

FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Competitive Examination - 2025 (BS-17)
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAJOR RELIGIONS (FOR NON-MUSLIMS)
Fully Solved Paper - Part-I (MCQs) & Part-II (Essay Questions)

Instructions (reproduced unchanged from the original paper): Part-I (20 MCQs, compulsory, 1 mark each, no negative marking) is attempted on a separate OMR sheet within the first 30 minutes. Part-II requires attempting ONLY FOUR of the seven questions, all carrying equal marks (20 each), on a separate Answer Book.

PART-I — MCQs (Solved & Ticked)

1. Which term refers to the oneness of God in Islam?

✓ (A) Tawhid — CORRECT ANSWER

- (B) Risalah
- (C) Akhirah
- (D) None of these

2. The Vedas are classified as:

(A) Smriti
✓ (B) Sruti — CORRECT ANSWER

- (C) Puranas
- (D) None of these

3. Which of the following is not one of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism?

- (A) Life is suffering
- (B) Suffering is caused by desire
- (C) Suffering ends with the Eightfold Path
- ✓ (D) None of these — CORRECT ANSWER

4. The Jewish holiday of Passover is called:

- (A) Yom Kippur
- (B) Purim
- ✓ (C) Pesach — CORRECT ANSWER
- (D) None of these

5. The Tripitaka in Buddhism consists of:

- ✓ (A) Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, Abhidhamma Pitaka — CORRECT ANSWER
- (B) Torah, Prophets, Writings
- (C) Upanishads, Puranas, Mahabharata
- (D) None of these

6. What is the term for liberation in Hinduism?

- (A) Karma
- ✓ (B) Moksha — CORRECT ANSWER
- (C) Dharma
- (D) None of these

7. The Christian concept of the Trinity includes:

- ✓ (A) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — CORRECT ANSWER
- (B) Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
- (C) God, Prophet, and Saints

(D) None of these

8. The reform movement in 19th-century Hinduism was led by:

✓ (A) Dayananda Saraswati — CORRECT ANSWER

(B) Buddha

(C) Moses

(D) None of these

9. The Jewish scriptures known as Tanakh include:

✓ (A) Torah, Prophets, Writings — CORRECT ANSWER

(B) Sutta, Vinaya, Abhidhamma

(C) Bible and Quran

(D) None of these

10. What is the primary focus of Jainism?

✓ (A) Non-violence — CORRECT ANSWER

(B) Soul liberation

(C) Enlightenment through meditation

(D) None of these

11. Which Hindu deity is known as the preserver?

(A) Shiva

(B) Brahma

✓ (C) Vishnu — CORRECT ANSWER

(D) None of these

12. The first pillar of Islam is:

(A) Zakah

(B) Salah

✓ (C) Shahadatayn — CORRECT ANSWER

(D) None of these

13. The Buddhist Eightfold Path is also called:

✓ (A) Ashtanga Marga — CORRECT ANSWER

(B) Dharma Marga

(C) Karma Marga

(D) None of these

14. In Christianity, the Atonement refers to:

✓ (A) Forgiveness of sins through Jesus' sacrifice — CORRECT ANSWER

(B) Baptism as a sacrament

(C) Original sin

(D) None of these

15. The sacred scripture of Islam is:

(A) Hadith

✓ (B) Quran — CORRECT ANSWER

(C) Torah

(D) None of these

16. The Jewish Sabbath is observed on:

(A) Friday

✓ (B) Saturday — CORRECT ANSWER

(C) Sunday

(D) None of these

17. The reform movement in Judaism includes:

(A) Zionism

✓ (B) Reform Judaism — CORRECT ANSWER

(C) Kabbalah

(D) None of these

18. Who is the founder of Buddhism?

(A) Dayananda Saraswati

✓ (B) Gautama Buddha — CORRECT ANSWER

(C) Guru Nanak

(D) None of these

19. What does "Risalah" in Islam refer to?

(A) Angels

✓ (B) Prophethood — CORRECT ANSWER

(C) Oneness of God

(D) None of these

20. Which text is part of Hindu Smriti?

(A) Vedas

(B) Upanishads

✓ (C) Manu Smriti — CORRECT ANSWER

(D) None of these

PART-II — Essay Questions (Solved)

Q. No. 2 (20 marks)

Define religion and discuss the emergence of the study of religion as a discipline. Differentiate between the theological and academic study of religion.

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

Defining Religion

Religion may be defined as a system of beliefs, practices, symbols, and institutions oriented toward the sacred or transcendent, providing communities with a shared worldview, moral framework, and rituals that give meaning to existence. Scholars such as Emile Durkheim emphasised its social function, while Rudolf Otto stressed the experiential encounter with the numinous, showing that religion resists a single, universally agreed definition and is better understood through its recurring features: belief in the sacred, ritual practice, ethical codes, sacred texts, and community.

Emergence of Religious Studies as a Discipline

The academic study of religion (Religionswissenschaft, 'Science of Religion') emerged in the nineteenth century, pioneered by Friedrich Max Muller, who called for the comparative, non-confessional study of world scriptures. It grew alongside colonial encounters with Asian and African religious traditions, the rise of comparative philology, and Enlightenment rationalism's push to study religion empirically rather than dogmatically, eventually institutionalised through university departments, chairs, and journals across Europe and North America by the early twentieth century.

Theological vs Academic Study of Religion

Theological study is confessional and normative: it proceeds from within a faith tradition, presupposes the truth of its doctrines, and aims to deepen and systematise belief for the benefit of adherents. Academic (or 'Religious Studies') methodology, by contrast, is descriptive and non-confessional: it brackets questions of ultimate truth, applies historical-critical, sociological, anthropological, and phenomenological methods impartially across traditions, and aims at objective understanding rather than personal faith formation - a scholar can academically study Islam, Buddhism, or Christianity without being a believer in any of them.

Significance of the Distinction

This distinction allows religious studies to function as a genuinely comparative, interfaith academic discipline within pluralistic universities and civil services, enabling scholars and policymakers to understand religious phenomena analytically - essential for interfaith harmony, counter-extremism policy, and religious literacy in diverse societies - while theology continues to serve the internal doctrinal and pastoral needs of individual faith communities.

Q. No. 3 (20 marks)

Discuss the life of Gautama Buddha and the spread of Buddhism. Highlight the rivalry between Brahmanism and Buddhism.

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

Life of Gautama Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama was born (c. 563 BCE) a Shakya prince in Lumbini (present-day Nepal). Sheltered from suffering in his youth, he encountered the 'Four Sights' - an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and an

ascetic - which shattered his illusion of a painless existence and prompted his 'Great Renunciation' of palace life at age 29. After years of extreme asceticism failed to bring liberation, he adopted the 'Middle Way,' and attained enlightenment (Bodhi) under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya at age 35. He delivered his first sermon at Sarnath, teaching the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, and spent the next 45 years teaching across northern India before his death (Parinirvana) at Kushinagar around 483 BCE.

Spread of Buddhism

After the Buddha's death, his teachings were preserved orally and codified at Buddhist councils, most decisively under Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BCE), whose imperial patronage sent missionaries across South Asia and beyond, into Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and later China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia, via the Silk Road and maritime trade routes. Over centuries Buddhism diversified into major schools - Theravada (Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia), Mahayana (China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam), and Vajrayana (Tibet, Mongolia) - while gradually declining in its land of origin, India, by the medieval period.

Rivalry with Brahmanism

Buddhism arose in the sixth century BCE partly as a reform movement against the dominant Brahmanical religion of the time, rejecting the authority of the Vedas, the caste-based privilege of Brahmin priests, elaborate animal sacrifice (yajna), and the concept of a permanent, unchanging Atman/soul central to Vedic-Upanishadic thought. Buddhism offered a path to liberation open to all regardless of caste, emphasising personal ethical effort and meditative insight over ritual and priestly mediation, directly challenging Brahminical religious and social authority.

Outcome of the Rivalry

This challenge triggered centuries of philosophical debate and social competition for royal patronage and lay support; over time, a resurgent, reformed Hinduism (aided by figures such as Adi Shankaracharya, whose Advaita Vedanta absorbed some Buddhist logical methods while defending Vedic authority) reasserted dominance in India, partly by presenting the Buddha himself as an avatar of Vishnu, while Buddhism, weakened by this reabsorption, invading forces, and loss of royal patronage, largely migrated and flourished instead across East and Southeast Asia, where it remains a major world religion today.

Q. No. 4 (20 marks)

Provide an overview of the Jewish scriptures, focusing on the Tanakh, Mishnah, and Talmud. How do these scriptures guide Jewish religious practices?

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

The Tanakh

The Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, is an acronym for its three divisions: Torah (the Five Books of Moses - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy - containing law, covenant, and narrative), Nevi'im (Prophets, both historical and oracular books), and Ketuvim (Writings, including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and the Five Scrolls). The Torah, believed to be divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai, holds primary authority and forms the basis of Jewish law and identity.

The Mishnah

The Mishnah (c. 200 CE), compiled by Rabbi Judah HaNasi, is the first authoritative written codification of the Oral Torah - legal traditions and interpretations transmitted orally alongside the Written Torah for centuries. Organised into six orders (Sedarim) covering agriculture, festivals, family/civil law, damages, sacred/temple matters, and ritual purity, it systematised Jewish law (halakha) into a structured legal code for the first time.

The Talmud

The Talmud consists of the Mishnah plus the Gemara - extensive rabbinic commentary, debate, and elaboration on the Mishnah's rulings, compiled over centuries in two versions: the Jerusalem Talmud (c. 4th century CE) and the more authoritative, comprehensive Babylonian Talmud (c. 6th century CE). It records multi-generational rabbinic argument, preserving minority opinions alongside majority rulings, and became the central text of rabbinic Judaism's legal and ethical reasoning.

Guidance for Jewish Religious Practice

Together these texts guide virtually every aspect of observant Jewish life: the Torah supplies core narrative, covenant, and commandments (mitzvot); the Mishnah and Talmud elaborate these into detailed practical law governing prayer, Sabbath and festival observance, dietary rules (kashrut), family law, ethical conduct, and civil/business dealings. Modern halakhic decision-making (posekim, rabbinic authorities) continues to draw on this layered textual tradition, applying Talmudic reasoning to new circumstances, making these scriptures a living, continuously interpreted guide rather than a closed, static law code.

Q. No. 5 (20 marks)

Describe the Christian concept of the Trinity and its relevance in Christian worship and doctrine.

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

The Doctrine of the Trinity

The Trinity holds that God is one in essence (ousia) but exists eternally as three distinct persons (hypostases) - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - co-equal, co-eternal, and fully divine, yet not three gods but one God in three persons. This doctrine, while not stated in a single explicit verse, was formulated through theological reflection on the baptismal formula ('in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,' Matthew 28:19) and passages describing the distinct yet unified roles of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Historical Formulation

The doctrine was hammered out over the early centuries against various challenges: Arianism (denying the Son's full divinity) was condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), which affirmed the Son as 'of the same substance' (homoousios) as the Father; the Council of Constantinople (381 CE) further affirmed the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, completing the classical formulation of the doctrine as it stands in the Nicene Creed today.

Relevance in Christian Worship

Trinitarian formulae structure central Christian rites: baptism is performed 'in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'; the sign of the cross, many liturgical blessings, and the doxology all explicitly invoke all three persons; the Eucharist similarly reflects Trinitarian theology, with prayers addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit.

Relevance in Christian Doctrine

The Trinity underlies core Christian teachings: the Incarnation (the Son becoming human while remaining fully divine), salvation (understood as the Father's plan, accomplished through the Son's atoning death, and applied to believers by the Spirit), and the Christian understanding of God as inherently relational and loving even prior to creation. It remains, in mainstream Christian theology, the central and most distinctive claim differentiating Christian monotheism from that of Judaism and Islam.

Q. No. 6 (20 marks)

Analyze the historical background of Islam, focusing on the Sirah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

Pre-Islamic Arabia and Early Life

Sixth-century Arabia (the 'Jahiliyyah' or age of ignorance) was marked by tribal warfare, idolatry centred on the Kaaba's numerous idols, and weak central authority. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born in Mecca (c. 570 CE) into the Quraysh tribe, orphaned young, and known even before his prophethood for his honesty (titled 'Al-Amin,' the trustworthy).

Prophethood, Meccan and Medinan Periods

At age 40 (c. 610 CE), he received the first revelation in the Cave of Hira, marking the start of his 23-year mission. The Meccan period (610-622 CE) was marked by persecution of the small Muslim community for preaching monotheism against entrenched Quraysh idolatry and vested interests. The Hijrah (migration) to Medina in 622 CE (marking year 1 of the Islamic calendar) transformed the movement into a political community, formalised through the Constitution of Medina, uniting Muslims, Jews, and other tribes. Subsequent years saw major events - the Battles of Badr, Uhud, and the Trench, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and the largely peaceful Conquest of Mecca (630 CE) - culminating in the Farewell Pilgrimage and Sermon (632 CE) shortly before his death.

The Rightly Guided Caliphs (Al-Khulafa al-Rashidun)

Following the Prophet's death in 632 CE, four companions successively led the Muslim community as caliphs: Abu Bakr (632-634 CE), who consolidated the state during the Ridda (apostasy) wars and began compiling the Quran into a single text; Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644 CE), under whom Islamic territory expanded rapidly into Persia and Byzantine Syria/Egypt, and who established administrative institutions and the Islamic calendar; Uthman ibn Affan (644-656 CE), who standardised the official written Quranic text distributed across the empire; and Ali ibn Abi Talib (656-661 CE), whose caliphate was marked by internal civil strife (the First Fitna), including the Battles of the Camel and Siffin.

Historical Significance

This 30-year Rashidun period is regarded across Sunni Islam as the normative model of righteous, consultative (shura-based) Islamic governance, combining rapid territorial expansion with the preservation and standardisation of the Quranic text, before the transition to hereditary dynastic rule under the Umayyads - a shift many later reform movements have looked back to the Rashidun era to critique or reform against.

Q. No. 7 (20 marks)

Compare and contrast the concepts of liberation in Hinduism and salvation in Christianity.

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

Hindu Concept of Liberation (Moksha)

Moksha is release from samsara, the beginningless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth driven by karma (the law of moral cause and effect) and avidya (ignorance of one's true nature). It is achieved by realising the identity of Atman (individual self) with Brahman (ultimate reality) in Advaita Vedanta, or loving union with a personal God in devotional (bhakti) traditions, through the paths (margas) of knowledge (jnana),

action (karma), and devotion (bhakti). Liberation is self-realisation, not the granting of a verdict by an external judge, and can, in principle, be attained through one's own disciplined spiritual effort across possibly many lifetimes.

Christian Concept of Salvation

Salvation is deliverance from sin and its consequence, spiritual death or separation from God, understood as a single, linear event: humanity's Fall introduced sin and death, and God's redemptive plan is fulfilled once-for-all through Christ's atoning death and resurrection. Salvation is generally held (especially in Protestant theology) to be received by grace through faith rather than by human effort or merit, culminating in bodily resurrection and eternal life with God.

Key Similarities

Both concepts address a fundamental human predicament (samsara/karmic bondage versus sin/mortality), both envisage a transformed, liberated final state beyond ordinary existence, and both traditions link ethical living and inner transformation to the attainment of that final state, whether through disciplined practice or through grace-enabled faith and obedience.

Key Differences

Hindu moksha is typically cyclical and self-realisational (removing a metaphysical misunderstanding about the self and reality, potentially over many lifetimes), whereas Christian salvation is linear and relational (a single lifetime, dependent on divine grace and a personal relationship with a saving God through Christ, not on the philosophical apprehension of pre-existing unity). Hinduism's final state, moksha, mostly transcends personal individuality and cosmic dualities in the Advaita school (merging with Brahman); the Christian final state preserves personal individuality in eternal, relational communion with a personal God. These differing anthropologies shape everything else about how each tradition frames liberation and its path.

Q. No. 8 (20 marks - Short notes on any TWO; all three solved below)

Write short notes on any two of the following: (a) Karma Marga in Hinduism (b) The Eightfold Path in Buddhism (c) The Five Pillars of Islam

✓ SOLVED - Model Answer

(a) Karma Marga in Hinduism

Karma Marga (the 'path of action') is one of the three classical paths to liberation described chiefly in the Bhagavad Gita, alongside Jnana Marga (knowledge) and Bhakti Marga (devotion). It teaches performance of one's prescribed duty (svadharma) selflessly, without attachment to the fruits of action (nishkama karma, Gita 2.47), transforming ordinary worldly activity into a spiritual discipline. Rather than renouncing action, the practitioner renounces the ego-driven craving for personal reward, offering all actions as duty or, in devotional readings, as an offering to God, thereby purifying the mind and gradually loosening karmic bondage without withdrawing from active life in the world.

(b) The Eightfold Path in Buddhism

The Noble Eightfold Path (Ashtanga Marga), the Fourth Noble Truth, is the Buddha's Middle Way to end suffering, comprising Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, grouped into the three trainings of wisdom (panna), ethical conduct (sila), and mental discipline (samadhi). Developed together rather than sequentially, these eight factors integrate ethical living, mental cultivation, and insight into the causes of suffering, leading ultimately to the cessation of craving and ignorance and the attainment of nirvana.

(c) The Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars (Arkan al-Islam) are the foundational obligatory acts of Muslim practice: Shahada (declaration of faith in the oneness of God and Muhammad's prophethood), Salah (five daily obligatory prayers facing the Kaaba), Zakat (obligatory almsgiving, typically 2.5% of qualifying wealth annually, for the poor and needy), Sawm (fasting from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan), and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime for those physically and financially able). Together they structure the devotional, ethical, and communal life of a practising Muslim, combining belief, worship, charity, self-discipline, and pilgrimage into a unified framework of religious obligation.

Attempt Strategy (Examiner's Note)

Part-I MCQs are compulsory (all 20 must be attempted; no negative marking, so never leave one blank). For Part-II, attempt ONLY FOUR of the seven questions, all carrying equal marks (20 each). For Q.8, only TWO of the three short notes are required in the exam - all three are provided here so you can choose whichever two you know best.