**Guide to Eastern Religion and Philosophy**

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In sorting out the diversity of Eastern thought, it helps to consider that there are four main traditions:

Hindu

Buddhist

Taoist

Confucian

These four traditions owe their origins and most of their development to two major civilizations of the East: Hinduism and Buddhism come from India, and Taoism and Confucianism come from China.

The Big Four

The Big Four Eastern philosophies are not, strictly speaking, the only philosophies of the East, just as India and China are not the only Eastern civilizations. But the Big Four have proven most influential in the lives, minds, and histories of people throughout the East.

**Hinduism.** The most influential native philosophy of India. Rather than single, organized belief system, Hinduism encompasses a host of various practices and beliefs recognized for centuries by millions of people. It has its origins in some of the oldest known writings, the Vedas (ca. 1500 B.C.E.), which include hymns to the Hindu gods, as well as philosophical speculation about the nature of ultimate existence. It incorporates Indian ways of life, religion, and scholarship.

**Buddhism.** Practices and beliefs derived from the teachings of Siddhartha Sautama ("The Buddha" or "Enlightened One," ca. 560 B.C.E.). The Buddha was an Indian prince who attained enlightenment after decades of seeking, fasting, and meditation. **He taught that all desire leads to suffering, which can be overcome by renouncing desire.** Buddhism spread from India throughout the East, including Tibet, Southeast Asia, Korea, China, and Japan, where it merged with native traditions and changed form. Meanwhile, in India, wherever it wasn't reabsorbed into Hinduism, it died out except on the island of Sri Lanka.

**Taoism**. Philosophy derived from the writings of ancient Chinese sages, most notably Yang Chu (fourth century B.C.E.), Lao Tzu (sixth or fourth century B.C.E.), and Chuang Tzu (fourth to third centuries B.C.E.). **Of these three, Lao Tzu is the most famous for being the attributed author of the *Tao Te Ching*** *(The Book of the Way and Its* *Power*). Philosophical Taoism emphasizes spontaneity, intuitive action, and harmony with nature. In addition, there is a religious, occult strain spheres.

**Confucianism.** Philosophy based on the teachings of K'ung Fu Tzu (ca. 550 B.C.E.), known in the West as Confucius. It stresses social harmony fostered through respect for superiors and benevolence toward subordinates. It became the official philosophy of imperial China starting from around 200 C.E. right up until 1911 and the fall of the Ch'ing Dynasty and founding of the Chinese Republic. Confucian learning formed the basis of the imperial examination system used for selecting public officials and supplied much of the rationale for the administration of the Chinese empire.

**CHAPTER FOUR / HINDUISM - Beyond the Gods**

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Hindu philosophy is its emphasis on renouncing the world in the attempt to achieve a transcendent state of being. This can be understood as a practical matter and as deeply spiritual, a way of understanding reality and a mystical act of devotion. The point of this transcendent state is not simply to gain knowledge but to experience higher consciousness. It is this focus on consciousness that sets Hindu philosophy apart. In Hinduism, the truth is literally a state of mind.

In the last half of the twentieth century, large numbers of people in the West came to appreciate the significance of consciousness. In India, however, the idea stretches back almost 4,000 years. It is not simply the main idea behind a philosophy or a religion, but the focus of many distinct, but interrelated, philosophies and religions, all of which approach the concept in different ways. This chapter talks about the thinking behind higher consciousness as the concept first developed in ancient India.

**Basic Concepts of Hindusim:**

Brahman, Atman, Moksha, Maya, Karma