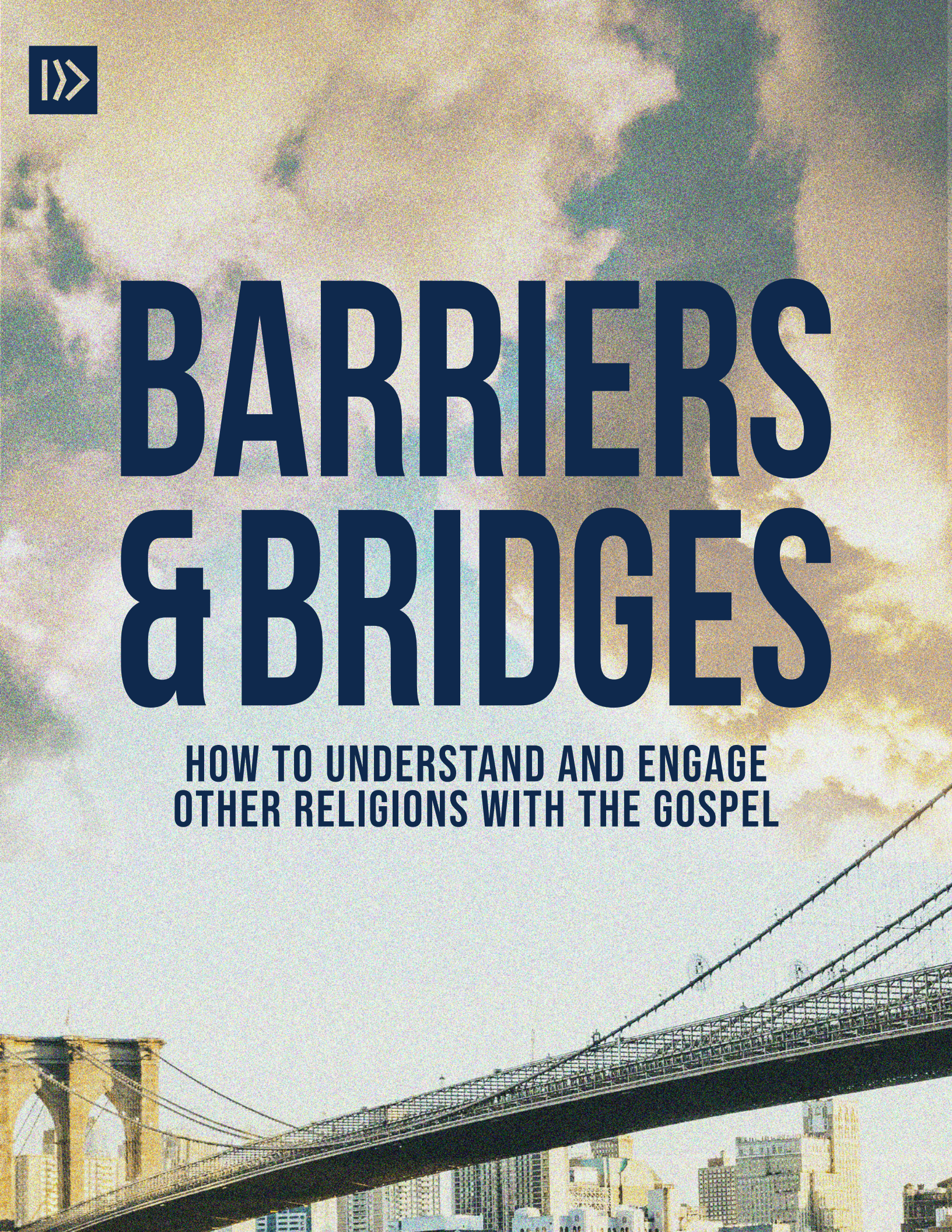
BARRIERS & BRIDGES

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE OTHER RELIGIONS WITH THE GOSPEL



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BY MATT BENNETT

Faster than ever before, North America is becoming more urbanized and globalized. The internet has connected people around the world, and the number of daily interactions we have with people from other cultures, countries, and religions is growing by leaps and bounds. Yet it does not always seem that the North American church is ready to engage the diversity and differences that are now part of our communities.

While it seems apparent that Christianity's influence has been declining over the past few decades in North American society, the church must not become so insular that it fails to prepare to engage wisely and enthusiastically with new neighbors and conversation partners. Even though many Americans and Canadians have left their Christian upbringing, it doesn't mean they have lost their religious instincts. In fact, many North Americans have embraced the non-Christian religious perspectives of their neighbors from Buddhist, Muslim, and Bahá í backgrounds.

Most North Americans will spend their lives in increasingly diverse cultural settings. As Christians who long for the gospel to be both heard and understood, we must educate one another on the beliefs and practices of various people groups and their faiths. Here are three important reasons for this:

1. Understanding people's cultures and faiths prepares us to better understand and relate to others. If we are prepared to demonstrate our understanding of others' cultures, it will speak volumes to them about our intention to be hospitable and kind.
2. Because many of these faiths are themselves "evangelistic," it behooves us to adequately prepare the church to understand our own faith (1 Pet. 3:15) and not be misled by those who promote other belief systems (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6f; 2 Pet. 2:1; 2 John 7-8).
3. The Great Commission includes the clear instruction that we are to make disciples of all peoples (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). We believe that salvation is found in no other name but Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5-6). We should desire to equip the saints to be ready to share the good news of Jesus clearly and understandably to all people groups and faiths in ways that are loving and sensitive, yet uncompromising (Eph. 4:15).

This booklet spotlights major religious movements related to people groups in North America. Our intention is to examine the possible cultural, social, or religious barriers that hinder Christians' efforts to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We also seek to provide principles and strategies that individuals and churches can use to bridge those barriers; however, this guide only scratches the surface and offers a very broad representation of each faith. Even still, it is our prayer that this starting point may be helpful in preparing you to give a defense for the hope that is within you to the neighbors the Lord has providentially placed in your life. May King Jesus receive all the glory as His gospel is proclaimed—both to the ends of the earth and just across the street.

BAHÁ'Í

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

Iran

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Bahá í is a faith that recognizes the validity of many prior world religions, including their religious books and key figures. This inclusiveness allows practitioners to affirm the texts and leaders of other religions without perceiving contradictions among them. Bahá u'lláh claimed to be the most current manifestation of God, yet he recognized the benefits of practicing the norms of prior religious movements. This makes Bahá í a very inclusive faith while still affirming its own distinct beliefs and practices.

KEY FIGURES

- Bahá u'lláh
- The Báb (A title meaning "the gate" assigned to Bahá u'lláh's forerunner)

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- Kitáb i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book)

BELIEFS

- **DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS**

  Beginning with Krishna and including other religious leaders such as Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad, Bahá u'lláh continues the historical manifestations of God in time.

BAHÁ'Í

- **THE KITAB I-AQDAS AND PROGRESSIVE REVELATION**
  The holy book that Bahá u'lláh produced supersedes prior revelation as the sacred text of Bahá í. However, this does not discredit prior revelation as authentic.
- **GOD**
  In Bahá í, God is singular, personal, transcendent, and powerful. It shares with Islam an insistence on a non-trinitarian monotheism, though Bahá í teaches that the various gods spoken of in other religions are in fact the one true God.
- **UNIFIED HUMANITY**
  A key principle in Bahá í faith is that of unity. The aim of their religion is to establish and promote unity between all peoples, regardless of religion, culture, or other points of potential division.

PRACTICES

- **NINETEEN-MONTH CALENDAR**
  Bahá ís follow a 19-month calendar of 19 days each month. This includes the final month, which is called Loftiness and is dedicated to fasting from sunup to sundown.
- **PRAYER**
  Two types of prayer are practiced in Bahá í: obligatory and general prayers. The obligatory prayers include three lengths: shorter, medium, and longer. A Bahá í practitioner is to choose one of these to perform each day while facing the shrine of Bahá u'lláh. General prayers can be offered for seeking God's favor or offering worship at any time.

BAHÁ'Í

- **RECITING THE GREATEST NAME**

  Along with prayers, Bahá ís often work through prayer beads each day, helping them to keep track of their recitations of the Greatest Name of God—Alláh-u-Abhá. They are instructed to say this name at least 95 times each day.

- **WORKING FOR UNITY**

  The belief in the oneness of God extends to the belief in the oneness of humanity. As such, Bahá í are committed to working for unification of humanity in every way possible. This includes advocating for a common language and currency, and against war, injustice, and division among peoples and nations. A central body of advocates and leaders for these efforts is elected to the Universal House of Justice. Their moral judgments are binding on the Bahá í community as they are often viewed as nearly morally infallible, as they establish laws for contemporary practice.

BAHÁ'Í

BARRIERS:

- Many Bahá ís in North America are somewhat familiar with Christian teachings and have made a conscious decision to reject Christianity in favor of the more inclusive nature of Bahá í.
- Bahá ís are monotheistic; nevertheless, they may have a difficult time understanding and accepting the Trinity.
- Despite being more inclusivist, believing all faiths basically teach the same essential truth, Bahá ís typically consider their faith to be superior to others insofar as it is most recent and final of the other world religions.
- Bahá í history is checkered with persecution.
- Bahá ís emphasize morality and justice as the hallmarks of true religion and see no need for personal salvation through Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection.
- Bahá ís spend little time thinking about the final judgment and typically reject the idea of hell. As a result, explaining the righteous wrath of God against sin can be difficult.
- Most Bahá ís have little interaction with the Bible or have consciously rejected its authority.

BAHÁ'Í

BRIDGES:

- Bahá ís put a great emphasis on the personal search for truth. This can lead to conversations related to what truth is and how it can be known.
- Bahá ís believe that Jesus was a true manifestation of God. This can provide an opportunity to consider Jesus' claims in places like John 8:58-59 or the Gospel account of Him in John 1:1-18.
- Bahá ís intend to promote justice but have a distorted view of justice. This facet of their faith can provide an opportunity to discuss biblical justice and the demand that sin be punished by a holy and righteous God.
- Offer Bahá ís a Bible and ask them to read the Gospel of John with you.

BUDDHISM

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

India

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Many argue that, rather than being a religion, Buddhism is more of a philosophy in most cases. This designation comes from the fact that Buddhism teaches that there is no god, nor an eternal punishment for sin. The Buddha himself instructed his followers to take from his teachings what works for them and to discard that which does not. Between meditation, mindfulness, and self-discipline instructions, Buddhist teaching is appealing in that it provides advice for clearing one's mind without imposing a moral dictate with its guidance. For those who wish to experience spirituality without being forced to follow an authority outside of themselves, Buddhism can be very attractive.

KEY FIGURES

- Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha)

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- Tripi aka (Three volumes of Buddhist teaching)

BELIEFS

- **ATHEISM**

  Buddhists believe that there is no creator or God controlling the universe. Buddhism is formally categorized as an atheistic faith because of this denial.

BUDDHISM

- **MATTER IS ILLUSION**

  Buddhists believe that the physical world we perceive lacks real and ultimate truth. Instead, the goal of Buddhism is to see beyond the physical world to perceive the truth beyond our world, our bodies, and even our minds.

- **SUFFERING IS CAUSED BY DESIRE**

  Buddhism teaches that our suffering and pain in this world are caused by the fact that we bind our desires to things in the material world, and that when those things disappoint us, our unmet desires cause suffering. The aim, then, of Buddhism is to teach people to kill their desires so as to kill suffering.

- **NIRVANA**

  Buddhism teaches that we are captive to an ongoing cycle of birth, life, death, and reincarnation. The hope is that during these lifetimes, a person will achieve enlightenment to the degree that he or she will be able to escape this cycle and assimilate into Nirvana—which means an unbinding or a loosening.

PRACTICES

- **EIGHTFOLD PATH**

  The Buddha taught that there were eight steps that practitioners of his teachings could follow to achieve enlightenment and Nirvana. These practices primarily involve cognitive efforts to meditate rightly, perceive rightly, and act rightly.

- **MEDITATION**

  Depending on which tradition of Buddhist thought one ascribes to, meditation will take slightly different forms. Some meditation involves a silent, intentional focus aimed at clearing the mind of distraction. Other forms involve Zen practices such as raking a pattern in a sand garden or practicing forms of painting or poetry.

BUDDHISM

- **VIRTUOUS LIVING**

  Practitioners of Buddhism often follow five precepts, including avoiding lying, intoxication, the pursuit of illicit sense-pleasures, covetousness, and bringing harm to others. While this last precept—avoiding bringing harm to others—is stated negatively, some schools of Buddhism have also included a positive statement of this virtue, which not only avoids causing harm (ahimsa) but seeks to be compassionate to others (Karu ā).

BUDDHISM

BARRIERS:

- There are many different expressions of Buddhism. Some function as an atheistic philosophy for life, while others have more religious elements to them, including a place for a god or gods.
- Most Buddhists view Jesus as a wise teacher, like Buddha. They often do not have firsthand experience with reading the Bible or attending a church service.
- The more philosophical expressions of Buddhism do not have a category for moral sins and therefore do not have a category for substitutionary atonement.
- Buddhists will not usually understand Christian or biblical terms, so spiritual conversations will require a Christian to define these words and explain what they mean.
- Buddhists believe in reincarnation, in which the self is passed to new bodies; therefore, they have little concern about an impending and final judgment after death.
- In Buddhism, the goal is to escape from the material world and everything that artificially divides people from unification with ultimate reality. This view is far different from the biblical story that ends with God remaking and revaluing the physical world.
- The hope for a Buddhist is not to be in right relationship with God but to lose oneself in Nirvana.

BUDDHISM

BRIDGES:

- Buddhists tend to be friendly and open to conversation. When you make Buddhist friends, ask them to meet up for tea or coffee and get to know one another.
- Talk to your Buddhist friends about where creation came from. Create opportunity for them to wrestle with the idea that matter matters because it was created by God.
- Press your Buddhist friends on whether they have ever had bad or wrong thoughts. If even their thoughts can be wrong, ask how they can hope to reach Nirvana if they are so frail.
- Explain that Jesus was not just a wise teacher but that He showed that He was God with us (Emmanuel). Introduce them to the Gospels and invite them to read the book of Matthew with you.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (LDS/MORMONS)

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

United States of America

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Many people have had encounters with Mormons through their door-to-door evangelistic efforts. While initially viewing them as nuisances, those who have engaged in conversation with Mormon missionaries often find them to be kind, hospitable people. Matched with stories of their demeanor and hospitality, many come to find Mormons to be good neighbors committed to their beliefs, as well as a positive addition to the community. This reputation can intrigue those outside the Mormon faith, causing them to be curious about the faith their neighbors espouse.

KEY FIGURES

- Joseph Smith
- Brigham Young

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- The Bible (KJV)
- The Book of Mormon
- Doctrine and Covenants
- The Pearl of Great Price

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (LDS/MORMONS)

BELIEFS

- **GOD**

  Mormon faith affirms monotheism insofar as they have one ultimate God figure, though it is sometimes considered polytheistic because it refers to Jesus as a God and teaches that those who reach the highest heaven will become gods of their own kingdoms in eternity.

- **CONTINUING REVELATION**

  While Mormons believe that the Bible is divine revelation, they also believe that there is ongoing revelation being produced by the leaders of the LDS faith.

- **HEAVEN**

  Mormons teach that there are multiple levels of glory, or heaven, that their faithful followers might obtain. Those who gain the highest heaven will rule their own kingdoms in what is called the Celestial Kingdom. The middle kingdom is called the Terrestrial Kingdom and is reserved for those who lived acceptably yet refused the message of Christ in this life. The third degree of glory is called the Telestial Kingdom, and it will be inhabited by those who refused Jesus' message, went to spirit prison during the 1,000-year reign of Christ, and accepted His gospel afterward. Those who refuse the gospel to the end—thought to be a relatively small number of people—will be cast into outer darkness.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (LDS/MORMONS)

PRACTICES

- **TEMPLE ATTENDANCE**

  Mormon meeting places are referred to as wards. Practicing Mormons are expected to attend the ward for corporate edification, worship, and prayer.

- **MISSION**

  Mormons believe that their faith is something that should be shared with as many people as will listen. They often engage in a two-year season of door-to-door missionary service after reaching 18 years of age.

- **MORAL LIVING**

  Mormons keep a strict code of conduct related to all areas of their lives. They observe chastity before marriage, avoid intoxicants and caffeine, and often wear special undergarments to remind themselves of the covenants they make in the temple.

- **CELESTIAL MARRIAGE**

  For Mormons, there are two kinds of marriage. Civil marriage ends at death. Celestial marriage, however, is thought to be an eternal bond that will continue in the afterlife. While Mormons practiced polygamy prior to 1890, the practice has been outlawed, and monogamy is the church's official teaching today.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (LDS/MORMONS)

BARRIERS:

- Some of the most difficult evangelistic conversations take place with those who believe they are already Christians. Mormons identify themselves as Christians and use a lot of Christian and biblical terms that sound very similar to our faith in Jesus.
- You will need to press in to ask who they think Jesus is, the role of good works in salvation, and how Jesus' death could save us if He weren't the one true God.
- Mormons have been taught that other Christians believe in error and that Joseph Smith was given new revelation in order to continue the one true church.
- Mormon missionaries can be aggressive, though they are often very kind, and their persistence can cause seekers to begin listening to their teachings. Likewise, Christians who are young in their faith can be drawn away by what sounds like similar teaching.
- The LDS believes the Bible has been corrupted and does not regard it as fully authoritative. They use the KJV but augment it with additional "scriptures" from Joseph Smith and other LDS prophets. The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price are regarded by Mormons as inspired scripture.
- Mormons believe marriage and family are necessary aspects of their system of salvation. Therefore, it is difficult for them to leave the church, as it may have serious repercussions, such as family and community ostracism or divorce.
- Mormon morality is deeply entrenched in the community, and the term "sin" is often categorized as major transgressions rather than daily, heart-level sins. Therefore, many Mormons will struggle to identify themselves as sinners in need of a substitutionary atonement.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (LDS/MORMONS)

BRIDGES:

- Mormons and evangelicals share many common moral and family values. These can make a natural bridge to discussing faith issues.
- Mormons often stand for conservative social values and can be cobelligerents in civic engagements. These shared causes can lead to friendships and opportunities for sharing the gospel.
- Many Mormons have been raised in the LDS community, yet do not have a deep knowledge of formal Mormon theology. Asking them to explain what they understand about Jesus, salvation, and God can open doors to show them what you believe through the Scriptures.
- Mormon missionaries showing up at your door can provide you with an opportunity to ask them questions, engage in dialogue, and use Scripture to show them who Jesus says He is. Be prepared, however, to engage them with sound doctrine and good exegetical evidence. Many are specifically trained to dissuade Christians with verses taken out of context or misinterpreted.
- Many Mormons are uncertain about the veracity of their traditional history and the origin story of Joseph Smith and his encounter with the angels and golden tablets. Ask them questions about these stories and whether they are corroborated by anyone else.

HINDUISM

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

India

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Being an Eastern faith, Hinduism has something of an exotic allure to it. The ability to choose from among a variety of deities to follow and serve allows followers a sense of choice in their religion. In many ways, Hinduism mirrors some of the thinking patterns that can be seen in various expressions of animism. Animism purports to give practitioners ways to seek the blessing of the spirits and deities they believe to be in control of various aspects of their lives. Hindu worship likewise offers specific ways to serve a variety of gods who are believed to be in control of blessings and curses that they can distribute to worshippers.

KEY FIGURES

- No known singular figure

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- The Vedas
- Upanishads
- Smriti Literature

BELIEFS

- **POLYTHEISM**

  Most of the expressions of Hinduism are polytheistic, though some will recognize the thousands of different gods as mere apparitions or avatars of a

smaller number of gods. Three gods tend to enjoy a more elevated place in public awareness and in the literature of Hinduism: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer), and Shiva (destroyer).

- **REINCARNATION**

  Each person's atman (roughly comparable to soul) is connected to a wheel of time called the wheel of sa sāra. Their atman progresses around the wheel, going through multiple iterations of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

- **KARMA**

  As a person lives each life, his or her religious and social duties are determined by the status of the family he or she was born into. When a person lives according to these expectations, he or she accumulates positive karma, which increases the chances of being reincarnated into a higher status in the next life.

- **MOKSHA**

  As a person's atman progresses from one life to the next, its goal is to eventually achieve liberation from the wheel of sa sāra and be released to enjoy a state of Brahman. This state is mysterious, but the hope is that one's atman reaches unity with the rest of reality.

PRACTICES

- **PUJA**

  The many rituals that Hindus perform in service to their gods are referred to as puja. These acts can involve leaving small gifts at shrines, bowing before statues of their gods, and offering prayers. Hindu families will often establish a shrine to their family god or gods within the home and perform daily puja in hopes of accruing positive karma and pleasing the gods to earn their blessing.

HINDUISM

- **TEMPLE VISITS**

  Temples and shrines are dedicated to a god or several gods and provide opportunities for Hindus to worship regional gods or gods other than their family gods. While a Hindu may visit many temples, he or she does not typically belong to one specific temple.

- **MEDITATION**

  Many Hindus practice meditation in order to clear their minds and focus on their dharma, which is the name for the sum total of their particular religious duties. Meditation may have become a more widespread practice after the rise of Buddhism and Jainism around 500 B.C. Both Buddhism and Jainism emerged from within Hinduism, and some of their practices filtered back into Hinduism as practices adopted and adapted from them.

- **CREMATION**

  At death, most Hindus choose to be cremated. If possible, the cremation will take place by a body of water, specifically the Ganges River in India. This practice is because the river's water is believed to be inhabited by a goddess who is able to cleanse the deceased of some of their negative karma, allowing them to receive better circumstances in their next life.

HINDUISM

BARRIERS:

- While three primary gods appear in many branches of Hinduism (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva), most Hindus are polytheists who actively perform rituals for many gods.
- Because Hindus are often polytheists with a vast pantheon of gods, they can often be excited to accept Jesus alongside their other gods. It is difficult to clearly convey the exclusivity of Christ.
- Hindus do not believe Jesus died as a substitutionary atonement for sin or that He rose from the dead.
- Most Hindus are not familiar with the Bible and do not regard it as authoritative. They have their own holy books, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita.
- Hindus believe in reincarnation in a prolonged cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. While the deeds done in life are part of the determining factor as to how individuals are reincarnated, the idea of a single, final judgment upon death is a foreign idea to them.
- Hindus do not understand the Christian concept of moral sin against God. For them, the issue is karma, which is determined by one's conduct in life. If one accumulates good karma, he or she will progress to a higher status. If bad, he or she will be reincarnated in a lower status.
- The ultimate goal for the Hindu is to get off the cycle of reincarnations and become one with the Brahman. This is accomplished by following the teaching of a guru who will lead them on a path or discipline involving meditation, keeping an ethical code determined by his or her status, and hoping for an extra measure of grace from the gods who determine one's reincarnated state.
- Hinduism is increasingly associated with Indian nationalism. Therefore, it could be difficult for Hindus to consider following Christ because that would mean giving up both their religion and their national identity.

HINDUISM

BRIDGES:

- Hindus are often very friendly people, and once you have been welcomed by a Hindu family, you are often welcomed into a more extended Hindu community.
- Though it may likely take a long time, your Hindu friends will benefit from thinking about whether it is more likely that one God created everything or if it was the work of a million gods who don't seem to get along.
- Explain the biblical concept of sin as opposed to karma. Go further by explaining the idea of being given one life and then the judgment.
- Give your Hindu friends a New Testament in their own language and ask them to read about Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Ask for their opinions on what it says.

ISLAM

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

Mecca, Saudi Arabia

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Islam affirms monotheism without the Trinity. It is superficially easier to comprehend the God of Islam than it is to wrap one's head around the biblical God. It is a faith that appeals to divine sovereignty, mercy, and control while also entrusting practitioners with the ability to work toward their own blessings. For an individual who is drawn to structure and ritual, Islam affords the chance to hope in God and work for oneself. However, formal Islamic theology does not envision a God who would seek meaningful, proximate relationship with His creatures. Instead, He remains far off and transcendent, unlike the biblical God who makes it clear that He intends to be God with us (Emmanuel).

KEY FIGURES

- Muhammad

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- **THE QUR ĀN:**
  Purportedly a verbatim record of a message recorded on a heavenly tablet, transmitted to Muhammad by the angel Jabril over the course of 22 years
- **THE SIRAT RASUL ALLAH:**
  A Biography of Muhammad's Life
- **THE HADITH:**
  Various Collections of Muhammad's Reported Sayings and Actions

ISLAM

BELIEFS

The core beliefs of most Muslims can be summarized by the five pillars of Islam—Shahada (belief), Selah (prayer), Zakat (charity), Sawm (fasting), and Hajj (pilgrimage)— and the six articles of faith—God (Allah), angels, holy books, prophets, day of judgment, and divine decree. However, it is also important to recognize that Muslims believe themselves to be the proper inheritors of Abraham's faith and therefore continue along the same lineage as the Jews and Christians who have corrupted their God-given faith. Islam is thus the corrective to Judaism and Christianity and the restoration of the religion exemplified by Abraham's submission.

- **ONENESS OF GOD (TAWHID)**
  The belief that God is one and has no partners; the sin of attributing partners to God is called shirk and is often understood to be unforgivable
- **HOLY BOOKS (KUTUB)**
  The belief that there are other heavenly books, including the Torah given to Moses, the gospel given to Jesus, and the Qur ān given to Muhammad
- **PROPHETS (ANBIYA)**
  The belief that there have been many prophets who have come before (many of whom are recorded in the Bible) who have brought the same essential message
- **DAY OF RESURRECTION (YOM AL-QIYAMA)**
  The belief that there will be a day when all are resurrected and judged by God prior to being assigned to paradise or hellfire
- **ANGELS (MALAK)**
  The belief that there are angelic messengers involved in delivering God's revelation, upholding God's throne, and announcing the resurrection

ISLAM

- **FATE (QADR)**
  The belief that God has a book in heaven in which He has written all of the events of history from beginning to end

PRACTICES

- **CONFESSION OF THE FAITH (SHAHADAH)**
  The confession that, "There is no god but the God, and Muhammad is His messenger"
- **FIVE DAILY RITUAL PRAYERS (SALAT)**
  Five interruptions of one's day to remember God in ritualized prayer, accompanied by synchronized movements that conclude in bowing one's forehead to the ground
- **CHARITY (ZAKAT)**
  Giving 2.5 percent of one's income to charity or the mosque as an act of generosity and provision for those who do not have means
- **RAMADAN FASTING (SAWM)**
  Fasting from water and food from sunrise to sunset during the 30 days of the month of Ramadan
- **PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA (HAJJ)**
  Once-in-a-lifetime requirement for Muslims with the means and health to make the journey; believed to result in the forgiveness of all prior sins

ISLAM

BARRIERS:

- Muslims regard Jesus as a prophet and messenger. While they revere their conception of Jesus, it is shaped by the Qur ān and not the Bible. The Qur ānic Jesus is an antichrist in that He does not die on the cross nor rise from the dead.
- Muslims are often taught from a young age to try to confuse and mock Christians by telling them the Trinity does not make sense and that the Bible has been corrupted and cannot be trusted.
- Muslims believe that the Qur ān is the perfect representation of God's communication to humanity and that it has never been changed, whereas they believe the Bible was corrupted by the Christians and Jews.
- Muslims do not believe that we need sacrifice or substitution to atone for our sins. They believe that if someone asks God for forgiveness, He can grant it as an act of mercy without sacrifice.
- Muslims believe that they can earn merit points (hassanat) by following Muhammad's example, memorizing the Qur ān, and observing the five pillars of Islam.
- Many Muslims distrust Christians and think that they are morally loose based on the entertainment they see coming out of the "Christian" West.
- Many Christians are reticent to talk to Muslims because they have come to stereotypically associate them with enemies and terrorists; however, Muslims are some of the easiest people to engage with in spiritual conversations.

ISLAM

BRIDGES:

- Take time to build relationships with Muslims. Initiate friendships and receive invitations to enjoy their hospitality. Once you make a Muslim friend, they will likely introduce you to a much larger Muslim community.
- Help to correct any misconceptions Muslims may have about Christianity (such as their view of the Trinity). Do this by showing them that you get the idea of the Trinity from the Bible. Show them John 1:1-18 and Matthew 28:19.
- Focus on Jesus Christ and who He is according to the New Testament. Give them a New Testament (the Injil) in their language. Ask them to read the Gospel of Matthew with you and show them how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus and that Jesus came to die on the cross and rise again to atone for our sins.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

United States of America

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses are well known for their evangelistic engagement in the communities in which they live. Often engaging in door-to-door evangelism or open-air evangelism in public spaces like parks, Jehovah's Witnesses are eager to speak about their faith. Some people are put off by their religious conversation, though others are attracted to Jehovah's Witnesses because they are willing to engage in conversation about things of eternal significance in a society resistant to such topics. While there are elements of Jehovah's Witness doctrine that have parallels with Christian teaching, they deny salvation through Christ alone by faith alone. As a result, some who are uncomfortable with the biblical idea of grace are attracted to the idea that you can earn God's favor through human efforts.

KEY FIGURES

- Charles Taze Russell
- Joseph Franklin Rutherford

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- The Bible *(Their own New World Translation)*
- The Watchtower Magazine
- The Governing Body *(a self-perpetuating board of male elders responsible for the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society)*

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

BELIEFS

- **JEHOVAH**

  Jehovah's Witnesses take their name from what they understand to be the biblical name for the Almighty God: Jehovah. They believe in one Almighty God who does not exist in the Trinity.

- **JESUS**

  Jehovah's Witnesses also reserve high esteem for Jesus, believing that He is the Savior of mankind and that He is a Son of God. However, they explicitly deny that He has equality with God and affirm with the early heretic, Arius, that Jesus is a created being.

- **SALVATION**

  Those who place their faith in Jesus, are baptized, and change their way of living will receive salvation as an act of grace from Jehovah. There will be a resurrection in which those who have died will come back to life and have an opportunity to be saved. If they refuse to believe, they will be destroyed and cease to exist.

- **144,000**

  Taking Revelation 14 literally, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that 144,000 believers will be saved to reign in the heavenly kingdom with Almighty God, Jesus, and the angels. However, most Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the number of those who will be saved to live on earth will be much greater.

PRACTICES

- **BIBLE READING AND STUDY**

  Jehovah's Witnesses engage in personal Bible reading and regular Bible studies in their Kingdom Hall gatherings. They read from their own translation of the Bible called the New World Translation.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- **PRAYER**

  Jehovah's Witnesses maintain personal habits of prayer that are both scripted and extemporaneous, individual and corporate.

- **MISSION**

  Jehovah's Witnesses often engage in missionary labor. Primarily, this labor consists of evangelism. If someone expresses interest in more information or getting connected to the church, discipleship and integration into the church is typically done through the Kingdom Hall.

- **KINGDOM HALL**

  Jehovah's Witnesses gather regularly for corporate worship and teaching in churches called Kingdom Halls. These meetings include many things Christians would be familiar with, from singing and praying to preaching and reading Scripture.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

BARRIERS:

- Jehovah's Witnesses regard their translation of the Bible (New World Translation) as the most accurate and their organization as its only valid interpreter. They have been influenced by the literature produced by the Watchtower Tract Society and will need to be exposed to biblical scholars who demonstrate the flaws of their interpretations and translations.
- Jehovah's Witnesses will not accept reading or study materials from non-JW sources, especially those critical of their faith. Inviting them to read with you, however, can open opportunities for them to connect with the Scriptures.
- Jehovah's Witnesses aggressively seek to make converts of Christians and adherents of other faiths, so they normally do not listen to other explanations of the Bible or doctrines.
- Jehovah's Witnesses experience significant social pressure to conform and not ask questions about the teachings of the church. It can make them reticent to entertain any questions or ideas offered by a non-Jehovah's Witness.
- Like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses use common Christian and biblical words to describe aspects of their beliefs as they understand them. Most doctrinal terms are radically redefined and contrary to historic Christian teaching.
- Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus. They believe that Jehovah is the true name of God and that orthodox Christian teaching about the Trinity is a corruption of the truth.
- Jehovah's Witnesses are often socially isolated by the rigid instructions given by their leaders to not participate in holidays or community events.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

BRIDGES:

- Since Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Bible to be God's Word, they do acknowledge its authority. This is a good starting place for a witness.
- Building relationships with Jehovah's Witnesses may be difficult given their isolation; however, you may find opportunities in work or school settings.
- When Jehovah's Witnesses withdraw or refuse to participate in actions like saluting the flag or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, use this as an opportunity to ask them why they reject these societal norms. Listen to their answers and begin a conversation.
- As with Mormons, if Christians are theologically prepared to show the biblical understanding of Christ, a Jehovah's Witness visit or preaching point in a public park can provide a good opportunity to engage them. Do some reading and preparation prior to this engagement so that you can politely but clearly refute erroneous interpretations of passages they point to as they seek to discredit orthodox Christian faith.

JUDAISM

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

Israel/Palestine

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Jewish history and customs are well known throughout North America due to the Judeo-Christian influences that have shaped this continent since the eighteenth century. Along with the allure of a Near-Eastern faith with rich traditions, deep familial ties, and an impressive history, the more recent Jewish history of oppression within the Western world has highlighted the victimization that many Jewish families have endured. The Holocaust alone is enough to engender a sense of awe at the resilience of a people whom many have tried to exterminate and subjugate. Such resilience can be attributed by some as evidence of divine blessing and providence and thus vindicates their religious convictions, making their teaching attractive to North Americans longing for truth, spiritual vitality, and connection.

KEY FIGURES

- Abraham
- Moses
- David

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- *Torah*
- The Hebrew Bible
- *Mishnah*
- *Talmud*

JUDAISM

BELIEFS

- **COVENANT PEOPLE**

  Jews trace their history back to God's call of Abraham (Abram) in Genesis 12. They are the nation and people who received the covenant at Sinai and whose identity is bound up in the promises that the LORD would be their God, that they would be His people, and that He would place them in the land promised to Abraham and delivered to their forefathers by Joshua.

- **MONOTHEISM**

  The controlling text for most Jews who are considering who YHWH is comes from Deuteronomy 6:4 and is often referred to as the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

- **MESSIAH**

  Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Most anticipate this anointed Savior to be a political ruler since the covenant promises made in 2 Samuel 7 speak of a king from David's line who will sit on an eternal throne.

- **EXILE**

  Many Jews believe that they are in a state of exile due to the rebellious hearts of their forefathers. Since the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., no temple sacrifices have been performed. This has led to various attempts to express what the sacrifices intended to accomplish, namely, displaying contrite hearts and humble spirits before God. Most Jews remain hopeful that God will soon send the Messiah to lead them back from exile and reestablish the temple and its sacrificial rituals.

JUDAISM

PRACTICES

- **THE LORD**

  Most Jews refuse to say or write the covenant name of God (which is often rendered in English as "YHWH"). Instead, when writing, they will indicate where the name of God occurs with some other rendering, such as "LORD" in English. When speaking, some will simply invoke "the name" or "ha shem" as a way of avoiding pronouncing God's name. This is an attempt to avoid unintentionally dishonoring, misusing, or speaking God's name in a manner that is unworthy of its glory.
- **TORAH READING**

  Many Jews engage in regular Torah reading. Often, devoted Jews will attempt to memorize the Torah. While the whole Hebrew Bible is believed to be from God, the first five books are especially important to Jewish self-understanding and worship.
- **SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE**

  Most practicing Jews attempt to attend synagogue on sabbath days. While synagogues are often buildings, Jewish tradition drawn from the Mishnah indicates that a quorum of 10 men can constitute a time of official communal worship anywhere.
- **PASSOVER**

  An important celebration for Jews is the Passover, which commemorates God's liberation of His people from Egypt's oppression, beginning their conquest of the promised land. Today, Jews who believe themselves to be in exile, due to no longer having access to the Jerusalem temple and sacrificial system, put themselves in the shoes of their forefathers who prayed during Passover that God would send the Messiah and allow them a new exodus and return to the land.
- **BAR MITZVAH/BAT MITZVAH**

  When young boys and girls reach the age of 12 or 13, Jews perform a celebration called a bar mitzvah (boys) or a bat mitzvah (girls). This celebration acknowledges a transition into moral competency, moving the child from being under their parents' moral oversight to being morally responsible for their own actions. After this celebration, a boy can be counted towards the required number of males present to convene an official prayer time.

JUDAISM

BARRIERS:

- Many Jewish people retain their Jewish identity ethnically for solidarity purposes, but do not actively believe in or practice the Jewish religion. You may find yourself in conversation with a person who introduces himself or herself as a Jew but who is actually an atheist.
- Many practicing Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come because they have rejected Jesus as the Messiah.
- Many Jews are reluctant to embrace Jesus because of the many persecutions against their people done in the name of Christ. For many Jews, Christian evangelism is considered highly offensive.
- Practicing Jews believe that they are the chosen people of God who remain under His covenant promises, though they are in exile and unable to offer the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus. They are not waiting for someone to save them from their sins but to save them from their exile.
- In many cases, if a Jewish person accepts Jesus, he is functionally losing his Jewish history, culture, and place in the community. Some Jews have accused Christian evangelists of trying to continue spiritually and culturally what Hitler tried to do physically: remove the Jewish people from the landscape. Evangelism, then, can be a highly charged endeavor.
- Most Jews do not regard the New Testament with any sense of divine authority.
- Many Jews, particularly in "Reform Judaism," or liberal Judaism, do not have a clear concept of life after death or may not believe in it at all.

JUDAISM

BRIDGES:

- Take time to build relationships with Jewish people. Ask them whether their practices that you observe come from the Hebrew Bible or from later traditions like the Mishnah or the Talmud.
- Focus on Jesus, not Christianity. Share about His life and claims to be the Messiah.
- Use the Old Testament to demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled prophecy as the Messiah.
- Ask them if they would read the book of Matthew with you and show them how Matthew connects Jesus' life and ministry to the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible that point to God sending His Messiah.

NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

India/North America

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

New Age Spirituality is attractive to North Americans insofar as it rarely includes a belief in a God who stands authoritatively over humanity. While some forms of New Age Spirituality recognize a greater power that governs the forces of nature, few ascribe to a moral code they must keep in order to live before this great power. New Age Spirituality takes a positive approach to the inherent goodness of the created world, and environmentally-minded North Americans find a home in New Age Spirituality's desire to care for and steward nature. Physical and spiritual healing are sought not from a God who is a moral agent, but from the resources naturally occurring in our environment, which are perceived as the bounty provided by a loving Mother Nature. This religious movement is attractive because it allows people to affirm the importance of spirituality and sensitivity to unseen forces. However, this spiritual movement does not require people to live by a code of conduct or absolute moral instructions. In fact, New Age Spirituality is not a single, monolithic religion as much as an umbrella term describing various religious expressions that share some common ideas and vocabulary.

KEY FIGURES

- Swami Vivekānanda *(19th-century teacher who introduced Hindu thought in the West)*
- Deepak Chopra *(Modern-day guru influential in promoting alternative medicine and New Age Spirituality)*

NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- There are no organizing scriptures, though many influential teachers have become authors whose specific followers treat their writings as sacred.

BELIEFS

- **CONNECTION BETWEEN MIND, BODY, AND SOUL**
  Most New Age Spirituality teaches that the physical world is not all there is. Furthermore, the physical world is inextricably connected to the invisible spiritual world. Therefore, actions in one's body can connect with or disrupt the realities and energies in the unseen realm.
- **CONNECTION BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE**
  In addition to the relationship between the visible and invisible parts of our world, most New Age Spirituality teaches that man and nature live in a balanced and mutually dependent relationship. Stewardship and care of nature are essential to man as he relates to the world around him.
- **CONNECTION WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD**
  Many practitioners of New Age Spirituality believe in unseen intelligent and personal forces working within the world. Human attempts to contact and connect with these forces can be successful, resulting in being more in tune with the whole world around a person—bringing success, peace, and contentment in a world of anxiousness, meaninglessness, and discord.
- **REINCARNATION**
  While not all sects of New Age Spirituality teach reincarnation, many believe in an ongoing cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. This belief is likely owing to the many connections New Age Spirituality can trace back to Hindu and Buddhist thought in its development, though witchcraft and occultism may also provide the source for these beliefs.

NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

PRACTICES

- **ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AND HOLISTIC HEALTH**

  Many practices in New Age Spirituality are connected to the pursuit of holistic health. This prevalence may include appealing to alternative medicines (acupuncture, essential oils, crystals, etc.) to enhance one's overall experience of life. Not limited to remedies for sickness, these practices seek to clarify thinking, remove impurity from the body, and connect a person to nature.

- **MINDFULNESS, MEDITATION, AND MANIFESTATION**

  Much of the individual practice of New Age Spirituality involves harnessing the mind. Like Buddhism, New Age Spirituality often prioritizes clarity of mind and the removal of distractions associated with mindfulness and meditation. Some expressions will also teach manifestation or the power of positive thinking to cause positive effects in the physical world.

- **SEANCE**

  Some New Age Spiritualists engage in séances, seeking to commune with the dead or unseen spirits for insight, wisdom, and guidance. Tarot cards and mediums may also be consulted as a part of the practice of their spirituality.

- **CRYSTALS**

  New Age Spirituality can also include practices related to the manipulation of crystals and semiprecious stones. Despite a lack of scientific evidence, claims that particular crystals and minerals can be used to block bad energy, relieve stress, and promote good health proliferate within New Age Spirituality.

NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

BARRIERS:

- New Age spirituality is not a monolithic religion with clearly defined texts, theology, and practices. It is very hard to know what a person actually believes simply because they identify as a practicing New Age Spiritualist.
- Many of the practices, sources of authority, and talking points of New Age Spirituality draw on unfamiliar pseudo-scientific disciplines that make it difficult to understand what a person truly believes.
- Since many people practice New Age Spirituality as a means of personal improvement, there is little doctrinal cohesion that can be analyzed.
- New Age Spirituality boasts of an experiential and unbounded engagement with life and nature. As a result, the accusation made against Christianity is that it is mentally confining and experientially dead.
- New Agers generally have an unbiblical pantheistic theology, believing God is all, and all is God.
- Many New Agers believe in reincarnation and karma, meaning that they are not thinking about a coming day of judgment or a reckoning of their sins upon death.
- Many New Agers regard Jesus as a highly evolved, spiritually enlightened man who realized the "Christ Principle," or innate divinity, present inside Himself, as it is inside all people.
- Most New Agers have a relativistic view of morality, though they generally favor doing good to others and saving the earth.

NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

BRIDGES:

- People involved in New Age Spirituality are open to new ideas and experiences and are not limited to materialistic and rationalistic concepts of truth and knowledge.
- New Age Spirituality prioritizes a search for truth and experience. While experience can be discussed through one's testimony, truth can be grounded objectively in what Scripture says, providing a more solid basis for belief than mere experience. Consider asking a New Age friend if they have ever misunderstood or misinterpreted an experience.
- The Christian should sensitively explain the implications of the New Age belief system, such as pantheism, which implies that God is impersonal, or the law of karma, which implies there are no innocent sufferers.
- It can be helpful to press a New Age practitioner on whether a faith that makes life absolutely about oneself is sufficient to explain the meaning of life beyond the individual's own existence. Mustn't there be something more than a person's own happiness and experience?
- Offer the New Ager a Bible and ask him to read the Gospels of Luke. Ask his opinion of what it says.

SIKHISM

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

India

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

As an Eastern religion, Sikhism presents a spiritually rich way of life in which all arenas are invested with religious meaning. Its origins come from discussions between Hindus and Muslims in the Punjabi region of India and Pakistan; thus, the ability to draw from multiple traditions leads to a more inclusive, synthetic approach to truth that aligns with North American instincts. The Sikh faith is open to the idea that salvation might be found through other religions while also promoting kindness, equity, and selflessness in ways that are attractive to North Americans without being exclusive.

KEY FIGURES

- Nanak – Founder of the faith

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- Adi Granth

BELIEFS

- **GOD THE TRUE NAME**
  Sikhs believe in one God, described as the True Name. This one God is transcendent as in Islamic teaching, but also immanent in ways that are atypical of Islamic thought. Some Sikhs believe God's presence to be so real that they espouse a sort of panentheism.

SIKHISM

- **ADI GRANTH**
  After Nanak, the founder and first guru of Sikhism, nine other gurus arose. Seeing the vulnerability of human gurus, the fifth guru, Arjan Dev, committed the teachings of Nanak, previous gurus, and material drawn from other religions to writing, compiling a book known as the Adi Granth.
- **GURU GRANTH SAHI**
  Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, established the Guru Granth Sahi as the "final guru." This Sikh scripture guides Sikh teaching and practice.
- **GOD'S PRESENCE**
  Sikhs believe that God's presence can be experienced by believers through reading the Adi Granth, worshiping, and meditating. A Sikh's worship is intended to draw him or her nearer to the True Name, so as to intimately experience his goodness and beauty.
- **MAYA (ILLUSION)**
  Similar to Hinduism, Sikhism sees the material world as being filled with illusions that distract us from connecting with God and serving Him. However, where Hinduism and Buddhism extend this illusion to the material world, Sikhs believe the illusion is constrained to worldly values. Ego, anger, greed, attachment, and lust are particularly sinister illusions that bind a person to a false perception of life. Seeing these illusions for what they really are, Sikhs can achieve a sort of salvation or inner peace in their lifetimes rather than awaiting it in the afterlife.

PRACTICES

- **GURDWARA GATHERING**
  Sikhs gather for worship, prayer, and instruction in a building called a Gurdwara. These buildings are for Sikhs but are also intentionally open to all as community centers. Often, after their worship gatherings, Sikhs will host community meals that are open to the public.

SIKHISM

- **REMEMBERING THE NAME**

  Sikhs repeat the name of God regularly throughout the day as a way of remembering God and His presence, shaping their meditation, and ritualizing their day. This ritual repetition of God's name is thought to draw them closer to God through five stages, the final one being the actual unity of their spirit with God.

- **SIKH DRESS**

  Men and women wear special clothing to signify their connection to the Sikh community. Men are most often identified by their beards and colorful turbans, which are wrapped in a specific fashion. Sikhs practice a sort of baptism initiation, and those who are baptized typically keep their hair long, wear bracelets, carry a wooden hair comb and a rounded dagger called a kirpan, and wear a special undergarment after their initiation and baptism.

- **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

  While Sikhs maintain a trained contingent for self-defense of the community, they are a peaceful people who regularly work for unity and peace. They espouse three types of service to be done on behalf of their community: physical labor, dedicating one's heart to others, and financial assistance to those in need.

SIKHISM

BARRIERS:

- Sikhism is a faith that has been influenced by Islamic monotheism. While it seems to teach a sort of panentheism, the concept of the Trinity is very foreign and likely to be rejected.
- Sikh communities tend to remain deeply connected and mutually supportive, even in North American areas where they have been present for over a century, such as in British Columbia.
- Sikhs adhere to traditional cultural and religious practices, such as men not cutting their hair or beards and attending regular temple worship events. This can make them appear disinterested in integrating into society and less approachable.
- Sikhs retain the Hindu concepts of karma and reincarnation and cannot understand the Christian ideas of heaven and hell. Though they do believe in divine judgment.
- Most Sikhs have little or no knowledge of the Bible, only their own scriptures called the Adi Granth, which are an amalgam of various religious teachings and traditions.

SIKHISM

BRIDGES:

- Since Sikhs have been in North America for a long time, they are familiar with Western culture and are usually open to developing friendly relationships with those outside of their faith.
- Christians can begin with the commonalities of how their religion shapes their whole lives.
- Sikhs may be open to visiting a church service. However, Christians should be ready to respond positively in turn to the Sikh's invitation to his temple if their conscience allows.
- Recognize that Sikhs have a long and proud history in India and Canada and commend them for their contributions to those societies.
- Sikhs have been described as "passively evangelistic" insofar as they intend to work for unity in the communities they inhabit. They are often intentionally kind and service-oriented, and their Gurdwaras (temples) are often open to visitors. This openness makes them very receptive to meeting new people and even discussing religion and faith.

WICCA (WITCHCRAFT)

COUNTRY/REGION OF ORIGIN

Europe/United States of America

WHAT MAKES THIS RELIGION ATTRACTIVE IN NORTH AMERICA?

Wicca carries with it an ancient and dark allure. Though it is often mistakenly associated with Satanism, Wicca is not Satanic but more of a neo-pagan religion. Promising connection with the primal forces of nature and striking a counter-cultural, alternative way of life, Wicca appeals to a subculture of North Americans in search of less common paths. This strand of spirituality allows for a broadly inclusivist approach to life, and the gods that are featured in Wicca serve more of a symbolic than authoritative role in the lives of Wiccans. Therefore, the freedom to choose one's own course, engage in a community with other non-conformists, and scratch a spiritual itch make Wicca attractive to some North Americans.

KEY FIGURES

- Gerald Gardner

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

- *Book of Shadows*

BELIEFS

- **DUOTHEISM**
  Many Wiccans believe in two gods—a male god and a female goddess. Gerald Gardner taught that there was a primal God who stood behind these two figures; however, the gods rarely play a role in the daily practices of Wiccans beyond symbolic, deistic dualities.

WICCA (WITCHCRAFT)

- **NATURE AND THE OCCULT**
  Drawing its teaching and practices from various ancient religions, Wicca teaches that the forces of nature can be harnessed by humans who obtain the knowledge of the spells, incantations, and rites that have been passed down through generations. One might detect a number of parallels between the dualities that feature in Eastern religions such as Taoism, where the balance between opposite forces (light and dark, male and female, day and night, etc.) is believed to release energy and power that can be leveraged toward the practitioner's desires.
- **WICCAN REDE**
  Wiccan ethics revolve around what is called the Wiccan Rede: "Harm no one; do what you will." In other words, as long as you do not harm other people or impinge upon their rights, do whatever seems good to you. Along with this guiding principle, Wiccans also uphold eight virtues: compassion, mirth, reverence, humility, honor, beauty, strength, and power.
- **AFTERLIFE**
  Apart from the *Book of Shadows*, there is no universally recognized canon for Wiccans to appeal to for guidance in theology. Many Wiccans believe in reincarnation post-mortem; however, others believe that successful Wiccans can unite with the invisible natural forces in the world—that when they die, they come to inhabit the spirit realm. Regardless, most Wiccans live more consciously of the present than focused on the future.

PRACTICES

- **MAGICK**
  Intentionally spelled differently than the more common "magic," Wiccans distinguish their practices and spells from the parlor tricks of magicians. These spells vary in what they intend to produce, from good luck, health, and love to more negative spells intended to bring negative effects to one's enemies.

WICCA (WITCHCRAFT)

Often, however, such negative spells would be associated with black magick or left-handed magick and would be rejected by practitioners who understand magick to be intended for good purposes within Wicca, in contrast to neo-pagan or occultist practices.

- **COVEN**

  A gathering of witches and warlocks is called a coven. These convene for the practice of magick, for observing rituals associated with various natural astrological cycles, and for a sense of community.

- **DRAWING THE CIRCLE**

  Circles are shapes that are thought to have the ability to harness natural powers. Thus, in the initiation of a coven gathering, the drawing of the circle marks the beginning of the gathering and is intended to tap into the natural powers that will be necessary for performing whatever spells or rituals the coven intends to perform.

- **OBSERVING THE CALENDAR AND NATURE**

  Many of the practices and rites that Wiccans observe correlate to phases of the moon and seasons of the year. October 31st is celebrated within Wicca not as Halloween, but as Samhain. Likewise, the elemental forces of nature are often considered in their practices, with balance being the objective. Again, one detects the influence of Taoism in the arrangement of the elemental forces of nature—earth, air, spirit, water, and fire.

WICCA (WITCHCRAFT)

BARRIERS:

- Wiccans think of their religion as something primal and ancient. Christianity, then, is often perceived as a late arrival whose teachings are distortions of the more original pagan instincts that Wicca retains.
- Most Wiccans view the world as being infused with divine presence in a pantheistic or panentheistic sort of way.
- Wiccans often practice magick to exert supernatural influence on the world and people. This can be disturbing and can cause people to keep their distance from these practices associated with darkness and evil spirits.
- Wiccans conduct ritual ceremonies in which they attempt to summon the spirit of a god or goddess, inviting it to inhabit their bodies. These practices are alarming for Christians whose understanding of such practices recognizes the danger in flirting with the powers and principalities with which we are at war.
- Wiccans are often mistaken for Satanists by Christians, which leads to mutual distrust.
- Most Wiccans know little of the Bible or Jesus and have rejected organized religion of any kind. Many Wiccans perceive themselves to have been mistreated by Christians and have wounds from prior interactions.

WICCA (WITCHCRAFT)

BRIDGES:

- Christians should not be afraid of developing friendly relationships with Wiccans. Most Wiccans are devoted to practicing positive magick or white magick, rather than invoking evil forces against their enemies.
- Allow Wiccans to explain what they believe and why they have adopted that faith. Many times, it is a reaction to conventional faith or rebellion against authority. Listen to their explanations and ask follow-up questions to get to the heart of the matter.
- Ask Wiccans if they are afraid of people knowing that they practice Wicca. Use this as an opportunity to show that you care and want to hear about the difficult circumstances of their lives.
- Christians should offer Wiccans a Bible, ask them to read the Gospel of Matthew, and then invite them to share their opinions of Jesus. Consider reading Matthew 9–11 with them and showing that Jesus' control over physical malady was connected to His claim of being the One whom the Jews were waiting for. (Show them the prophecies in Isaiah 35:4-6; 61:1.)

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