**WHO IS GOD ?**

[Michelangelo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo)'s depiction of God in the painting *Creation of the Sun and Moon* in the [Sistine Chapel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistine_Chapel))

*This article discusses the term* ***God*** *in the context of* [*monotheism*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism) *and derived* [*henotheistic*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henotheism) *forms. See* [*deity*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deity) *or* [*goddesses*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goddess) *for details on* [*polytheistic*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism) *usages. See* [*Names of God*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_God) *for terms used in other languages or specific faiths. See* [*God (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_%28disambiguation%29) *for non-religious meanings.*

**God** is the term used to denote the **Supreme Being** ascribed by [monotheistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheistic) [religions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religions) to be the creator, ruler and/or the sum total of, [existence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence). Conceptions of God vary widely, despite the common use of the same term for them all.

**Attributes of God**

Common traits attributed to most concepts of God are [absoluteness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Absolute) and other superlative qualities. However, many other definitions of the [word](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_%28disambiguation%29) exist. For example:

* The concept of God evolves with time and intellect.
* God may be *Supreme* but is not necessarily a *Being*.
* Some concepts of God may include [anthropomorphic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropomorphic) attributes, [gender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_and_gender), particular [names](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_God), and ethnic exclusivity (see [Chosen people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chosen_people)), while others are purely [transcendent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendent) or philosophic concepts.
* The concept of God is often embedded in definitions of truth, where the sum of all truth is equated to God.
* There are variations on defining God either as a person, or not as a person but as an impersonal force (see [Absolute Infinite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_Infinite)). Also at stake are questions concerning the possibilities of human/God relations. There are countless variations in traditions of worship and/or appeasement of God.
* Some concepts of God center on a view of God as ultimate, [immanent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanent), transcendent, eternal Reality beyond the shifting and constantly mutable multiplicities of the sensible world.
* In much religious and philosophic thought, God is considered the [creator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creator_God) of the universe.
* Some traditions hold that the creator is also the sustainer (as in [theism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theism)), while others argue that their God is no longer involved in the world after creation (as in [deism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism)).
* The common definition of God assumes [omnipotence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omnipotence), [omniscience](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omniscience), [omnipresence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omnipresence), and [omnibenevolence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omnibenevolence). However, not all systems hold that God is necessarily [morally](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) good (see [summum bonum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summum_bonum)). Some hold that God is the very definition of moral goodness and that God is equivalent to love. Others maintain that God is beyond morality.
* [Negative theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negative_theology), sometimes called [apophatic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apophatic) theology argues that no true statements about attributes of God can be made at all (because this asserts that the essence of God's being can be expressed accurately within the limits of human [language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language)), while [agnostic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnostic) positions argue that limited [human](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human) understanding does not allow for any conclusive opinions on God whatsoever. Some mystical traditions ascribe limits to God's powers, arguing that God's supreme nature leaves no room for spontaneity.
* The concept of a singular God is characteristic of monotheism, but there is no universal definition of monotheism. The differences between monotheism and polytheism vary among traditions (see also [dualism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dualism), and henotheism).
* Some espouse an exclusionist view, holding to one sole definition of God. Others hold an inclusionist view, accepting the possibility of more than one definition of God to be true at the same time.
* There are also [atheistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism) explanations for the concept of God that can include psychological and/or sociological factors.
* The modern intellectual movement Objectivism uses the term *god* as a rhetorical metaphor for the supreme potentiality of human existence. The only attribute needed of an Objectivist *god* is a self-sufficient ego- a view of life not involving any form of sacrifice, either of self or others. God=I
* [Nature and Attributes of God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06612a.htm) - Catholic Encyclopedia article

**Etymology**

Earliest attestation of the Germanic word in the [6th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/6th_century) [Codex Argenteus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Argenteus) ([Mt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew) 5:9)

The word *God* continues [Old English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English_language)/[Germanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_languages) *god* (*guþ, gudis* in [Gothic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_language), *gud* in modern [Scandinavian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scandinavian) and *Gott* in modern [German](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_language)), from [Proto-Germanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Germanic) *\*ǥuđan*. The original meaning and [etymology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etymology) of the Germanic word *god* has been hotly disputed, though most agree to a reconstructed [Proto-Indo-European](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-European_language) form *\*khutóm*, which is the neuter passive perfect participle of the root *\*khu-*, which likely meant "[libation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libation)", "[sacrifice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice)". Compare:-

* [Vedic Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic_Sanskrit) *hu-* = "to sacrifice".
* [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) *khu-*, *kheu-* = "to pour".
* Common Germanic strong verb *\*geutan* ([Anglo-Saxon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Saxon) *gēotan*) = "to pour", English [*in-got*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingot).

The connection between these meanings is likely via the meaning "pour a [libation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libation)". Another possible meaning of *\*khutóm* is "invocation", related to [Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit) *hūta*.

The same root appears in the names of three related [Germanic tribes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_tribes), the [Geats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geat), the [Goths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goths) and the [Gutar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gutar). These names may be derived from an eponymous chieftain [Gaut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaut) who was subsequently deified, who sometimes appears in early Medieval sagas as a name of [Odin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odin) or one of his descendants, a former king of the Geats (*Gaut(i)*), an ancestor of the [Gutar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gutar) (*Guti*), of the Goths (*Gothus*) and of the royal line of [Wessex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wessex) (*Geats*) and as a previous hero of the [Goths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goths) (*Gapt*). The [Lombardic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lombardic_language) form of Odin, *Godan*, may derive from cognate [Proto-Germanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Germanic) *\*ǥuđánaz*.

The word *God* was used to represent [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) *Theos*, [Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) *Deus* in [Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible) translations, first in the Gothic translation of the [New Testament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament) by [Ulfilas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulfilas). For the etymology of *deus*, see \*[dyeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dyeus). Greek *theos* is possibly unrelated, and of uncertain origin. [De Saussure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_de_Saussure) tentatively connected Baltic and Germanic words for "spook", ultimately cognate with Latin *fumus* "smoke".

[Etymology of the Word God](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608x.htm) - Catholic Encyclopedia article

**Capitalization**

KJV of 1611 ([Psalms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalms) 23:1,2): Occurrence of "Lord" (and "God" in the heading)

The development of English orthography was dominated by [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) texts. Capitalized "God" was first used to refer to the Judeo-Christian concept, and may now signify any monotheistic conception of God, including the translations of the [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language) [*Allāh*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah) and the African [Masai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masai) [*Engai*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engai).

In early English bibles, the [Tetragrammaton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetragrammaton) was rendered in capitals: "IEHOUAH" in [William Tyndale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tyndale)'s version of 1525. The [King James Version](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KJV) of 1611 renders

* [*YHWH*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YHWH) as "The Lord", also as "Jehovah", see Psalms 83:18; Exodus 6:3.
* [*Elohim*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elohim) as "God"
* *Adonay* [*YHWH*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YHWH) as "Lord God"
* [*YHWH*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YHWH)[*Elohim*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elohim) as "Lord God"
* *κυριος ο θεος* as "Lord God" (in the New Testament)

The use of capitalization, as for a proper noun, has persisted to disambiguate the concept of a singular *God* from [pagan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism) deities for which lowercase *god* has continued to be applied, mirroring the use of Latin *deus*. Pronouns referring to God are also often capitalized and are traditionally in the masculine [gender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_%28grammar%29), i.e. "He", "His" etc. However, in more recent times, some people have referred to God in feminine terms, such as "She" and "Her".

**Names of God**

YHWH, the name of God or [Tetragrammaton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetragrammaton), in [Phoenician](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenician_language) (1100 BC to AD 300), [Aramaic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic) (10th Century BC to 0) and modern Hebrew scripts.

*For more details on this topic, see* [*Names of God*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_God)*.*

The noun *God* is the proper English name used for the deity of monotheistic faiths. Different names for God exist within different religious traditions:

* Allah is the unique name of God used in [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam), and also by most non-Muslim Arabs. *ilah*, cognate to northwest Semitic [El](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_%28god%29), is the generic word for a God (any deity), Allah contains the article, literally "The God". Also, when speaking in English, Muslims often translate "Allah" as "God". One tradition states that Allah has [99 names](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/99_Names_of_God).
* [Yahweh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh) Hebrew: 'YHVH' (יהוה), Elohim, and [Jehovah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah) are some of the names used for God in various translations of the Bible. Others include El Shaddai, [Adonai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adonai), Amanuel, and Amen. When Moses asked "What is your name?" he was given the answer *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. See [The name of God in Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_name_of_God_in_Judaism) for Jewish names of God. Most Orthodox Jews, and many Jews of other denominations, believe it wrong to write the word "God" on any substance which can be destroyed. Therefore, they will write "G-d" as what they consider a more respectful symbolic representation. Others consider this unnecessary because English is not the "[Holy Language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language)" (ie, Hebrew), but still will not speak the Hebrew representation written in the [Torah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah), "yih-yah", aloud, and will instead use other names such as Adonai (my lord).
* The [Holy Trinity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity) (meaning the Father, the Son ([Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus) [Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ)), and the [Holy Spirit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Spirit)/"[Holy Ghost](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Ghost)") denotes God in almost all mainstream Christianity. Arab Christians will often also use Allah to refer to God.
* The [Neomelnia](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Neomelnia&action=edit) name for "God" is *Avs*.
* God is called *Igzi'abihier* (lit. "Lord of the Universe") in the [Ethiopian Orthodox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tewahedo_Church) Church.
* [Jah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jah) is the name of God in the [Rastafari movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastafari_movement).
* Some churches ([United Church of Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Canada), [Religious Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_Science)) are using "the One" alongside "God" as a more gender-neutral way of referring to God (See also [Oneness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneness)).
* The [Maasai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maasai) name for "God" is [Ngai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngai), which occurs in the [volcano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volcano) name [Ol Doinyo Lengai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ol_Doinyo_Lengai) ("the mountain of God").
* The [Mi'kmaq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mi%27kmaq) name for "God" is *Niskam*.
* [Ishvara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishvara) is the term used for God among the Hindus. In [Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit), it means the Supreme Lord. Most [Hindus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu) worship the personal form of God or [Saguna Brahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saguna_Brahman), as [Vishnu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu), [Shiva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva), or directly as the Supreme Cosmic Spirit [Brahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman) through the [Gayatri mantra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayatri_mantra). A common prayer for Hindus is the [Vishnu sahasranama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu_sahasranama), which is a hymn describing the one thousand names of God. Ishvara must not be confused with the numerous deities of the Hindus. In modern Hindi, Ishvara is also called [Bhagavan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavan).
* [Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism) is non-theistic: Instead of extolling an anthropomorphic creator God, [Gautama Buddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha) employed [negative theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negative_theology) to avoid speculation and keep the undefined as ineffable. Buddha believed the more important issue was to bring beings out of suffering to liberation. Enlightened ones are called [Arhats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arhat) or Buddha (e.g, the *Buddha* [Sakyamuni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakyamuni)), and are venerated. [Bodhisattva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhisattva) is an enlightened being that has chosen to forego entering into [nirvana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana) until all beings are enlightened. Buddhism also teaches about the [devas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deva_%28Hinduism%29) or heavenly beings who temporarily dwell in states of great happiness.
* [Jains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jain) invoke the five paramethis: [Siddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddha), [Arahant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arahant), [Acharya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acharya), [Upadhyaya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upadhyaya), [Sadhu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadhu). The arhantas include the 24 [Tirthankaras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirthankaras) from [Lord Rishabha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Rishabha) to [Mahavira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahavira). But Jain philosophy as such does not recognize any Supreme Omnipotent creator God.
* [Sikhs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhs) worship God with the name Akal (the Eternal) or Omkar (See [Aum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aum)). Help of the [gurus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru) is essential to reach God.
* In [Surat Shabda Yoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surat_Shabd_Yoga), names used for God include *Anami Purush* (nameless power) and *Radha Swami* (lord of the soul, symbolized as [Radha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radha)).
* [Ayyavazhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayyavazhi) asserts [Ekam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekam), (The Ultimate Oneness) as supreme one and [Ayya Vaikundar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayya_Vaikundar) the Incarnation of Ekam. There are also several separate lesser gods who were all later unified into [Vaikundar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaikundar).
* The [Bahá'í Faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD_Faith) refers to God using the local word for God in whatever language is being spoken. In the Bahá'í Writings in Arabic, Allah is used. Bahá'ís share some naming traditions with Islam, but see "Bahá" (Glory or Splendor) as The [Greatest Name](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greatest_Name) of God. God's names are seen as his attributes, and God is often, in prayers, referred to by these titles and attributes.
* [Zoroastrians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism) worship [Ahura Mazda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahura_Mazda).

**History of monotheism**

*See also* [*monotheism*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism)*,* [*Abrahamic religion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrahamic_religion)*.*

The religions that are monotheistic today are often thought of as having been of relatively recent historical origin—although efforts at comparison are usually beset by claims of most religions to being very ancient or eternal. Eastern religions, especially in [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) and [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India), that have concepts of [panentheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism), are notably difficult to classify along [Western](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_world) notions of monotheism vs. [polytheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism).

In the [Ancient Orient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Orient), many cities had their own local god, though this henotheistic worship of a single god did not imply denial of the existence of other gods. The [Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrews) [Ark of the Covenant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ark_of_the_Covenant) is supposed (by some scholars) to have adapted this practice to a [nomadic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomad) lifestyle, paving their way for a singular God.

The iconoclastic cult of the Egyptian solar god [Aten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aten) was promoted by the [pharaoh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharoah) [Akhenaten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhenaten) (Amenophis IV), who ruled between 1358 and 1340 BCE. The Aten cult is often cited as the earliest known example of monotheism, and is sometimes claimed to have been a formative influence on early Judaism, due to the presence of Hebrew slaves in Egypt. But even though [Akhenaten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhenaten)'s [hymn to Aten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Hymn_to_the_Aten) offers strong evidence that Akhenaten considered Aten to be the sole, omnipotent creator, Akhenaten's program to enforce this monotheistic worldview ended with his death; the worship of other gods beside Aten never ceased outside his court, and the older polytheistic cults soon regained precedence.

Other early examples of monotheism include two late [rigvedic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigveda) hymns (10.129,130) to a [Panentheistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheistic) creator god, [Shri Rudram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shri_Rudram), a [Vedic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic_religion) hymn to [Rudra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudra), an earlier aspect of Shiva often referred to by the ancient Brahmans as Stiva, a masculine fertility god, which expressed [monistic theism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monistic_theism), and is still chanted today; the [Zoroastrian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrian) [Ahuramazda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahuramazda) and Chinese [Shang Ti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shang_Ti). The worship of polytheistic gods, on the other hand, is seen by many to predate monotheism, reaching back as far as the [Paleolithic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic). Today, monotheistic religions are dominant, though other systems of belief still exist.

**Theology**

Theologians attempt to explicate (and in some cases systematize) beliefs; some express their own experience of the divine. Theologians ask questions such as, 'What is the nature of God?' What does it mean for God to be singular? If people believe in God as a duality or trinity, what do these terms signify? Is God transcendent, immanent, or some mix of the two? What is the relationship between God and the universe, and God and mankind?

* [Theism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theism) holds that God is both transcendent and immanent; thus, God is simultaneously infinite and in some way present in the affairs of the world. Catholic theology holds that God is [infinitely simple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_simplicity) and is not involuntarily subject to time. Most theists hold that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, although this belief raises questions about God's responsibility for evil and suffering in the world. Some theists ascribe to God a self-conscious or purposeful limiting of omnipotence, omniscience, or benevolence. [Open Theism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Theism), by contrast, asserts that, due to the nature of time, God's omniscience does not mean he can predict the future. "Theism" is sometimes used to refer in general to any belief in a god or gods, i.e., monotheism or polytheism.
* [Deism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism) holds that God is wholly transcendent: God exists, but does not intervene in the world beyond what was necessary for God to create it. In this view, God is not [anthropomorphic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropomorphic), and does not literally answer prayers or cause miracles to occur. Common in Deism is a belief that God has no interest in humanity and may not even be aware of humanity.
* Monotheism holds that there is only one God, and/or that the one true God is worshipped in different religions under different names. It is important to note, however, that monotheists of one religion can, and often do, consider the monotheistic god of a different religion to be a false god. For instance, many Christian fundamentalists consider the God of Islam (Allah) to be a false god or demon. However, theologians and linguists argue that "Allah" is merely the Arabic word for "God," and not the literal name of a specifically Muslim God (this is more clearly shown by the fact that Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews refer to God as "Allah" with no problem whatsoever). To Muslims, the Bible is a holy scripture and Jesus is a Holy Prophet, so Islam is considered a continuation of Christianity. Many Jews consider the [messiah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah) of Christianity (Jesus) to be a false god and some monotheists (notably fundamentalist Christians) hold that there is one [triune](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triune) God, and that all gods of other religions are actually demons in disguise (as in [2nd Corinthians 11](http://wikisource.org/wiki/Bible%2C_English%2C_King_James%2C_2_Corinthians#Chapter_11) verse 14). Eastern religious believers and [Liberal Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Christian) are more likely to assume those of other faiths worship the same God as they. Muslims believe that Jesus is not the son of God, because relating God to any partners or spouses or offspring is considered blasphemy and apostasy. They believe that Jesus is the Messiah and a Holy Prophet.
* Pantheism holds that God is the universe and the universe is God. Panentheism holds that God contains, but is not identical to, the Universe. The distinctions between the two are subtle, and some consider them unhelpful. It is also the view of the [Liberal Catholic Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Catholic_Church), [Theosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosophy), Hinduism, Ayyavazhi some divisions of Buddhism, and [Taoism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoism), along with many varying denominations and individuals within denominations. [Kabbalah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabbalah), Jewish mysticism, paints a pantheistic/panentheistic view of God - which has wide acceptance in [Hasidic Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasidic_Judaism), particularly from their founder [The Baal Shem Tov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_ben_Eliezer) - but only as an addition to the Jewish view of a personal god, not in the original pantheistic sense that denies or limits persona to God.
* [Dystheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dystheism) is a form of theism which holds that God is malevolent as a consequence of the [problem of evil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_evil). Dystheistic speculation is common in theology, but there is no known church of practicing dystheists. See also [Satanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satanism).

Most believers allow for the existence of other, less powerful spiritual beings, and give them names such as angels, saints, [Djinni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Djinn), demons, and [devas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deva).

* [Relation of God to the Universe](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06614a.htm) - Catholic Encyclopedia article

**Conceptions of God**

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(Tagged December 2005)

**Abrahamic conceptions**

[16th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_century) Christian view of [Genesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis): God creates [Adam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_and_Eve) (Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel)

Judaism, Christianity and Islam see God as a being who created the world and rules over the universe. God is usually held to have the properties of holiness (separate from sin and incorruptible), justness (fair, right, and true in all His judgments), [sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty) (unthwartable in His will), omnipotence (all-powerful), omniscience (all-knowing), omnibenevolence (all-loving), omnipresence (present everywhere at the same time), and immortality (eternal and everlasting). He is also believed to be transcendent, meaning that He is outside space and outside time, and therefore eternal and unable to be changed by earthly forces or anything else within His creation.

Jews, Christians and Muslims often conceive of God as a [personal God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_God), with a will and personality. However, many [rationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalist) philosophers felt that one should not view God as personal, and that such personal descriptions of God are only meant as metaphors, as it was widely viewed that God's transcendence meant that He could not act in the lives of ordinary people.

In [Eastern Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Christianity), it remains essential that God be personal; hence it speaks of the three *persons* of the [Trinity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity). It also emphasizes that God has a will, and that God the Son has two wills, divine and human, though these are never in conflict. However, this point is disputed by Oriental Orthodox Christians, who hold that God the Son has only one will of unified divinity and humanity (see [Miaphysitism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miaphysitism)). The personhood of God and of all human people is essential to the concept of [theosis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosis) or deification.

**Biblical definition of God**

God according to the Bible is characterized not just as Creator, but also as the "Heavenly Father".

The Torah (which would later be incorporated into the Christian [Old Testament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Testament)) characterizes God by these attributes: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." ([Exodus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exodus) 34:6-7)

The Torah contains no systematic theology: No attempt is made to give a [philosophical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) or rigorous definition of God, nor of how God acts in the world. It does not explicitly describe God's nature, exemplified by God's assertion in Exodus that "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live". Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible are the words omnipotent, omniscient, or omnibenevolent used to define God in a systematic sense.

Although Scripture does not describe God systematically, it does provide a poetic depiction of God and His relationship with people. According to the Biblical historian [Yehezkal Kaufmann](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Yehezkal_Kaufmann&action=edit), the essential innovation of Biblical theology was to posit a God that cares about people, and that cares about whether people care about Him. Some people believe that the Bible should be viewed as humanity's view of God, but theologian [Abraham Joshua Heschel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Joshua_Heschel) described the Biblical God as "anthropopathic", which means that one should read the Bible as God's view of humanity, and not as humanity's view of God.

Similarly, the New Testament contains little systematic theology: no philosophical or rigorous definition of God is given, nor of how God acts in the world; however John's gospel states: "*God is light*" ([John](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_John) 1:5), before he states: "*God is love*" (John 4:8) and: "*God is a Spirit*" (John 4:24). The author of the [Epistle to the Hebrews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Hebrews) presents a more grim side of the deity when he states: "*For our God is a consuming fire.*" (Hebrews 12:29).

The New Testament provides an implicit theology as it teaches that God interacted directly with people, in the person of Jesus, and that he subsequently sent the Holy Spirit. In this view, God becomes someone that can be seen and touched, and may speak and act in a manner easily perceived by humans, while also remaining transcendent and invisible. This appears to be a radical departure from the concepts of God found in Hebrew Bible. The New Testament's statements regarding the nature of God were eventually developed into the doctrine of the [Trinity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity).

**Kabbalistic definition of God**

Mainstream Orthodox Judaism teaches that God is neither matter nor spirit. They teach that God is the creator of both, but is himself neither. But if God is so different from his creation, how can there be any interaction between the Creator and the created? This question prompted early Kabbalists (Jewish [mystics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism)) to envision two aspects of God, (a) God himself, who in the end is unknowable, and (b) the revealed aspect of God who created the universe, preserves the universe, and interacts with mankind in a personal way. Kabbalists believe that these two aspects are not contradictory but complement one another, similar to a creation inside a person’s mind.

This view has been developed further in [Hasidic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasidism) and anti-nomian circles, however. Kabbalah teaches that in order to create the universe, God "withdrew," and created the universe within the space from which "He" contracted. It is taught in the [Zohar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zohar) that God, at the beginning of creation, shattered ten ספירות ("sephiroth") or כלים ("kaylim" or "vessels") scattering their fragments throughout the universe. (Physicist-theologian [Gerald Schroeder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Schroeder) makes a correlation between this view and [Big Bang theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_bang) in *Genesis & The Big Bang*.) The [sephiroth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephirah_%28Kabbalah%29) — represented by the so-called עץ חיים ("Etz Hayim" or "[Tree of Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree_of_life_%28Kabbalah%29)") — are comprised of different vessels embodying various emanations of God's being.

With this in mind, the Kabbalist [Isaac Luria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Luria), explained that all creation contained ניצוץ ("nitzutz" or "holy sparks") — the remnants and shards of the sephiroth/kaylim which God had shattered — and offered a theological purpose known as תיקון עולם ("[Tikkun Olam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikkun_Olam)" or "rectifying the world") which states that humanity's duty is to recognize the holy sparks inherent in all creation and to elevate them by performing מצות ("[mitzvoth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitzvah)"), otherwise regarded as the fulfillment of Biblical obligations. This view gave rise to the concept of [panentheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism) in Judaism: The notion that God is inherent in all things, and is corroborated by the Jewish principle בצלם אלוהים ("b'tzelem Elohim" or "in the image of God"), inferring that all humanity is created with God inherent. The concept derives from Genesis 9:6 (serving as a Biblical proof-text for the position), "For in the image of God He made man." Thus, suggested Luria, by doing mitzvoth directed towards our fellow human being, we recognize the nitzutz within them, and thus sanctify and elevate their inherent Godliness.

This notion is exemplified rather well by a Jewish nursery school song

[Hashem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashem) is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere. Up, up, down, down, right, left, and all around. Here, there, and everywhere, Hashem is truly there.

Over time, this view evolved into the belief that all of creation and all of existence was in fact God itself, and that we as humanity are unaware of our own inherent Godliness and are grappling to come to terms with it. The standing view in neo-Hasidism, currently, is that there is nothing in existence other than God. I.e., all being is God. As it is stated in the ancient Kabbalistic incantation, אין עוד מילבדו ("Ain od milvado") — "There is nothing but God." Thus, it has become understood that God used God's self to form the universe. Rather than a contraction and the creation of something "other" in the void which God created, it is as though God punched a doughnut-hole in God's self and used the remaining "[munchkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munchkin_%28disambiguation%29)" to form all of creation.

This paradigm shift is well documented by [Zalman Schachter-Shalomi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zalman_Schachter-Shalomi), a [Lubavitch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lubavitch) Hasidic rabbi and founder of [Jewish Renewal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Renewal) and its neo-Hasidic progeny, in his book *Wrapped In A Holy Flame*:

I'd like to say we are in the shift to the place where everything is God, pantheism. The understanding that has come from mysticism and from people on the cusp of periods moving from past to present, people talking about primary experience, is that the body and the soul cannot be separated. It shouldn't be that they should be fighting one another, that you have to get rid of one in order to get the other. We want Wholeness, a holistic understanding, now. I believe that people are moving from theism to pantheism. There are some who don't like the word *pantheism*, the idea that God is everything. They prefer the word *panentheism*, which means that God is *in* everything. I, however, don't think that the distinction is real. What was the objection that people had to pantheism, God is everything? "Are you going to tell me that the excrement of a dog is also God?" And the answer to this would be —"Yes." What is wrong with that?

It is only from the human perspective that we see a difference between that and *challah*. On the sub molecular level, on the atomic level, they all look the same. And if you look from a galactic perspective, what difference is there between one and the other? So if "God is everything," why are you and I here? Because we are the appearance of God in this particular form. And God likes to appear in countless forms and experience countless lives. If you would have mentioned this point of view when theism was dominant, you might have been killed. The theists would complain, "What you are saying is that there are no differences anymore? Does that mean that everything is right, everything is kosher? Where are the differences?" And those are good questions. We are not so far advanced yet that we can explain all these things, but deep down, the deepest level of the pattern is that God is everything. So it's not that God *created* the world but that God *became* the world.

Another progenitor of neo-Hasidism, [Rabbi Arthur Green](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Rabbi_Arthur_Green&action=edit), further describes the evolution of pantheistic thought in the Hasidic world, as well, in his book *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology*

**Qur'anic definitions of God**

*Main article*: [Islamic concept of God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_concept_of_God)

*Allah* ([Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language) *Allahu* الله) is traditionally used by Muslims as the Arabic word for "God" (not "God's personal name", but the equivalent of the Hebrew word "El" as opposed to "YHWH"). The word *Allah* is not specific to Islam; [Arab Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Christians) and Arabic-speaking [Sephardi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephardi_Jews) and [Mizrahi Jews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mizrahi_Jew) also use it to refer to the monotheist deity. Arabic translations of the Bible also employ it, as do the [Catholics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholics) of [Malta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malta) who pronounce it as "Alla" in [Maltese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maltese_language), a language derived from and most closely related to Arabic, as well as Christians in [Indonesia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia), who pronounce it "Allah Bapa" (Allah the Father).

Most of the [99 names of God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/99_names_of_God) found in the Qur'an are not actually names, but attributes. One, however, Al Haq, meaning The Truth, seems to equate to absolute truth as that which cannot be negated. Al Haq is more than a reflection of faith in the existence of The God, and links the concept of God to all creation forever. Thus Allah transcends the prophetic origins of Islam and is thus universal in all time and applies to all existence—past, present, and future.

**Negative theology**

*Main article:* [*Negative theology*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negative_theology)*.*

Some Jewish, Christian and Muslim [Medieval](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval) philosophers, including [Moses Maimonides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_Maimonides) and [Pseudo-Dionysius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Dionysius), as well as many sages of other religions, developed what is termed as [Apophatic Theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apophatic_Theology) or the [Via Negativa](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Via_Negativa&action=edit), the idea that one cannot posit attributes to God and can only be discussed by what God is not. For example, we cannot say that God "exists" in the usual sense of the term, because that term is human defined and Gods qualities such as existence may not be accurately characterized by it. What we can safely say is that *God is not nonexistent*. Likewise God's "wisdom" is of a fundamentally different kind from limited human perception. So we cannot use the word "wise" to describe God, because this implies he is wise in the way we usually describe humans being wise. However we can safely say that *God is not ignorant*. We should not say that God is One, because we may not truly understand his nature, but we can state that there is no multiplicity in God's being.

The reason that this theology was developed was because it was felt that ascribing positive characteristics to God would imply that God could be accurately described with terms that were used to describe human qualities and perceptions. As humans cannot truly comprehend what kind of wisdom an eternal transcendent being might have, or what infinity might be like, we cannot in fact know or characterize His true nature. It is beyond human ability and would only mislead people.

The same path is known in [Hindu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu) tradition as [Neti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neti_neti), literally "not this nor that".

The proponents of this theory often experienced [meditation](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Apophatic_meditation&action=edit) which they viewed as one of the only effective ways of having a personal relationship with God. It involved trying to reach beyond the words commonly used to describe Him and His more [ineffable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ineffability) characteristics, and to comprehend in a [mystical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism) manner the truths about Him which could not be achieved through religious language. Thus many sages and saints of both monotheistic and other traditions experienced mystical trances, or [raptures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapture) and stated they were unable to describe God or their [visions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vision) fully.

**God as Unity or Trinity**

Muslims, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses and a small fraction of other nominal Christians are *unitarian monotheists*. The vast majority of Christians have been and still are *Trinitarian monotheists*.

* Unitarian monotheists hold that there is only one "person" (so to speak), or one basic substance, in God. Some adherents of this position consider Trinitarianism to be a form of polytheism.
* Trinitarian monotheists believe in one God that exists as three distinct persons who share the same substance/essence; the Christian version of this is called the Trinity. The Hindu version [Trimurti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trimurti), differs from Christianity in holding that God has three aspects (though shown as andromorphs) rather than being three distinct persons. Trinitarians hold that the three persons have the same purpose, holiness, and sovereignty, and therefore each can be worshipped as God, without violating the idea that there is only one God to which worship belongs. The [Smarta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smarta) denomination of Hinduism also hold that belief and believe that worship of any aspect of God is equivalent. Although not a perfect analogy, the other denominations of Hinduism, [Shaivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaivism) and [Vaishnavism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavism) would be considered unitarian monotheistic faiths.
* Ayyavazhi says [Ayya Vaikundar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayya_Vaikundar) as the unity of [Ekam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekam), [Narayana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narayana) and human *(See:*[*Ayyavazhi Trinity*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayyavazhi_Trinity)*)*
* [Mormons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon) believe that there are three separate divine personages. One of these personages is a spirit without a body referred to as the "Holy Ghost". The other two personages are resurrected beings with *perfected* or *glorified* (often called *celestial*) bodies referred to as [Heavenly Father](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavenly_Father) (or less commonly "Elohim") and his son, Jesus Christ. Mormons hold that God is a *Holy Man* who advanced to his divine status through a repeatable process of progression. They believe that by following their religion's teachings, humans can literally become gods (sometimes phrased as "become like Heavenly Father") at some point after death and [resurrection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection); this is also called [Exaltation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exaltation).
* [Rastafarians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rastafari_movement) believe that [Haile Selassie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haile_Selassie) is both God the Father and God the Son, made manifest in human flesh as the reincarnation of Jesus, while the Holy Spirit is seen to dwell within all believers (of Rastafari), and within all people (believed by some).
* Hasidic Jews hold that there are ten [Sefirot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephirah) (emanations) of God. Each of these are more distinct than a characteristic, but less distinct than a separate personage.
* [Monism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monism) is the metaphysical position that all is of one essential essence, substance or energy, that being a pantheist, or panentheist, immanent God. Monism can be inclusive of other interpretations of God.
* Dualism is the idea of two, nearly equal divine entities, one being the good God, and the other being an evil god, or [Satan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satan). All beings are under the influence of one side, or the other, if they know it or not. [Zoroastrianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism) is an example of dualism.

**Binitarianism**

[**Binitarianism**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binitarianism): A view within Christianity that there were originally two beings in the Godhead, the Father and the Word that became the Son (Jesus the Christ). Binitarians normally believe that God is a family, currently consisting of the Father and the Son. Some binitarians believe that others will ultimately be born into that divine family. Hence, binitarians are [nontrinitarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nontrinitarian), but they are also not unitarian. Binitarians, like most [unitarians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarians) and [trinitarians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinitarians), claim their views were held by the original New Testament Church. Unlike most unitarians and [trinitarians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinitarian) who tend to identify themselves by those terms, binitarians normally do not refer to their belief in the duality of the Godhead, with the Son subordinate to the Father, as binitarianism; they simply teach the Godhead in a manner that has been termed as binitarianism.

"The word “binitarian” is typically used by scholars and theologians as a contrast to a trinitarian theology: a theology of “two” in God rather than a theology of “three”... it is accurate to offer the judgment that most commonly when someone speaks of a Christian “binitarian” theology the “two” in God are the Father and the Son...A substantial amount of recent scholarship has been devoted to exploring the implications of the fact that Jesus was *worshipped* by those first Jewish Christians, since in Judaism "worship" was limited to the worship of God" (Barnes M. Early Christian Binitarianism: the Father and the Holy Spirit. Early Christian Binitarianism as read at NAPS 2001). Much of this recent scholarship has been the result of the translations of the [*Nag Hammadi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nag_Hammadi) and other ancient manuscripts which were not available when older scholarly texts (such as W. Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*, 1913) were written.

Although some critics prefer to use the term ditheist or dualist instead of binitarian, those terms suggests that God is not one, yet binitarians believe that God is one family.

**Conceptions of God in Hinduism**

[**Aum**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aum). Found first in the Vedic scriptures of Hinduism, Aum has been seen as the first manifestation of the unmanifest [Brahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman) (the single Divine Ground of Hinduism) that resulted in the phenomenal universe.

[Krishna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna) revealing the eternal super-consciousness to [Arjuna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arjuna)

* The [Sanskrit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit) and [Hindi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindi) word for God, that is used most commonly, is Ishvara, lit., the Supreme Lord, pronounced as "īshvərə". Hindus believe that **Ishvara** is only One. This must not be confused with the numerous deities of the Hindus known as [devas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deva_%28Hinduism%29), which can number up to 330 million. A deva may be translated into English as a god, a deity, a demi-god, an [angel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel) or any celestial being or thing of high excellence, and hence is venerable.
* The [Vedantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedanta) school of Hindu philosophy also has a notion of a Supreme Cosmic Spirit called [Brahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman), pronounced as "brəh mən". **Brahman** is (at best) described as that infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, incorporeal, transcendent and immanent reality that is the divine ground of all existence in this universe. Brahman is actually indescribable. It is at best, "Sat" + "Chit" + "Ananda", ie, Infinite Truth, Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Bliss. Brahman may be called as God, or better, as Godhead.
* A major branch of Hinduism, [Advaita Vedanta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advaita_Vedanta), served as the fertile grounds from which one of the first monistic philosophies of God was developed. According to Advaitins, **Brahman** is the only Ultimate Reality in this world, and everything else is an illusion. They believe that [Māyā](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_%28Hinduism%29) is that complex illusionary power of Brahman which causes the Brahman to be seen as the distinct material world. When man tries to know the attributeless Brahman with his mind, under the influence of Maya, Brahman becomes God (**Ishvara** as described as above). God is Brahman with Maya. He is [Saguna Brahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saguna_Brahman) or Brahman with positive attributes. He is one and unique. He is omniscient, omnipresent, incorporeal, independent, creator of the world, its ruler and also destroyer. He is eternal and unchangeable. He rules the world with his Maya. However, while God is the Lord of Maya and she (ie, Maya) is always under His control, living beings (jīva, in the sense of humans) are the servants of Maya (in the form of ignorance). This ignorance is the cause of the unhappiness and sin in the mortal world. While God is Infinite Bliss, humans are miserable. God (Ishvara) always knows the unity of the Brahman substance, and the Mayic nature of the world. There is no place of a Satan or devil in Hinduism, unlike Abrahamic religions. Advaitins explain the misery because of **ignorance**. God or Ishvara can also be visualized and worshipped in anthromorphic form like Vishnu, Krishna or Shiva. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy continues with the view that once one becomes aware of the *unity of being* of Godhead, he will then be able to see beyond the illusions of division and separation from Godhead, and recognize his or her own inherent unity with the Brahman. See [Advaita Vedanta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advaita_Vedanta).
* In the two largest branches of Hinduism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism, it is believed that **Ishvara** and Brahman are identical, and God is in turn anthromorphically identified with Shiva or Vishnu. God, whether in the form of Shiva or Vishnu has six attributes. However, the actual number of auspicious qualities of God, are **countless**, with the following six qualities being the *most important*.
* The number six is invariably given, but the individual attributes listed vary. One set of attributes (and their common interpretations) are:
	+ *Jñāna* (Omniscience), defined as the power to know about all beings simultaneously;
	+ *Aishvarya* ([Sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty), derived from the word Ishvara), which consists in unchallenged rule over all;
	+ *Shakti* (Energy), or power, which is the capacity to make the impossible possible;
	+ *Bala* (Strength), which is the capacity to support everything by will and without any fatigue;
	+ *Vīrya* (Vigor), or valor which indicates the power to retain immateriality as the supreme being in spite of being the material cause of mutable creations; and
	+ *Tejas* (Splendor), which expresses his self-sufficiency and the capacity to overpower everything by his spiritual effulgence.; (*cited from* Bhakti Schools of Vedanta*, by Swami Tapasyānanda.*)
* A second set of six characteristics are
	+ *Jñāna* (Omniscience),
	+ *Vairagya* ([Detachment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detachment)),
	+ *Yashas* (Fame),
	+ *Aishvarya* (Sovereignty, derived from the word Ishvara),
	+ *Srī* (Glory) and
	+ *Dharma* ([Righteousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Righteousness)).
* Other important qualities attributed to God are *Gambhīrya* (grandeur), *Audārya* (generosity), and *Kārunya* (compassion).
* Chanted prayers, or [mantras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantra), are central to Hindu worship. Many mantras are from the sacred [Vedas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veda), and in Sanskrit. Among the most chanted mantras in Hinduism are the [Vishnu sahasranama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu_sahasranama) (a prayer to [Vishnu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu) that dates from the time of the [Mahabharata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata) and describes him as the *Universal Brahman*), [Shri Rudram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shri_Rudram) (a Vedic hymn to Rudra, an earlier aspect of Shiva that also describes Him as Brahman) and the [Gayatri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayatri) mantra, (another Vedic hymn that initially was meant as a prayer to the Sun, an aspect of Brahman but has other interpretations. It is now interpreted as a prayer to the impersonal absolute Brahman).
* The followers of [Shaktism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaktism) like to conceive the divine power of the Ishvara as a female goddess, the divine mother called [Devi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devi) or [Durga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durga). Another famous hymn, [Lalitha Sahasranama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalitha_Sahasranama), describes the 1000 names of [Devi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devi), worshipped as God the Divine Mother.
* It is important to add that in Hinduism (*Sanatana Dharama*) God is considered the Supreme Being, and many views of God range from panentheism to dualism to [monism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monism) and monotheism. His appearance, in its entirety, cannot be comprehended by the common man. His appearance with form is only a manifestation of certain characteristics. The various forms of God or deities which apparently give [Smarta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smarta) Hinduism a character of polytheism, are regarded as mundane manifestations of One Brahman or Ishvara, only to facilitate his devotional worship.
* Ayyavazhi prefers almost a similar theory to Advaita Vedanta. However, [Kashmir Shaivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir_Shaivism), one notable [Saivite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saivite) branch disagrees and focuses on panentheism. Furthermore, it rejects the [Mayan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_mythology) illusion theory by stating that if God is real, then His creation must be real and not illusory.

In Hinduism there are two principle methods of worship:

1. To worship God through meditation on an icon ([murti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murti)).
2. To worship God without icon worship.(eg. non-anthromorphic symbols such as [linga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linga), [saligrama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saligrama), Ayyavazhi, or through meditation)

In the early [Upanishads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishads) the conception of the Divine Teacher guru on earth. Indeed, there is an understanding in some Hindu sects that if the devotee were presented with the guru and God, first he should pay respects to the guru since the guru had been instrumental in leading him to God. Hence many gurus have the epithet of [Bhagwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagwan), a term often confused with God.

[**Hari Bhakti Vilasa**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hari_Bhakti_Vilasa&action=edit) mantra ( 4.344)

Prathamam tu gurum pujya tatas caiva mamarcanam

Kuran siddhim avapnoti hy anyatha nisphalam bhavet

*One does not directly worship one's God. One must begin by the worship of the Guru. Only by pleasing the Guru and gaining his mercy, can one offer anything to God. Thus, before worshiping God, one must always worship the Guru.*

See also [Guru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru).

**Christian Monism**

Within the body of Christian belief, the only well-known developed system of monism is found within the recently developed (1975) teachings of the book known as [A Course In Miracles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Course_In_Miracles) (ACIM). The philosophical system of ACIM presents what appears to be a unique synthesis of Hindu monistic [Advaita Vedanta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advaita_Vedanta) teachings, blended with the early Christian teaching of the universal-fatherhood-of-God belief. In this philosophy God retains the traditional Christian role of an *All loving, all forgiving Father*, as portrayed in the Christian allegory of the [Prodigal Son](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prodigal_Son), yet God is also attributed with the qualities of complete *oneness* with all of mankind. The apparent contrast between the existence of this *oneness* with God, and the common belief in human separation from God, is explained by the belief that man's apparent separation from God is a mere *illusion*, an illusion that can be overcome by gaining a full understanding of, and by adopting an unfailing practice of, the dynamics of Christian forgiveness.

**The Ultimate**

Arguably, Eastern conceptions of [The Ultimate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ultimate) (this, too, has many different names), except for Shaivism and Vaishnavism, which do focus on a personal God, are not conceptions of a *personal* divinity, though certain Western conceptions of what is at least *called* "God" (e.g., [Spinoza's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_Spinoza) pantheistic conception and various kinds of mysticism) resemble Eastern conceptions of The Ultimate.

**Aristotelian definition of God**

*Main article:* [*Aristotelian view of God*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotelian_view_of_God)*.*

In his [Metaphysics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphysics), [Aristotle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle) discusses meaning of "being as being". Aristotle holds that "being" primarily refers to the [Unmoved Movers](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Unmoved_Mover&action=edit), and assigned one of these to each movement in the heavens. Each Unmoved Mover continuously contemplates its own contemplation, and everything that fits the second meaning of "being" by having its source of motion in itself, moves because the knowledge of its Mover causes it to emulate this Mover (or should).

Aristotle's "unmoved mover" is very unlike the conception of God which one sees in most religions. It has been likened to a person who is playing [dominos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domino) and pushes one of them over, so that every other domino in the set is pushed over as well, without the being having to do anything about it. This differs to the interpretation of God in most religions, where He is seen to be [personally involved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanence) in His creation.

Aristotle's definition of God attributes perfection to this being, and as a perfect being can and only contemplate upon perfection and not on imperfection, otherwise perfection would not be one of his attribute. God according to Aristotle is in a state of "stasis" untouched by change and imperfection.

**Modern views**

**Process philosophy and Open Theism**

* [Process theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_theology) is a school of thought influenced by the metaphysical [process philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_philosophy) of [Alfred North Whitehead](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_North_Whitehead) (1861&ndash;1947).
* [Open theism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_theism), a theological movement that began in the 1990s, is similar, but not identical, to Process theology.

In both views, God is not omnipotent in the classical sense of a coercive being. Reality is not made up of material substances that endure through time, but serially-ordered events, which are experiential in nature. The universe is characterized by process and change carried out by the agents of free will. Self-determination characterizes everything in the universe, not just human beings. God and creatures co-create. God cannot force anything to happen, but rather only influence the exercise of this universal free will by offering possibilities. See the entries on [Process theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_theology), [Panentheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panentheism), and [Open theism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_theism).

**Posthuman God**

Similar to this theory is the belief or aspiration that humans will create a God entity, emerging from an [artificial intelligence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_intelligence). [Arthur C. Clarke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_C._Clarke), world-renowned [science fiction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_fiction) author, said in an interview, "It may be that our role on this planet is not to worship God, but to create him." Clarke's friend and colleague, the late [Isaac Asimov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Asimov), postulated in his story "[The Last Question](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Question)" a merger between humanity and machine intelligence that ultimately produces a deity capable of reversing [entropy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entropy) and subsequently initiates a new Creation trillions of years from the present era when the Universe is in the last stage of [heat death](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat_death).

Another variant on this hypothesis is that humanity or a segment of humanity will create or [evolve](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution) into a [posthuman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posthuman) God by itself; for some examples, see [Christian transhumanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_transhumanism), [technological singularity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_singularity), and [omega point](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omega_point).

**Extraterrestrials**

Some comparatively new belief systems and books portray God as [Extraterrestrial life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraterrestrial_life). Many of these theories hold that intelligent beings from another world have been visiting Earth for many thousands of years, and have influenced the development of our religions. Some of these books posit that prophets or messiahs were sent to the human race in order to teach morality and encourage the development of civilization. (See e.g. [Rael](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rael)). [Francis Crick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Crick), co-discoverer of the structure of [DNA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA), suggested that life on Earth [originated far away](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panspermia) because of what he considered to be a miniscule timeframe allotted by scientists for the [emergence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abiogenesis) of life on Earth.

**Phenomenological definition**

The philosopher [Michel Henry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Henry) defines God in a phenomenological point of view. He says : "God is Life, he is the essence of [Life](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_the_life&action=edit), or, if we prefer, the essence of Life is God. Saying this we already know what is God, we know it not by the effect of a learning or of some knowledge, we don’t know it by the thought, on the background of the truth of the world ; we know it and we can know it only in and by the Life itself. We can know it only in God." (*I Am the* [*Truth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_of_Life)*. Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*).

This Life is not biological life defined by objective and exterior properties, nor an abstract and empty philosophical concept, but the absolute [phenomenological life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenological_life), a radically immanent life which possesses in it the power of showing itself in itself without distance, a life which reveals permanently itself.

**The Rosicrucian conception of God**

*Main article:* [*The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rosicrucian_Cosmo-Conception#The_Rosicrucian_conception_of_God_and_the_scheme_of_evolution)

According to [Max Heindel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Heindel)'s *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, and in [Esoteric Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esoteric_Christianity), in the beginning of a *Day of Manifestation* a certain collective Great Being, God, limits Himself to a certain portion of space, in which He elects to create a [Solar System](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_System) for the evolution of added self-[consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness).

Heindel states that in the Solar system, God's Habitation, there are [seven Worlds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosicrucian_Fellowship#The_Seven_Worlds_.26_the_Seven_Cosmic_Planes) differentiated by God, within Himself, one after another. Rosicrucians teach that the, above referred, seven Worlds belong to the lowest of the seven "Cosmic Planes". The Worlds and Cosmic Planes are not one above another in space, but the seven Cosmic Planes inter-penetrate each other and all the seven Worlds. They are states of spirit-matter, permeating one another, so that God and the other great Beings pervade every part of their own realms and realms of greater density than their own, including our world.