Graf interprets the narrative as providing, rather than an explicit initiation rite, a role model for young men who, like Theseus before becoming a king in Athens, have to pass through a transformation before taking on an adult role. It is about a rite of passage with its dynamic tripartition—"separation, liminality, and integration"—that is not limited to initiation rites but exists in many other circumstances, including pilgrimage (Graf, 2013, p. 19; cf. V. Turner 1967).

Whatever the case, which we shall leave for the moment to the intricacies of debate among the esteemed experts on ancient Greek religion, the foundational themes of those myths and rituals from ancient Greece have inspired much of Western civilization over the centuries since the demise of the Greek Empire, and even shaped the direction in which the other religious traditions in the West evolved, since the Greek translations of the Torah survived (the Septuagint; see Law, 2013) and were widely used by Jews and Christians, and Greek was the apparent language of the New Testament (see, e.g., Blass, 1961) and many formative figures of the early church as it diffused into the ancient world, transforming from a Jewish movement into a world religion.

Judaism

The Judeo-Christian tradition became intertwined with Western civilization and diffused even further as the Europeans conquered the Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia. Islam remained strongest in the Middle East, although it made substantial inroads into Africa and Central Asia. Unlike Islam and Christianity, Judaism did not seek converts, nor did it syncretize much with other religions, as did Hinduism and Buddhism. As a result, Judaism has remained primarily an ethnic religion with social boundaries separating Jews from other socioreligious groups, although those boundaries have softened somewhat in places like the United States, where Jews have become more assimilated into the broader culture. Jews became widely dispersed geographically, however, and took their religion with them wherever they went. Moreover, despite its continued identification with a specific social group, Judaism developed a universalistic theology. The impact of the Jewish faith thus goes far beyond its limited social and ethnic boundaries.

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people around the ancient Fertile Crescent of the Middle East, from present-day Iraq to what is now Israel. According to Jewish tradition, their migration had a divine sanction:

> Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1–2)[1]

This ancient tribal legend contains two elements of universalism: (1) The God is still associated with a clan but is not limited to a particular place, and (2) the promise of blessing to Abraham (Abram) will benefit not only his clan but also "all the families of the earth." The movement toward universality is thus part of a decision to migrate, a journey that involves both disengagement from ancestral space and a sense that the protective clan God will travel with them. This mobility of their deity, the bond between a people and a God, and a nascent sense that the God is concerned about others outside their covenant are hallmarks of Judaism that have persisted through the centuries.

Judaism was institutionalized as a religion only after the Exodus from Egypt, probably in the 13th century BCE. According to the Hebraic scriptures, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah migrated to Egypt during a period of famine and became slaves of the Egyptians. Moses, a Jew raised in the palace, had a spiritual vision in which the God of his ancestors instructed him to liberate the slaves from the pharaoh. In the watershed event of Hebrew history and religion, Moses and his brother Aaron organized the slaves, confronted the Pharaoh, and eventually escaped after the Egyptians suffered a series of "plagues" because the Pharaoh refused to release them. A final divine punishment befell the land:

> At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. (Exodus 12:29)

The only firstborn spared were the Hebrews, because they put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses so that the destroyer would pass over them.

Released at last by the pharaoh, the freed slaves wandered in the desert and established a covenant with their God. The **Decalogue** (Ten Commandments) given to Moses at Mt. Sinai established the exclusive relationship of the Hebrew people—a *berith*—with their God—no longer simply a clan God

but God of the nation of Israel. In the ensuing years, the Israelites invaded their "Promised Land," conquered the people living there, and established a monarchy. The religious tradition laid down by Moses was dominant among the Israelites, but worship of the indigenous Gods of the region was frequent as well, especially Ba'al, the God of Storms, and Anath (or Ashtoreth or Astarte), the Goddess of Love, War, and Fertility. Not surprisingly in an agricultural society, the worship of these Gods involved the central issues of sex and fertility; the mating of the rain–vegetation God with the fertility Goddess was reenacted ritually by humans playing their respective roles, much to the dismay of the priests (see Deuteronomy 23:17–18).

Ancient Judaism was a primal clan religion whose social organization took the form of a **theocracy**, a fact that put its stamp on the tradition that persists to this day. As a way of life, Judaism insisted on strict ethical standards in all economic enterprise and political activity. God demanded strict adherence to standards of justice, with special attention to the poor, orphans, and widows. This concern for the downtrodden reflects the tradition's origins among an oppressed people seeking liberation.

The **Hebrew scriptures**, according to the tradition, came from God, and the first five books (the **Pentateuch**) were written by Moses (an idea modern scholars do not think literally true). The Hebrew scriptures are constituted by the following:

1. The Pentateuch, known as the **Torah**, or Law
2. The **Prophets (Nevi'im)**
3. The **Writings (Kethuvim)**, which include such contributions as the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and the Song of Songs

The Torah, Prophets, and Writings together constitute the **Tanakh**, or the Written Torah, which also has a vast body of commentaries containing oral and written traditions. They include the Mishnah and rabbinical commentaries on the Mishnah called the Gemara, which together are called the **Talmud**, completed 1,500 years ago. A number of other important texts exist outside the mainstream, such as the **Zohar**, the primary text of the Kabbalah in the Jewish mystical tradition. It is similar to Sufism in Islam and mysticism in other traditions in that the Zohar's emphasis is on the intense, direct experience of the divine. The text is of such depth and controversy that one group of rabbis declared that no one under 40 should read the Zohar!

Judaism emphasizes that God spoke to the Hebrew people through the Torah, still sometimes written on a scroll, kept in a cabinet in the synagogue, and treated with great respect. Traditionally written in Hebrew on

parchment, the scroll should not be touched directly—someone reading it will use a pointer (*yad*) to follow along the text without touching it. This early emphasis on the written word rather than on an oral tradition placed its stamp on Western civilization as well. The rabbinic tradition, especially after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, cultivated the study of the Torah and later the Talmud. Centuries of rabbinical training and Judaism's emphasis on learning, reading, and writing have produced a rich literature.

Jewish Beliefs

Much like Buddhism and its Three Jewels, we might summarize the ideas of the Jewish faith with three concepts: God, Torah, and Israel—that is, the deity, God's teachings, and the community, which in this case is the holy nation, or chosen people, of Israel. Ritual is more important than doctrine to the Jewish tradition, which except for the most fundamental confession of faith allows wide latitude in belief, especially in its reformed branch. This lack of emphasis on doctrine and the concomitant stress on ritual and community is primarily a function of the fact that a Jew is not, for the most part, someone who *believes* in Judaism—that person is either born Jewish or is not. A Jew is a member of a family, and those few people who convert to the faith are not just members of a religious community but become the "adopted children" of Abraham and Sarah (see Hertzberg, 1962, p. 21).

The Shema, the heart of morning and evening prayers, expresses the fundamental belief of Judaism as a ritual confession of faith found in the Torah:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Praised be God's glorious sovereignty for ever and ever.
>
> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. These words which I command you this day shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. You shall talk of them at home and abroad, night and day. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand; they shall be as frontlets between your eyes, and you shall inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and upon your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4–9)

The Jewish Cosmogony

The Jewish understanding of the nature of the cosmos begins with the Jews' own sacred history and their special relationship with the Creator. The same God who sacralized Abraham and Sarah's migration, freed the Hebrews from slavery under the Egyptians, and led them to the Promised Land created

the world. Moreover, at the end of the process, God created humanity in God's own image and gave this last creature dominion over the rest of creation. Herein lies the creative tension of Judaism, which can lead to remarkable dedication to the causes of justice and peace as proclaimed by the ancient Hebrews but also to the exploitation of power by those who proclaim themselves chosen by God. It is precisely this potential for abuse of power that was denounced by the ancient Hebrew prophets and was the source of the prophetic tradition and activist orientation within Western culture, a fountain of the West's strength as well as its weakness.

The creation story in the Hebrew scripture known as **Genesis** is a major piece of literature in Western culture and reveals a great deal about the civilization's worldviews. The Christian and Islamic cosmogonies are borrowed from that of their parent religion, Judaism, and expressed in the creation stories of Genesis, in which the one God created the universe. First, this story states that although their Creator declared creation good, humans disobeyed God and thus were expelled from the paradise in which there was no pain or suffering. Second, God gave humans control over the rest of the natural world, blessed them, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This feature of the Judaic cosmogony lays the groundwork for the activist approach toward the world in general, and the scientific–technological revolutions of the modern West in particular.

Third, the patriarchal strains in the creation story are significant and have been used to legitimate male dominance. Eve allegedly initiated eating the forbidden fruit, which led to the so-called "Fall," so some assign the blame for the expulsion of humans from paradise to the female sex. There are, however, two separate Hebrew creation stories, probably coming from two distinct sources. According to the first version, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). In the second version, God creates Adam and then decides "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). Then God makes all the beasts and birds and finally causes the man to sleep, takes a rib from his side, and uses it to create the woman. In the first version, God creates the two genders simultaneously as equals. In the second version, which is more often remembered and cited, God creates the female as a helper to the male, thus seeming to imply her inferiority.

With more women involved in scholarly examination of the scriptures and traditions of every faith, new questions arise at every turn. As Mary Jo Neitz (2003) put it, for example,

> we must ask "What is Eve's story? What is *paradise* for her?" As told in the second chapter of Genesis, God and Adam set things up and agreed about the rules before Eve arrived on the scene. In verses 19–20 Adam names everything, before God even creates Eve. Did Eve agree to the rules? Did she want to name things? Did she have a choice? There is another story in Hebrew folklore about Lilith, Adam's first wife, who insisted on equality and flew away when Adam tried to tell her what to do (Gottlieb, 1995, pp. 73–78). What was her story? I would like to hear Eve's version of the story we get in Chapter 2 of Genesis. (p. 5)

Finally, the Hebrew creation narrative weaves together competing themes of freedom and domination. On one hand, humans are created in the image of God and thus have a wide range of freedom; on the other, they are disobedient and therefore in need of authoritative social institutions that keep them from engaging in immoral behavior. Contradictory worldviews are an important aspect of religious myths and appear in a wide range of examples: Opposing ideas are woven into a narrative, which then often becomes a focus for cultural conflict.

Jewish Theodicies

Whereas the Eastern religions tend to explain suffering and death on the basis of long-term continuity and cycles of history, Western religions usually rely on a theory of suffering caused by dramatic changes in history, sometimes as a result of human agency followed by divine punishment. The Judeo-Christian–Islamic tradition posits that humans once lived in paradise, the Garden of Eden, where suffering and death did not exist. By disobeying God—eating the forbidden fruit of the knowledge of good and evil—humans became estranged from God and were expelled from paradise, ushering in both suffering and death.

The Genesis account of the Fall also suggests that God was somehow unhappy with the possibility of human immortality, and that is at least partly why God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden (Genesis 3:22–23). Because separation from God is the cause of suffering and death, the solution to misery is a return to God. The usual paths in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are conversion and/or repentance, turning back to God, and restoring the lost relationship with the deity, a process facilitated by the rituals and actions of the faith community. In Christianity, one confesses and loves God and one's neighbor. In Islam, one relies upon the Five Pillars: (1) affirming one's belief in the One God, (2) performing ritual prayers, (3) sharing one's wealth (**zakat**), (4) celebrating Ramadan (the month of

fasting), and (5) undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca. In Judaism, the community must engage in repentance and a restoration of the covenant, to do justice and walk with God.

Jewish theodicies reflect the social nature of Judaism and the ancient Hebrews' covenant with their God. The Fall in the Garden of Eden identifies the emergence of evil in the world because of alienation from God. Suffering and death themselves are consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience, which in turn resulted in their separation from the Creator, in the same sense that a child feels pain when separated from the parent. Suffering can be overcome through individual conversion and/or repentance, in order to return to God. This theory of suffering remains a constant reminder throughout Jewish history that—as in the Eastern law of karma—the person who causes suffering or breaks the covenant with God will somehow suffer, sometimes even at God's hands.

It appears, however, that the just also suffer, a problem discussed eloquently throughout Jewish literature, in part because of the great suffering that Jews have experienced as a people over the centuries—from that expressed in the ancient book of Job to the literature of the Holocaust. A popular contemporary Jewish exploration of the problem of suffering is Rabbi Harold Kushner's (1981) *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, in which he contends that a satisfactory explanation for suffering is possible only when people forfeit the idea of God as omnipotent or all powerful.

Jewish Ritual

Jewish kosher laws, a complex set of regulations about food selection, preparation, and eating according to ancient Hebrew rituals, provide an interesting case of religious rituals that link routine social life with the broader goals of the tradition; they are organized on the principle of the distinction between the sacred and the profane so emphasized by Durkheim. Such dietary restrictions serve the obvious purpose of providing norms for approved eating practices, important in primal societies in which religious and social regulation were not clearly differentiated. As well as forbidding the eating of certain kinds of animals, kosher laws prohibit mixing meat and dairy foods, which must not even be prepared or served by the same utensils. Finally, the Talmud and later works define the exact manner in which food must be prepared and eaten: Animals must be killed in a prescribed procedure, all meat must be free of surface blood before being eaten, and so on. These boundaries of food preparation and eating undoubtedly provided a practical protection in ancient times from

disease and other hazards. Many of the regulations may not sound immediately logical within the context of 21st-century theories of health and nutrition but reflect ancient public health practices and perhaps even historically specific problems that the Hebrew community encountered. A related concern is a humanitarian one for the animals themselves. Some of the preparatory regulations, such as instructions for how to kill an animal properly, mitigate the extent to which it suffers and have an interesting relevance to ethical questions surrounding industrial agriculture, which usually places profit maximization above principles of ethical treatment of animals.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas suggested that the logic of the kosher laws lies in the principle of classification itself. Establishing boundaries between purity and danger is a direct way of ordering the world. Categories of forbidden food include types of animals that do not neatly fall into one category or another in the threefold Hebrew classification of the universe as the Earth, the waters, and the firmament: "Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness" (Douglas, 1966, p. 55). Through this complex set of dietary laws, Orthodox Jews are reminded with every meal and in every encounter with the natural world of the link between the people and their God, the boundaries between Hebrews and other tribes. In this sense, then, the *medium* is the message. What is important is not which foods are taboo, or even which criteria are used, but that the laws have a logic to the people who follow them and that the boundaries around food consumption reinforce boundaries around religious and hence social identities. Nonetheless, Jewish kosher practices are preserved even among many secular Jews whose (sometimes unconscious) cultural taste preferences are informed by centuries of custom—some may not have moral objections to eating pork, but find it an unattractive food choice.

The major holidays of the Jewish year reflect this religion's agricultural roots and recall significant events in the history of Israel. Three autumn holidays include **Rosh Hashanah** (New Year), **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement), and the **Sukkoth** (the Feast of Booths, a harvest festival commemorating the wilderness wandering following the Exodus). **Pesach**, or Passover, in the spring celebrates God's liberating activity in history, portrayed symbolically in the *seder* meal. The ritual serves as a reminder of social history: the Jews' liberation from slavery and their hope for a messiah. It is sustained by the ethnic religious community but is couched in universalistic terms for the benefit of all humanity: Just as God worked through Moses to liberate the Hebrew slaves, Jews today are reminded of their duty to work for the liberation of all who are oppressed.

With its vast literature and formidable richness, the Jewish belief system became the basis for the Christian and Islamic traditions, a historical fact that resulted in its dissemination far beyond the boundaries of the ancient Hebrew tribes. Of particular importance for Christianity was the Jewish belief that the "anointed one," the messiah, would usher in a messianic age of peace and justice for all humanity. The followers of Jesus insisted that he was that messiah.

Christianity

The religion we know as Christianity was originally a Jewish movement started by a Jewish prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, who now has 1.5 to 2 billion followers (almost one third of the world's human population); more people now call themselves Christians than identify with any other religious affiliation. Sociologically, the reason for Christianity's dominance of the religious landscape is not so much a superior theology as its alliance with the power structures of Western civilization, first with the Roman Empire after the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century CE and then with the Western European powers through the Middle Ages and into the expansionism of the colonial period. In the 19th century, colonial and missionary movements spread in tandem from Europe to other parts of the world, conquering land, economic and political resources, and cultures.

As many countries joined the global community through the colonial system, Christian missionaries educated their political, economic, and intellectual elites. Like other transplanted religions, Christianity transformed dramatically as it diffused across cultures and became increasingly cosmopolitan. One characteristic of Christianity, deriving from its multiculturalism, is the tremendous variety of "Christianities" around the world. As the religious movement spread, many indigenous people grafted their own religious beliefs and practices onto the basic ideas of the Christian faith. Christian worship often includes pre-Christian religious rituals and takes on the color and many of the features of the indigenous religions it has replaced.

Before it became the official religion of Europe, Christianity was a backwater religious movement favoring the poor. Despite the diversity of its participants (see Grant, 1963/1972), the early Christian movement appealed especially to isolated, marginal people in a politically insignificant location rather than to those at the center of power. Because early Christianity was much different from contemporary practice, we have to cut through many layers of culture to understand its primary form (see Loisy, 1903/1976). Christianity was initially a Jewish movement, one of several reform movements at the time, and fell within the tradition of the Jewish prophets with

whom Jesus was identified. The apostles were a group of passionate itinerant preachers who ran into trouble with the authorities wherever they went—a far cry from the contemporary Christian leaders, especially in the West, who are respected members of the community (and usually middle class).

Jesus first joined the movement started by his relative, John the Baptist, and did not develop his own group of followers until after John's execution. Although Jesus never declared himself the head of a new religion and repeatedly affirmed his faithfulness to the Jewish tradition, he was a classic charismatic authority who challenged the religious establishment of his day. He struggled frequently with religious and civil authorities, and from the very beginning of his ministry, people sought to kill him. In his first sermon, Jesus proclaimed the following:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to give the good news to the poor; he has sent me to heal the afflicted in heart, to announce freedom to the prisoners and give sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed, to announce the year of grace of the Lord. (Luke 4:18–19)

Immediately following the sermon,

> all those in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. (Luke 4:28–29)

This sort of controversy followed him throughout his ministry, until the religious and political authorities finally executed him.

After Jesus's death, a dramatic occurrence changed the character of this small reform movement: His followers became convinced that he had risen from the dead. The movement itself was dramatically revitalized, becoming a thriving force that gradually spread throughout the ancient Middle East and eventually into the centers of power as well as the margins of society.

One of the most sociologically significant characteristics of Christianity is its universalistic criteria for membership. Religious belief systems are usually tied closely to a specific social grouping, but early Christianity was deliberately universal in its recruitment. Judaism is an inherited religion: To be a Jew, one essentially has to be born into the community. To be a Christian in the early church, one needed no ethnic or tribal qualifications; one simply had to declare "Jesus is Lord" and go through a rite of passage—baptism—to become a member of the community. This radically universal nature of Christianity, consistent with Jesus's teachings, was institutionalized by the apostle Paul, who spread the new religious system throughout the ancient Middle East. Moreover, a central belief is that God is love—in fact, the

writer of I John (4:7–8) goes so far as to declare, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."

This lack of ethnic or tribal membership criteria led to a multicultural religious community very early on. Christianity emphasized belief more than ritual. A persistent central question of the community, "What must I do to be saved?" may sound familiar to many readers of this book, but it is a rare question indeed in the world's religions and in most religions makes little sense or none at all. Christianity thus became highly intellectualized as people began to fight one another over what beliefs were required to be a member of the community in good standing. In most other religious traditions, such issues were simply not central because the matter of membership was not so problematic. Thus, the Christian belief system carries an added weight of historical importance as the defining feature of membership in this religion.

It is possible, despite the enormous number of variant Christian communities throughout the world, to isolate some basic beliefs that are nearly universal among Christians, although there are a very wide range of interpretations regarding them:

1. God is love.
2. Jesus is Lord.
3. One should love God and one's neighbor.
4. God intervenes in history.
5. The Bible reveals God's nature and will.

The religious movement of early Christianity was centered on the person of Jesus, believed to be the messiah, the savior or liberator sent by God to deliver people from bondage. Gradually, the church came to see Jesus himself as God, along with the Creator (or Father) and the Holy Spirit. The combined divinity and humanity of Jesus—the doctrine of the **incarnation**—is not peculiar to Christianity but is one of its central characteristics. The idea of a "Godhead," similarly, is not altogether unlike the Hindu idea that a single Supreme Soul exists in three manifestations incarnated in various ways. All together, the three elements, or "roles" of the Christian God, known as the **Trinity**, make up one single being, although the way in which they do has been a matter of considerable controversy throughout Christendom. The Christian concept of God incorporates the complementary (or contradictory?) ways in which the divine is experienced—as an originator of

life (the Father, in its patriarchal imagery), as a liberator who comes to people's aid (the Son or messiah, Jesus), and as the sustainer or spiritual energizer of life (the Spirit).

The idea that Jesus is the "Son of God" is a complicated one, especially for Muslims, who are taught that this is a blasphemous idea. The concept is quite foundational for some Christians and complex and mysterious for others; indeed, the early church had numerous debates, councils, and declarations about the issue. The Hebrew scriptures have numerous references to Sons of God, and the idea probably does not mean (at least to most people) that God took a wife and had a son, or that he is somehow physically God's offspring. Abdullah Ibrahim (n.d.)[2] pointed out that Arabs are often called "sons of the desert" but that no one takes that in a literal sense—it is meant to be understood spiritually. Moreover, he argued the following:

> Because God is so much greater than man, He chooses to express Himself in human terms so that we can understand Him. When Surah 22, Hajj, verse 61 says that Allah sees and hears, it does not mean He has ears and eyes. Rather He is expressing a spiritual truth in such a way that we can understand that He is All-knowing. Similarly, behind the title "Son of God" is a spiritual truth expressed in human terms.

The early Christians believed that the God who created the universe—a God who had become embodied in humanity and sustained people as they passed through both the suffering and the joy of life—was a God of love. In fact, God is frequently identified with love, providing an important element of the Christian theodicy, or theory of suffering and death: No matter how bad things seem to be, one can always be confident that the universe is a friendly one and love will ultimately triumph. The third major belief—that one should love one's neighbor as well as God—derives from Jesus's own teaching and forms the basis of Christian ethics, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

Fourth, because Christians believe that God acts in history, the tradition has a historical perspective on the nature of the world. Most Christians believe God will ultimately bring about a dramatic transformation of the universe to fulfill the "Kingdom of God" on Earth as it is in heaven. Christians generally imagine this kingdom as a peaceable one in which love and justice reign. Christian **eschatologies** (theories about the end of time) provide two distinct theories of how the kingdom will arrive: (1) a major cataclysmic event will occur, the Apocalypse, in which good people will be rewarded and evil people punished, and (2) a universalistic vision in which all of creation will be united in the Christ when he returns. Members of the

early church were convinced that Jesus would return before they died, that the end of the world was imminent, and that the Kingdom of God, as portrayed in the parables of Jesus and the teachings of the Christian scriptures, required a radical commitment to God. Believers should shed their traditional loyalties—even to their families and jobs—and live a life of love and justice.

Finally, Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, is a religion of the book—that is, its central beliefs are written and codified in a set of sacred scriptures. Two primary collections of writings constitute the Christian **canon** (the writings declared authoritative for a given tradition): the Hebrew scriptures (known to Christians as the Old Testament) and the New Testament (written between 50 and 140 CE), together known as the Bible. In practice, however, a smaller section—a "canon within the canon"—identifies portions of the Bible as more significant than others. The church traditionally gives primary importance to the four **Gospels** because they record the life and teachings of Jesus, but in many churches (especially more conservative congregations), the Letters (or Epistles) take a more prominent place.

Much contemporary scholarship focuses on the historical development of the Christian scriptures, believed by some to be the literal Word of God and by others to have been inspired by God but written by fallible humans and changed over time. As noted in Chapter 1, controversies about inconsistencies in the Bible are as much political as religious. Nineteenth-century pro-democracy forces in Western Europe attacked the church as a basis of the monarchy's legitimacy by raising questions about the church's theodicies and other truth claims. Most of the claims about a literal interpretation of the Bible that the Roman Catholic Church made in the heat of the battle have since been withdrawn by Rome, but many Protestant groups continue to believe that such a position is a necessary doctrine for any true Christian.

Christian theodicies borrowed from Judaism rely primarily upon the theory that separation from God—the Creator and source of all good—causes evil, suffering, and death. They are **eschatological**, asserting that the problem of suffering will be resolved at the end of time, and they tend to be messianic. Christians believe that a messiah or liberator—Jesus Christ—has already come and will come again to reunite creation with God. Most Christians are also millenarian: They believe that an ideal society will come; some are convinced that the transformation will take place in this world, whereas others believe that the change will happen in the next world.

There are two major differences between Christian cosmologies and theodicies and those of the Jewish parent religion: (1) the Christian church's emphasis on "right belief" evolved as a consequence of its universalistic

criteria of membership (belonging was a matter of believing) and (2) that Christianity, especially **Protestantism**, places a stronger emphasis on individual responsibility. Once more, the sociological reason for this shift in emphasis lies in the nature of the tradition: Whereas Judaism has defined suffering as something the community experiences collectively, Christianity has placed more emphasis on individual choice and its consequences.

Christian Rituals

Two central rituals found across the Christian faith, the **Eucharist** (communion) and baptism, involve communication with God in the context of collective worship. Ironically, these rituals were borrowed from the Jewish tradition and adapted by the church to denote distinctive Christian identity. Even though they are explicitly designed for communication with God, both rituals address the sociological problem of membership in the community. Because the early church broke so radically with the religious context it grew out of by denying ethnic or tribal requirements for membership, the issue was an important one. Controversies about circumcision and kosher laws recorded in the New Testament reflect the difficulties of this new form of socioreligious organization no longer rooted in ethnicity. Baptism thus became a rite of passage into the community, and the Eucharist was designed to bring members together in the body of Christ.

Several layers of symbolic meaning can be found in the Eucharist or communion service, the eating of bread and drinking of wine: First, the ritual involves a reenactment of the "Last Supper" Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion. Second, it also recalls the ancient Hebraic Passover meal, the ritual occasion for which Jesus and his disciples had assembled. The Hebrew rite commemorated the delivery of the slaves from Egypt and the night of the "Passover," when the Egyptian sons were slaughtered but the Hebrew children were spared. (Behind both of those rituals, it should be noted, hovers the much more ancient idea of a hierophany involving human and animal sacrifices. In some ancient traditions, the God, or the animal in which the God resides, is killed and eaten, allowing participants literally to partake of the God and incorporate it into their very being.)

Because the early Christian church saw itself as the resurrected body of Christ, the Eucharist was at the center of worship life as a way of reinforcing the internalization of Jesus into the members of the community. They reconfirmed their "incorporation" in the church, the body of Jesus, when they ate the body and drank the blood (Matthew 26:26–28). As Christianity was removed from its primal roots, in which the natural and symbolic worlds are one, the relationship between the blood and body of Jesus to

the wine and bread was rendered increasingly abstract. At the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Roman Catholic Church countered the Protestant Reformation by insisting that the bread and wine actually became, through the mystery of the Eucharist ritual, the body and blood of Christ (the doctrine of *transubstantiation*). In the modern world, the literalness of the Eucharist has been stripped away; ironically, those contemporary Christian communities that insist most vociferously on a literal interpretation ("fundamentalist" Protestants) are often the most symbolic in their interpretation of the ritual. In some churches, a further abstraction is made by introducing grape juice as a symbol for the wine that represents the blood.

The most widely diffused religious tradition, Christianity has a long history of transformation from its Jewish roots. Although the central rituals of the faith have considerable continuity, they have also been diversified and modified through contact with other cultures as Christianity was carried by various empires and colonizers. Let us look briefly at this process, which hints at what may happen in the contemporary globalization of society and culture.

Because of its detachment from social criteria for membership, Christianity was syncretistic from the beginning. Its earliest advocates acted on the universalism of the founder's teachings and took the movement from the core to the periphery of the ancient Roman Empire. Along the way, it became infused first with Greek philosophy (as in the Gospel of John), and later with a wide variety of other religious and philosophical perspectives. During the Western colonial period, Christianity became transnational and global and its practices grew exceedingly diverse. Although the colonial church eradicated many indigenous local practices in an effort to carry out its perceived mission of spreading an exclusivist religious truth, Christianity itself was dramatically changed by its encounters with various traditions. In the West, especially in New World Protestant denominations, it took on features that would seem foreign to the Christians of ancient Palestine. Elsewhere, Christian belief and practice melded with local practices in a way that most Americans would find astonishing. Although the most general sets of symbols and core beliefs remain intact, they are interpreted in quite different ways around the world, expressed in rituals and ideas that reflect the indigenous religions that Christianity replaced or with which it coexists.

One of the most striking examples of this process is in India, which is predominantly Hindu but has a Christian tradition claiming roots in the first century CE from the apostle Thomas, who reportedly first took the Christian gospel to the Asian subcontinent. In traditional Indian culture, the Gods each have their special festival days when they are brought out of their temples and paraded through the streets on a chariot borne or pulled by believers. Over the centuries, the Indian Christian church has adopted many of the

practices of the indigenous folk religions, including these processions. In Kodaikanal, in the mountains of South India, the statue of Mary is annually removed from her resting place at Saint Mary's cathedral, put on a "chariot," and reverently pulled through the streets of the town in a daylong procession. Thousands of people come on foot, and by bus, oxcart, and car, to participate. The streets blaze with lights, and as Mary works her way through the crowd, babies are lifted up to the statue for her blessing. Vendors hawk their wares: everything from religious artifacts and worship aids to food, clothing, and toys for the kids. A carnival atmosphere prevails, and people gather to talk, renew acquaintances, and enjoy the holiday. Through the process of this festival honoring Mary, life in Kodaikanal is also honored, and collective life is celebrated in the midst of poverty and disease.

Another example of syncretism between Christian and indigenous Indian practices can be seen in a Catholic orphanage outside Madurai in South India, where a statue of Mary adorns the central courtyard. That the sisters who run the orphanage would make Mary the visual focal point of their establishment is not surprising. What may be surprising is that she is standing atop a lotus flower.

Although religious traditions sometimes appear fixed and immutable, they are in fact dynamic phenomena that grow out of specific social circumstances in specific natural environments and are then transformed as the conditions in which they flourish change. This tension between continuity and change is characteristic of all human institutions, including religion. The figure of Mary is a very interesting one in Christianity, as she is extremely popular, especially among women and within the so-called Third World. There is a sense in which she buffers women against the patriarchy of the tradition, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, where she is so prominent.

Christian Hierarchy and Rebellion

Christianity's social organization, the most formalized of all the major religious traditions, is a direct response to the universalism of its theology, which encouraged efforts to convert all nonbelievers to the faith. Whereas many traditions can draw on the social organization of the culture in which they are carried, the deliberate break made by the early Christian movement with the Jewish socioreligious order precipitated the construction of cultural and ideological, rather than ethnic or tribal, boundaries to shape the new religious movement (NRM). Such a radical break with social organization is inherently destabilizing, however, so the history of the Christian church becomes a story of continual efforts to attach the ideas of the faith and the interests of its institutions to particular social orders.

Reading between the lines of the New Testament, we can detect many religious conflicts emerging from this universalistic experiment in social organization as the early Christian community fought to establish its identity. First came the division between the ethnically Jewish church in Jerusalem, headed by the local leader Peter and the non-Jewish congregations founded or nurtured by the more cosmopolitan Roman citizen Paul, who was dramatically converted to the movement and later transformed it (hence the Christian saying, "robbing Peter to pay Paul"). Many of Paul's letters address the relationship between what it means to be a Christian and whether or not this excludes non-Jews and whether one needs to be kosher or circumcised or otherwise connected to the ethnic roots of the faith in Judaic culture. Time and again, the early community, especially under Paul's charismatic leadership, came down on the side of universalism.

These early battles were waged over and over again as Christianity diffused and became entangled in social and political alliances, finally resulting in institutional divisions of the church that were more political than theological. The church councils of the early centuries, meetings of high church officials from the far-flung corners of "Christendom," were called to settle doctrinal disputes that had political or societal bases. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to monopolize the tradition, tracing the authority of the pope back to Peter, who, according to tradition, was anointed by Jesus to succeed him. When the church split between the Roman and Eastern Orthodox branches in 1054 CE, it was because the Holy Roman Empire itself had divided into Eastern and Western branches. Similarly, the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century reflected not only legitimate religious disputes over the need for reform in a religious hierarchy that had become infatuated with power, but also the struggle between Roman ecclesiastical authorities and German political elites (see Bainton, 1950). Along with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches, the Reformation created a third major branch of the church, Protestantism, but the Protestant branch subsequently subdivided into an extremely large number of sects that later grew into denominations in their own right, setting the stage for further reformations.

The history of the Christian church is one of continual rebellion and recrystallization in conjunction with related historical, social, and political developments. As the church attempted to compensate institutionally for its lack of a social organizational base, it became increasingly rigid and hierarchical in sharp contrast to the egalitarian nature of the early Christian community. The vast complex of the institutional order of Christianity at the beginning of the 21st century reflects the tremendous diversity of cultural styles, sociological and political alliances, and theological differences within

the church. This institutional diversity runs across denominational boundaries, but it is internally marked as well and has been radically challenged by Christianity's confrontation first with a myriad of indigenous cultures and recently with the democratic ethos of the modern world. The Roman Catholic Church, with its strict chain of command developed over the centuries, has taken much of the brunt of the modern rebellion against authority, but other branches of the church have been similarly shaken by populist and democratic movements as well.

The shape of modern democracy was influenced positively by people demanding political freedoms as a vehicle for religious freedom. Important structural innovations were developed by the founders of the American republic, for example, and models of democratic participation were created by such Christian sects as the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. The Quakers rebelled in the middle of the 17th century against the formalism of ecclesiastical institutions and practices, even within the reformed Protestant churches. Rejecting even the sacramental rituals of the Eucharist and baptism, the Friends (as they called themselves) emphasized the four principles of equality, peace, simplicity, and community and cultivated a radically democratic institution. One arm of the Friends, in an effort to purge the community of empty ritualism, resorted to silent worship, interrupted only when any participant felt "moved by the spirit" to speak. Gradually, however, although they continued to emphasize simplicity in their interactions and forms of worship, even the Quakers developed their own distinctive rituals and specialized language that help to solve the problems of collective life and to create the boundaries not provided by a common ethnicity.

Islam

> *In the name of God, the Benevolent, the Merciful!*
>
> *Praise is proper to God, Lord of the Universe, the Benevolent, the Merciful!*
>
> —Qur'an 1:1–2[3]

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are sometimes called "three strands of a tightly woven rope" within the **Abrahamic tradition** because they trace their roots to the same Semitic religious heroes, Abraham and Sarah. The Islamic faith is one of the fastest-growing and most misunderstood religions in the world today. Approximately one out of five people call themselves Muslims. Indonesia has the largest number. At the center of Islamic belief is a monotheism inherited

from Judaism; the concept of *tawhid*, the unity of God; and the belief that God spoke to humans in the **Qur'an**, the Islamic scriptures, through a prophet in the tradition of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

Islam is perhaps the most difficult of the traditions for a non-Muslim American to write about, because of the pervasive misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in the media—which is where most Americans get their information about Islam, and which is so patently inaccurate. Moreover, I was reminded of the difficulty of the overall task of this book while preparing the section on Islam; perhaps Daniel Martin Varisco (2005) put it best when he insisted, "It is easy to create unity out of diversity but seldom does it serve an analytic purpose" (p. 136). In his critique of academic approaches to the study of Islam, he observed the shortcomings of the classics from Clifford Geertz (1968) to Ernest Gellner (1981), Fatima Mernissi (1975), and Akbar Ahmed (1988), as well as Edward Said's (1978) critique of "Orientalism" in Western scholarship.

Islam's founder, Muhammad, known as the **Prophet**, was born in about 570 CE on the Arabian Peninsula. Orphaned at a young age, he grew up in his merchant uncle's household and became a well established and respected merchant himself. He married a wealthy widow, Khadija, had children (two sons died and four daughters survived), became a respected citizen of Mecca, and then became disenchanted with his comfortable life and the materialistic meaninglessness of his culture. Muhammad experimented with spiritual contemplation in a cave on Mount Hira, just outside the city, and spent long hours in solitary meditation. One evening in the cave, a voice spoke to him, the first of a series of revelations recorded in the Qur'an. He was petrified and ran home to his wife, who was one of the few who stood by him at the beginning of his long and difficult spiritual journey.

Muhammad began relating the revelations he had received to others in Mecca, but he was met with hostility and mounting opposition there from religious and business elites, who considered him a threat because of his prophetic emphasis on justice and spiritual discipline. The tribe of Quraysh, which controlled Mecca, first tried to co-opt him and then threatened him; local merchants instituted a social and economic boycott against his entire family and then attempted to kill him. Some of the Prophet's converts fled to Ethiopia in 615 CE, and in 622 CE, Muhammad and his followers left Mecca, moving to the nearby city of Medina, where they established their religious community, the **ummah**, the foundation of Islam. The Muslim calendar thus begins with that year of the migration.

The ummah grew quickly in Medina, and its influence spread to the surrounding territories. This expansion led to military conflicts between Muhammad's followers and a Quraysh army, among others. Eventually, the

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The ummah grew quickly in Medina, and its influence spread to the surrounding territories. This expansion led to military conflicts between Muhammad's followers and a Quraysh army, among others. Eventually, the

ummah became the dominant religious, military, and political force in the region. In 629 CE, Muhammad and his followers returned triumphantly to Mecca, took control of the city, and established the religious practices and organizational patterns of Islam.

Islamic Beliefs

> Walk into any bookstore, and you will initially be drawn to a stack of breathless titles that are truly frightening. These journalistic exposés reveal worlds of terrorist intrigue and plots against the United States. Alongside these instant potboilers are books with a more sober tone, delivering with masterful condescension the verdict of failure upon Islamic civilization, and the promise of an apocalyptic clash between Islam and the West. . . . How can anyone make sense of all this?
>
> —Carl Ernst (2003, p. xiii)

> Islam's scriptural sources stress that mercy—above other divine attributions—is God's hallmark in creation and constitutes his primary relation to the world.
>
> —Umar Faruq Abd-Allah (2004, p. 1)

It is almost a truism in discussing Islam to begin with the Five Pillars that ritually reinforce the religious and social boundaries of the ummah, draw people into the community, and provide an important redistribution of wealth from rich to poor.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Despite the diversification of the tradition as it spread throughout much of the world, Islam's core remains remarkably constant, with the following elements showing up almost everywhere Muslims worship:

1. *Shahada*, or profession of faith
2. Ritual prayers (*salat*) as part of communal and individual life cycles
3. Zakat, the sharing or giving of alms from a proportion of one's wealth
4. Ramadan, a month of fasting from daybreak to sundown to cultivate spiritual, physical, and moral discipline
5. Hajj, a pilgrimage to the sacred places in and around Mecca

The first pillar, the shahada, is the profession of faith: "There is no God but God [Allah], and Muhammad is God's messenger." The shahada is

affirmed at all key events in one's life cycle (especially at births and deaths) and is included in daily prayers. To embrace Islam, one must simply make this declaration before witnesses. According to the tradition, everyone is born Muslim.

The second pillar consists of making personal prayers along with the formal ritual prayer (salat) that is repeated several times daily, normally at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and late evening. The salat is used to frame the entire day, reminding believers that God should be at the center of their lives. The fact that the devout of all social classes worship together on the same level in the mosque symbolizes the equality of all in God's eyes. The entire Muslim world faces Mecca and prays, turning to neighbors at the end of the prayer with the traditional greeting, "Salaam" (peace).

The third pillar, zakat, requires Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to the poor and others needing assistance. This ritual giving includes the important practice of hospitality and provides a mechanism for sustaining the social order by redistributing wealth and addressing social needs. The term *zakat* literally means "purification," suggesting that wealth is defiling unless shared with others. This practice, stemming from Muhammad's vision of justice and condemnation of the materialism of his time, now requires an annual donation of 2.5% of a believer's wealth.

The fourth pillar of Islam is Ramadan, a month of fasting from daybreak to sundown to cultivate spiritual, physical, and moral discipline. Besides abstaining from food, drink, and sex during the daylight hours, Muslims are enjoined to focus on the core values and practices of their faith during that period. After sunset, the fast is broken, followed by prayers and shared meals with family and friends. After the last day of the month, Muslims celebrate Eid al Fitr, one of the major festivals of the Muslim year.

Finally, the believer must at least once participate in the fifth pillar, hajj, the pilgrimage to the sacred places in and around Mecca. Although not required if it is a financial burden, this pilgrimage is a highlight in the lives of the faithful as they retrace the steps of generations of their predecessors. Mecca is the axis of the Muslim world, toward which all face in prayer; it is the holy center where humans encounter the sacred. By making their own pilgrimage to Mecca, the believers trace their spiritual roots back through the centuries: They reenact the founding of Islam with Muhammad and finally join Abraham and Ishmael in encountering the God who created the world and is compassionate and merciful to all.

The ritual package known as the Five Pillars reminds Muslims on a daily basis that religion is not part of the structure of Islamic society—it *is* the structure—and that Islam is not part of the daily life of a Muslim—it *is* his or her life. The rituals associated with the Five Pillars are designed to draw

believers constantly back to Allah. Performed publicly, they mark Muslims as believers wherever they may be. A religious tradition that is not compartmentalized but diffused throughout a believer's life is undifferentiated and primal in character, makes more demands on its adherents, and is sometimes less tolerant of other belief systems and lifestyles than more cosmopolitan religions. It is, however, also more effective in providing believers with religious purpose and guiding their lives, so many practitioners understandably resist efforts to "modernize" their beliefs and secularize the other spheres of their lives.

The Islamic faith centers first of all around intense commitment to and worship of the One God, the Creator of the universe. Sharing a heritage with Judaism and Christianity, the faith of most Muslims is quite different from what is portrayed in the news media. When Susan Savage (2004) examined images of Muslims on television news programs over a two-week period, she found 417 images of Muslims as violent compared to 23 neutral images of Muslims. During that time, she found no images of pacifist or nonviolent Muslims. She also found that television was a major source of information about Islam for non-Muslims, so it is not surprising that misunderstandings are abundant.

A second important feature of Islamic belief is that the Qur'an is God's word as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, the Qur'an is the Word of God for Muslims in the same sense that Jesus is the Word of God for Christians. The Qur'an is in the Arabic language and, among the strictly orthodox, cannot be translated into any other language; this prohibition is breaking down, however, as Islam becomes more cosmopolitan.

Third, God requires a disciplined, ethical life, as outlined in the Qur'an. Muhammad believed it was essential for believers to cultivate such qualities in a natural and social environmental hostile to spiritual growth. Fourth, the tradition is institutionalized within the context of the all-encompassing religious community, the ummah, to help people nurture a spiritual lifestyle.

Doctrinal and social boundaries are drawn around Islam and the community of believers, although Islamic rulers have often shown considerable tolerance in allowing others to practice their own religions. The uncompromising monotheism of Islam led to a strong condemnation of "idolatry" and the association of other deities with God, sometimes leading to conflict with other religious communities, as in India, where a plethora of Gods is sometimes seen as competing with Allah, although this issue may be more a matter of politics than spiritual life.

Muhammad's emphasis always seems to be on cultivating a spiritual lifestyle that is God centered and promotes justice. This is far more important than any particular doctrinal issue. As the Qur'an (5:48) puts it,

So race to virtues

God is your destination, all

And God will inform you

On all that wherein you have differed . . .

Despite Muhammad's prophetic departures from earlier religious practices, Islam remained close to its roots in early Judaism. Muslims believe Islam is merely the latest expression of the Abrahamic tradition, and the language and ethos of their religion is similar to aspects of ancient Judaism. Muhammad is a prophet who stands in the direct line of prophets stretching from Abraham and Moses through the ancient Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. A sophisticated and very diverse tradition today, Islam still retains many elements of a primal religion, in which religious life is ideally coterminous with everyday life. Human conduct should always be oriented to God, according to Islam, so that daily life is sacralized by the religious experience.

If the Qur'an is Islam's soul, the family is its body. The family is the basic unit of Islam and is supposed to mirror the ideal society. Religious institutions still regulate the traditional Islamic family, in which there is little blurring of gender roles. Women play an important role, and there is much debate in contemporary Islam about the status of women in the Qur'an and Hadith. This is part of the reason for the strong reaction against the intrusion of Western ideas about the changing role of women, now a major political issue throughout the Islamic world. It is difficult to know what the authentic views of the Prophet Muhammad were on the issue of women, given the historical context of the oppression of women in his time and the generations of male interpretations of his life and teaching. Clearly women played a key role in his own spiritual development, from his wife Khadija, who first gave him the courage to speak, to his daughter Fatima, who used to sit beside him when he spoke in public. Recent movements among Muslim women have challenged much of what people—both within and outside the faith—think about the role of women in Islam (see, e.g., Fernea, 1998; Shaikh, 2003; Wadud, 1999; and the discussion in Chapter 6).

With their similar origins in the creation story of Genesis, Muslim theodicies, like Christian and Jewish ones, focus on the idea of separation from God as the source of suffering and death. The Creator aspect of God is highly significant to Muslims, who place a strong emphasis on a transcendent God who is nonetheless compassionate and merciful despite an exalted position. The pain of the separation from the Creator is a central theme among the

Sufis, the mystical branch of the Muslims. Like most mystics in other traditions, the Sufis seek an intimacy with God through devotion and prayer, like that the Prophet obtained through his long hours of solitary worship. Sufis sometimes use the metaphor of the reed to explain suffering and death. The reed is fashioned into a flute that laments being separated from its source, the reed bed, and yearns to be reunited. The human separated from his or her Creator is brought back to God through the rituals of the Islamic community.

Those who are faithful to God are rewarded with paradise. Ali Mazrui (1986) noted the following:

> Muhammad's image of heaven enchants the wretched societies of thirst. The drought-ridden areas of the Middle East and Africa are fertile ground for the message of Mohammad—to people in dry lands, what is heaven if not abundance? The Islamic paradise has all kinds of rivers flowing under it—the dream of a clean natural fountain, the bliss of a wet eternity.

Those who forget God and the teachings of the Qur'an, who fail to show mercy, will be punished for their misdeeds. The faithful, however, will be rewarded for their discipline and devotion to God, for their acts of justice and mercy, and will be reunited with God for eternity.

Abd-Allah (2004) said it is accurate to describe Islam as a religion of mercy. He observed that "Islam's scriptural sources stress that mercy—above other divine attributions—is God's hallmark in creation and constitutes his primary relation to the world from its inception through eternity, in this world and the next" (p. 1). Moreover, the most important name of God is Allah, which Abd-Allah noted is similar to the word for God in the language of Jesus, Aramaic—*Alaha* (God, the true God). The next most significant name for God is "the All-Merciful, the Mercy-Giving" ('r-Rahman 'r-Rahim), which is at the beginning of all but one chapter of the Qur'an and is central to Islamic ritual (Abd-Allah, 2004, p. 2).

I will take up some of the implications of this belief about God as most merciful when discussing the issue of Islamic ethics in Chapter 5.

Kinship Network Continuities in Judaism and Islam

Whereas Christianity broke with the ethnic identities of its roots, both Judaism and Islam struggled to retain elements of their kinship ("tribal") organization in which religious and social organization were not clearly divided. Islam retained the universalistic message of Judaism and Christianity while tightening the social boundaries of its faith community. Islam's tribe is not

one of biological inheritance like Judaism but a spiritual family, the ummah. Muslims ritualize this family by referring to one another as brother and sister.

The ancient Hebrews built an ark in which to keep the tablets with the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, that Moses received at Mt. Sinai, and they carried it to Jerusalem, where a temple was built to house it. The temple was the center of religious life until its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, when many of the Israelites were carried off to Babylon. Fifty years later, Babylon itself fell and the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt and rededicated in 515 BCE. The religious specialists who maintained the original temple prefigured the rabbis—the teachers—who became especially prominent in Jewish life after the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 CE, following a period of Jewish revolts against Rome. In the Rabbinic period, which dates from about the beginning of the Common Era, the two institutions of modern Judaism were clearly established: the **Temple** and the Torah. The rabbis helped to shift the focus of Jewish practice from the Temple to the Torah, especially after Jews were forbidden access to Jerusalem by the Romans. The Torah itself, the written scriptures of the faith, became something of a portable institution; it was believed to contain the presence of God and served to facilitate the rituals of worship much like the Temple, but it could be transported when members of the community were forced to migrate to other parts of the world.

The shift from an emphasis on the Temple to the Torah was significant historically as Judaism became somewhat disengaged from sacred locations, less local, and more cosmopolitan, but social boundaries around the community were still emphasized. Jerusalem retained sacred significance because of its historical importance, but Israel's God could be encountered wherever the rituals of the faith were performed. Gradually, all members of the faith, not just the priests, could perform every ritual practice required by the tradition. No matter where they were in the world, Jews could act in their homes and their daily lives as if they were priests in the Temple (although some rituals require a minimum of 10 Jews, a *minion*, to be properly conducted). A major reason for the decentralization of Jewish institutions was the mobility and dispersion of the community. After the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century BCE and again following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in 70 CE, Jews were scattered all over the world and carried their religious traditions with them, constituting what is called the **Diaspora**.

Because ritual is more important than belief in traditional Judaism and the religion is rooted in an ethnic identity reinforced by ritual, the rabbis became ritual experts more than theologians. The emphasis on the written

The Veneration of Ancestors

In many indigenous cultures, ancestor spirits are part of the ongoing life of the community. The "living dead" continue to participate, in a new way, and their descendants honor them with periodic gifts or other acts of respect. Even in the highly rational culture of modern Japan, indigenous practices of ancestor veneration persist, incorporated into the modern economy by enterprising corporations who sell, according to one estimate (J. Nelson, 2008), household altars to the tune of $1.6 billion a year. The economic giant that is modern Japan emerged from the rubble of World War II with many of its ancient traditions intact. J. Nelson (2008) put it as follows:

> Most families of sufficient economic means at this time had not one but two altars in their homes: the first, called a *kamidana* 神棚, was for those beneficial but ambiguous deities known as *kami* which were associated with pre-Buddhist animism and, beginning around 1870, a reconfiguration of Shinto sponsored by the state. The other altar was the family's *butsudan* 仏壇 that served as both a stage for interacting ritually with one's ancestors and as an extension of the family's membership in a local Buddhist temple. (p. 309)

Relations to the ancestors vary tremendously in indigenous beliefs around the world, of course. Sometimes they are consulted privately or through formalized oracular rituals for advice or assistance. In some systems, ancestors are believed to reward or punish their descendants depending on their behavior as a kind of omnipresent moral police. Indigenous Zimbabwean rituals, for example, almost all have to do with seeking assistance from or appeasement of ancestors through an offering of homemade beer poured on the ground. Often someone becomes possessed (via trance) by the spirit of an ancestor and gives commandments to the kin group in a different voice assumed to be that of the deceased (J. L. Cox, 1998). In others, if ancestors fail to assist the petitioner, they may be simply ignored—Melanesians reportedly wore the jawbone of an ancestor around their neck for good luck, only to discard it if the good fortune was not forthcoming (Bloch, 2010).

Some indigenous theodicies, especially in Asia, interpret suffering as a natural process and explain death as part of the cycles of nature, minimizing an individual's pain by putting it in a broad cosmic context, as in the cycles of rebirth in which the process of dying is analogous to changing one's clothes. The potential danger for the individual in such a system is in becoming disengaged from the community, which does not occur at death but rather when that person transgresses social boundaries and violates sacred taboos—a much more dangerous act than the natural process of death.

What is clear is that in many parts of the world, ancient indigenous beliefs still shape contemporary events and daily lives. Many sophisticated urban dwellers in Taipei still burn symbolic "ghost money" as a sign of respect for the ancestors and major international political figures give homage to their ancestors. Nelson Mandela (1994) wrote in his autobiographical *Long Walk to Freedom* that as a young man he "learned that to neglect one's ancestors would bring ill-fortune and failure in life" (p. 10). During the annual *Eje* ceremony of the Yoruba, a spiritual leader gives yams to the God of the Sea, to the ancestors, and to other local spirits responsible for crop fertility.

Indigenous Rituals

Rituals of spirituality among the world's thousands of indigenous belief systems are as varied as their settings and thus difficult to generalize, so we can only give a glimpse into the myriad forms of religious practice in that sphere. They include a wide variety of what Victor Turner (1967) called "life-crisis rituals" and "rituals of affliction" (p. 6).

Life-crisis rituals "mark the transition from one phase of life or social status to another" (V. Turner, 1967, p. 7), such as initiation ceremonies for the passage from childhood to adulthood at puberty, as well as weddings and funerals. Traditional Navajo may still hold a *Kinaaldá* for a young woman when she reaches menarche. Paiutes still hold all-night "wakes" when someone dies. Many North American plains tribes also hold a "memorial" about a year after someone's death so that mourning can be completed. Rituals of affliction address misfortunes—for example, illnesses, reproductive disorders, or hunting failures. In the Ndembu culture studied by Victor Turner (1967), these misfortunes come from being "caught" by spirits of the dead. Turner prefers to call these "shades," since the terms *spirit* and *ancestor spirit* suggest remote or distant ancestors, whereas the "shades" are "the spirits of those who played a prominent part in the lifetime of the persons they are troubling" (V. Turner, 1967, p. 10). Shades are believed to come out of the grave because they have been neglected or because of disapproved conduct. Most indigenous groups have healing rituals to deal with all types of afflictions, including distinctly modern problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder, which can be alleviated by the performance of an Enemy Way ceremony among the Navajo.

One of the most widespread and still-practiced religious rituals among indigenous groups in North America is the sweat lodge. Although there is huge variation among tribes, a few common elements can be identified. The superficial purpose of most sweat ceremonies is to purify oneself both

physically and spiritually. Water is poured at intervals over very hot rocks and produces steam, which is kept within a small, tightly enclosed round space. People with cardiac or other potentially limiting health conditions are usually warned in advance about the risks of participating in these ceremonies, which may include prolonged exposure to high temperatures and high humidity. Participants generally sweat profusely during the ritual, and one is said to "sweat out" physical impurities. The deeper purpose is actually "to renew life," which is the meaning of *inikagapi,* the Lakota word for this ritual (Marshall, 2001, p. 223).

Most sweats include four rounds of prayer, since the number four is a pattern number, or a frequently used number to describe any aspect of existence, as in four seasons, four directions, four stages of life, four quarters of a medicine wheel, and so forth, for most North American indigenous groups. In some traditions, the first round of steam and prayer is focused on individual issues, the second on extended family and clan issues, the third on issues involving all other humans, and the fourth on issues concerning all life on Earth. In some cases, a sweat may be done as a preliminary purification in preparation for participation in more arduous rituals such as sun dances. Full details of this ceremony are deemed inappropriate to share here. Sun dances are a northern plains tradition in which dancers fast (no food or water) for four days in succession while dancing with spiritual intent in the heat of the summer sun in order to secure blessings, usually for a close relative or friend experiencing a life crisis but also for the well-being of an entire kin group or tribe.

For many tribal peoples, not only are the spiritual and mundane indistinguishable, but the spiritual and the humorous may also be indistinguishable. The Eurocentric notion that sacred things need to be kept distant from mundane things does not apply to indigenous traditions of "sacred clowns" found both in seminomadic northern plains tribes and among more sedentary Puebloan groups. Among the Lakota, the *Heyokha,* or "sacred trickster," behaves in ways contrary to social and biological norms—for example, by wearing clothes inside out, riding backward on horses, shivering and adding additional clothing during a heat wave, or attempting to make round things such as bowls or eggs flat or straight, sometimes destroying them in the process. (Lame Deer & Erdoes, 1972).

In so doing, the Heyokha brings laughter—a useful survival activity for people experiencing the stresses of poverty and oppression—and intentionally promotes critical thinking and questioning of even the most revered spiritual leaders and practices. According to Mizrach (2008), the Heyokha was "truly unpredictable, and could do the unexpected or tasteless even during the most solemn of occasions." Thus the individual Lakota has to turn