

Teaching on Other World Religions

By Shirley Davis

A. Introduction

Questions – Who can quote **Mark 16:15**?

How many independent countries exist in the world today? – The definition varies but the answer is about 195, not counting places like Puerto Rico and Greenland that are actually territories ruled by other nations.

How many people live in the world today (2009)? – About 6.78 billion = 6,780,000,000



Facts – 30% of the global population is still un-evangelized and untargeted by most churches = about 1.6 billion people in 38 different nations. There are still 13,000 un-reached people groups and millions who have still never heard the Gospel – especially CHILDREN everywhere!

B. Miss World Pageant

Prepare six youths to dress up as contestants from countries representing the other main world religions (see photo as example). Print out the questions and answers for each contestant and share the facts in the form of interviewing the “Miss World contestants”. At the end, get everyone to cheer and clap for their favorite contestant and award the winner a “crown”.



C. Illustrated teaching

While preparing for this, volunteers can be chosen to identify on a world map the location of the countries mentioned in the previous pageant. If possible, share a slideshow or pictures of important aspects of each of the other main world religions while teaching more information (see examples)

D. Game

Choose two teams with 3-4 members in each. A pile of prepared index cards is placed in front of each team, and at the word “Go” the teams must place the names of each of the main 6 other world religions at the top of a bulletin board, or on the floor. The remaining cards are then placed under each of the six headings, with the key words that are related to each religion. Note – some key words may apply to more than one religion, but there is only one correct final arrangement with a total of three cards with key words and one country name under each heading of a religion (therefore a total of 2 x 30 cards are needed for the two teams). The team that gets the arrangement correct first wins.

Answers – Animist – Togo, witchdoctor, idols, superstition; Hinduism – India, Shiva, reincarnation, castes; Buddhism – Myanmar, Buddha, enlightenment, prayer wheels; Islam – Saudi Arabia, Mohammed, Quran, jihad; Judaism – Israel, Torah, kosher, Messiah; Communism – North Korea, Juche, atheist, Marxist.

Facts used with permission from The Voice of the Martyrs publications www.persecution.com www.KidsofCourage.com and from Operation World (21st Century edition)

MISS TOGO

Q.1: Please tell us about your country –

A: Togo is a small, narrow country in West Africa, between Ghana to the west and Benin to the east, and bordering the Atlantic to the south. It's only 35 miles wide but about 340 miles from north to south. It has about 6 million people but there are over 78 different ethnic groups or tribes, and 80% of the people depend on subsistence farming.

Q.2: What kind of government does Togo have?

A: Togo was governed first by Germany and then by France until its independence in 1960. Since then it has been ruled by a one-party military regime. There was an attempt to establish a democratic system in 1992 but it ended in anarchy and virtual civil war. Since then the strict military government has continued with such widespread human rights abuses and government corruption that much foreign aid has been suspended.

Q.3: What is the main religion of Togo?

A: The Europeans brought Christianity but during the 1970s there was a severe anti-Christian policy and most religious groups were banned and missionaries thrown out of the country. Now there is considerable religious freedom again and about 50% of the Togolese people say they are Christians. About 25% are part of a rapidly growing Muslim population; and the remainder is animist. Togo has long had the highest percentage of traditional tribal people in Africa who have not heard the Gospel.

Q.4: Tell us about the animists in Togo -

A: Animists follow traditional tribal beliefs and witchcraft, idolatry, superstition and folklore all continue to have a strong hold, not just in the remote villages but even among the educated, professional people in the cities. They believe in many gods, each reigning over a family, village or place such as a river or mountain. Most people believe in one God who created everything but is too distant to be concerned with the affairs of men. They believe they must try to appease the local gods to prevent angering them and bringing sickness or disaster upon themselves. Often these gods are connected with dead ancestors who understand the tribe's needs, and most people follow the customs and rituals without knowing why.

MISS INDIA

Q.1: Please tell us about your country –

A: India is the large triangular-shaped country that dominates South Asia and the Indian Ocean. With a population of well over a billion, it also has the world's largest population density with 364 people per sq.km. It has many different people groups – one survey identified 4,635 distinct people groups with different culture and caste, speaking 213 different main languages, although Hindi is most widespread and English common in many parts.

Q.2: Tell us about the economic development of India

A: India gained independence from Britain in 1947, and went on to develop economic relations around the world. It has become a world leader in computer software production but its economy has been offset by the high birthrate, widespread corruption, and prejudice. Over 900 million people live in poverty, and no other country can rival the needs of India's children. Of the more than 400 million under 18, 70 million are child laborers, 10 million are bonded servants (paying off their parents' debts) and over 15 million children are homeless or on the streets.

Q.3: Tell us about Hinduism and the caste system -

A: The 3rd largest world religion, Hinduism is mostly found in India where 80% of the people are Hindu. Its caste system is fundamental and pervades all aspects of life (caste being decided by birth). The 6,000 or so different castes each function separately, divided by social barriers. High castes have the better-educated career positions; "middle class" castes occupy the worker/serving positions; the lower castes are known as "outcastes" or untouchables and cannot improve their situation and so are without hope – although many are now becoming Christians.

Q.4: Tell us about the Hindu beliefs -

A: Hindus worship millions of gods and their beliefs are wide-ranging, but they believe in reincarnation after death – sometimes as animals or insects and not just as people. Hinduism is widely perceived as a religion of tolerance and peace, and influences all around the world through Hare Krishna, yoga and New Age teachings. The main gods are Brahman, Shiva and Vishnu, but many animals are thought sacred and so cannot be killed – such as cows, snakes and even rats! The River Ganges is considered to be divine water and able to heal and wash away sins. Millions flock to its banks daily to bathe in it and even drink it – although it is terribly polluted, even with the bodies of dead animals!

MISS MYANMAR

Q.1: Please tell us about your country –

A: It was previously known as Burma, and is located on the Bay of Bengal between India and China. The capital is Rangoon. Myanmar is isolated from the neighboring countries by a ring of tall mountains. It was rich in natural resources but has been plundered by its own leaders, leaving it destitute and its people in poverty. Now it's most successful export is opium, and Myanmar produces 50% of the world's supply of this drug.

Q.2: Please tell us about the government -

A: Myanmar has been controlled by a military regime since 1962 and even when the people demanded a democratic election in 1990, in which the opposing party won 85% of all the seats, the military leaders refused to hand over the power. They refuse to acknowledge a growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country, and when a terrible cyclone hit in May 2008, causing massive damage and millions of people to lose their lives, the government even refused help from outside the country!

Q.3: What is the main religion in Myanmar?

A: About 83% of the population is Buddhist, and about 9% Christian, who are mostly in northern tribal areas. Theoretically there is freedom of religion but in rural areas often there is violence against Christians, and most missionaries were kicked out of the country in the 1960's. The government wants everyone in Myanmar to follow Buddhism and follow the path seeking "enlightenment".

Q.4: Please tell us about Buddhism -

A: It is an offshoot of Hinduism and was taught by Siddhartha Gautama, known as Buddha, in 525 B.C. Buddhists believe there is no absolute God and Buddha is not considered a god but only one who came to set an example. He taught that the goal in life is to achieve "Nirvana" - a state of eliminating all desires and therefore escaping suffering. Many men spend years as monks (often seen wearing orange colored robes) and use prayer wheels in their search for enlightenment while wandering or in a monastery.

MISS SAUDI ARABIA

Q.1: Please tell us about your country –

A: Saudi Arabia is in the Middle East between Africa and Iran, and covers over two million sq.km of harsh desert, yet contains 25% of the world's known oil reserves. 80% of its population of over 28 million people lives in cities, and many foreign workers have come to work there. Yet in spite of the oil wealth, Saudi Arabia has large debts due to financing the spread of Islam around the world, and spectacular corruption of the royal family.

Q.2: What is the political system there?

A: It is an absolute monarchy with the government totally controlled by the large royal family, who appear very westernized yet the justice system is vastly different from the West and based strictly on the Koran and harsh Islamic laws. Saudi Arabia probably has the world's worst record on religious freedom and human rights. Over 93% of the people are Muslim and no other religion is tolerated. Leaders of secret gatherings are imprisoned or even killed. Even general crimes like stealing or eloping are punished by cutting off hands, feet or even heads!

Q.3: Who founded Islam?

A: The Prophet Mohammed in 610 A.D, and he wrote the Quran, a book of teachings considered to be the final word of Allah (God). It includes some passages similar to the Old Testament and mentions Jesus as a prophet, but rejects teaching of redemption, stating that acceptance into Heaven is at Allah's will only. The most holy city, Mecca, (where Allah is supposed to have received the Koran from God) is in Saudi Arabia and must be visited at least once in the life of every Muslim as a pilgrimage called the Haj – and every year millions arrive in Mecca for this ceremony.

Q.4: Please tell us more about Muslims -

A: Shi'ite Muslims believe the religious leaders should also be political rulers, but the majority Sunnites believe in separation of the two. Sufis teach harsh self-denial and form a mystical branch, and of course Muslim extremists preach Jihad (or Holy War) against all infidels or non-Muslims. But most Muslims are moderate, seeking peace, and they follow the basic rules of worship and conduct, praying 5 times daily toward Mecca, giving to the poor and fasting during the month of Ramadan. But ultimately, according to the Koran, the only way to be certainly accepted into heaven by Allah is to die fighting in a Jihad, or Holy War.

MISS ISRAEL

Q.1: Tell us about your country please –

A: Israel is a tiny country at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, surrounded by the Arab countries of the Middle East. It has an area of just over 20,000 sq. km. and in addition controls another 7,500 sq.km. in the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights. Its population of about 6 million people mostly lives in cities, and 80% are Jews, with most of the others being Arabs. The official languages are Hebrew and Arabic, and the capital is Jerusalem.

Q.2: Please tell us more about the Jewish nation -

A: The Jews were scattered around the world for almost 2,000 years, yet wherever they lived, they kept their beliefs and traditions, and knew that one day God would give them back their homeland. Finally in 1948 the original area of land, then called Palestine, was set apart as the new nation of Israel. Jews from all over the world began to return even though millions had been killed for their faith in places like Germany and Russia. Many Jews live on a kibbutz (a type of communal farm) and through the years much desert has become productive land.

Q.3: What do the Jews believe?

A: Jews believe that the Tanakh (Old Testament) and Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) are God's Word. They also follow other holy scriptures called the Talmud, written by Jewish religious leaders to explain God's Word. They worship on the Sabbath (Friday evening through Saturday evening) and have holy days like Passover and Yom Kippur that help remind them of the laws and what God has done for their people. They worship in synagogues and Jerusalem is the holy city where one day the temple will be rebuilt and the Messiah will come.

Q.4: Please tell us about the Jewish people -

A: Because the Jews lived for so many years in other countries, there are many different groups although their faith and traditions are the same. Hassidic Jews follow the scriptures exactly and so the men wear prayer shawls, large hats, and never cut their sideburns. Orthodox Jews also follow the Jewish laws although not quite so rigorously – the men usually wear a skullcap or "yarmulke", and the women often wear wigs to cover their hair. They also follow the strict food laws called Kosher, and do no work at all on the Sabbath (no cars are driven or electrical appliances used). Reform Jews have adapted the laws more to contemporary culture.

MISS NORTH KOREA

Q.1: Please tell us about your country –

A: North Korea consists of the northern half of the Korean Peninsula which projects south from China between the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan. Its area is over 122,000 sq.km and its climate is colder and harsher than that of the southern part. North Korea's population is estimated at over 26 million, with almost no foreigners, because it has been completely isolated from the rest of the world since the Korean War over 50 years ago.

Q.2: Tell us about the government there -

A: Communist forces took over after the Korean War in the 1950s and thousands of Christians were killed or fled. Although officially called The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it is probably now the most repressive regime in the world, completely dedicated to Stalinist communist theology. Almost everyone serves in the army for a time, yet the majority of the people live in poverty and severe famine has gripped the nation. Anyone who voices objections to the government is punished and sent to harsh labor camps where most die within 2-3 years.

Q.3: Can you tell us about the leaders please?

A: The leader, Kim Jong Il, followed his father who created "Juche" as the state religion (although they are atheists). Juche means "self-reliant" but it teaches people to rely on the government and its dictator for everything. It uses cult indoctrination – for example, North Korean children are given just ONE piece of candy each year, yet before eating it they must bow in a prayer of thanks to the dictator god. Everyone must give praise to Kim Jong Il and his father, whose writings are studied and broadcast over the one and only TV and radio stations.

Q.4: What about foreign visitors?

A: Only very few foreign visitors are allowed into North Korea where they must stay in the capital, Pyongyang, or be taken on certain tours. Pyongyang is merely a fake "show city" inhabited by the most dedicated communist workers. There are even 2 or 3 churches there to prove the "freedom of religion" although in fact they are also fakes. No other religion than Juche is permitted and possession of a bible brings a death sentence with imprisonment of up to THREE generations of your family. Yet many North Koreans are becoming Christians in secret.

Illustrated teaching on other main world religions (examples)

1) Animist



Animist

1. Animists believe many gods and spirits are found in trees, rocks, plants, and certain localities, as well as in idols made to represent special spirits. Some also believe in a great god who is above all others, but he is far away from humans and does not care about their daily lives.
2. Animists are found all over the world, but especially among primitive peoples who lack writing and depend on ancient stories, traditions and superstitions passed on by the elder members of the tribe.
3. Many animists believe that after death, a person's spirit continues to live near their earthly home. Animists may make offerings to their dead ancestors to please them.
4. Animists believe sins are acts that offend gods and spirits, and spirits punish people by bringing misfortune on them.
5. If there is sickness or misfortune they often turn to witchdoctors to contact the spirits and find out what must be done to appease the gods.
6. Animists often follow traditions and rituals without knowing why, believing that they worked in the past and so somehow keep life going forward.

2) Hinduism



Hinduism

1. It is the 3rd largest religion in the world today with an estimated 850 million Hindus, found mostly in India; but it has influenced people all around the world through New Age teachings, Hare Krishna, and yoga.
2. Hindus may believe in one main god; and some Hindus pick one god to be their own special god, but Hindu teachings tell of millions of gods. The main ones include Shiva and Vishnu, and everyone is considered part of the god Brahman, like drops in the sea. Cows and many other animals are considered sacred.
3. Hindus consider many writings sacred, including the Vedas and the Bhagavad-Gita.
4. Hindus believe in reincarnation. Doing wrong things means a person may come back in a worse condition in their "next life" – which may be as a human or as an animal! Hindus believe they may have to be re-born hundreds or thousands of times to pay for all the mistakes made in former lives.
5. The River Ganges is considered to be a holy river, and the water so pure that it can never be polluted; so millions of people go daily to bathe in it for healing, to wash away their sins, and even to drink it!
6. The caste system divides Hindus into strict social groups that influence every area of daily life.

3) Buddhism



Buddhism

1. Buddhism is probably the fourth largest world religion with most of its followers in China and other parts of Asia.
2. It was founded in the 6th century B.C. by a prince in India named Siddhartha Gautama, but later called "Buddha." He did not see himself as a god but only as an example to his fellow monks.
3. Buddhist teachings do not tell of a supreme creator God; and followers may worship many gods which are written about in their many holy books.
4. Buddhism teaches reincarnation, where a soul is supposedly born again and again until it reaches a state of "nirvana" and becomes part of the universe.
5. Buddhists believe all suffering comes from desire. They think the way to end desire is to strive to follow "The Eightfold Path" of right thoughts and right works, and that if they can do that it will end the cycle of reincarnation.
6. Buddhism teaches that those seeking enlightenment need to concentrate on their own spiritual path, and so many young men wander as priests for some years, wearing the familiar orange robes. The people are expected to help them by giving food and money to support them in their search.
7. Buddhists worship in temples and shrines and often use prayer wheels in their worship.

4) Islam



Islam

1. Today's 1.5 billion Muslims make up 22% of the world's population, particularly stretching across Africa, the Middle East and Indonesia – making Islam the 2nd largest religion in the world after Christianity.
2. Islam was founded in the seventh century A.D. by the Prophet Muhammad – considered to be the last in a long line of prophets including Moses and Jesus.
3. The Quran (or Koran) is the Muslim holy book, believed to have been revealed to Muhammad by Allah (their God)
4. Muslims believe that Allah cannot be known, and he is not like a father to humans, loving sinners or seeking to save them.
5. They believe good deeds may cancel out bad deeds, but no one will know if they are saved until Judgment Day, because Allah forgives or punishes whomever he wants.
6. Muslims pray 5 times each day facing Mecca (in Saudi Arabia), their most holy city, which they believe they should visit as a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime.
7. The Quran teaches that men are superior to women, and women have few rights or freedoms. It also teaches that it is a Muslim's duty to heavily tax or even to kill all who are "infidels" – that is, do not follow Islam. Such a holy war against infidels is called a "jihad".

5) Judaism



Judaism

1. Though a “small” religion with only 14 million adherents, Judaism is included as one of the great world religions because of its importance as being the original religion from which Christianity and Islam later developed. It was founded by God making a promise to Abraham, about 2000 BC.
2. Since 1948 Israel has once again become the homeland of the Jewish people who had been scattered around the world for thousands of years, although they always kept their traditions and beliefs - separating them from others.
3. Jews live by the Torah, Old Testament scriptures and the many books interpreting them called the Talmud. These “laws” govern every aspect of their life and are often memorized or sung in Hebrew.
4. Jewish history is remembered by many special feast days during the year, and they have special dietary laws that are called “kosher”.
5. Orthodox Jews strictly follow the traditions and laws, and wear certain clothing. Reform or Liberal Jews attempt to adapt the laws to contemporary culture.
6. Jerusalem is considered the Holy City, and most Jews believe that one day the temple will be rebuilt there and the Messiah will return for His people there.

6) Communism



Communism

1. It is estimated that there are about 85 million people living under Communist regimes today (2009), mainly in North Korea, China, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba, although there are also people in many other countries who believe in communism.
2. A man named Karl Marx, who lived in the 1800s, spread many of the teachings followed by communists through his book called *The Communist Manifesto*. He believed that God is an invention of man and does not exist.
3. Such people who believe there is no God are called atheists, and are found in every country around the world.
4. To Marxists, the group (or government) is supreme. They believe people should give up their personal rights and property to the larger group because the needs of the whole society are more important than the rights of individuals.
5. The government controls newspapers, television stations, and radio stations, and often imprisons or kills those who disagree with it.
6. In North Korea the people are required to give all honor and glory to the leader Kim Jong Il. They bow and offer gifts to statues of him and his father; this new form of religion is called Juche.