

# Realizing the teachings of All Faiths: Establishing Interfaith Harmony for Peaceful Society

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## ABSTRACT

Forty three belief systems are existed in our world but all are not much more familiar. Among all these faiths, twelve, namely Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism, Shantoism and Baha'i are recognized as classical religions. All twelve recognized religions are the division of Semitic and non-Semitic religions. Religions of the world can be mainly categorized into Semitic and non-Semitic religions. Non-Semitic religions can further be divided into Aryan religions and non-Aryan religions. All these religions have good essence. Every scripture is useful for teaching, correction, training in righteousness and attaining virtue. So actively knowing about all Religions and respecting each other and finding a balance is therefore crucial, whereby respect and understanding is fostered not only with regards to different faiths, but with regards to diversity in general. Interfaith Dialogue can play an important role in this field. Love, Altruism, Forgiveness and Tolerance are all the Pillars of Dialogue. Through this interfaith dialogue we will be aware of the universality of all religions and we will be able to make Interfaith Harmony. Inter-faith dialogue has the potential to enrich and strengthen understanding within diverse Faiths. Through the understanding of all religions we can proceed to a world for better living and we could be able to establish Interfaith Harmony that is, 'one humanity in many faiths'. The purpose of my paper is to show that the importance of the teaching of all classical religions, the importance of Inter faith dialogue for understanding the teaching of all religions and the importance of Interfaith harmony for establishing a tension free peaceful society.

**Keywords:** Religion, Interfaith Dialogue, Teachings of all Religions, Interfaith Harmony, Society.

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## INTRODUCTION

'Keeping faith in the essence of all religions,  
Giving importance to all religions,  
Paying respect to all religions,  
Discussing the Good and bad of all religions,  
Admitting the corrections of each others' religions,  
Follow own religion correctly and give space to other religions,  
Holding meetings together within all religions,  
Maintain love and respects within each others' religions,  
For establishing Interfaith Harmony all of these should be followed by all religions.  
Then a peaceful society will be established by the followers of all religions,  
One humanity will be appeared within the diversity of religions.'<sup>1</sup>

Religion is belief in sacred text and practice or follows the moral teaching for the realization of divinity which already exists within us in hidden form. According to Swami Vivekananda, religion is a constitutional necessity for man and plays a role mightier than anything else in our life. So religious attitude should be encouraged and properly cultivated and followed for making peaceful and happy life. Following own religion in a perfect way, understanding and respecting sensitively other religions is the necessary condition for making a peaceful society. So, to make a peaceful society religion plays a great role. There is truth in all religions and many people on this planet have found the right path for them. There are many paths to the Divine, mine is but one. We can imagine a Picture of a huge field and at the center is the biggest tree. There are perhaps a million ways to get to that tree. It all depends on where we are currently standing. No matter what side of the field we are in, our path is to the center. The tree is the highest realization of spiritualism. Our paths are different but

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<sup>1</sup> From my(Dr. quotes: [yourquote.in/priyadarsini-mitra-vjq/quotes](http://yourquote.in/priyadarsini-mitra-vjq/quotes))

our goal is the same. Our path is our own religion but our aim is the same that is the highest realization of spiritualism. All religions evolve from the same source. Just what the source is, we are not sure. We can call it whatever we wish. We are all also a part of that source. We are one. There is only one human family, one world and one universe. According to Dalai Lama, "all human beings come from a mother's womb. We are all the same part of one human family. We should have a clear realization of the oneness of all humanity. All religions are essentially the same in their goal of developing a good human heart so that we may become better human beings".

According to Dr. Hans Kung, a professor of ecumenical theology and president of the Global Ethic Foundation, "***there will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religion***". So, to build a peaceful society we need to make dialogue between all religions. Through this interfaith dialogue we will be aware of the universality of all religions and then only interfaith harmony will be established.

All religions have good essence. Every scripture is useful for teaching, for correction, for training in righteousness and for attaining virtue. So actively knowing about all Religions and respecting each other and finding a balance is very crucial. When we will do this then interfaith harmony will be established. Interfaith Dialogue can play an important role in this field. Inter-faith dialogue has the potential to enrich and strengthen understanding within diverse Faiths and interfaith harmony only come through this interfaith dialogue. Interfaith harmony will be established through interfaith dialogue because through the dialogue we can understand that every religion follows different Paths but the Goal of all religions is same. Through Interfaith dialogue we can understand that all revealed religions are based on peace, security, and world harmony. So when we will go through interfaith dialogue then only interfaith harmony will be established. When interfaith harmony will established then all religions stay together and every religions will share the good essence of each others. But for making interfaith dialogue and establishing interfaith harmony individual transformation through rectification by own religion's teaching is very important, because when we will follow our own religion in perfect way and will pay respect to other faith then only interfaith harmony will be established. And our rectified mind only is able to do that. So for establishing interfaith harmony the most important condition is individual transformation. Therefore, we have to achieve perfect knowledge about my religion and other religions and we should be a spiritual person, not a religious person.

### **Twelve classical recognized World Religions**

In this world there are broadly two divisions in religion these are Semitic and non-Semitic. All twelve recognized religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism, Shinto, Baha'ism) are the division of Semitic and non-Semitic religions. Non-Semitic religions can be divided into Aryan religions and non-Aryan religions.

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

The non-Semitic religions can be divided into Aryan and non-Aryan religions: Aryan religions are the religions that originated among the Aryans, a powerful group of Indo-European speaking people that spread through Iran and Northern India in the first half of the second millennium BC (2000 to 1500 BC).

The Aryan Religions are further subdivided into Vedic and non-Vedic religions. The Vedic Religion is given the misnomer of Hinduism or Brahminism. The non-Vedic Religions are Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc. Almost all Aryan religions are non-Prophetic religions.

Zoroastrianism is an Aryan, non-Vedic religion, which is not associated with Hinduism. It claims to be a prophetic religion. The non-Aryan religions have diverse origins. Confucianism and Taoism are of Chinese origin while Shintoism is of Japanese origin. Many of these non-Aryan religions do not have a concept of God. They are better referred to as ethical systems rather than as religions.

### **Pluralistic Nature in All Faith Traditions**

The all faith traditions are pluralistic in nature. *Pluralism* maintains that all religions are equally valid and belief that every religion is true. Religious pluralism means that the acceptance of all religious paths as equally valid, promoting coexistence. Every religion may bring a person to salvation. This cannot be compatible with exclusivism (**Religious exclusivism** is the doctrine or belief that only one particular religion or belief system is true) but may coincide with inclusivism (**Inclusivism**,

one of several approaches to understanding the relationship between **religions**, asserts that while one set of beliefs is absolutely true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true. It stands in contrast to exclusivism, which asserts that only one way is true and all others are in error). Once cannot simultaneously believe that there is only one means of salvation and believe that there are many ways to salvation.

"All major religious traditions carry basically the same message that is love, compassion and forgiveness the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives." Dalai Lama

"Pluralism holds to one's own faith, and at the same time, engages other faiths in learning about their path and how they want to be understood Pluralism and dialogue are the means for building bridges and relationships that create harmony and peace on our planet home." Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

At present the global forums of interfaith dialogue and others like them provide strong foundations for a greater understanding of different religions in an effort to promote peace. The concepts of all recognized religions on religious pluralism through their altruistic views have been mentioned below:

#### **Vedic Religion or Hinduism-4000 to 2500 BCE**

*'This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.'* Mahabharata 5:1517

The origins of Vedic Religion can be traced to the Indus Valley civilization sometime between 4000 and 2500 BCE. Unlike other religions, this religion has no founder; it originated in the religious practices of Aryan tribes who migrated into India from central Asia over 3,000 years ago. Aryans also called their religion *Manava Dharma*, the religion of man, meaning that it was not an exclusive religion of the Aryans, but was meant for the whole of mankind. Another name was *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal religion, illustrating their belief that the religion was based on some eternal truths. Hinduism, the name of this religion came much later. Though believed by many to be a polytheistic religion, the basis of this religion is the belief in the unity of everything. This totality is called Brahman (one supreme reality). The purpose of life is to realize that we are part of God and by doing so we can leave this plane of existence and rejoin with God. Hinduism is a monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic and henotheistic type religion. The sacred text of Vedic religion is Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishads, & Rig Veda.

The Hindu religion is naturally pluralistic. Pluralism can be best summed up by two declarations. The first is a well-known *Rig Vedic* hymn says: "Truth is One, though the sages know it variously" (*Ēkam sat vipra bahudā vadanti*). The second is all religions should be equally respected (*sarva dharma sadbhāva*). The *Rig-Veda* says, the 'Truth' is one even though the learned may describe it variously. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* (4:11) personalizes this summation in Sri Krishna who proclaims: "As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me" (*ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃs tathāiva bhajāmyaham mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ*). The Hindu religion has no theological difficulties in accepting degrees of truth in other religions. Hinduism emphasizes that everyone actually worships the same God, whether one knows it or not. Just as Hindus worshiping Ganesh is seen as valid by those worshiping Vishnu, so someone worshiping Jesus or Allah is accepted. Many *foreign* deities become assimilated into Hinduism, and some Hindus may sometimes offer prayers to Jesus along with their traditional forms of God.

Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true.' He explains this through the analogy of reaching the roof by different ways, either by stone stairs, or by wooden stairs, or by bamboo steps, or by a rope or by a bamboo pole. The great Vedantic prophet Vivekananda said, 'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.'

We can see that service to mankind has been praised by Vedic religion. The Vedantic idea that the service of *jiva* is the true worship of God has been stressed in modern times by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi. Renunciation and service are two fundamental elements of Hindu religion, which purify the heart.

The performance of *svadharma* on which the *Gītā* lays profound emphasis is included in this notion. The famous hymn of the Sāmkhya Yoga of the *Gītā* teaches us how to work for others without the least desire for reward. It says, '*Karmanyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣhu kadācana / Mā Karmaphalāheturbhūh mā te saṅgōstvākarmaṇi*' Bhagwat Gita: Chapter Two verse 47 which means 'Your right is to work only, never to the fruits there of. May you not be motivated by the fruits of actions; nor let your attachment be towards inaction'. The *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas are full of stories with altruistic spirit which emphasize on the efficacy of service and self-sacrifice for others.

### **Judaism-2000BCE**

*'What is hateful to you; do not to your fellowman. That is the law: all the rest is commentary.'* Talmud, Shabbat 31a  
Judaism originated in Israel in the Middle East. Migrations and expulsion of Jews have resulted in the existence of Jewish communities in all parts of the world. Judaism is based on the existence of one God, Yahweh, who came into agreement with the descendants of Abraham who were God's chosen people. Judaism originated with a divine covenant between the God of the ancient Israelites and Abraham around 2000 BCE. The next leader of the Israelites, Moses, led his people out of captivity in Egypt and received the Law from God. Joshua later led them into the Promised Land where Samuel established the Israelite kingdom with Saul as its first king. King David established Jerusalem and King Solomon built the first temple there. In 70 CE the temple was destroyed and the Jews were scattered throughout the world until 1948 when the state of Israel was formed. Judaism's holy writings, known as the Torah, reveal how God has been present with them throughout time. The name of the scripture of Judaism is Torah, Tanach, & Talmud.

Jews believe in one creator who alone is to be worshipped as absolute ruler of the universe. He monitors people's activities and rewards good deeds and punishes evil. The Torah was revealed to Moses by God and cannot be changed though God does communicate with the Jewish people through prophets. Jews believe in the inherent goodness of the world and its inhabitants as creations of God and do not require a savior to save them from original sin. Judaism is an altruistic religion who believes in good deeds for the betterment of all.

### **Zoroastrianism-1000 BCE**

*'That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.'* Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94:5  
Zoroastrianism was founded by the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) in Persia which followed an aboriginal polytheistic religion at the time. He preached what may have been the first monotheism with a single supreme god, Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord). Zoroastrians belief in the dualism of good and evil as either a cosmic one between Ahura Mazda and an evil spirit of violence and death, Angra Mainyu, or as an ethical dualism within the human consciousness. Zoroastrianism's creator Ahura Mazda, through the Spenta Mainyu (Good Spirit, "Bounteous Immortals") is an all-good "father" of *Asha* (Truth, "order, justice"), in opposition to *Druj* ("falsehood, deceit") and no evil originates from "him". "He" and his works are evident to humanity through the six primary Amesha Spentas and the host of other Yazatas, through whom worship of Mazda is ultimately directed. Spenta Mainyu adjoined unto "truth"; oppose the Spirit's opposite, Angra Mainyu and its forces born of Akəm Manah ("evil thinking"). The Zoroastrian holy book or scripture is called the Avesta which includes the teachings of Zarathushtra written in a series of five hymns called the Gathas. They are abstract sacred poetry directed towards the worship of the One God, understanding of righteousness and cosmic order, promotion of social justice, and individual choice between good and evil. The rest of the Avesta was written at a later date and deals with rituals, practice of worship, and other traditions of the faith.

Zoroastrians worship through prayers and symbolic ceremonies that are conducted before a sacred fire which symbolizes their God. They dedicate their lives to a three-fold path represented by their motto: "Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds."

Zoroaster, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, was well aware of the Aryan tradition which saw only One Reality behind all the various deities that people worshipped in the Vedic age.

In Zoroastrianism, service is pivotal as it is the opposite of self-seeking. The path of service is but one aspect of the path of '*Asha*' (righteousness or purity or truth). The basic ethical virtues praised in Zoroastrianism are good thought, good word and good deed. So Zoroastrianism is an altruistic religion and altruistic concept ethically related pluralistic concept.



### Buddhism- 563 BCE to 483 BCE

*'Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.'*  
UDANA-VARGA, 5:18

Buddhism developed out of the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama who, in 535 BCE, reached enlightenment and assumed the title Buddha. He promoted 'The Middle Way' as the path to enlightenment rather than two extremes self mortification and self indulgence or hedonism. Long after his death the Buddha's teachings were written down. This collection is called the Tripitaka. Buddhists believe in rebirth and that one must go through cycles of birth, life, and death. After many such cycles, if a person realize the reality of life and free from their attachment to desire, they can attain Nirvana.

Buddhism is altruistic and pragmatic religion. Buddha preached his teaching for rectification of society through the rectification of individual. To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind- this is the teaching of the Buddhas. (Verse183). Buddhism is famous for loving kindness, great compassion and selfless service to the living beings. 'May all beings be happy' is the general prayer of the followers of Buddhism. The first command of Buddha to his followers was: "Go forth, o bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, for the good, for the happiness of gods and men. Let not two go by one way. Preach the doctrine that is beautiful in its beginning, beautiful in its middle, and beautiful in its ending. Declare the holy life in its purity, completely both in the spirit and the letter."<sup>2</sup> Move to the world for the welfare of the many and for the happiness of the many (*bahujana hitaya—bahujana sukhaya*). So understanding the Buddha's all fundamental teachings like four noble truth, eight fold paths, law of karma, three marks in existence, four sublime state and five precepts (pancasila) are very important to establish interfaith harmony because all these basic tenets are for the reformation of society through the rectification of individual. When individual will be rectified by Buddha's basic teachings then he or she will be guided by his or her perfect knowledge and this rectified mind or transformed mind will be the great supporter of Interfaith harmony. Kindness and tolerance are important features of Buddhism. Buddhism has always been characterized by the observance of tolerance towards other religions; it has an open and receptive mind. This spirit of tolerance and receptivity is revealed by its adoption of many elements from other religions. For example, though the Buddha never encouraged faith in God and deities, many Hindu deities have found a place in Buddhist rituals in India.

In the *Brahmajala Sutta*, the Buddha is recorded as stating that the teachings of other sects of his day were based on one or more of 62 erroneous theories and that falling into those errors would prevent attaining permanent liberation from suffering: "Bhikkus, there are countless philosophies, doctrines, and theories in this world. People criticize each other and argue endlessly over their theories. According to my investigation, there are sixty-two main theories which underlie the thousands of philosophies and religions current in our world. Looked at from the Way of Enlightenment and Emancipation, all sixty-two of these theories contain errors and create obstacles. A good fisherman places his net in the water and catches all the shrimp and fish he can. As he watches the creatures try to leap out of the net, he tells them, 'No matter how high you jump, you will only land in the net again.' He is correct. The thousands of beliefs flourishing at present can all be found in the net of these sixty-two theories. Bhikkus, don't fall into that bewitching net. You will only waste time and lose your chance to practice the Way of Enlightenment. The earliest reference to Buddhist views on religious pluralism in a political sense is found in the Edicts of Emperor Ashoka: All religions should reside everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart. Rock Edict Nb7 (S. Dhammika)

Contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desire that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions. Rock Edict Nb12 (S. Dhammika)

When asked, "Don't all religions teach the same thing? Is it possible to unify them?" the Dalai Lama said: "People from different traditions should keep their own, rather than change. However, some Tibetan may prefer Islam, so he can follow it. Some Spanish prefer Buddhism; so follow it. But think about it carefully. Don't do it for fashion. Some people start Christian; follow Islam, then Buddhism, then nothing. In the United States I have seen people who embrace Buddhism and change their clothes! Like the New Age. They take something Hindu, something Buddhist, something, something... That is not healthy. For individual practitioners, having one truth, one religion, is very important. Several truths, several religions, is contradictory. I am Buddhist. Therefore, Buddhism is the only truth for me, the only religion. To my Christian friend, Christianity is the only truth, the only religion. To my Muslim friend, [Islam] is the only truth, the only religion. In the meantime, I respect and admire my Christian friend and my Muslim friend. If by unifying you mean mixing, that is impossible, useless."

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<sup>2</sup> Mahavagga, Vinaya Pitaka

Buddhism is a religion which teaches people to 'live and let live'. In the history of the world, there is no evidence to show that Buddhists have interfered or done any damage to any other religion in any part of the world for the purpose of introducing their religion. Buddhists do not regard the existence of other religions as a hindrance to worldly progress and peace.

The 14th Dalai Lama has done a great deal of interfaith work throughout his life. He believes that the "common aim of all religions, an aim that everyone must try to find, is to foster tolerance, altruism and love".

#### **Shinto- 500<sup>+</sup>BCE**

Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion, closely tied to nature, which recognizes the existence of various "Kami", nature deities. The first two deities, Izanagi and Izanami, gave birth to the Japanese islands and their children became the deities of the various Japanese clans. One of their daughters, Amaterasu (Sun Goddess), is the ancestress of the Imperial Family and is regarded as the chief deity. All the Kami are benign and serve only to sustain and protect. They are not seen as separate from humanity due to sin because humanity is "Kami's Child." Followers of Shinto desire peace and believe all human life is sacred. They revere "musuhi", the Kami's creative and harmonizing powers, and aspire to have "makoto", sincerity or true heart. Morality is based upon that which is of benefit to the group.

Shinto believes that humans have an innate moral sense, and can be motivated by shame to avoid doing wrong. Acts of wrong-doing are cleansed through acts of purification. Sincerity, which is the harmony of thought and action, is a prized human characteristic. The Shinto vision for society has varied in different eras, but at its core is the idea of harmony—harmony between humans and kami, harmony within social groupings, and harmony between humans and nature. According to Shintoism world is one great family and we should not become angry even though others become angry. The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form. Even the wishes of an ant reach to heaven. Leave the things of this world and come to me daily with pure bodies and pure hearts. A single sincere prayer moves heaven. You will surely realise the divine presence through sincere prayer. Where you have sincerity, there also is virtue. Sincerity is a witness to truth. Sincerity is the mother of knowledge. Sincerity is a single virtue that binds Divinity and man in one. Retribution for good or ill is as sure as the shadow after substance. To do good is to be pure. To commit evil is to be impure. To admit a fault is the beginning of righteousness. The first and surest means to enter into communion with the Divine is sincerity. If you pray to a deity with sincerity, you will surely feel the divine presence. Our eyes may see some uncleanness, but let not our mind see things that are not clean. Our ears may hear some uncleanness, but let not our mind hear things that are not clean. So when we know this religion we can understand it is also an altruistic religion. This religion talks about the harmoniously living with each other.

#### **Confucianism-500 BCE**

*'Do unto other what you would have them do unto you.'*  
*Analecets 15:23*

K'ung Fu Tzu (Confucius) was the founder of Confucianism. He was born in 551 BCE in the state of Lu in China. He traveled throughout China giving advice to its rulers and teaching. His teaching was totally altruistic and pragmatic. His teachings and writings dealt with individual morality and ethics, and the proper exercise of political power. He stressed the following values like ritual, propriety, etiquette, love, righteousness, honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness. The highest Confucian virtue is the benevolence towards others. Confucianism is a great altruistic religion which was appeared to rectify the rulers for the benevolence of his pupils. It is an altruistic and pluralistic religion.

#### **Jainism-420 BCE**

*'In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.'*  
*Lord Mahavira, 24th Tirthankara*

The founder of the Jain community was Vardhamana, the last Jina in a series of 24, Mahavira who lived in East India. He attained enlightenment after 13 years of deprivation and death in 420 BCE. **Agamas** are original texts of Jainism based on the discourse of the *Tirthankara*. Jainism has many similarities to Hinduism and Buddhism which developed in the same part of the world. They believe in karma and reincarnation as like other religions but they believe that enlightenment and liberation from this cycle can only be achieved through asceticism. This is the practice of only eating that which will not kill the plant or animal from which it is taken. They also practice ahimsa, non-violence, because any act of violence against a living thing creates negative karma which will adversely affect one's next life. The best example of pluralism is the 'Anekāntavāda' professed by Jainism. The Anekāntavāda teaches that all predications are true only in reference to the standpoint taken and the aspect of the object considered. All our judgements are relative because we can know only some aspects of the reality. We quarrel and disagree because we forget this truth. Thus Anekāntavāda inspires one to respect the

views of people of other faiths and ideologies. *Ahimsa* and charity are two distinct characteristics of Jainism. In Jainism *ahimsa* is the greatest rule of conduct that implies a life of love for all. This love is a powerful force that generates a secular outlook, sympathy and compassion for those in distress and tolerance for those in opposition. Love for the living beings, in general, and mankind; in particular, inspires every Jain to serve others.

#### **Taoism- 440 BCE**

Taoism was founded by Lao-Tzo, a contemporary of Confucius in China. Taoism began as a combination of psychology and philosophy which Lao-Tzo hoped would help end the constant feudal warfare and other conflicts of his time. His writings, the *Tao-te-Ching*, describe the nature of life, the way to peace and how a ruler should lead his life. Taoism became a religion in 440 BCE when it was adopted as a state religion.

Tao, roughly translated as *path*, is a force which flows through all life and is the first cause of everything. The goal of everyone is to become one with the Tao. Tai Chi, a technique of exercise using slow deliberate movements, is used to balance the flow of energy or "chi" within the body. People should develop virtue and seek compassion, moderation and humility. One should plan any action in advance and achieve it through minimal action. Yin (dark side) and Yang (light side) symbolize pairs of opposites which are seen through the universe, such as good and evil, light and dark, male and female. The impact of human civilization upsets the balance of Yin and Yang. Taoists believe that people are good by nature and that one should be kind to others simply because such treatment will probably be reciprocated. According to Lao Tzu "When there is no desire, all things are at peace." Lao Tzu explained in his book, *TaoTe Ching* that for our desire we become selfish, we ignore others and we follow our artificial life. According to Lao Tzu we should embrace the nature and stay pure. Then automatically we all leave peacefully.

#### **Christianity- 30<sup>+</sup>CE**

Christianity started out as a breakaway sect of Judaism nearly 2000 years ago. **Christianity** is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who serves as the focal point of the Christian faith. It is the world's largest religion. Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) and believe that through His death and resurrection, humans can be reconciled to God and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of eternal life. Jesus, the son of the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph, but conceived through the Holy Spirit, was bothered by some of the practices within his native Jewish faith and began preaching a different message of God and religion. During his travels he was joined by twelve disciples who followed him in his journeys and learned from him. He performed many miracles during this time and related many of his teachings in the form of parables. Among his best known sayings are to "love thy neighbor" and "turn the other cheek." At one point he revealed that he was the Son of God sent to Earth to save humanity from our sins. This he did by being crucified on the cross for his teachings. He then arose from the dead and appeared to his disciples and told them to go forth and spread his message. Most Christians believe that Jesus was both human and divine—the Son of God. While there has been theological debate over the nature of Jesus, Trinitarian Christians believe that Jesus is the Logos, God incarnate, God the Son, and "true God and true man"—both fully divine and fully human. Jesus, having become fully human in all respects, suffered the pains and temptations of a mortal man, yet he did not sin. As fully God, he defeated death and rose to life again. According to the Bible, God raised him from the dead. He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God, and he will return to earth again for the Last Judgment and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the World to Come.

In Christianity also acts of charity and service are very common. The Bible is full of stories and sermons that speak highly of service to neighbours, the poor, the needy, the sick and the distressed.

The seven Christian virtues are from two sets of virtues. The four cardinal virtues are Prudence, Justice, Restraint (or Temperance), and Courage (or Fortitude). The cardinal virtues are so called because they are regarded as the basic virtues required for a virtuous life. The three theological virtues, are Faith, Hope, and Love (or Charity). Prudence also described as wisdom, the ability to judge between actions with regard to appropriate actions at a given time, Justice also considered as fairness, the most extensive and most important virtue, Temperance also known as restraint, the practice of self-control, abstinence, and moderation tempering the appetite, Courage also termed fortitude, forbearance, strength, endurance, and the ability to confront fear, uncertainty, and intimidation, Faith is belief in God and in the truth of His revelation as well as obedience to Him (cf. Rom 1:5:16:26), Hope is the expectation of and desire of receiving; refraining from despair and capability of not giving up. They believe that God will be eternally present in every human's life and never giving up on His love and Charity is a supernatural virtue that helps us love God and our neighbors, the same way as we love ourselves. "The second is this, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:31). "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, you shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his

female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:13-17). When we study the ethics of Christianity we see it is too much pragmatic and altruistic.

### Islam- 622 CE

Islam was founded in 622 CE by Muhammad the Prophet, in Makkah (also spelled Mecca). Though it is the youngest of the world's great religions, Muslims do not view it as a new religion. They believe that it is the same faith taught by the prophets, Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus. The role of Muhammad as the last prophet was to formalize and clarify the faith and purify it by removing ideas which were added in error. The two sacred texts of Islam are the Qur'an, which are the words of Allah 'the One True God' as given to Muhammad, and the Hadith, which is a collection of Muhammad's sayings. The duties of all Muslims are known as the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims follow a strict monotheism with one creator who is just, omnipotent and merciful. They also believe in Satan who drives people to sin, and that all unbelievers and sinners will spend eternity in Hell. Muslims who sincerely repent and submit to God will return to a state of sinlessness and go to Paradise after death. Alcohol, drugs, and gambling should be avoided and they reject racism. They respect the earlier prophets, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

Islam too emphasizes the pluralist nature of human society and inculcates in its believers a respect for other faiths which are mentioned in the holy Qur'an. It encourages pluralism when it says that 'and abuse not those who worship other than Allah, lest, exceeding the limits they abuse Allah through ignorance. . .so others have no right to attack them.' The Qur'an also says that there cannot be compulsion in the matter of religion. It makes it obligatory for all Muslims to respect other faiths and other's right to believe what they like. One of the most notable schools of Islam is the mystic group known as the 'Sufi'. The Sufis were open to all faiths. They showed great respect for Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity.

Islam is also famous for its teaching of equality, acts of charity, and communal brotherhood. Charity and service to the poor are special dictates of Islam. Islam is based on a kind of religious socialism which assures equality of all men as sons of Allah. Islamic brotherhood finds expression through the spirit of service and help towards the needy.

Reference to Islamic views on religious pluralism is found in the Quran. The following verses are generally interpreted as an evidence of religious pluralism: Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 48 states: If Allah so willed, he would have made you a single People, but his plan is to test each of you separately, in what He has given to each of you: so strive in all virtues as in you are in a race. The goal of all of you is to Allah. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute. (Quran 5:48)

Surah Al-Ankabut verse 46 states: And dispute not with the People of the Book, except with means better than mere disputation, unless I be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury, but say to them: "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him that we bow." (Quran 29:46). "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error." (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256). "To you (non-believers) be your Way (Religion), and to me mine." (Surah Al-Kafirun 109:6).

Islam's fundamental theological concept is belief in one God. Muslims are not expected to visualize God but to worship and adore him as a protector. Any kind of idolatry is condemned in Islam. (Quran 112:2) As a result, Muslims hold that for someone to worship any other gods or deities other than Allah (*Shirk* (polytheism)) is a sin that will lead to separation from Allah.

Muslims believe that Allah sent the Qur'an to bring peace and harmony to humanity through Islam (submission to Allah). Muhammad's worldwide mission was to establish universal peace under the *Khilafat*. The *Khilafat* ensured security of the lives and property of non-Muslims under the *dhimmi* system. This status was originally only made available to non-Muslims who were "People of the Book" (Christians, Jews, and Sabians), but was later extended to include Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Hindus, Mandeans (Sabians) and Buddhists. *Dhimmi* had more rights than other non-Muslim religious subjects, but often fewer legal and social rights than Muslims. Some Muslims, however, disagree, and hold that adherents of these faiths cannot be *dhimmi*. *Dhimmi* enjoyed some freedoms under the state founded by Muhammad and could practice their religious rituals according to their faith and beliefs.

The Sufis were practitioners of the esoteric mystic traditions within an Islam at a certain point. Sufism is defined by the Sufi master or Pir (Sufism) or fakeer or Wali in the language of the people by dancing and singing and incorporating various philosophies, theologies, ideologies and religions together (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Paganism, Platonism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and so forth with time). Famous Sufi masters are Rumi, Shadhili, Sheikh Farid, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Shams Tabrizi, Waris Shah, Ghazali, Mian Mir, Attar of Nishapur, Amir Khusrow, Salim Chishti. The Sufis were considered by many to have divine revelations with messages of peace, tolerance, equality,



pluralism, love for all and hate for no one, humanitarians, philosophers, psychologists and much more. Many had the teaching if you want to change the world, change yourself and you will change the whole world. The views of the Sufi poets, philosophers and theologians have inspired multiple forms of modern day academia as well as philosophers of other religions. See also Blind men and an elephant.

Persian poet Rumi says: I looked for God. I went to a temple, and I didn't find him there. Then I went to a church, and I didn't find him there. And then I went to a mosque, and I didn't find him there. And then finally I looked in my heart, and there he was. Rumi also says: How many paths are there to God? There are as many paths to God as there are souls on the Earth. Rumi also says: A true Lover doesn't follow any one religion, be sure of that. Since in the religion of Love, there is no irreverence or faith. When in Love, body, mind, heart and soul don't even exist. Become this, fall in Love, and you will not be separated again.

### **Sikhism- 1500 CE**

*'Don't create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone.'*

*Guru Arjan Devji 259, Guru Granth Sahib*

Sikhism is one of the youngest of the major world religions. It is a monotheistic and panentheistic religion that originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent about the end of the 15th century. The fundamental beliefs of Sikhism, articulated in the sacred scripture Guru Granth Sahib, include faith and meditation on the name of the one creator, unity of all humankind, engaging in selfless service, striving for social justice for the benefit and prosperity of all, and honest conduct and livelihood while living a householder's life.

The Sikh faith was founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab area, now Pakistan. Sikhism is based on the spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak, the first Guru, and the ten successive Sikh gurus. Guru Nanak established Kartarpur (Creator's town) around 1520 and gathered the original core of the Sikh Panth (community) there. After the death of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, became the literal embodiment of the eternal, impersonal Guru, where the scripture's word serves as the spiritual guide for Sikhs. This text, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib, was compiled by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. It consists of hymns and writings of the first 10 Gurus, along with texts from different Muslim and Hindu saints. The holy text is considered the 11th and final Guru. An Indian religion, Sikhism rejects claims that any particular religious tradition has a monopoly on Absolute Truth.

Sikhs believe in a single formless God with many names, who can be known through meditation. Sikhs pray many times each day and are prohibited from worshipping idols or icons. They believe in samsara, karma, and reincarnation as Hindus do but reject the caste system. They believe that everyone has equal status in the eyes of God.

Sikhism too is a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. It is non-exclusivistic by nature. Nanak strove to bring the Hindus and the Muslims together through his illustrious life and teaching. There is a popular verse which describes him as a *guru* for the Hindus and a *pir* for the Muslims—'*Guru Nanak Shah fakir / Hindu ka guru, mussulman ka pir.*'

In Sikhism, *sewà*, or service is also fundamental. In fact, Sikhism evolved from a desire to render service to those who were suffering and to uplift the downtrodden. The Sikh gurus considered all kinds of service—spiritual, social, political or military—as the service to God.

The Sikh Gurus (religious leaders) have propagated the message of "many paths" leading to the one God and ultimate salvation for all souls who treading on the path of righteousness. They have supported the view that proponents of all faiths can, by doing good and virtuous deeds and by remembering the Lord can certainly achieve salvation. Students of the Sikh faith are told to accept all leading faiths as possible vehicles for attaining spiritual enlightenment, provided the faithful study, ponder and practice the teachings of their prophets and leaders. Sikhism had many interactions with Sufism as well as Hinduism, influenced them and was influenced by them.

The pluralistic dialogue of Sikhism began with the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak after becoming enlightened saying the words "Na koi hindu na koi musalman" - There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim. He recognized that religious labels held no value and it is the deeds of human that will be judged in the hereafter what we call ourselves religiously holds no value. Sikhs have always being eager exponents of interfaith dialogue and will not only accept the right of other to practice their faith but have in the past fought and laid down their lives to protect this right for others.

### **Baha'i-1863 CE**

The Bahá'í Faith arose from Islam in the 1800s based on the teachings of Baha'u'llah and is now a distinct worldwide faith. Bahá'u'lláh was the founder. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* or *Aqdas* is the central book of the Bahá'í Faith written by Bahá'u'lláh, the

founder of the religion, 1853-1873. It has the same status as the Quran for Muslims or the Bible for Christians. The work was written in Arabic under the Arabic title *al-Kitābu l-Aqdas*. The faith's followers believe that God has sent nine great prophets to mankind through whom the Holy Spirit has revealed the "Word of God." This has given rise to the major world religions. Although these religions arose from the teachings of the prophets of one God, Bahá'í do not believe they are all the same. The differences in the teachings of each prophet are due to the needs of the society they came to help and what mankind was ready to have revealed to it. Bahá'í beliefs promote gender and race equality, freedom of expression and assembly, world peace and world government. They believe that a single world government led by Bahá'í will be established at some point in the future. The faith does not attempt to preserve the past but does embrace the findings of science. Bahá'í believe that every person has an immortal soul which cannot die but is freed to travel through the spirit world after death.

Bahá'u'lláh, founder of Bahá'í Faith, urged the elimination of religious intolerance. He taught that God is one and has manifested himself to humanity through several historic messengers. Bahá'u'lláh taught that Bahá'í must associate with peoples of all religions and show the love of God in relations with them whether this is reciprocated or not.

Bahá'í refer to the concept of Progressive revelation, which means that God's will is revealed to mankind progressively as mankind matures and is better able to comprehend the purpose of God in creating humanity. In this view, God's word is revealed through a series of messengers: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and Bahá'u'lláh (the founder of the Bahá'í Faith) among them. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, Bahá'u'lláh explains that messengers of God have a twofold station, one of divinity and one of an individual. According to Bahá'í writings, there will not be another messenger for many hundreds of years. There is also a respect for the religious traditions of the native peoples of the planet who may have little other than oral traditions as a record of their religious figures. Interfaith and multi-faith interactivity is integral to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Its founder Bahá'u'lláh enjoined his followers to "consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship".

Unity of Religion is a core teaching of the Bahá'í Faith which states that there is a fundamental unity in many of the world's religions. The principle states that the teachings of the major religions are part of a single plan directed from the same God. It is one of the core teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, alongside the unity of God, and the unity of humanity.

So after going through all religions we can understand that all revealed religions are based on peace, security, and world harmony. Love, Altruism, Forgiveness and Tolerance are all the Pillars of Dialogue. For creating interfaith dialogue Pluralism has a great role.

### **The Importance of Interfaith Harmony and Interfaith Dialogue**

'Know the essence of every Religion.  
Be a good follower of own Religion,  
But respect every Religion.  
Love your own Religion.  
Be friendly to every religion.  
Make interfaith dialogue with the fellows of every religion.  
Give importance to every Religion,  
Believe in living together with all religions,  
Follow pluralistic view for the betterment of all religions.  
Pluralistic views teach us to stay side by side with every religion,  
Pluralistic view can make interfaith dialogue within all religions,  
Interfaith dialogues establish interfaith Harmony among all religions,  
Interfaith Harmony makes a peaceful society with all religions'.<sup>3</sup>

For building Interfaith harmony interfaith dialogue has a great role. If interfaith dialogue is seed then interfaith harmony is the fruit. Both belong together. *Interfaith* is a process of coming together of people committed to their respective religions and spiritual paths for the purpose of mutual understanding, appreciation and enrichment. This process is often termed *interfaith dialogue*. It can be informal or formal, internal to oneself, between neighbors, among community groups, right up

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<sup>3</sup> From Priyadarsini Mitra quotes: [yourquote.in/priyadarsini-mitra-vjq/quotes](http://yourquote.in/priyadarsini-mitra-vjq/quotes)

to large international gatherings. The venue can be a church, temple, mosque, or a house, street, bus, institutions anywhere. Interfaith Dialogue refers to positive interaction between people of different religions at both the individual and institutional levels. Interfaith Dialogue does not talk about syncretism or alternative religion, but it involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others, rather than to synthesize new beliefs.

When we go through interfaith dialogue then we will understand that all religions have different worship and theology but they share a common teaching love and peace. When we will understand this then only interfaith harmony will be established.

Interfaith harmony will be established through interfaith dialogue because through the dialogue we can understand that every religion follows different Paths but the Goal of all religions is same. All religions contain within themselves the same essential truths, although the packaging is different. And that is good. Every human being on the planet is unique. Not one of us really practices the same religion. Every person's mind is different and every person needs his or her own unique path to reach the top of the mountain. Some paths are narrow, some are broad. Some are winding and difficult and some are safe and dull. Eventually we'll all get to the top of the mountain; we don't have to worry about our neighbors getting lost along the way. They'll do just fine. We all need different approaches to fit our different natures. Despite external variations in the world religions, the internals are more alike than not. Every religion teaches similar moral and ethical virtues; all religions teach the importance of spiritual striving and the necessity of honoring our fellow human beings as part of that striving. Inter-faith dialogue has the potential to enrich and strengthen understanding within diverse Faiths and interfaith harmony only come through these interfaith dialogue.

All revealed religions are based on peace, security, and world harmony. So when we will go through interfaith dialogue then only interfaith harmony will be established. When interfaith harmony will be established then all religions stay together and every religion will share the good essence of each others. Deepening in Our Path Just as we honour the various world religions and respect their adherents, we must grow and deepen in our own particular spiritual path--whatever it may be. We shouldn't dabble in a little bit of Buddhism and a little bit of Islam and a little bit of Christianity and then try a new combo plate the following week. Spiritual practice is not a smorgasbord. If we throw five varieties of desserts into a food processor, we'll just get one unpalatable mess.

Interfaith harmony also stresses the necessity of diving deep into the spiritual tradition of our choice, sticking with it, and working hard. If we want to dig a well, we have to choose your location and keep digging until you reach water. It doesn't do any good to dig a bunch of shallow holes. While a shallow spiritual life is probably better than no spiritual life at all, it nevertheless doesn't take us where we want to go: to freedom, to God-realization. Once we choose which spiritual path we wish to follow, we should doggedly pursue it until we reach the goal. The point is, we can do this while not only valuing other traditions, but also learning from them.

If interfaith harmony establish then an egalitarian society also will be build up. When individual will be guided by his perfect knowledge then he will know that all perfections, all powers are already within himself, which these have not to be given him by others. When he realizes this, he becomes free that moment, he achieves equality. He also realize that everyone else is equally as perfect as he, and he does not have to exercise any power, physical, mental or moral, over his brother men. He abandons the idea that there was ever any man who was lower than himself. Then he can talk of equality; not until then.

## **CONCLUSION**

A true understanding of the various faiths would therefore greatly reduce the mutual bitterness among their followers and pave the way for communal concord and harmony. Therefore we find that service to mankind has always been an integral part of all religions and their scriptures command us to render services to the distressed, the needy, the poor and the sick. In other words, every religion exhorts us to have love and compassion for the whole humanity. Every religion urges us to have profound respect for others. The incidents of religious violence that occur in our country are due to insufficient knowledge of our own as well as other religions. Swami Vivekananda said again and again that we can know through the study of religion the truth that the essence of all religions is the same. We may call it God, Allah, Jehovah, the spirit of love, law of nature or whatever we may like. Mahatma Gandhi said, 'I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man and woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. A friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty'. He himself made a study of many great scriptures and after a long study came to the conclusion that (i) all religions are true; (ii) all religions are almost as dear to him as his own Hinduism. No religion is the enemy of another. Islam and Christianity are not the enemies of Hinduism, nor is Hinduism their enemy.

Lastly, it may be said that we, the citizens of India have made our country secular. So it is our duty to maintain the true spirit of secularism. And it can be possible through a deep study of different religions. Religion, if properly understood and interpreted, cannot be antagonistic to healthy secularism, then only no religious violence will occur and the unity of all human beings with the existing diversity of religions could be strengthened.

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