

Parallels Across Religious Mysticism Chart

Concept	Hinduism	Buddhism	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
Ordinary life as a state of illusion or sleep	<i>Maya</i> (illusion), the <i>Lila</i> (Divine Play); the cyclic wheel of <i>samsara</i> (changing flow of the phenomenal world).	<i>Shunyata</i> (emptiness). "Nothing possesses an essential, enduring identity." <i>Avidya</i> (ignorance).	No, though there are references to "waking up" as with the shofar calling Jews to repentance	Fallen state due to Original Sin	Humanity was "created in the best mold" but has fallen to "the lowest of the low" (through forgetting and bad actions).
Increasingly subtle layers or levels of reality (planes, dimensions), inhabited by beings with bodies appropriate to those levels	3, 7 or 14 worlds (<i>lokas</i>) depending on how they are subdivided. Physical, emotional (astral), mental, causal and transcendent planes. <i>Koshas</i> are appropriate bodies that inhabit each plane.	6 <i>lokas</i> (worlds). Can be broken up into 31 planes of existence.	4 worlds (Kabbalah the Zohar / Luria) <i>Atzilut</i> : Emanation (spirit), <i>Briyah</i> : Creation (mind), <i>Yetsirah</i> : Formation (astral), <i>Assiyah</i> : Action (physical)	7 mansions of the Interior Castle (St. Theresa of Avila). Underhill's <i>Mysticism</i> : Awakening, Purification, Illumination, Introversion, Ecstasy and Rapture, Dark Night of the Soul, the Unitive Life	7 heavens encountered by the Prophet (peace be upon him) in his Night Journey; he was also shown a hell state and a state beyond Paradise.
Seven levels of existence	7 <i>Chakras / Lokas</i> (planes)	Six realms of existence (In Tharavada teachings, 5)	Tree of Life/ 7 Heavens	St. Theresa's Interior Castle, Underhill, above	7 Levels of the <i>Nafs</i> (ego, self)
Paradise, hell, intermediate states	Levels of <i>devas</i> , humans, asuras	The Six Worlds (heaven, humans, <i>asuras</i> , animals, <i>pretas</i> (hungry ghosts), hell	Paradise, earth, <i>Gahenna</i> , <i>sheol</i>	3-7 heavens, earth, limbo, purgatory, hell	7 heavens and 7 hells. (According to <i>ahadith</i> , all are removed from hell eventually)
Existence of a 'primordial religion'	<i>Sanatana Dharma</i>	No such concept to the best of my knowledge.	Judaism itself is seen as the primordial religion. Maimonides codified these ideas.	"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. " -- John 1:1	The Religion of Abraham. "Islam" in the broad sense of "peace through submission to the Divine," sent to all humanity in different forms
Repayment for good and evil actions. Paid back during life, after death, or both	Law of Karma	Law of Karma	Divine Justice	"As ye sew, so shall ye reap." Judgement Day	<i>Yaum ad-Din</i> (Day of Requitall)

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Subtle spiritual/ physical energy flows through the universe and channels in the body; grace, sweetness	<i>Kundalini, nadis</i> (energy channels in the body) <i>prana, amrita</i>	<i>Chi, ki</i>	<i>Shefa, Shekinah</i> (Divine Presence)	Grace, Holy Spirit, Gifts of the Spirit, Tongue of Flame, Pentecost. "Living water"	<i>Hayy</i> (God's aspect of Divine Life). <i>Baraka</i> (spiritual energy and blessing)
Undifferentiated Godhead – God without qualities	<i>Nirguna Brahman</i> (God without qualities)	Though the term "God" is not used, Tathagata (Suchness, Thusness) may be analogous.	<i>Eyn Sof</i> (infinite essence)	Dionysius the Areopagite: Undifferentiated Godhead overflows to make Creation.	<i>Dhat</i> (God without qualities) as opposed to <i>Sifat</i> (Divine Qualities). <i>Al-Haqq</i> (God's aspect as Truth)
Unity / Oneness of God (sometimes implies an undivided Reality)	<i>Advaita</i> (non-duality). Prayer: "Lord, forgive me three sins which are due to my human limitations. . ."	Everything has Buddha nature, but most are unaware. --Mahayana	<i>Echad/ Shema</i>	"Three in One." A religious Mystery.	<i>Tauheed</i> (unity)
First manifestation of God as Light and/or Sound	<i>Shabda Brahman</i> (God in the aspect of sound) "The letter AUM (OM) is all this." – <i>Mandukya Upanishad</i>	<i>Prabhāsvaratā</i> : luminosity, clear light, radiance, purity mind free of <i>kleshas</i> . <i>Dzogchen</i> , fundamental nature reality and all phenomena. Ground/Mother Luminosity, radiant essence, virgin substance underlying all of life.	<i>Or Eyn Sof</i> (Light of Infinite Essence) is a stage in the creation of the universe.	The Logos. "I am the Light of the World," "The light shined in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God."	<i>An-Nur, Nur(un) ala Nur, Nuri Muhammad. Sarmad</i> , the cosmic sound current. Creation occurred through God's command "Kun!" ("Be!")
Many aspects / qualities of God	<i>Saguna Brahman</i> . The 'gods'. <i>Brahma/Vishnu /Shiva, Saraswati, Ganesha, Kali, etc.</i>	No "God" in Buddhism as such; peaceful and wrathful deities, buddhas or other beings exemplifying different qualities, e.g., the 21 Taras	10 Holy Names of God 10 sephirot, also Divine Names (El Elyon, YHVH, Avinu Malkenu, Adonai, etc.).	The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) Various roles such as Lord, Almighty and Creator. "I am the alpha and the omega."	<i>Sifat / Asma al-Husna</i> : The 99 Beautiful Names (or Qualities, Aspects) of God. The Alive, the Loving, the Subtle, the Aware, etc.
Mercy and Compassion of God or godlike beings	Vishnu (member of the Hindu 'trinity'; Krishna (earthly manifestation of Vishnu))	Compassion, Buddhas, Bodhisatvas. Dalai Lama	<i>Chesed / Rachamim</i>	Grace, the sacrifice made by Jesus for humanity	Divine attributes including <i>Halim, Ghafar, 'Afuw, Rahman and Rahim</i>

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Descent of God or emissaries of God into the world, at any time or at the end of time	Avatars - Vishnu's Incarnations who come "when dharma decays". "I have gone out and become all this." – Bhagavad Gita <i>Kalki</i>	Descent of Amida and 25 bodhisatvas (a popular motif in Tibetan and Japanese art). <i>Maitreya Buddha</i>	The Prophets, who were channels of God's Word, sent by God The expected Messiah	One incarnation – Jesus Christ The return of Jesus at the end of time.	The Prophets (sent by God). In Shi'ism, the 12 Imams, beginning with Ali. The return of Jesus with the <i>Mahdi</i> .
Types of beings	<i>Devas</i> (gods), humans, animals, <i>asuras</i> (elementals), <i>demons</i>	<i>Devas</i> , (gods) humans, animals, <i>pretas</i> (hungry ghosts), <i>asuras</i> , demons	Archangels, angels, humans, animals, demons (<i>shadim</i>)	Archangels, angels, humans, animals, demonic beings	<i>Mala'ikatika</i> (angels), humans, animals, jinn, <i>shaitans</i> (demons)
Humanity as the microcosm, containing all aspects of being	" <i>Tat tvam asi</i> ," meaning, "Thou art That," refers to the identity of <i>Atman</i> (our inner consciousness) with <i>Brahman</i> , the Supreme Consciousness	"The whole of existence arises in me, In me arises the threefold world, By me pervaded is this all, Of naught else does this world consist."	All that the Holy One created in the world He created in man. <i>Talmud, Abot de Rabbi Nathan 31</i> <i>Adam Kadmon. Shekinah</i> (spark)	"Man is the meeting-point of various stages of Reality." Rudolph Eucken in Underhill's <i>Mysticism</i>	Humans are combinations of the 99 Divine Names/ Aspects); also contain all animal, vegetable and mineral nature (Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Bawa Muhayuddin)
Pivotal or central place of human level as only being with free will	Human beings are responsible for their actions, but God is the ultimate doer. By renouncing fruits of actions, humans are liberated. (from <i>Vedanta</i>)	From the human level, we can get off the wheel of <i>samsara</i> . "How hard it is to attain a human birth," said the Buddha.	"I [God] have set before you life and death, blessing and curse: therefore choose life" (Deut.30:19). "I have made you a little lower than the angels." (Humans err because of free will.)	Animals are controlled by instinct, while angels are pure agents of God's will. Neither group experiences conflict and choice in the sense that humans do.	This spiritual station of choice was offered to every being, mountains etc.; all refused in fear except Man. "Surely man is hasty." says the Qur'an.
'Spark' or 'breath' of God within humans or all beings	Brahman and Atman; Krishna pictured in the hearts of every being. " <i>Om tat Sat</i> ;" " <i>Tat tvam asi</i> ". "This is That," "thou art that;" phenomenal world is not different from Enlightenment.	Suchness of things, mindfulness, <i>Prajnaparamitra Sutra</i>	<i>Nefesh chayah</i> ("living soul") <i>Ruach</i> ? <i>Netzotz</i> ("spark")	And the Lord God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Genesis 2:7	<i>Ruh</i> – the Breath or Spirit of God which is breathed into the human being, whose physical body is made of earthly substance ('clay')

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Existence of Enlightenment / Enlightened beings	<i>Nirvana, moksha</i> (liberation) <i>paramahamsas, jivanmuktas</i> (sages, awakened beings, liberated beings)	<i>Nirvana, bodhi. Buddhas, arhats, bodhisatvas. "Tathagata", one who has gone.</i>	Zaddiks, Rabbis of the Talmud; Bal Shem Lamedvavniks: 36 hidden holy Jews	Christ (literally "anointed") those who become "like me"	Sufism: Hujwiri's and Ibn al-Arabi's 'divine courts'. <i>Qutb, Abdals</i> , etc. Shi'a: 12 Imams. <i>Insan Kamil</i> (Perfected Human Being).
Possibility of achieving union with (or disappearance into) God or Supreme Reality	<i>Jivanmukti, Moksha. A jivanmukta</i> (freed, realized being) has no " <i>sankalpa</i> " (self will). The will has merged with the Divine and God is the only doer.	<i>Satori, way of the Arhat. Nirvana, "complete absorption into the undifferentiated ground of being; spiritual bliss."</i>	Devkut ("cleaving to God"). No complete merging. Humility/ <i>bital yesh</i> relates to renouncing the ego.	Mystical Marriage, Unitive State	<i>Fana /Baqaa</i> (Ego effaced, reappearance as God-filled being)
High, holy people who are near to God (on earth or on other planes)	<i>Rishis, true gurus, jivanmuktas, paramahamsas</i> (literally "great swans")	<i>Buddhas, arhats, bodhisatvas. "Tathagata", one who has gone.</i>	<i>Zaddiks, Rabbis of the Talmud; Bal Shem</i>	Saints, the Pope, staretz (plural?) of Eastern Orthodox Christianity	<i>Auliya</i> (singular, <i>Wali</i>), Pirs, Sheikhs, <i>Muqarribin</i> , the Near Ones
Beings who forego paradise to serve others	Narada and Valmiki in <i>The Ramayana</i>	Bodhisatvas	<i>Zaddiks, Rebbes</i>	The self-sacrifice of Jesus for humanity?	Some <i>aulia</i> , Sufi saints, martyrs are similar
Sacred law to be observed by everyone and/or sacred law specifically for "believers"	<i>Dharma</i> <i>Yamas and Niyamas</i> (Do's and don'ts) from Patanjali's Sutras.	The Four Noble Truths. The Three Treasures ("I take refuge in the buddha, the dharma, the sangha (community))	7 Laws of Noah (for non-Jews) The 10 Commandments. <i>Halachah</i> , 600+ rules to be observed. Jews observe the 7 Laws of Noah and many more.	The 10 Commandments. Sermon on the Mount; Love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself.	Way of the <i>hanifa</i> (Abraham). <i>Sharia, Sunna</i> (practice of the Prophet). 4 Sunni and 1 Shi'a school of law. (<i>Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Jafaari</i>)
Spiritual evolution through successive stages	Age-related and life-stage related stages, 7 chakras, reincarnation with eventual liberation	Zen Ox-herding pictures	Madregot (rungs) of the spiritual ladder. Student, rabbi, zadik, prophet, other stages	Alexandrian early teachers (Origen, Clement) & Gnosticism	"Surely you will travel from stage to stage." "You are arranged in ranks." 7 levels of the <i>nafs</i> (self)
Intentional spiritual path (for those who wish or are ready to go deeper)	Paths of <i>Karma, Bhakti, Jnana, Raja</i> and other Yogas.	Eightfold Path	<i>Kabbalah/ Hasidism</i>	Monasticism, lay brother- or sisterhood. "The Christian Walk."	Sufism

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Schools of successively awakening teachers and students, from an enlightened founder	Swami Orders: <i>Saraswati</i> (nature), <i>Giri</i> (mountain), etc.	Zen lineages (e.g., Soto lineage of Dogen Zengi); Tibetan lineages	Hasidic lineages. Rabbis of the Talmud.	Monastic orders founded by Sts., Francis, etc. In Eastern Orthodox faith, lineages such as described in <i>The Way of a Pilgrim</i>	Sufi <i>Tariqas</i> (orders): Naqshbandi, Qadri, Mevlevi, Jerrahi, etc.; the <i>silsila</i> (chain of transmission).
Relationship of enlightened teacher / receptive student	Guru / Chela ("Guru" implies 'light out of darkness')	<i>Living Buddha Zen</i> by Lex Hixon describes many of these.	<i>Rebbe / hasid</i>	Orthodox – <i>Staritz</i> / student ("Way of a Pilgrim")	Sheikh (Shaykh) / Dervish
Sudden perception of truth / ecstatic transformation of the ordinary	Vivekananda. "This cup is God, this plate is God; nothing could be more absurd." (Then he awakened.)	<i>Satori</i>	State of <i>Gadalut</i> (expanded awareness, expanded consciousness)	Conversion, 'born again' experience. Saul on the road to Tarsus.	<i>Wajd</i> . Different states of bliss, peace, awe, unity, etc. (High <i>ahwal</i> (plural of <i>hal</i> , see below).
High, ecstatic states (temporarily given) and ascending levels (stable, earned)	Various levels of <i>samadhi</i> (deep absorption) with or without an object (<i>sankalpa</i> and <i>nirbikalpa</i>).	4 stages of awakening: stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, arhat. (Theravada / Early Buddhism)	Ecstasy and <i>ruach</i> , <i>ha-kodesh</i>	Illumination, Union (<i>Mysticism</i> , Evelyn Underhill)	<i>Hal</i> and <i>Makam</i> (state and station), <i>wajd</i> , <i>kashf</i> (insight)
Breath as a meditation practice / pathway back to God	<i>Pranayama</i> Breathing patterns for specific purposes.	Vipassana /Theravadan techniques; Zen techniques	Certain Kabbalah practices	"Breath prayer" for continual recollection or a moment of immersion. Desert Fathers and Mothers.	Patterns in Qur'anic recitation <i>Fikr</i> practices
Meditation and contemplation	<i>Dharana</i> (concentration) <i>Dhyana</i> (contemplation) <i>Samadhi</i>	Theravadan mindfulness meditation; <i>Zazen</i> ('just sitting', Zen)	<i>Kavanah</i> , which translates as "concentration," "feeling" or "devotion." Can lead to inner understanding.	Way of Mary. Desert Fathers and Mothers, Carmelites, Eastern Orthodox Hesychism	<i>Dhikr</i> (Remembrance of Allah) silent or spoken
Study, intellectual endeavor, discernment as a spiritual path, may include discussion and argument.	<i>Jnana yoga</i> , "Neti, neti." ("Not this, not that.) Discrimination between true and false.	Intense study of holy texts. Vigorous debate and argument is part of some schools.	Intensive study and discussion of holy texts and commentaries. Argument is included.	St. Ignatius, the Jesuits. St. Jerome, St. Augustin, Bible scholarship.	Qur'an/ hadith scholars, Golden ages in Baghdad and Spain, Ibn Arabi
Use of music, movement, and ecstasy to awaken Divine Love	Bhakti yoga, <i>kirtan</i> , <i>bhajans</i>	Mindfulness (Vipassana) while moving in daily activities, chanting	Hasidic dancing and singing. Davening.	Charismatic movement, Pentecostalism, revivals, love of Jesus and God	Sufi <i>dhikr</i> and whirling, <i>illahis</i> (Turkey), Qawali music (India)