

Guide on Religious and Spiritual Organization of Life

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Updated at August 16th, 2026.

Edition: 7.

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Disclaimer

The topic of religion and spirituality was reviewed and the article has been written while I was travelling in Indostan and South East Asia. That's why the article reflects religious/spiritual diversity and flexible attitude towards the topic that are specific for local social landscapes. If you are living in other parts of the planet, you should analyze and absorb the content of the current article exclusively in social, religious, spiritual, historical, and cultural contexts of Indostan and South East Asia. And you should never apply ideas extracted from this article to local life in other parts of the planet without preliminary detailed legal and social research.

Introduction

The purpose of the current guide is to provide a general review of religious and spiritual systems (further just *systems*) that contain a full range of concepts, materials, and techniques to organize complex life processes.

For writing the guide 100+ modern and ancient systems have been explored shortly to understand all options developed in the history of humankind. However, my knowledge of this topic is still very far from professional one. That's why you should rely on this guide in the only case: if your own knowledge is close to zero. Rechecking all provided information in academic literature and original theological sources is strictly recommended.

The topic of religion and spirituality is reviewed in the current guide as an instrumental one solely; in other words, religion and spirituality are analyzed from the point of view of their application to reaching lay life goals.

In all sections where systems are listed a sorting order is implemented by dates of initial crystallization.

The guide has popular science purposes and targeted at readers interested in theology, history, and applied psychology.

Organization of life

For all my life (47+ years) I had a chance to make a few long-term global travels, entered several professional fields on different levels, and attempted to implement complex templates of family relationships inherited from parents/grandparents. All this gave me some knowledge on organization of complex life processes spanning many years. In addition to pure “technical skills and operations” necessary to perform all aforementioned tasks, it is possible to extract from complex life processes the following concepts describing their different aspects. Concepts are grouped by their nature. Definitions are given only where it may be necessary for clarity.

GENERAL CONCEPTS	DEFINITIONS
General label of the process	Label that clearly marks the sense of the process, e.g. <i>runaway travel</i> .
BOUNDING CONCEPTS	DEFINITIONS
Goal	Clear structured definition of what is desired upon completion of the process.
Entry point	Starting physical point or starting activity of the process.
Extremum	Some physical or psychological limit reached in implementation of the process.
Result	Anything that may be considered as a result; even absence of any result.
Result from previous periods of life	Unexpected result of thoughts and actions started many years ago, and appearing in the new context where it may look strange and non-applicable.
Period of inertia upon completion	Period of messy minimal activity with a length up to several months following the moment of reaching the most important goals in the process, or the moment of reaching unbreakable blocker.
Risk	
Acceptable loss	
Cleaning from distractions and obstacles	Procedure of psychological build-up and mind cleaning necessary for concentration on main aspects of the process.
ANALOGY CONCEPTS	DEFINITIONS
Behavior model	Particular example of behavior in the format of life story of some person(s) implementing the same process.
Conceptual analogy	Theoretical analogy helping to find the next non-obvious non-logical step in implementation of the process.

SOCIAL CONCEPTS	DEFINITIONS
Affiliation with social group	Feeling of belonging to real or virtual social group providing necessary information, emotional support, and psychological build-up necessary for immersion into the process.
ROUTINE CONCEPTS	DEFINITIONS
Ritual	Any regularly performed physical and/or mental activity that improves skills necessary for other parts of the process.
Stream	Continuous long-term flow of microactions and microthoughts representing the core sense of the process.
<i>Info-drive</i> (self-invented term)	Small randomly collected textual block of information (blog post, article, small book etc) uncovering new aspects of the process and pushing further.
<i>Emo-drive</i> (self-invented term)	Small randomly collected multimedia block of information (music record, music video, vlog record, part of movie etc) uncovering new aspects of the process and pushing further.

Notes: you may notice in the table given above that there is no such concepts as *taboo*, *obedience*, *sin* etc that may play very important role in different systems; however, they are completely covered by the concept of *extremum* and self-applied restrictions upon affiliation with social groups; so, it is just a matter of terminology and a matter of shifted accents.

All these life process organization concepts were practiced by me exclusively through regular sportive training of different types, through listening music of all genres, and through life-long reading of fiction, popular science literature, academic materials, travel literature. However, I guess for many people such methods may be too complex. Practicing religious and spiritual systems that provide implementation techniques for all aforementioned concepts may be much more feasible solution. And here we come to the questions that current guide responds: a) what systems provide the most comprehensive toolsets for organization of life processes? b) what systems cover different edge cases with being still widely applicable?

Main systems

Response to questions raised in the previous section turned out to be quite simple.

1. **Hinduism:** Being more an ecosystem than a particular religion this system provides solutions for all life questions and allows to build custom multi-layered systems for personal use. In relation to the topic of this guide a flexible system with the following structure of layers may be proposed: a) Purusharthas balanced according to requirements of the implemented life process; b) Advaita Vedanta philosophy or Neo-Vedanta philosophy (both reject caste division, although doing it on different levels, it allows to avoid rigidity of traditional Hinduism); c) Smarta

tradition that explains rules of everyday life (chosen as interconnected with Advaita Vedanta);
d) Four Paths of Yoga (Karma, Bhakti, Jnana, Raja), Seva, and Niyama Yama as modes of action. In addition to all listed for the lowest layer, it is worth to review other traditions of yoga like Tantra, Hatha, Laya, Kundalini etc.

2. **Three Teachings (Confucianism, Taoism, Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism):** Merging these systems together and constructing a custom multi-layered system is a traditional culturally approved practice in countries of East Asia and South East Asia (it is widespread practice to include into lower levels of the constructed system local ancestral binding cults and animistic cults). Vajrayana branch of Buddhism is not traditionally practiced within Three Teachings framework, however there is no strict limits against this, it just should be made consciously (in any case it is just a part of Mahayana from a theological point of view). The same rule is valid for modern offshoots of Buddhism like Won, Navayana, and Engaged. It is necessary to mention that some Buddhist concepts and practices tightly intersect with Hinduism practices (e.g. different types of yoga).
3. **Hellenistic philosophies (primarily Stoicism and Epicureanism):** Being philosophies but not religions these systems allow full flexibility in adaptation to requirements of lay life. If we will review them in historical context, these philosophies may expand easily to many artistic, educational, and military traditions, and even to Christianity, which makes them widely applicable for any type of lay life.
4. **Sunni Islam (with a possible Sufi leaning):** In contrast to all other systems in this list, any flexible manipulations with Islamic concepts are not allowed. In other words, an adherent can take from Islam all he needs and all he wants, but he cannot reinterpret this system in any way he likes. It should be done within established interpretational framework. Moreover, Islam is the most state-oriented system of all major ones (even if a state is not Islamic). So, according to this principle the adherent is allowed to absorb and to apply only those aspects of Islam that fit modern laws and policies of a state where the adherent lives. Such rigidity is completely counterbalanced by a wide range of cultures and societies that adapted Sunni Islam through the course of its history. If Sufi concepts and techniques are necessary, it should be understood that in some countries Sufism may be either highly persecuted, or tightly controlled, or just may be considered as a non-desired branch of Islam.

The list of systems covering edge cases but still being rather rich for managing all aspects of lay life processes is more diverse.

1. Being related to Jewry somehow and desiring to keep this relatedness: Judaism (primarily Conservative branch that allows all range of practices under the same label); this system provides the full set of lay life management tools as Hinduism and Sunni Islam, the same concepts as Sahajdhari Sikhism, the same level of community absorption as Nondenominational Evangelicalism and Protestantism, and Tikkun Olam concept that may be

used as an ideology of global peace; in other words, it is the richest system of all mentioned in the main systems section with the only important limitation of being an ethnocentric one.

2. Necessity in deification of objects of nature without digging too much in texts: Shinto, but not as a lower level addition to Three Teachings, instead of it as a primary system above all of them.
3. Necessity in flexible religious philosophy with an accent on intellectual, physical, and spiritual development: custom variation of Sahajdhari Sikhism.
4. Necessity in the concept of global peace and unity placed on the top of life philosophy with keeping some affiliation to local cultures and mainstream religions: a) Quakerism – it may be considered as non-desired non-traditional branch of Christianity in some countries; b) Bahá'í – it may be not recognized as a religion at all in some countries, and may be considered as affiliated with Israeli politics in others; c) Ahmadiyya – it is considered as heretical in some Islamic countries.
5. Strict necessity in absorption into a diverse open community: Nondenominational Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism.

Other systems

Further you may see summary of other systems that may provide better solutions for particular aspects of life management, but lack something important.

Systems with multiple behavior models and analogies that may be applied to lay life	All branches of Islam respecting hadiths (the same limits on application of hadiths to daily life must be used as those described above for Sunnism).
Systems providing rich toolsets for rituals, life streams, and info/emo-drives	Concept of life as a stream is a core of Neoplatonic philosophy. Many branches of Hinduism, Catholicism, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Eastern Orthodox Churches provide rich ritualistic toolsets and wide ranges of artistic, textual, and musical materials. However, they are either too rigid, or too ethnocentric, or too statecentric to be considered as universal solutions for life processes management. The same limits are applicable to multiple Protestant churches that are not mentioned here, but they provide much less toolsets and materials. All branches of Islam respecting hadiths (the same limits on application of hadiths to daily life must be used as those described above for Sunnism). All mainstream branches of Christianity create and distribute devotional music.

	Few Western and Indian ethnocentric systems may practice illegal activities for reaching emotional enlightenment, but they are not reviewed here.
Systems actively using rationalism in all interpretations of traditions	Samkhya and Nyaya schools of Hinduism (interpretation is allowed for qualified scholars), Jainism (interpretation is allowed for everyone), Zaydism (interpretation is allowed for qualified scholars), Nizari Isma'ilism (interpretation is allowed for imam only), Reform Judaism (interpretation is allowed for everyone).
Systems considering reality as an epistemological source	Almost all systems listed in <i>Main systems</i> section, almost all mainstream religions, and multiple ancient and primordial religions/cults consider reality as an epistemological source. However, few particular systems give the maximum attention to such approach to reality: Kasmir Shaivism, Alevism, Jesuits, Chabad Hasidism, Mouridiyyah.
Ethnocentric but still relatively open systems that provide easy social affiliation	Afro-Latinoamerican religions (Candomblé, Santeria), diasporal Youruba religious cults
Well-established systems that allow rich cultural syncretism with easy social affiliation	Caodaism allows to practice Three Teachings within monotheistic ritualistic framework and with veneration of historical lay personalities of Western civilization as saints. Multiple Christian and para-Christian systems of Sub-Saharan Africa.
Systems providing well-established frameworks for ascetic life paths	Jainism, Catholic monasticism, Eastern Orthodox Churches monasticism
Systems for situations of social and/or personal catastrophes	Shi'a Islam and Vajrayana Buddhism contain toolsets for such cases. In other systems handling of such situations is not well developed. Some systems that provide mass public solutions for situations of social and personal catastrophes are not reviewed in this guide (they may be either extremist branches of mainstream systems or some primordial polytheistic animistic cults).
Systems of the highest and the lowest complexity	Highest complexity: Navya-Nyāya school of Hinduism, Gelugpa Prasangika-Madhyamaka subsystem of Buddhism. Lowest complexity: multiple minimalistic branches of Christianity and

	Islam; these branches may be illegal or not desired in many countries; and due to minimalistic approach to religion and spirituality they are hardly applicable to organization of complex life processes; that's why they are not reviewed in this guide.
Others	There are some Western so-called <i>corporate-style religions</i> and there are some <i>guru movements</i> exported from India that provide structural religious or pseudo-religious frameworks for modern previously atheistic or previously Christian population. These systems proselytize actively and give possibility of immediate affiliation with social groups. But they are not reviewed in this guide; in some countries they may be illegal and have a status of <i>totalitarian sect</i>. Also, I suppose, it may be possible to find few more secular spiritual systems developed in the modern times (since 1800), and comparable by significance and extendability to Hellenistic philosophies. However, I could not do it easily. Feel free to perform such research by yourself.