

Monotheism, Origin, Major Monotheistic Religions, Key Features

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VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

MONOTHEISM



Monotheism is the belief in **one supreme God** who created and controls the universe. It is one of the most important religious ideas in human history and forms the foundation of many major religions. Unlike polytheism (belief in many gods), monotheism emphasizes the unity, power, and uniqueness of a single divine being.

Monotheism Origin and Development

Monotheism developed gradually over time. Early human societies mostly followed polytheism, but later some civilizations began believing in a single God.

- **Ancient Egypt:** Pharaoh Akhenaten promoted the worship of one god (Aten)
- **Judaism:** One of the earliest religions to firmly establish monotheism
- Later adopted and expanded by **Christianity and Islam**

Major Monotheistic Religions

Monotheistic religions are those that believe in one supreme God who is the creator and sustainer of the universe. The three major monotheistic religions- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have shaped world history, culture, and moral systems.

1. Judaism

- **Earliest organized monotheistic faith**, originating in the Middle East around 2000 BCE
- Central belief in one God, **Yahweh**, who is eternal, formless, and just
- Sacred scripture is the **Torah**, part of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh)
- Strong concept of a **covenant relationship** between God and the people of Israel
- Emphasis on **Halakha (religious law)** governing daily life, ethics, food, and rituals
- Prophetic tradition (e.g., Moses, Isaiah) guiding moral and social justice
- Importance of **Ten Commandments** as basic moral code
- Worship takes place in **synagogues**, led by rabbis
- Key practices: **Sabbath (Shabbat) rest, dietary laws (Kosher), circumcision**
- Major festivals: Passover, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah
- Focus on **community identity, tradition, and historical continuity**

2. Christianity

- Developed from Judaism in the 1st century CE based on teachings of **Jesus Christ**
- Belief in **one God in three forms (Trinity)**: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Sacred text is the **Bible** (Old Testament + New Testament)
- Core belief that Jesus is the **Son of God and savior**, who died for human sins and was resurrected
- Central teaching of **salvation through faith, grace, and love**
- Ethical focus on **compassion, forgiveness, humility, and charity**
- Organized into different denominations: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox
- Worship in **churches**, led by priests or pastors
- Key practices: **prayer, baptism, Eucharist (Holy Communion)**
- Major festivals: Christmas, Easter, Good Friday
- Emphasis on **missionary work and spreading teachings globally**

3. Islam

- Founded in the 7th century CE in Arabia by Prophet **Muhammad**
- Absolute monotheism called **Tawhid**, belief in one God **Allah**
- Sacred text is the **Quran**, considered the literal word of God
- Supplemented by **Hadith** (sayings and actions of the Prophet)
- Follows the **Five Pillars of Islam**:
 - Shahada (faith)
 - Salah (prayer 5 times daily)
 - Zakat (charity)

- Sawm (fasting during Ramadan)
- Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca)
- Concept of **Ummah (global Muslim community)**
- Law system called **Sharia**, covering moral, social, and legal aspects
- Worship in **mosques**, led by imams
- Major festivals: Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha
- Strong focus on **accountability, justice, and life after death (Day of Judgment)**

Modern Reforms in Monotheism

During the 18th and 19th centuries, monotheistic ideas were used as a tool for religious and **social reform in India**. Reformers and organizations promoted the belief in one formless God, aiming to remove social evils and revive the original spiritual essence of religion.

- **Role of Raja Ram Mohan Roy**
 - One of the earliest reformers to promote **monotheism in Indian society**
 - Advocated belief in **one supreme God** and rejected idol worship
 - His work *A Gift to Monotheists* emphasized rational religion and unity of God
 - Founded the Brahmo Samaj to promote social and religious reforms
 - Opposed practices like **Sati, caste discrimination, and superstitions**
- **Contribution of Arya Samaj**
 - Founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati
 - Promoted a return to the **Vedas as the true source of knowledge**
 - Strongly supported **monotheism (belief in one God)**
 - Rejected **idol worship and ritualism**, considering them later distortions
 - Emphasized **education, social reform, and equality**
 - Encouraged reforms like **women's education and opposition to caste-based discrimination**
- **Core Reform Ideas**
 - Focus on **pure monotheism and rational thinking**
 - Removal of **social evils and blind traditions**
 - Revival of **ancient spiritual values in a modern form**
 - Promotion of **ethical living over rituals**

Monotheism vs Polytheism

Monotheism and polytheism are two major types of religious belief systems that differ mainly in the number and nature of gods worshipped. While monotheism focuses on one supreme God, polytheism believes in multiple gods with different roles and powers.

Monotheism vs Polytheism		
Basis	Monotheism	Polytheism

Meaning	Belief in one supreme God	Belief in many gods and goddesses
Number of Deities	Only one God	Multiple gods with different functions
Nature of God(s)	All-powerful, all-knowing, universal	Gods have limited powers and specific roles
Unity of Power	Power is centralized in one divine being	Power is divided among many deities
Religious Examples	Islam , Christianity, Judaism	Ancient Greek religion, Roman religion, traditional forms of Hinduism
Worship Style	Focused on one God through prayer and devotion	Worship of different gods for different needs (rain, wealth, war, etc.)
Moral System	Clear and unified moral code	Moral codes may vary depending on different deities
Concept of God	Formless or beyond human understanding	Often represented in human or natural forms
Sacred Texts	Single or central holy books (e.g., Quran, Bible)	Multiple myths, scriptures, and traditions
Scope of God(s)	Universal God for all people	Gods may be linked to specific regions, cultures, or functions
Afterlife Concept	Clear belief in judgment and afterlife	Varies widely depending on tradition
Philosophical Approach	Emphasizes unity and absolute truth	Emphasizes diversity and multiple perspectives

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