a Semitic tribe that lived in an area of the Middle East roughly centered on the ancient city of Jerusalem. Over time their central beliefs were written down in the Bible (Old Testament), which contains the history of the Jews, as well as the words of prophets and kings. Most importantly, the Bible teaches the children of Israel how to live according to God's wishes. These are the central beliefs of Judaism. There is only one God and you must not worship any other gods before Him. God is all powerful, all knowing, and eternal. Each man prays to God directly, without the need for an intermediary. People can atone for sins through words and deeds. God has chosen the Jewish people to be in a covenant with Him, and some day God will send a Messiah to bring all of the chosen people back to Israel and usher in an era of peace and prosperity to the Earth. Judaism is a remarkably strong and resilient faith. Throughout history the Jews have been oppressed and enslaved by a series of conquerors. They have been taken from their homeland and scattered across Europe, Africa and Asia. They have been the targets of a program of unbelievably brutal genocide. But throughout it all, the Jews have remained faithful to their religion and their God.

Meditation

Meditation is the practice of relaxing the body while calming and focusing the mind. Many religions - Buddhism, for example - see meditation as a religious ritual, but it is also widely used outside of religion. According to Buddhism, meditation is a path to spiritual enlightenment. It allows one to gain wisdom and it provides refuge from the burden of karma and the toils and misery of daily existence. The Buddha himself gained great wisdom and knowledge of the nature of human suffering from meditating under a humble Bo tree. Many people use meditation as a way to relieve the stress and strain of daily life. The Hindu practice of "yoga" is a formalized form of meditation that enjoys popularity across the globe. Meditation is widely believed to have healing powers, as it allows one's mind to aid the body in overcoming injury and infirmities.

Monastery

A monastery is a building where monks can retreat from the world and concentrate upon the divine. Usually a monastery will have strict rules of conduct to protect its unworldly members from temptation. In some monasteries, the monks are totally silent; in others no visitors are allowed inside. Monasteries usually have many daily rituals and religious services. Throughout the ages monasteries have often been centers of learning. In remote areas the monks may be the only literate people for miles around. Monks have often been employed as scribes, copying out the words of their religion's sacred scripture. Monasteries frequently have extensive libraries, holding religious, scientific, medical and philosophical texts.

Monotheism

Monotheism is the belief that there is only one God. Perhaps the oldest monotheistic religion is Judaism. The original Israelites were polytheistic in a sense, since they did not deny the existence of other gods in addition to their own. However, after being exiled to Babylonia in 586 BC, the Judeans turned to a truly monotheistic religion, where the God of Israel was seen as the universal God ruling the destiny of all nations. The scriptures of Judaism became part of the teachings of the two most widespread monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam. More developed than earlier polytheistic beliefs, monotheistic religions tend to encompass and structure the entire lifestyles of the people who practice them.

Mysticism

People of the ancient world were fascinated and awed by the forces of nature surrounding them. Earthquakes, storms and other phenomena were generally regarded as signs from heaven. Individuals and groups arose to formulate explanations for these events, and pass the knowledge along to the tribe. The priests and priestesses of mysticism, who were often called oracles, claimed union with the divine through meditation and trance-like contemplation. Primitive mysticism offered mankind the first, tenuous links with the powers that shaped their world, and represented the first move toward the organized polytheistic and monotheistic religions to come.

Obelisk (Egypt)

An obelisk is an upright four-sided pillar that tapers to a point, usually placed to commemorate some important god, person or event. The earliest known obelisks are found in Egypt, which is believed to have invented the form. Obelisks were a prominent feature of Egyptian architecture, and two were generally placed at the entrance to Egyptian temples. Cleopatra's Needles - the most famous Egyptian obelisks (which were later looted and relocated to various countries around the world) - were constructed of granite and stood over 20 meters in height. While much larger obelisks have since been built - at 167 meters the Washington Monument in the United States is the tallest obelisk in the world - the Egyptian obelisks were extremely impressive feats of architecture and engineering for their time. (i.e. Washington Monument)

Philosophy

The word "philosophy" comes from a Greek term meaning "love of wisdom." In ancient Greece, literacy and an interest in the natural world were common in a burgeoning upper class. In their leisure time, these people contemplated principles of thinking and being, logic and mathematics, and the natures of reality and existence. In ancient times, the study of philosophy was indistinguishable from the study of science, and many of the theories formulated by the early philosophers became the basis for studies in the fields of astronomy, medicine, chemistry, and physics. The teachings and writings of the ancient philosophers of Greece and the Orient also, in part, laid the groundwork for many of the world's oldest organized religions.

Polytheism

Polytheism is the belief that the world and the environment is ruled or controlled by a number of different gods or divinities. Many ancient religions were polytheistic, notably those of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Norse, and the Romans. Often, polytheistic religions have different gods for each force of nature and earthly phenomenon; for instance: a sun god, a moon god, a god of thunder, a god of the forests, and so forth. The reason for such diversity in divine beings probably stems from ancient civilizations attempting to find explanations for natural events they could not understand.

Taoism

When discussing "Taoism," one must be careful to distinguish between the philosophy of Tao and the religion of Tao. The philosophy of Tao came first. According to tradition, the philosopher Lao-Tsu lived in the 4th Century BC. He wrote the "Tao Te Ching," which can be roughly translated as "The Book of the Way and its Virtue." The Tao Te Ching is written in verse. It is extremely subtle and difficult to understand. Many scholars have spent years trying to interpret it. The book can be (very primitively and probably inaccurately) summarized as follows. The "Tao" is what exists before everything else. It is formless, and from it all things are formed. Man must aspire to simplicity; only by discarding the useless trappings of culture and civilization can man return to his original state of emptiness - Tao - when all is possible. According to Lao-Tsu, "the sage has no heart of his own" - no intentions, no preconceptions, and no agenda. The religion of Taoism is based upon worship of Lao-Tsu as a deity. According to Taoist religious tradition, in 142 AD Lao-Tsu appeared to Zhang Daoling, a hermit, and told him that the world was coming to an end, and those who followed Lao-Tsu would go on to another, better life. Further, Lao-Tsu's followers would have access to the celestial powers that control the fate of mankind. Zhang preached Lao-Tsu's words and gained many converts. Over time, Taoism split into a number of schools. Some believed that they could change the world through talismans, alchemy, and magical spells. Some sought to achieve immortality through a Buddhist-like enlightenment. A variety of gods from Chinese folklore and Buddhist tradition were incorporated into the religion. Taoism spread widely throughout China, and it was the official state religion for a thousand years, until the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. The Communists virtually eradicated the religion in China during the Cultural Revolution (1960-

76), when many of the temples were destroyed and the monks and priests sent to "reeducation" camps. In the 1980s China restored some religious tolerance, and Taoist temples are slowly being rebuilt and repaired. It is believed that many Chinese still practice Taoism in some form, despite the government's restrictions. Taoism is also practiced by some 31 million people outside of China, the largest group being in Taiwan. Its influence can be felt world-wide in the practices of acupuncture, herbalism, feng shui, and martial arts.

Taoist Pagoda

Many of the most elaborate and extensive Taoist religious buildings are pagodas - tiered towers with multiple eaves. This building style originated in Nepal and has since spread across much of Asia. Unfortunately, many great Taoist pagodas were constructed of wood - wood holds special religious significance for Taoists - and have not withstood the onslaught of time. Taoist pagodas tend to be bright and colorful structures, with broad curving roofs that are adorned with divine figures and traditional symbols of luck such as dragons and carp. Taoism is not a selfish faith, and the pagodas may have rooms or shrines dedicated to Buddhist meditation and/or Hindu deities.

Taoist Shrine

The Taoist Dai Miao, or "Temple of the God of Mount Tai," is located on Mount Tai in Shandong Province, China. One of the "five sacred mountains of China," Mount Tai has been of great religious importance throughout Chinese history, and evidence suggests that pilgrims have been climbing the mountain for at least 3000 years. There are 22 temples, 97 ruins, and several thousand stone tablets and inscriptions scattered across its rugged shoulders. The Dai Miao is the largest temple complex on the mountain, covering an area of about a million square feet. The buildings within the temple have been built and rebuilt a number of times, the most recent major overhaul occurring about 2000 years ago during the Han Dynasty. In its latest incarnation, the temple is a replica of the Imperial Palace. The complex has five major halls and many small buildings. The most important building is the Palace of Heavenly Blessings, constructed in 1008. The building contains a mural titled, "The God of Mount Tai Making a Journey." The mural is 10 feet in height by about 200 feet long. It was painted in 1009, making it 1004 years old. Next to the Palace of Heavenly Blessings stand the Yaocan Pavilion and the entrance archway, as well as the Bronze Pavilion in the northeast corner. The Dai Temple is surrounded by the 2,100 year-old Han Dynasty cypresses. Beloved as much for its rugged beauty as for its religious significance, the Dai Miao remains one of the most important religious structures in the world.

Temple

In Civilization IV, a temple is defined as a building where the faithful come to worship. Christians call their temples "churches," while Muslims call theirs "mosques," and Jews call theirs, simply, "temples." Temples are far more common than cathedrals, but much less large and ornate. Even the smallest village can possess a temple.

Ziggurat

The Ziggurats were religious centers dedicated to the gods of ancient Sumeria. Each was comprised of a temple built upon of a series of tiered, earthen platforms, raising the building atop and dwarfing the surrounding structures. Every city's Ziggurat was dedicated to one specific god. These individual dedications sprung from the Sumerian belief that each temple was not a place of worship, but the actual home of the god. Belief held that the gods originated from the distant mountains, and it is thought that the ziggurats were raised in order to make the new dwellings of the gods a little more like home.