

Introduction to Confucianism: Confucianism is a system of beliefs based on the teachings of Kong Fu Zi (first called Confucius by Europeans), who lived in China from 551 to 479 B.C. Confucius developed a practical philosophy for life and government—which focused on proper conduct, respect for elders, education, and government service—that he felt would create a peaceful, stable society. Confucius based his ideas on ancient Chinese traditions of respect and hard work. The code of behavior he taught revolved around five relationships: 1) ruler and subject, 2) parent and child, 3) husband and wife, 4) sibling and sibling, 5) friend and friend. Confucius believed these relationships would be harmonious if the people involved were loyal, courteous, honest, faithful, and obedient to those in authority. Confucianism taught, for example, that harmony in the family would result from a child showing absolute respect for the parent's authority. Confucius also believed that if the ruler lived according to strong virtues, then the ruler's subjects would follow his or her example and a harmonious, stable society would be possible.

Introduction to Buddhism: Buddhism is a religion based on the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, which means “enlightened one.” Gautama lived in India from 563 to 483 B.C. Buddhism was brought to China around A.D. 200 by Buddhist monks and traders who traveled to China from India and central Asia along the Silk Road. The Buddha's teachings are summed up in the Four Noble Truths: 1) all life is suffering and pain; 2) suffering and pain are caused by desire for wealth, pleasure, fame, and power; 3) to end suffering one must overcome desire; 4) to overcome desire, one must follow the Middle Way. The Middle Way stresses virtuous (morally excellent) conduct and compassion for all living things, which leads to calmness and purity of mind. Buddhism preaches reincarnation—the idea that when a person dies, the soul is reborn in a new body. The first goal in life, Buddhists believe, is to attain nirvana, the condition of desiring nothing. When one attains nirvana, he or she breaks the cycle of life and death and no longer is reincarnated into an earthly life of suffering. The final goal for Buddhists is to devote their lives to bringing others to enlightenment.

Introduction to Daoism: Daoism is a religion based on the teachings of Laozi, believed to be the first Daoist philosopher, who lived from 606 to 530 B.C. Laozi taught that the goal of life was to achieve oneness with the Dao, a universal force connected to nature that cannot be defined, only experienced and felt. Daoism teaches that humans should see themselves as part of nature and should understand change as part of everything. Daoism stresses that the best way for humans to find peace is by living simply, in harmony with nature. To discover how nature acts, taught Laozi, sit by a river, feel a breeze, and observe a drifting cloud. Notice that nothing in nature strives for fame, power, or knowledge. The river, the breeze, and the stream move without effort because they follow the Dao, the way of nature that guides all things. Daoists do not believe in strong government, but that happiness and peace can be achieved by contemplating (thinking about) nature and leading a balanced life in tune with nature, not by following societal rules and laws. Daoism teaches that harmony comes from balancing the opposite forces of nature, called *yin* and *yang*. Yin's attributes include female, earth, dark, and cold; yang includes male, sky, light, and heat.

Three Ways of Thought

1. "Like a spider caught in its own web is a person driven by fierce cravings. Break out of the web, and turn away from the world of sensory pleasure and sorrow." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

2. "If a ruler himself is upright (honest), all will go well without orders. But if he himself is not upright, even though he gives orders they will not be obeyed." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

3. "Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad (numerous) creatures without contending (having conflict) with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the Way." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

4. "The mind is flighty, and hard to grasp; the mind pursues all its desires. To tame the mind is great goodness. Subdue (bring under control) the mind and know tranquility (calmness). In your own words, what does this statement mean?"

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

5. "The more laws and edicts (official rules) are imposed, the more thieves and bandits there will be." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

6. "Be respectful at home, serious at work, faithful in human relations. Even if you go to uncivilized areas, these virtues (good qualities) are not to be abandoned." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

7. "Seeing that our body, with hair and skin, is derived from our parents, we should not allow it to be injured in any way. This is the beginning of filial respect (repaying a parent's kindness). We develop our own character and practice the way so as to perpetuate our name for future generations, and to bring honor to our parents." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

8. "Life is a journey, death is a return to the earth, the universe is like an inn, the passing years are like dust." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?

9. "The sage (wise person), because he does nothing, never ruins anything; and, because he does not lay hold of anything, loses nothing." In your own words, what does this statement mean?

Who do you think said it, Buddha, Confucius, or Laozi, and why?