

5 Major Religion Blocks

by Bob Sjogren and Bill and Amy Stearns

Muslim Unreached Peoples

One night, in the year A.D. 610, a vision came to Muhammad: "O Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God." Thus the religion of Islam was born.

The word "Islam" means "submission," and "Muslim" means "one who is submitted to God (Allah)." To be a Muslim, one must say with conviction at some point in his life the creed "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet." Upholding the five "pillars of Islam" is also expected.

These are:

1. Recite the creed.
2. Pray five times daily at specified times.
3. Fast for the lunar month of Ramadan. (The fast includes abstaining from food and drink during the day. After sundown one is able to eat and drink).
4. Give alms. (Alms constitute 2.5% of one's income and are given for the upkeep of the mosque and to help the needy).
5. Make the hajj, the holy pilgrimage to the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, at least once in one's life. (The more times one makes the hajj, the more spiritual he is considered).

Muslims consider their religion to be an extension of Christianity and Judaism, but they believe the Christian Trinity to be blasphemous and they deny the deity of Jesus. Although the Qur'an instructs Muslims to "listen to the people of the Book," (referring to the Bible), Muslims believe that Christians have corrupted the Holy Injil (the Gospels of the New Testament), so the Bible today is not accurate.

Whenever a crowd of Western Christians is asked whether they've heard that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, hands shoot up to acknowledge this awareness. It is true that Islam is the fastest-growing major religion in the world, growing at 2.9% annually-beating Christianity as a whole, whose growth is 2.3%. Yet if we were to break down Christianity into various groups, the evangelicals and Pentecostals are the fastest-growing major religious grouping in the world-evangelicals growing at 5.4% and Pentecostals at 8.1% annually.

Although Islam is a growing religion, a high birthrate among Muslims is responsible for most of the growth. Nevertheless, says Chicago-area writer Deb Conklin, Islam is claiming many new converts because:

1. Islam is an uncomplicated religion. The only thing one needs to do to convert to Islam is to wholeheartedly recite the creed. There are only six major doctrines: belief in one God; in angels; in the Holy Books-including parts of both Testaments as well as the Qur'an; in the prophets-among whom are Jesus and Muhammad; in a day of judgment; and in predestination. The five practices (pillars) of Islam are external and equally simple to learn.
2. Islam is an adaptable religion. It has contextualized itself into hundreds of cultures. Since there is nothing in Islam contradicting the existence of a spirit world, it easily absorbs the animistic worldviews and practices of peoples to whom it is brought. In fact, even today, the vast majority of Muslims embrace such "folk Islam."
3. Islam is a zealously "evangelistic" religion. The purpose of Muslims is to win the Western world to Islam. If you think that can't happen, think again. Some areas evangelized by Paul are now firmly under the sway of Islam. So are the cities of Istanbul (once Constantinople) and Alexandria, both once thriving centers of Christianity.

One out of every five persons living on the earth is a Muslim. Perhaps more significantly, about 35% of all unreached people groups are dominantly Muslim.

With evangelistic zeal backed by oil dollars, Muslims are willing to go anywhere and spend whatever it takes to win the world to Islam. In North Africa, the governments of Muslim countries in one recent year spent more to promote missionary activity in eight North African countries than the total Western missionary expenditure for the entire world. In countries with a Christian population, plans are to exterminate Christianity.

Hindu Unreached Peoples

Hinduism is nearly impossible to explain simply since it is actually a conglomeration of ideas, practices, beliefs, and convictions. Hinduism is therefore often puzzling to Westerners; it revolves around a totally different center than does Christianity, asking fundamentally different questions and supplying different answers:

1. As a philosophy Hinduism states: There is a spark of divinity in every human. To call a human a sinner, then, is virtually blasphemy and there is, of course, no need of a Savior. The writing of Vivekananda says, "It is sin to call anyone a sinner." Good and evil are only illusions. And illusions are dispelled by knowledge. "Salvation," then, is being freed from ignorance, not from our sense of biblical sin. Probably a typical Hindu definition of sin would be "causing grief."

Each soul - a "drop of God"-is reborn over and over in higher or lower incarnations of humans, animals, or vegetables according to that soul's karma. Karma is the sum of a person's good deeds. These deeds are in a ceremonial sense, not so much in the Western sense of moral good deeds. These good deeds accumulate to allow a person to reincarnate to a higher position in life-for example from a woman to a man-while bad deeds demand a person become a lower form in the next life cycle.

2. As a world religion, Hinduism teaches that people are free to choose their own god from among about 330 million. Ultimate salvation is gained through (1) the way of knowledge, (2) the way of devotion, or (3) the way of good ways. This salvation is a release (Moksha) of the soul from the cycle of rebirth to reunite with the Absolute-as a drop of water falls into the ocean.
3. As a popular religion, Hindus believe that Hinduism is a mixture of ancestral tradition, animal worship, temple cults, magic, exorcism, astrology, and the teachings of gurus (avatars or incarnations of gods). General beliefs include: regard of the cow as a goddess; the material world is just an illusion; the world is growing progressively worse; the old is better than the new; and what will be will be regardless of man's efforts to promote or hinder it.

The West has seen a glimpse of Hindu philosophy in many New Age Movement teachings, in the Transcendental Meditation practices of Mahesh Yogi, and in the Hare Krishna converts asking for donations in airports. These mostly negative impressions unfortunately color Western perceptions of the individuals caught in Hinduism-individuals whose relentless quest for peace (shanti) can be God's way of bringing them to himself. Yet most Hindus have no access to the true Gospel; All they know of hristianity is what they have seen in the lives of "Christians."

Today nearly 24% of Asia's three billion people are Hindus. Most live in India, Nepal, and Bali in Indonesia, with large numbers in Bhutan, Fiji, Mauritius, and Suriname and Guyana in South America.

To the Hindu, God is not personal: "It moves. It moves not. It is far and it is near. It is within all this and it is without all this" is a common statement about the god - force of the universe called Brahma.

God - the Absolute - neither loves nor hates human beings, neither helps nor hinders them.

God is to be worshipped in the forms one's ancestors worshipped - in the forms of trees, animals, images, persons, and millions of gods. Two gods are prominent: Vishnu, preserver of the world, and Shiva, the destroyer. Vishnu is usually worshipped through one of his incarnations - Rama or Krishna. Many Hindus live in deep fear that they will invoke the wrath of the Kula Devata - the family god - on themselves and their families if they, become too interested in Jesus Christ.

Hinduism generally fosters a sense of despair and pessimism, since it is never clear whether one is offending some god, or whether one is effectively progressing or falling behind in the pursuit of salvation. Poverty also easily pervades a Hindu community, since, to the Hindu, holiness and affluence are incompatible. Also, the sacredness of all forms of life - since ancestors may have reincarnated into animals - paradoxically fosters poverty. In India, for example, 30% of each year's grain crop is destroyed by rats, which must be allowed to live, and the sacred cattle that wander the streets of India could feed the entire country for five years if used for food.

Hinduism, with its caste system, is a form of social security - everyone knows where they belong. With Christianity's insistence on abolishing the caste distinctions, Hindu converts would lose their standing in society-their privileges, employment, and wealth. Hindu students who convert to Christianity regularly lose their government - sponsored financial aid. Conversion to Christianity often leads to excommunication from the community, damage to the entire family's reputation, termination of marital prospects, and even physical persecution. A recent poll suggested that fully 20% of Hindus would consider becoming followers of Jesus Christ if they didn't have to be cut off from their families and their society in order to do so.

Hindus in general are very open to all sorts of new religious ideas. In Hinduism, all roads lead to God, so all religions are basically good. Generally, any form of worship is right if one's ancestors or one's caste have practiced it. Hindus will often "accept" Jesus as one of their many gods. Because of this eclectic acceptance of all gods, it is difficult to reach out to Hindus. They may readily bow in prayer to receive Christ into their life, but they are simply adding "one more god" to be worshipped.

Look up these verses:

John 14:6

Ephesians 2:8-9

Zephaniah 2:11

Jeremiah 1:16

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Follow-Up Questions

1. What are some key differences between Muslims and Christians?
2. What are some key differences between Hindus and Christians?
3. What fears would you have in sharing the gospel with a Hindu or Muslim?
4. How can you use this information in a practical way this week?