

The Concept Of GOD

In Major Religions



Dr. Zakir Naik



Concept of God

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By Dr. Zakir Naik

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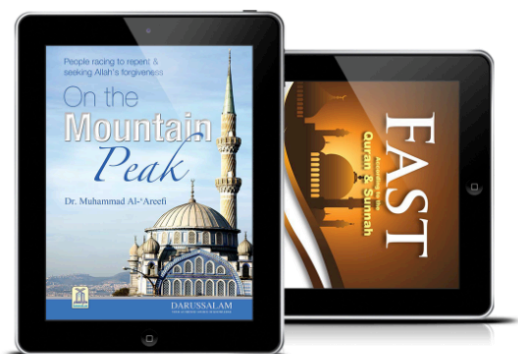
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Contents

INTRODUCTION	6
CATEGORIZATION OF MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS	7
Semitic religions	7
Non-Semitic religions	7
Aryan religions	7
Non-Aryan religions	7
Most authentic definition of God in any religion	7
Concept of God in Hinduism	9
Common Concept of God in Hinduism	9
Bhagwad Geeta	9
Upanishads:	9
The Vedas	12
Brahma Sutra of Hindu Vedanta:	14
Concept of God in Sikhism	17
Definition of Sikh and Sikhism	17
The Five - 'K's'	17
Mulmantra: The Fundamental Creed of Sikhism	17
Guru Nanak influenced by Kabir	19
Concept of God in Zoroastrianism	21
Qualities of God according to Dasatir:	21
Qualities of God according to Avesta	22
Concept of God in Judaism	24
Concept of God in Christianity	27
The mission of Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him) - he came to fulfill the Law:	28
God sent Jesus (Peace be upon him):	29

Jesus (Peace be upon him) of Nazareth - a man approved of God:	29
The First Commandment is that God is One:	29
Concept of God in Islam.....	31
The Most Concise Definition of God:	31
Surah Ikhlas - the touchstone of theology:	31
What does Islam say about ‘god-men’?.....	32
By what name do we call God?	33
God does not become a human being:.....	33
Worship of another human is useless:	34
God does not perform ungodly acts:.....	34
God does not forget nor does He make mistakes:	34
Good performs Godly acts:.....	34
The Creator prepares the instruction manual:.....	35
Allah chooses Messengers:.....	36
Some people are ‘blind’ and ‘deaf’:	36
ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.....	38
Each Attribute of God is unique and possessed by Him alone:.....	38
One attribute of God should not contradict with other attributes:	39
All attributes should point to the one and same God:.....	39
Unity of God:	39
ALL RELIGIONS ULTIMATELY BELIEVE IN MONOTHEISM.....	42
People change scriptures for their benefit:	42
TAWHEED	43
Definition and Categories:	43
a. Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah (maintaining the Oneness of Lordship)	43
b. Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat (maintaining the Singleness of Allah’s name and attributes):	43

c. Tawheed al-Ibaadah or Uloohiyah (maintaining all kinds of worship only for Allah);	44
SHIRK:	47
a. Definition:	47
b. Shirk is the greatest sin which Allah will never forgive:.....	47
c. Shirk leads to Hellfire:	47
d. Worship and obedience to none but Allah:.....	47
CONCLUSION:	49

INTRODUCTION

One of the distinguishing features of our civilization is the presence of a large number of religions and ethical systems. Mankind has always sought to understand the reasons for creation and his own place in the scheme of things.

Arnold Toynbee studied the history of man through the ages and put his findings in a monumental work consisting of ten volumes. He summarized that in the history of man, religion stood as the center. In an article in The Observer on October 24, 1954 he wrote:

"I have come back at the belief that religion holds the key to the mystery of existence."

Religion, according to the Oxford Dictionary means,

"belief in a superhuman controlling power especially in a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship."

A common feature of all major religions is the belief in a Universal God or Supreme Divine Authority that is Omnipotent and Omniscient. Followers of all major religions believe that the God they worship is the same God for them as well as for others.

Marxism, Freudianism and other 'non-religious' beliefs tried to attack the roots of organized religions. But these in turn, developed into belief systems themselves. For instance, when communism was adopted by many countries of the world it was preached with the same commitment and fervor that characterizes the act of preaching and propagation of religions.

Thus religion is an integral part of human existence. The Glorious Quran says in the following verse:

"Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms that is between us and you, that we worship none but Allah. If then they turn back, say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)". (Al-Quran 3:64)"

The study of various religions has been an extremely rewarding experience for me. It has reaffirmed the belief that God created every human soul with some knowledge of His existence. The psychological constitution of man is such that he accepts the existence of the Creator, unless he has been conditioned to believe the contrary. In other words, belief in God requires no condition, while a rejection of God does.

CATEGORIZATION OF MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

Religions of the world can be broadly categorized into Semitic religions and non-Semitic religions. Non-Semitic religions can be divided into Aryan religions and non-Aryan religions.

Semitic religions

Semitic religions are religions that originated among the Semites. According to the Bible, Prophet Noah (Peace be upon him) had a son called Shem. The descendants 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. These religions are Prophetic religions that believe in Divine Guidance sent through prophets of God.

Non-Semitic religions

The non-Semitic religions are further subdivided into Aryan and non-Aryan religions:

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.

Non-Aryan religions

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.

Most authentic definition of God in any religion

The concept of God espoused by a religion cannot be judged by merely observing the practice of its followers. It is quite common for the followers of many religions to be ignorant of the concept of God in their scriptures. It is therefore better to analyze the concept of God in any religion by referring to its holy scriptures.

Let us understand the concept of God in major world religions by analyzing what their scriptures have to say about it.



Concept of God in Hinduism

The most popular among the Aryan religious in Hinduism, 'hinhu' is actually a Persian word which stands for the inhabitants of the region beyond the Indus Valley. However in common parlance Hinduism is a blanket term for an assortment of religious beliefs, most of whom are based on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Geeta.

Common Concept of God in Hinduism

Hinduism is commonly perceived as a polytheistic religion. Indeed, most Hindus would attest to this, by professing belief in a multitude of gods. Some Hindus believe in the systems of three gods while Some Hindus actually believe in the existence of thirty-three crore i.e. 330 million gods. However learned Hindus who are well-versed with their scriptures insist that a Hindu should believe in and worship only one God.

The major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim perception of God is the common Hindus' belief in the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism considers everything, living and non-living to be divine and sacred. The Hindus therefore consider the trees, the sun, the moon, the animals and even the human beings as manifestations of God. For the common Hindu, everything is God.

Islam, on the contrary, exhorts man to consider himself and his surroundings as examples of divine creation rather than as divinity itself. Muslims therefore believe that everything is God's i.e. God with an apostrophe 's'. In other words we believe that everything belongs to God. The trees, the Sun, the Moon and everything in this Universe belong to God.

Thus the major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim beliefs is difference of the apostrophe 's'. The Hindu says everything is God. The Muslim says everything is God's, i.e. God with an apostrophe 's'.

The Holy Quran says:

"Come to common terms as between us and you". The first common term is "that we worship none but Allah".

The first common term is "that we worship none but Allah".

So let us try and find commonality by analyzing both Hindu and Islamic scriptures.

Bhagwad Geeta

The most popular among all the Hindu scriptures is the Bhagwad Geeta. Consider the following verse from the Geeta:

"Those whose intelligence has been stolen by material desires surrender unto demigods and follow the particular rules and regulations of worship according to their own natures." (Bhagwad Geeta chapter 7 verse 20 (B. G. 7:20))

The Geeta is referring to the people who are materialistic and therefore worship demigods i.e. besides the True God.

Upanishads:

The Upanishads are also considered sacred scriptures by the Hindus. Consider the following verses from the Upanishads:

(i) “Ekam evaditiyam”

“He is One only without a second.”(Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:1)

(ii) Consider again, the following verses from the Upanishads:

“Na casya kasju janita na cadhipah.”

“Of Him there are neither parents nor Lord”(Svetasavatara Upanishad 6,9) (part II page 263)

(iii) Consider the following verses from the Upanishads:

“Na tasya pratima ati”

(There is no likeness of Him.)(Svetasvatara Upanishad chapter 4:19)

“Nainam urdhvam na tiryancam na madhye na parijagrabhat na tasya pratime asti yasya nama mahad yasah.”

“There is no likeness of Him whose name is great glory”.

(The principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan pg736 & 737)

(Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, the Upanishad part II page no 253)

Compare the above verses with the following verses of the Holy Quran:

“And there is none like unto Him.” (Holy Quran, 112:4)

“There is nothing like Him.” (Holy Quran, 42:11)

(iv) The following verses from the Upanishad allude to the inability of man to imagine God in a particular form:

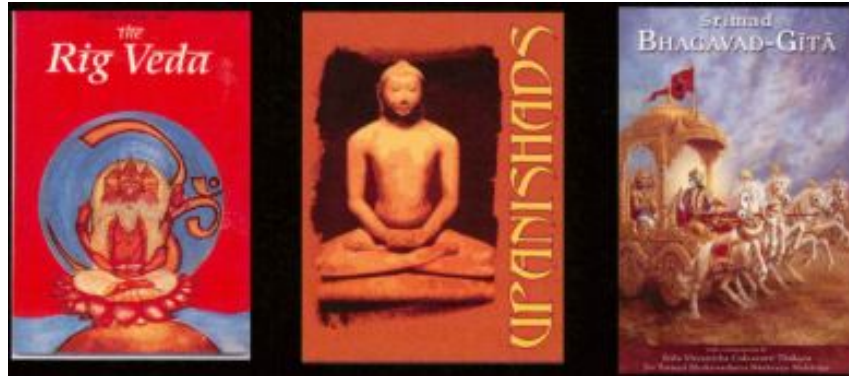
“Na samdrse tisthati rupam asya, na caksusa pasyati kas canaiam. Hrda hrdistham manasa ya enam, evam vidur amrtas te bhavanti”.

“His form is not to be seen, no one sees Him with the eye. Those who through heart and mind know Him as abiding in the heart become immortal”.(Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:20)

The Holy Quran refers to this aspect in the following verse:

“No vision can grasp Him but His grasp is over all vision:

He is above all comprehension, well acquainted with all things”. (Holy Quran 6:103)



The Vedas

Vedas are considered the most sacred amongst all the Hindu scriptures. There are 4 main vedas. Rig Ved, Yajur Ved, Sam Ved and Atharva Ved.

1. Yajur Ved

Consider the following verses from the Yajur ved:

“Na tasya pratima asti”

“There is no image of Him.” (Yajurved32:3)

It further says:

“As He is unborn, He deserves our worship.”

“There is no image of Him whose sustains within Himself all luminous objects like the Sun etc. May He not harm me, this is my prayer. As He is unborn, He deserves our worship”(The Yajurveda by Devi Chand M. A.Pg377)



“He is bodyless and pure.”

It is mentioned in Yajurved 40:8:

He hath attained unto the Bright, Bodiless, Woundless, Sinewless, the pure which evil hath not pierced. Far-sighted, wise, encompassing, he self-existent hath prescribed aims, as propriety demands, unto the Everlasting Years”.(Yajurved 40:8)(Yajurveda samhita by Ralph I. H. Griffithpg 538)

It is also mentioned in the Yajur Veda:

“Andhatama pravishanti ye asambhuti mupaste”

“They enter darkness, those who worship natural things”, for example air, water, fire, etc. “They sink deeper in darkness those who worship sambhuti. Sambhuti means created things, for example table, chair, idol, etc”.

(Yajurved 40:9)

It also mentions a prayer stating:

“Lead us to the good path and remove the sin that makes us stray and wander.”(Yajurveda chapter 40:16)

2. Atharvaved

Consider the following verses from Atharva ved:-

(i) “Devamahaosi”

“God is verily Great”(Atharvaveda 20 58:3)

“Verily, Surya, thou art great; truly, aditya, thou art great. As thou art great indeed thy greatness is admire: Yea, verily, great art thou, O God”.

(Atharveda Samhiti vol 2 William Dmigh Whitney pg 910)

A similar message is given in the Holy Quran in Surah Rad.

“He is the Great, the most High”. (The Holy Quran 13:9)

3. Rig Ved

(i) The oldest of all the vedas is Rigveda. It is also the one considered most sacred by the Hindus. The Rig Ved states that

“Sages (learned Priests) call one God by many names”.(Rigveda 1:164:46)

(ii) The Rigveda gives no less than 33 different attributes to Almighty God, many of these are mentioned in Rigveda Book 2 hymn 1

Amongst the various attributes given in Rigveda, one of the beautiful attributes mentioned in Rigveda Subh II verse 3 for Almighty God is ‘Brahma’. ‘Brahma’ means ‘The Creator.’ Translated into Arabic this word it means ‘Khaliq’. Muslims can have no objection if Almighty God is referred to as ‘Khaliq’ or ‘Creator’ or ‘Brahma’. However Muslims definitely do not subscribe to the view that ‘Brahma’ is Almighty God who has four heads (naoozubillah), Muslims take strong exception to it. Describing Almighty God in