**Three Major Religions mentioned in *Life of Pi*;**

**Christianity, Hinduism and Islam**

**Christianity** (from the [Ancient Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_language) word Χριστός, [*Christos*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ), a translation of the [Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language) מָשִׁיחַ, [*Māšîăḥ*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah)*)*is an [Abrahamic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrahamic_religions), [monotheistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism) [religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion) based on the life and [oral teachings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_gospel_tradition) of [Jesus of Nazareth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus) as presented in the [New Testament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament). Christianity is the [world's largest religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups#World_Religion_Database), with approximately 2.2 billion adherents, known as [Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christians). Most Christians believe that Jesus is the [Son of God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_God), [fully divine and fully human](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypostatic_union), and the [saviour of humanity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvation_(Christianity)) whose coming was prophesied in the [Old Testament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Testament). Consequently, Christians refer to Jesus as [Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ) or the [Messiah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah).

The foundations of [Christian theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_theology) are expressed in [ecumenical creeds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical_creeds). These [professions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Profession_(religious)) of faith state that Jesus suffered, died, was buried, and was [resurrected](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus) from the dead in order to grant eternal life to those who believe in him and trust in him for the [remission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgiveness#Christianity) of their [sins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_views_on_sin). The creeds further maintain that Jesus bodily [ascended](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus) into heaven, where he reigns with [God the Father](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_the_Father). Most [Christian denominations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination) teach that Jesus will [return](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Coming) to [judge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Judgment) everybody, living and dead, and to grant [eternal life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_life_(Christianity)) to his followers. He is considered the [model](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_model) of a [virtuous](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue) life. His [ministry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus), [crucifixion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus), and resurrection are often referred to as "[the gospel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_gospel)", meaning "good news". The term [*gospel*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel) also refers to written accounts of Jesus' life and teaching, four of which – the Gospels of [Matthew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew), [Mark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mark), [Luke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke), and [John](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_John) – are considered [canonical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canonical_gospels) and included in [Christian Bibles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Bible).

Christianity is an [Abrahamic religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrahamic_religions) that began as a [Jewish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple_Judaism) sect in the mid-1st century. Originating in the [Levant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levant) region of the Middle East, it quickly spread to [Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria), [Mesopotamia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia), [Asia Minor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Minor), and [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt). It grew in size and influence over a few centuries, and by the end of the 4th century had become the official [state church of the Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_church_of_the_Roman_Empire), replacing other forms of [religion practiced under Roman rule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Rome). During the [Middle Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages), most of the remainder of Europe was [Christianized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianization), and adherents were gained in the [Middle East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East), [North Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Africa), [Ethiopia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia), and parts of [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India). Following the [Age of Discovery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Discovery), Christianity spread to the [Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas), [Australasia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasia), [sub-Saharan Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-Saharan_Africa), and the rest of the world through [missionary work](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_mission) and colonization. Christianity has played a prominent role in the shaping of [Western civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_civilization).

Worldwide, the three largest groups of Christianity are the [Catholic Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church), the [Eastern Orthodox Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church), and the various denominations of [Protestantism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism). The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox [patriarchates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchate) split from one another in the [schism of the 11th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East%E2%80%93West_Schism), and Protestantism came into existence during the [Reformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant_Reformation) of the 16th century, splitting from the Roman Catholic Church.

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**Hinduism** is the dominant religion, or way of life, of the [Indian subcontinent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent), and consists of [many diverse traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_denominations). It includes [Shaivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaivism), [Vaishnavism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavism) and [Shaktism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaktism) among numerous [other traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_denominations), and a wide spectrum of [laws and prescriptions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma%C5%9B%C4%81stra) of "daily morality" based on [karma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma), [dharma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma), and societal norms. Hinduism is a categorization of distinct intellectual or philosophical points of view, rather than a rigid, common set of beliefs.

Hinduism has been called the "[oldest religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oldest_religion)" in the world, and some practitioners refer to it as [*Sanātana Dharma*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San%C4%81tan%C4%AB), "the eternal [law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma)" or the "eternal way" beyond human origins. It prescribes the "eternal" duties, such as honesty, mercy, purity, self-restraint, among others.

Western scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion or synthesis of various Indian cultures and traditions, with diverse roots and no single founder. This "Hindu synthesis" emerged around the beginning of the Common Era, and co-existed for several centuries with Buddhism, to finally gain the upper hand in most royal circles during the 8th century CE. From northern India this "Hindu synthesis", and its societal divisions, spread to southern India and [parts of Southeast Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_India).

Since the 19th century, under the dominance of western [colonialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonialism) and [Indology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indology), when the term "Hinduism" came into broad use, Hinduism has re-asserted itself as a coherent and independent tradition. The popular understanding of Hinduism has been dominated by ["Hindu modernism"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Vedanta), in which [mysticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism) and the unity of Hinduismhave been emphasized. During 20th century, [Hindutva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindutva) ideology, a part of the [Hindu politics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_politics) emerged as a political force and a source for national identity in India.

Hindu practices include daily rituals such as [puja](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puja_(Hinduism)) (worship) and recitations, annual festivals, and occasional pilgrimages. Select group of [ascetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadhu) leave the common world and engage in lifelong [ascetic practices](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C4%81dhan%C4%81) to achieve [moksha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moksha).

[Hindu texts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_texts) are classified into [Śruti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Aruti) ("revealed") and [Smriti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smriti) ("remembered"). These texts discuss [theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_theology), [philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_philosophy), [mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_mythology), [Vedic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic) [yajna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yajna) and [agamic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_(Hinduism)) [rituals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rituals) and [temple building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_temple), among other topics. Major scriptures include the [Vedas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedas), [Upanishads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishads) (both *Śruti*), [Mahabharata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata), [Ramayana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramayana), [Bhagavad Gita](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita), [Puranas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puranas), [Manusmṛti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manusm%E1%B9%9Bti), and [Agamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agama_(Hinduism)) (all *smriti*).

Hinduism, with about one billion followers is the [world's third largest religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups), after [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) and [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam).

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**Islam** ([/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ˈɪslɑːm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English); [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): **الإسلام**‎, *al-ʾIslām*  is a [monotheistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheistic) and [Abrahamic religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrahamic_religion) articulated by the [Qur'an](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quran), a [book](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_holy_books) considered by its adherents to be the [verbatim](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/verbatim) word of [God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Islam)) and by the teachings and normative example (called the [*Sunnah*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah) and composed of [*hadith*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith)) of [Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_in_Islam) ([c.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circa) 570 [CE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Era) – c. 8 June 632 CE), considered by them to be the last [prophet of God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophets_of_Islam). An adherent of Islam is called a [Muslim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim).

Muslims believe that God is [one and incomparable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tawhid) and the [purpose of existence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purpose_of_life) is to worship God. Muslims also believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a [primordial faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_true_faith) that was revealed before many times throughout the world, including notably through [Adam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam), [Noah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah), [Abraham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_view_of_Abraham), [Moses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_view_of_Moses), and [Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_in_Islam), whom they consider [prophets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophets_in_Islam). They maintain that the previous messages and revelations have been partially [misinterpreted or altered](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahrif) over time, but consider the Arabic Qur'an to be both the unaltered and the final revelation of God. Religious concepts and practices include the [five pillars of Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Pillars_of_Islam), which are basic concepts and obligatory acts of [worship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worship), and following [Islamic law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia), which touches on virtually every aspect of life and society, providing guidance on multifarious topics from [banking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_banking) and [welfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakat), to [family life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Islam) and the [environment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_ethics#Environmentalism).

Most Muslims are of two [denominations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_schools_and_branches): [Sunni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni_Islam) (75–90%) or [Shia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam) (10–20%). About 13% of Muslims live in [Indonesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia), the largest Muslim-majority country, 25% in [South Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asia), 20% in the [Middle East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East), and 15% in [Sub-Saharan Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Africa). Sizable minorities are also found in [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Europe), [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_China), [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Russia), and the [Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_the_Americas). Converts and immigrant communities are found in almost every part of the world (see [Islam by country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_by_country)). With about 1.6 billion followers or 23% of [earth's population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_population), Islam is the [second-largest religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups).

Denominations within Islam are:

**Sunni**

The largest denomination in Islam is Sunni Islam, which makes up 75%–90% of all Muslims. Sunni Muslims also go by the name *Ahl as-Sunnah* which means "people of the tradition [of Muhammad]". These hadiths, recounting Muhammad's words, actions, and personal characteristics, are preserved in traditions known as [Al-Kutub Al-Sittah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Kutub_Al-Sittah) (six major books).

Sunnis believe that the first four [caliphs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliph) were the rightful successors to Muhammad; since God did not specify any particular leaders to succeed him and those leaders were elected. Sunnis believe that anyone who is righteous and just could be a caliph but they have to act according to the Qur'an and the Hadith, the example of Muhammad and give the people their rights.

The Sunnis follow the Quran, then the Hadith. Then for legal matters not found in the Quran or the Hadith, they follow four [madh'habs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madhhab) (schools of thought): [Hanafi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanafi), [Hanbali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanbali), [Maliki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maliki) and [Shafi'i](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shafi%27i), established around the teachings of [Abū Ḥanīfa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ab%C5%AB_%E1%B8%A4an%C4%ABfa), [Ahmad bin Hanbal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_bin_Hanbal), [Malik ibn Anas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malik_ibn_Anas) and [al-Shafi'i](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Shafi%27i) respectively.

All four accept the validity of the others and a Muslim may choose any one that he or she finds agreeable. The Salafi (also known as [Ahl al-Hadith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahl_al-Hadith) or the pejorative term [*Wahhabi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabi) by its adversaries) is an ultra-orthodox Islamic movement which takes the first generation of Muslims as exemplary models.

**Shia**

The Shia constitute 10–20% of Islam and are its second-largest branch.

While the Sunnis believe that a Caliph should be elected by the community, Shia's believe that Muhammad appointed his son-in-law, [Ali ibn Abi Talib](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_ibn_Abi_Talib), as his successor and only certain descendants of Ali could be Imams. As a result, they believe that [Ali ibn Abi Talib](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_ibn_Abi_Talib) was the first *Imam* (leader), rejecting the legitimacy of the previous Muslim caliphs [Abu Bakr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Bakr), [Uthman ibn al-Affan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uthman_ibn_al-Affan) and [Umar ibn al-Khattab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umar_ibn_al-Khattab).

Shia Islam has several branches, the largest of which is the [Twelvers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelvers), followed by [Zaidis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaidiyyah) and [Ismailis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismaili). Different branches accept different descendants of Ali as Imams. After the death of Imam [Jafar al-Sadiq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jafar_al-Sadiq) considered the sixth Imam by the [Twelvers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelvers), and the [Ismaili](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismaili)'s, the Ismailis started to consider his son Isma'il ibn Jafar as the Imam and the Twelver Shia's (Ithna Asheri) started to consider his other son Musa al-Kazim as their seventh Imam. While the [Zaydis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaidiyyah) consider [Zayd ibn Ali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zayd_ibn_Ali), the uncle of Imam [Jafar al-Sadiq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jafar_al-Sadiq), as their fifth Imam.

Other smaller groups include the [Bohra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustaali) and [Druze](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Druze), as well as the [Alawites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alawites) and [Alevi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alevi). Some Shia branches label other Shia branches that do not agree with their doctrine as [Ghulat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghulat).

**Sufism**

Sufism (Tasawwuf) is a mystical-ascetic approach to Islam that seeks to find divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. By focusing on the more spiritual aspects of religion, Sufis strive to obtain direct experience of God by making use of "intuitive and emotional faculties" that one must be trained to use. However, Sufism has been criticized by the Salafi sect for what they see as an unjustified [religious innovation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bidah). [Hasan al-Basri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasan_al-Basri) was inspired by the ideas of piety and condemnation of worldliness preached by Muhammad and these ideas were later further developed by [Al-Ghazali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Ghazali) in his books on Sufism. Sufi-majority countries include [Senegal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegal), [Chad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chad) and [Niger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger).