A Discussion Guide for:

*The Truth: About the Five Primary Religions*

The first book in The Oracle Institute Foundational Trilogy
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Week One

Introduction & Chapter I:

1. The author’s “quest for spiritual Truth” began when she was suffering through a divorce and was desperately seeking answers.  
   • Do you think this is a common reaction during times of pain?  
   • Have you turned to God or questioned the “meaning of life” when you’ve had to deal with a crisis?

2. The author talks about her childhood and her parents’ relationship to God and religion.  
   • Do you think that her experiences as a child and her parents’ decisions about God and religion were significant influences in her spiritual quest and/or the outcome of her quest, as well?

3. The author asks the question, “Are we human beings who occasionally have spiritual experiences, or are we spiritual beings who currently are having human experiences?”  
   • What do you think?

4. Over the centuries, there has been much controversy regarding the relationship between science and religion. The author postulates that through philosophers, scientists and prophets, God has revealed “Truth” to us, “piecemeal,” and on “a need to know basis.”  
   • Have scientists and philosophers – in addition to the Prophets – helped to build a “Tower of Truth” for humanity?  
   • Do you agree that all such “truth-seekers” are messengers of God?

5. The author believes there are no coincidences. She says, “What skeptics calls a Coincidence, initiates call a Sign, and believers call a Miracle.” She talks about Sam, her guru, who entered her life at the moment she was ready and needed spiritual guidance.  
   • Have you ever have spiritual guides, angels, signs or miracles suddenly appear in your life at the precise time you needed them?
Week Two

Chapter II, Part 1:

Hindu, Jewish, and Buddhist Prophets

1. The author believes that humanity’s past and present history reveal the disturbing fact that our greatest mistakes have involved lethal conflict over which religion is the closest to God.
   - Do you agree that religious conflict has caused pain and suffering? Give examples.
   - Has your past or present church or temple leader espoused this belief?

2. Referring to the Appendix, after the prophets died, it appears that the man-made religions and political systems became corrupted over time by leaders who suffered from greed and hubris.
   - Do you agree or disagree?
   - Are greed and hubris the “two cardinal sins” as the author suggests?

3. The author speaks about the commencement of a private journey of faith which she calls *Saddha*, plus the performance of good works while on the Earth Plane.
   - Discuss your own personal journeys, plus what you think about doing good works on the earth plane.
   - Does your church or temple encourage these good works and/or self-study?

4. The goal of Hinduism is to stop the cycle of reincarnation (immortality – *samsara*), and the way to release from the material world (*moksha*) is to perfect the self (*atman*). Manu’s code helped to define the Hindu caste system which separates humans into different social and spiritual categories. Also, women were not deemed worthy of achieving enlightenment.
   - How do you feel about these aspects of the Hindu religion? (Note that Mahatma Gandhi, considered an important Hindu prophet, defied the Hindu caste system and wanted to update his religion).

5. Regarding the compilation of the Old Testament:
   - Were you surprised to learn that the Old Testament was written over the course of 2,000 years or so?

6. According to the author, the Jewish interpretation of Genesis is that (i) God gave us the ability to seek knowledge and discern right from wrong; (ii) God gave us free will; and (iii) God holds us accountable whenever we choose evil over good.
   - Do you agree or do you believe that mankind is inherently sinful?

7. The Jews are still waiting for the Messiah because according to the original prophecies, the Messiah will be crowned King of Jerusalem and will establish everlasting peace and abundance on Earth and will live forever.
   - Does this resonate with you? Discuss.
8. The Jewish faith believes in the necessity of spiritual development and perfection of the soul. Thus, one must have more than faith to be pleasing to God; one must adhere to God’s laws and perform acts of charity and other good works.
   • Do you resonate with this standard, even if you are of a different faith?
   • Also, Judaism continues to conceptualize God only in the male form. How do you feel about this aspect?

9. The author recites legends of miracles performed by Buddha which seem to mirror the powers ascribed to Jesus.
   • Do you believe Buddha had the same “powers” as Jesus?
   • What are the Four Noble Truths ascribed to Buddha? Do you agree with them?
   • What is the Eight-Fold Path?

10. Buddha had little use for the Hindu rules and rituals.
    • How do you feel about “improvements” or “upgrades” to earlier religions?

11. Buddha described nirvana differently than Jesus described heaven.
    • How are nirvana and heaven different?
    • What is your concept of heaven?
Week Three
Chapter II, Part 2:

Christian Prophets

1. The author wrote that she felt “phantom pain” from the Christian dogma as she embarked on the path of Saddha.
   - Have you experienced guilt or pain in embracing a form of belief different from that which you were reared?

2. The author paints a picture of the early Christian church which skewers Jesus’ birth, chronologies, teachings, and life in order to gain followers and political control.
   - Does organized religion today control or edify?
   - What has been your experience?

3. The lives of Buddha and Jesus parallel each other in numerous ways.
   - What similarities did they share?
   - How were they different?

4. According to the author, the Catholic Church hid the recently discovered Gnostic Gospels and the Dead Sea Scrolls for 40 years.
   - Has your clergy referred to them, or made you aware of them?
   - Have you read any of these documents? If so, what did you find in them that might be a threat to the Catholic Church and orthodox Christianity?

5. The author groups mankind’s shortcomings into two main categories: Greed and Pride.
   - Which public figures have recently been exposed in the media for such shortcomings?

6. The primary message of the Ten Commandments is to love our neighbors as ourselves.
   - Have you had an experience where you found this tenet difficult to follow?

7. The author discusses the “Passover Plot” – that Jesus may have survived the crucifixion.
   - Do you think this is possible based on the evidence presented?
   - If Jesus did survive the cross, does that diminish his message?
   - Do you believe a blood sacrifice was needed to “save” humanity?
Week Four

Chapter II, Part 3:

Paul and Early Followers of Jesus

1. The author talks about the early Christians being divided into 3 sects: (i) the Jewish Christians, who believed Jesus (or his brother James) was the Messiah and would conquer the Romans and fulfill the Old Testament prophesies; (ii) the Gentile Christians, who were converted by Paul, equated Jesus with God, and believed that faith alone in Jesus/God was enough to ensure salvation; and (iii) the Gnostic Christians, who believed that Jesus’ teachings ran much deeper and required internal spiritual growth to find God.
   - Which of these early Christian sects resonates with you the most?

2. Discuss Saul of Tarsus and the role he played in forming the Christian religion.
   - Before reading this book, were you aware that Paul’s version of Jesus’ teachings was different from James’ and the Apostles’ understanding?
   - What are your thoughts about Paul’s ministry (i.e., the deification of Jesus, faith in Jesus alone as the path to salvation, church hierarchy commanded and appointed by God, women being unequal to men, etc.)?
   - Why do you think Paul deviated so far from Jesus and James’ theology?
   - In your opinion, was Paul’s mission a good thing or not?

3. Through Jesus, the Jewish Christians received a new message, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Taking this message to the ultimate, these early Christians were required to sell their possessions and live in a communal lifestyle.
   - Were you aware of the role played by James the Just in early church decisions?
   - Do you think the Jewish Christians would have adopted a communal lifestyle had they known that the “second coming” was not going to occur in their lifetime?
   - Today, we call this lifestyle “communism” or “socialism.” In our democratic society, we argue over welfare for the poor, universal healthcare, paying taxes, etc. Do you think that communism or socialism is a more spiritually evolved ideology than democracy or capitalism?
   - Do you think that a communal lifestyle more often promotes or hinders spiritual development in the community members?

4. Similar to the teaching of Buddha and according to The Gospel of Thomas and Luke (page143), Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is inside us.
   - What does this mean to you?
   - Is heaven a place/destination or a state of existence?
   - Can you enter “heaven” while you are still alive?
   - Has your perception of heaven changed over time?
   - What does your church/religion tell you about heaven?
Week Five
Chapter II, Part 4:

Muslim Prophets

1. The author states that Muhammad was illiterate and that he married a woman 15 years his senior who believed in him. As her business partner, Muhammad learned about the world through commerce and travel. Like Moses, he saw Allah as the one and only God and humanity as basically good.
   - How does the story of Muhammad’s life resonate with you?
   - The Muslims believe that Jesus, a great prophet himself, foresaw Muhammad as the next prophet described in the Gospel of John. What is your reaction to this interpretation of the Bible?

2. At the age of 40 and seeking a spiritual life, Muhammad questioned why there was so much religious divisiveness when Jews, Christians and Muslims all believed in one God. Islam espoused that mankind should unite under one religion.
   - Why has this been impossible?
   - Do you think humanity eventually will unite under one religious belief system?

3. Muhammad’s message of “Brotherly Love and Charity for the less fortunate” (i.e., living the Golden Rule), was rejected by the warlords of his time. According to the Quran, Islam means “submission,” and Muslims are those who surrender.
   - Do you see this as true or false today?

4. A central tenet of Islam is that the faith is an ordained extension of Christianity and Judaism. Muhammad believed that the Semitic peoples (Jews and Arabs) were brothers because they are descendents of Abraham. He preached against abuse of women, gambling, and the killing of infant females. He also believed that the spirit of God was comprised of both male and female energy.
   - Do you think his wife had an influence on his thinking?
   - Why do you suppose women are treated so oppressively in many Arab nations today?

5. It is said that Ramadan, the month of fasting from dawn to dusk (saum), was patterned after Passover. Discuss the significance of these holidays in the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

6. Critics of Islam point to Muhammad’s three wars as evidence that he was not a man of God. However, both Jews and Christians have instigated “holy wars.”
   - Why has this accusation not been leveled at Moses or Joshua, who led numerous bloody conflicts in God’s name?
   - And what about the Catholic Popes who ordered the Christian Crusades?
7. The Quran was written in 650 CE by Muhammad’s followers as he spoke, and it has never been altered by man. Like the Old and New Testaments, the Quran contains rules that govern individual obligations and those that maintain social order.
   • Discuss the 5 Pillars of Islam as written on page 163.
   • How do they compare to Jewish and Christian commandments?

8. Muhammad taught that mankind is innately good: Since Allah is perfect, mankind’s design must reflect that perfection. Muhammad also taught that Allah gave man free will as a gift and that Adam and Eve’s indiscretion to disobey God was at their peril not ours.
   • Do you agree that self-responsibility demands that we each have the ability and obligation to choose good over evil?
   • Muslims believe we use our inner moral compass (fitrah) to pursue goodness and truth. Comment on this.
Week Six
Chapter III

The Seven Rules of Any Good Religion

1. Rule Number 1 emphasizes the importance of philosophy.
   - How do philosophers affect religion?
   - Is philosophy an integral part of religion?
   - Do you agree with the author that we have a duty to explore religion?

2. Rule Number 2 emphasizes the importance of science.
   - Do you agree with the author’s statement, “God is science”?
   - What role does mythology play in religion?
   - Do you think science and spirituality are interfacing now? Will they merge one day?

3. Rule Number 3 emphasizes the importance of morality.
   - How does morality fit into a religious belief?
   - Do you agree that every time a major prophet came to earth, a new religion started?

4. Rule Number 4 emphasizes the importance of justice.
   - How important is structure within certain organizations/religions?
   - What is “righteous anger”?

5. Rule Number 5 emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness.
   - Do you agree that a good religion fosters respect toward people who practice other faiths?
   - Have you ever participated in a religious ceremony not of your faith? How did you feel in these incidences?

6. Rule Number 6 emphasizes the importance of openness.
   - Discuss the author’s statement, “We are here to learn.”
   - Do you agree with her observation that the only real path to God is personal soul growth?

7. Rule Number 7 emphasizes the importance of spirituality.
   - Do you agree with the author that we each need an “inspirational environment” to foster our relationship with God?
   - What does an inspirational environment look and feel like to you?

8. In this chapter, the author presents what she believes to be “The Seven Rules of Any Good Religion” – criteria that she based on the prophets’ explicit instructions and the methodology utilized by mystics, philosophers and scientists.
   - Do you agree that these rules are a good guide for seeking spiritual Truth and following the Saddha process of soul growth?
• Are all seven rules necessary for a religion to “qualify as a sound theological institution”?
• Do you see the seven rules as equal in weight?
• Are there any other criteria that you would include (or delete) from her seven rules?
• Are you comfortable with the word “Rule”?
How the Major Religions Fail Us: Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism

1. In this chapter, the author expressed her belief that it is our collective mission to create a utopia here on Earth, and in doing so, we will prepare ourselves for the afterlife in the Ethereal Plane.
   - Do you agree with this view?
   - If so, what changes can our religious establishments make to facilitate this mission?
   - What can we do as individuals regarding our thoughts, actions, and deeds to help create “utopia” here on Earth?

2. In studying Hinduism, the author sadly notes that this religion does not believe that women are worthy of spiritual enlightenment and that Manu’s 2,000 year old misogynist dogma about women continues to be enforced within Hindu culture today.
   - Were you aware that much of India still practices a caste-based belief system?
   - Why do you think it has been so difficult for Hindu women to overcome this archaic and ancient system?

3. Even though the author finds it difficult to find anything in the Hindu religion that complies with the “Seven Rules of Any Good Religion,” she does note that early Hindus were the first to recite the “Universal Law of Karma,” which she feels is an essential component of any valid spiritual belief system.
   - Discuss Karma. Do you agree that it is an essential component of a healthy religion?
   - Do you agree that our actions – both good and bad – impact our soul’s growth and our ability to reach God in the Ethereal Plane?

4. According to Genesis Chapters 1 and 2, there are two very different versions of the creation myth, and the early Jews adopted the Chapter 2 version. As a consequence, the author notes that the Jews came to view mankind as fallible (though not inherently sinful), and women were seen as lacking the same level of divinity granted to men.
   - Do you recall being told this version of the story as a young girl (i.e., Eve created from Adam’s rib)?
   - How has the Jewish creation myth affected your vision of women, and your own femininity (if you are a woman), and the female role in society?

5. The author states, “incredible harm always results from denial or subversion of Truth.”
   - Do you agree that by holding fast to creation myths, fundamentalist religions deny their congregants the ability to use their God-given intellect and accept the advanced state of our scientific research?
   - Or, do you feel there is little harm in holding on to myths that have been around for thousands of years?
6. Today, many Jews still believe that they have an exclusive and God-given right through the Covenant with Abraham to the land known as Israel,
   - Do you believe that God would “choose” one race over another?
   - How do you view the displacement of the Palestinian people?
   - Do you see any resolution to this “holy war” over the “holy city”?

7. Buddha described nirvana as a state of being in which the soul becomes fully detached from the material plane and eventually is “extinguished.” Thus, the state of enlightenment is not so much a reunion with a Creator, but an undefined merging on an energetic level.
   - Do you find this a difficult belief to accept?
   - Do you feel that there would be no point in doing good deeds and being moral if there was no union with a Supreme Being after death?
Week Eight  
Chapter IV, Part 2:  

How the Major Religions Fail Us: Christianity

1. The 1870 C.E. declaration of “Papal Infallibility” holds that: (i) the pope is never wrong in matters of faith; and (ii) the pope has the final word on all religious issues including evaluating new historic and scientific discoveries (p. 269).
   - How does this feel to you in the 21st Century?
   - Discuss contemporary issues that the popes have dealt with in a questionable manner (i.e. AIDS epidemic, ordination of women, pedophilia within the priesthood).

2. The brief history of the Cathars (pp 289-292) describes them as a puritan sect of Christians who believed that Jesus came to Earth to spread the Truth about the benevolent nature of God. The author reports that the “Catholic Church was so threatened by this small group that the Inquisition was created to eliminate them.”
   - Why were they such a threat (see pp 290-291)?
   - In your eyes, what were the ramifications of the Inquisition?

3. At a minimum, Mary Magdalene was a devout disciple of Jesus according to all the gospels (both canonical and Gnostic).
   - How was the depiction of Mary Magdalene changed from the time of Jesus through the 20th Century?
   - You may wish to examine: Prophet Micah (p. 299); the Black Madonna and Child (p. 301); the Cathars (p. 305); the Gnostic Gospels (p. 317); Pope Gregory I (p. 319); and Pope Paul VI in 1969 (p. 319).

4. The author states that the man-made core tenets of Christianity are “emotionally damaging and spiritually harmful.”
   - Do you agree or disagree?
   - Consider the church’s response to homosexuality, celibacy, the treatment of women, and anti-Semitism.
Week Nine
Chapter 4, Part Three:

How the Major Religions Fail Us:
Islam

1. The Islamic faith views Abraham’s first son Ishmael as the patriarch from whom the Arab people and Muhammad descended. Like the prophets before him, Muhammad claimed to speak for God and he claimed authority to speak to all Arabs, including his “Jewish Brothers” who had been chased out of Israel by the Romans.
   - Do you agree that if Ishmael and Isaac were both sons of Abraham, the feuding of thousands of years is brother killing brother?
   - If that is so, why can’t they resolve their differences and live in peace?

2. Muhammad believed that the deification of Jesus and the Trinity are pagan beliefs because there is only one true God (p. 328). He also said the personification of God was potentially dangerous.
   - Why has mankind attempted to portray God in human terms?
   - Why is it not enough to believe in a Spiritual entity that is always with us?

3. To Muhammad, war was acceptable only as a means of self-defense. Thus, Islamic fundamentalists are not properly practicing their religion when they declare “unholy jihads.” The author tells the story of Osama Bin Laden to show that he started out as a man defending his beloved homeland from invaders and despoilers. Yet in the U.S., Osama bin Laden has come to personify evil and people cheered in the streets when he was killed.
   - Could a man of peace in the Middle East have as much influence as bin Laden?
   - Do you think Jesus could spread peace today?

4. Muhammad espoused that the key to transforming hatred to love is forgiveness.
   - How have you learned to forgive someone who has wronged you?

5. The abhorrent treatment of women (p. 346) is not supported in the Holy Quran, which emphasizes protecting women and improving their status. “Dress modestly and take care when out in public” is a far cry from a burqa.
   - Why have men subjugated women to such a degree and manipulated Islamic Law?
   - Do you think our Muslim sisters have the strength to fight for their rights?

6. Muhammad believed that Jews, Christians, Muslims and all who believed in Allah/God should live together in peace (p. 349). He would have liked all to convert to Islam but did not demand conversion or punish people for holding fast to their beliefs.
   - What happened to change this?
   - Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, are the Muslims going through a “Dark Ages” like the Christians did after the fall of the Roman Empire?
Week Ten

Chapter 5:

Why We Are Spiritually Polarized

1. The author concludes that all five of the primary religions are hopelessly out of date and that instead of building a Tower of Truth, mankind has constructed a Tower of Babel!
   - Do you agree?
   - Are the five primary religions holding us back from making spiritual advances?
   - Do you think humanity is on the verge of the “Fifth Spiritual Paradigm”?
   - What evidence do you have to support this belief?

2. The author states that in order to achieve peace and harmony, humanity must learn how to love – not only God – but ourselves and each other. (NOTE: the second installment in The Oracle Institute foundational trilogy is The Love: Of the Fifth Spiritual Paradigm).
   - Do you agree with this concept?
   - What can we do to achieve this?
   - Is there a “Religion of Love”?

3. The author does a good job of showing the Bible to be the product of men of power, not the hand of God.
   - Once we acknowledge that men wrote the holy books, can we intellectually still believe in the power of those words to control our fate?

4. For centuries, religion was an effective tool for controlling the poor and uneducated masses. However, during the second half of the 20th Century, the spiritual tide started to turn when mankind collectively began to value human rights, women’s rights, and the inalienable rights and freedoms given to us by God.
   - Do our religions still serve us today?
   - If so, how? If not, why?

5. Many individuals still view God as a masculine deity or force.
   - Have you begun to embrace the idea that the Supreme Being contains both masculine and feminine energies?
   - How do you envision God today as opposed to when you were a young child?

6. With many crises looming, the world is changing rapidly and revolution is in the air …
   - Do you agree that we are living through a “Great Cusp” – a critical period of human history that immediately precedes a massive paradigm shift?
   - Given the dangerous times in which we live, do you think we’re moving into dystopia and approaching WWII?
   - Or do you agree with the author that the New Millennium, ultimately, will be a time of love and sharing on an unprecedented level?
   - Has reading The Truth brought you greater clarity to continue your spiritual journey?