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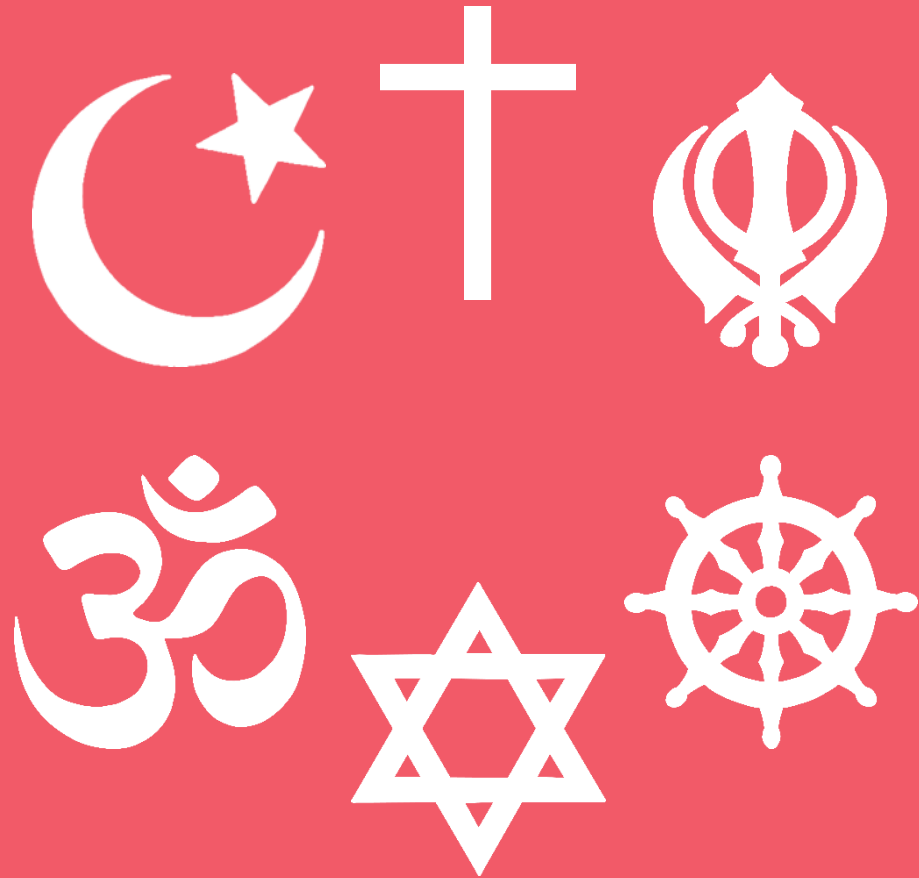
Peace



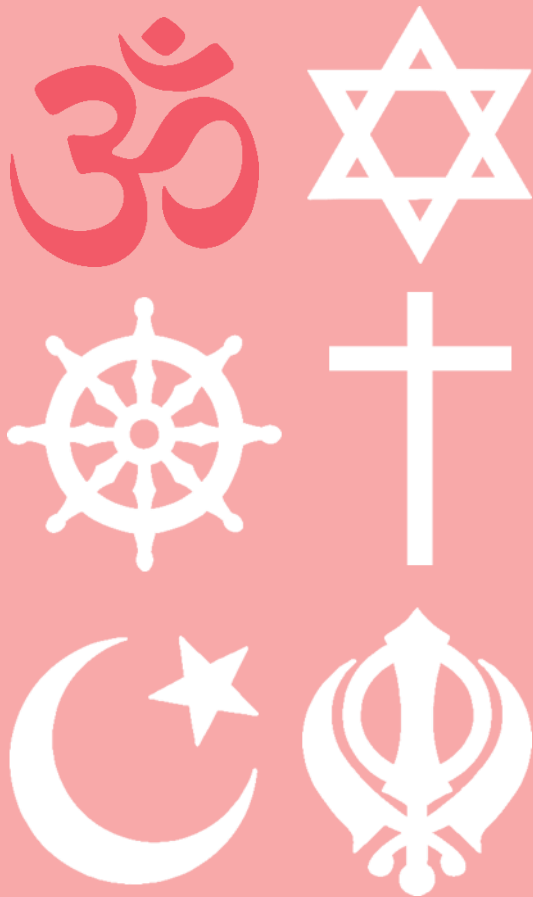
Peace, and the longing for peace, is a central theme in all religions. All religions have, at their best, been enablers of peace.

However, they have also fanned the flames of conflict, a modern example being the escalating tensions in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia Muslims which illustrates this all too clearly.

Today's lesson will look at each religion's views on peace one at a time.



Hinduism



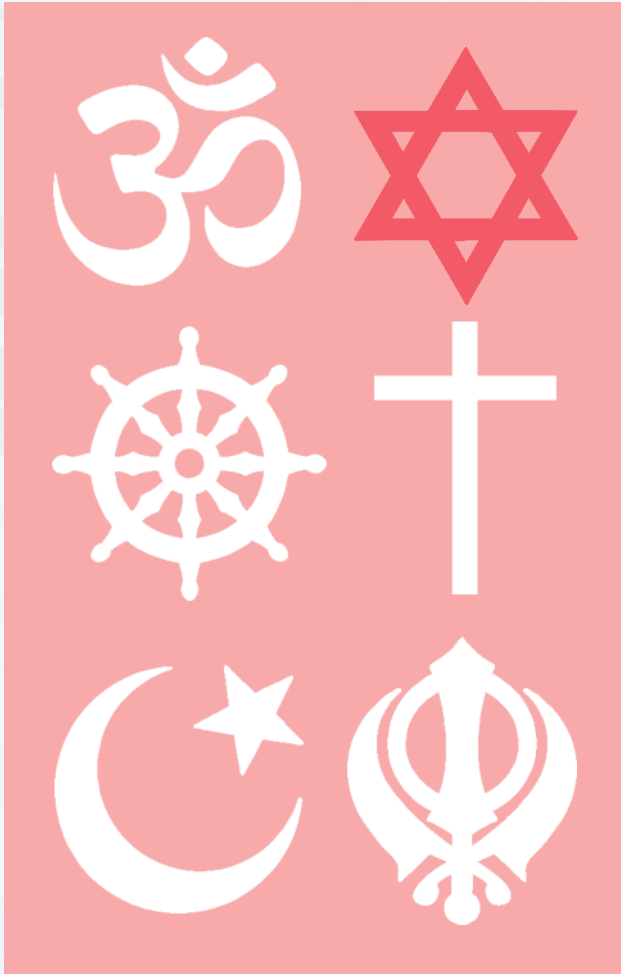
A key teaching in Hinduism is ahimsa or non-violence.

One of the most famous Hindus in modern times was Mahatma Gandhi, a man who showed that non-violence can be effective against oppression.

There is a beautiful Hindu prayer:

*Lead us from the unreal to the real;
lead us from the darkness to light;
lead us from hatred to love; lead us
from war to peace. And let peace fill
our hearts; peace fill our world;
peace fill our universe. Shanti, shanti,
shanti ... peace, peace, peace.*

Judaism



Shalom (peace) is a key word in the Torah.

Peace in Judaism means more than simply the absence of war.

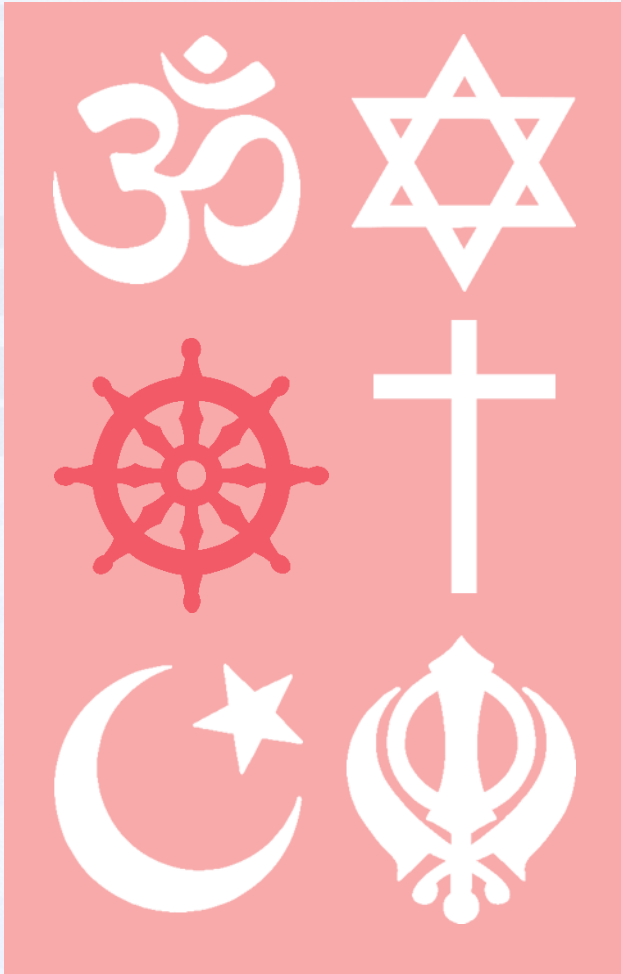
It also include such positive concepts as prosperity (for all, not just the rich), fertility of crops, harmony and general well-being.

In the book of Micah there is the following prophecy:

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not take up sword against nation and they will never again be trained for war. (Micah 4.3)

Jews believe that when the Messiah ('the anointed one') finally comes he will establish peace throughout the world.

Buddhism



The Buddha taught that ignorance, greed and hatred were the three fires that prevent us from being enlightened.

He taught his followers the way of ahimsa.

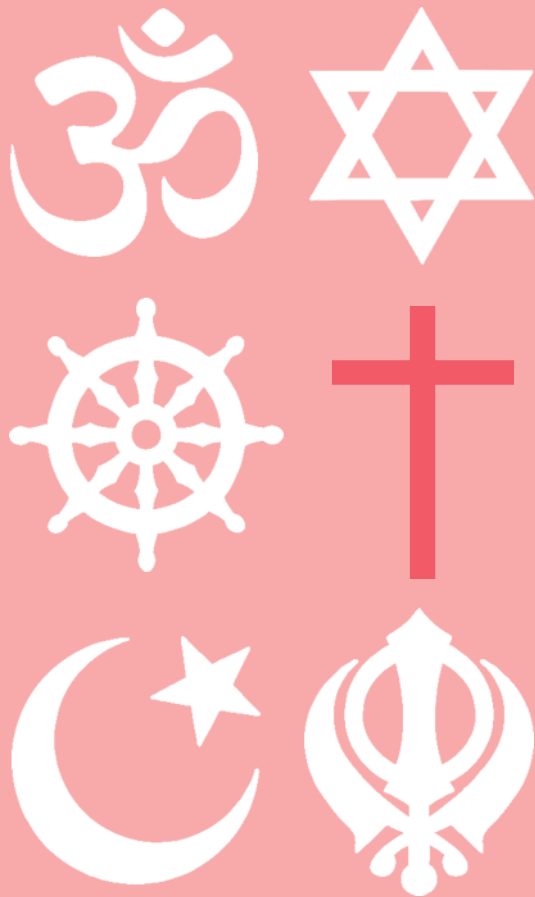
Through the practice of meditation, Buddhists try to learn how to let go of self-centredness and live peacefully and generously with one another.

A famous Indian emperor, Ashoka, converted to Buddhism after being horrified at the terrible loss of life caused by one particularly terrible battle.

A famous saying of the Buddha's is:

Never in this world is hatred overcome by hatred: it is only overcome by love. This is the eternal law.

Christianity



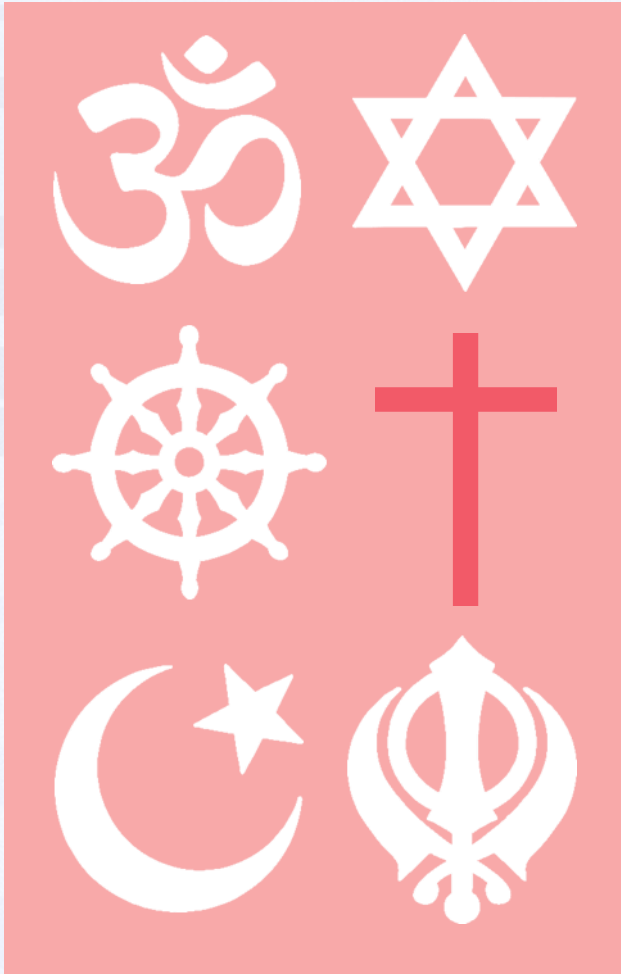
Christians believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

The message of the angels to the shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth was 'Peace on earth!'

Jesus also taught the way of non-violence: 'If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other also.' (Matthew 5.39).

The night before the crucifixion, Jesus said to his disciples: 'Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace such as the world cannot give.' (John 14.27).

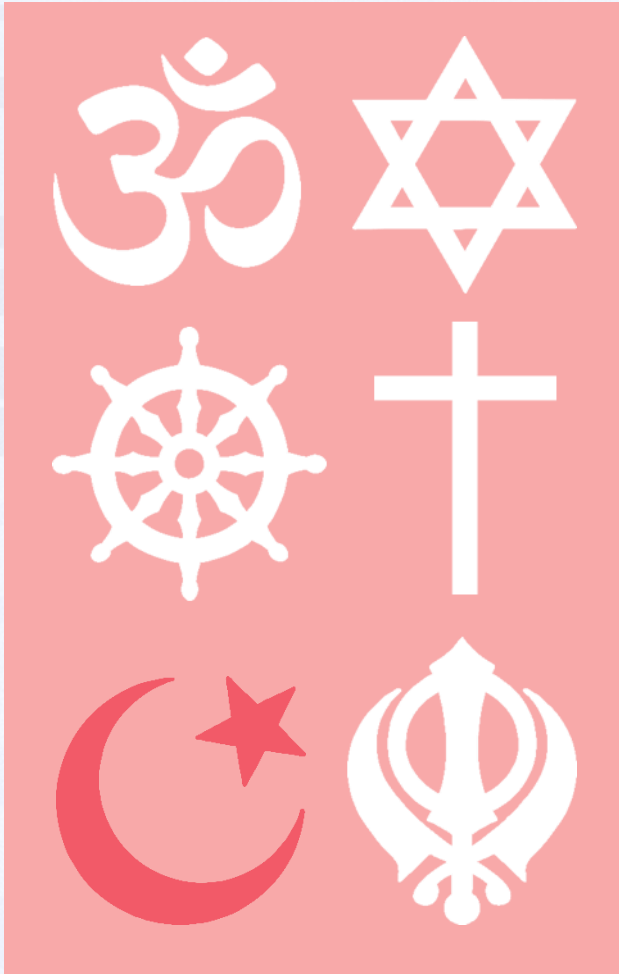
Christianity



Christians believe through the Cross and Resurrection God was reconciling the world to himself (making peace with humanity). 'This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body through the Cross, by which you killed the enmity. So he came and proclaimed the good news: peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near.' (Colossians 2. 16-17).

For the first 300 years of the Church's life, Christians were pacifists, and refused to serve in the Roman army. This changed when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, but there have always been Christians, such as the Quakers, who keep up the pacifist tradition.

Islam



The word 'Islam' means both 'submission' and 'peace', and Islam has always emphasised the value and importance of peace, both between individuals and nations.

However, there has never been any tradition of pacifism in Islam, and an important concept is that of the Jihad.

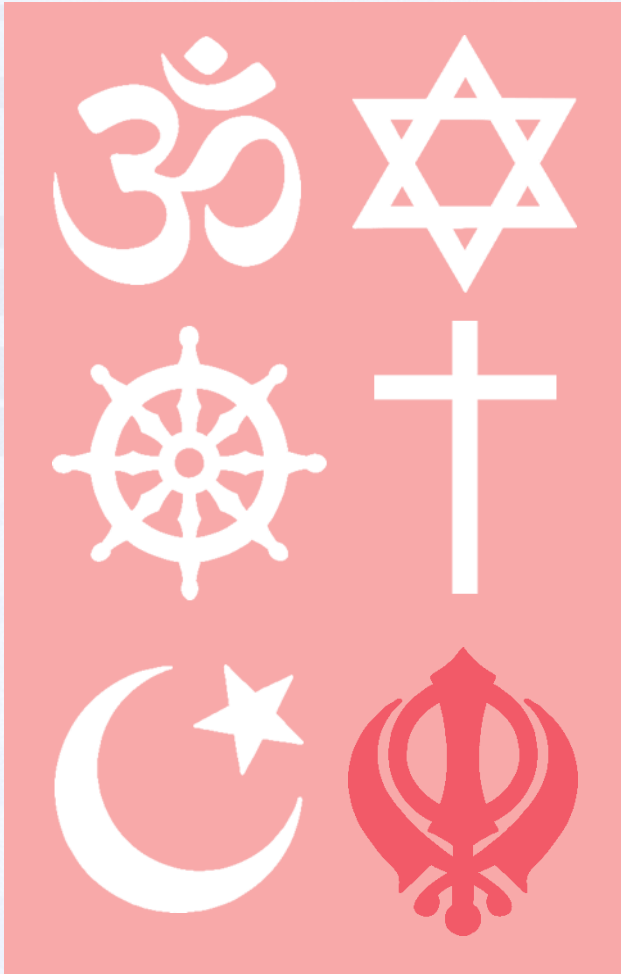
Jihad is often translated as 'holy war', but the precise meaning is 'struggle'.

The Qur'an makes it clear that the biggest part of jihad is the struggle within oneself to become a better Muslim, but the word is also sometimes used to describe war in defence of one's religion.

The Qur'an is clear that while Muslims may fight in defence of Islam or their country, they should not start a war.

The typical Muslim greeting is Salaam Aleiykum (Peace be with you).

Sikhism



The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was committed to non-violence and wrote these words: 'No one is my enemy, no one is a foreigner; with all I am at peace. God within us render us incapable of hate and prejudice.'

Sadly, as the Sikhs grew in number, they found themselves under attack from both Muslims and Hindus and had to defend themselves with the use of force.

They gained a reputation for being fierce warriors, and one of the Five Ks (the distinguishing marks worn by fully committed Sikhs) is a kirpan (dagger).

Sikhism approves of any action designed to promote human rights and harmony, and they have been much involved in charitable work with the poor and needy, of all faiths and none.

Every Sikh gurdwara (temple) must have a kitchen, and anyone who enters a gurdwara will be offered food and drink.

