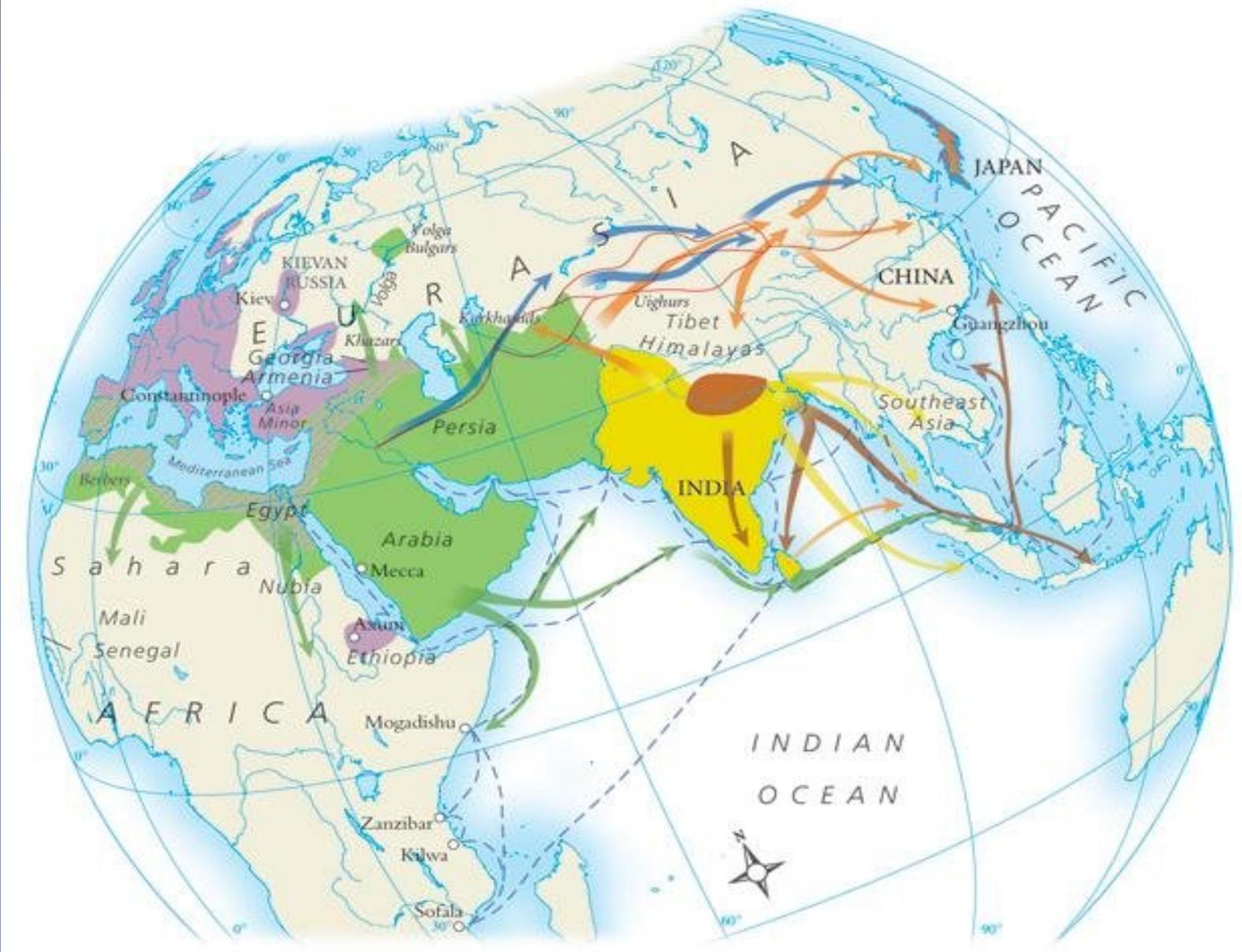# Rise & Impact of World Religions:

Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism

World Religion: Necessary Conditions

- Religion must be open to all
  - Most ancient religions are gender-specific or culturally specific
- Religion must appeal to all levels of society: poor, middle, elites
  - Offering spiritual transcendence--personal salvation
  - Allowing one to belong to something larger than oneself
- Need for opening to conversion:
  - times of turmoil, unrest, feeling that old religion isn't working
  - in personal circumstances that makes converting to new religion a great advantage, or
  - in a position in which they can be coerced (defeated in war)

The Rise of World Religions to 1000 C.E.

How do religions spread?

All of the following are often interlinked,
but let's think about how each one works by itself.

- **Trade**
  - **Exchange of goods and exchange of ideas**
    - **Buddhism to East Asia along the Silk Route**
    - **Islam into West Africa along the Saharan caravan routes**
- **War**
  - **Islamic Empire**
    - **Jihad: war as religious duty**
  - **Charlemagne's conquests of pagan Germans**
    - **War in the service of the church**
- **Conversion of Elites (Military, Political, Commercial)**
  - **Christianity**
    - **Roman**
    - **Ethiopian**
    - **Persian**
    - **Georgians, other Central Asians**
  - **Buddhists**
    - **Koreans**
    - **Japanese**

Case Study: Rome and Christianity
Middle East & Islam

- **Elite sponsorship: Christianity**
  - **Constantine and Rome**
    - **Imperial favor brought Christian clergy into state bureaucracy.**
    - **Christians redefined educational system for the elite.**
    - **State religion by the end of the fourth century**
    - **Conversion by general population takes off**
    - **Conversion of neighboring states (Armenia, Georgian kingdoms, Ethiopia) as a means of associating with Rome**
    - **Persecution of non-Christians accelerates as Christianity spreads**
- **Elite sponsorship: Islam**
  - **Takeover of Arabia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia**
  - **Tolerance of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians**
    - **Move to Arabic as official language throughout Dar al-Islam**
    - **Taxes on non-Muslims create incentives to convert to Islam**
    - **Periodic persecutions**

Case Study: Buddhism in Tang China

- **Tang dynasty in China.**
    - **Imperial favor brought Buddhist clergy into the state bureaucracy.**
    - **Buddhist clergy give heightened legitimacy to rulers by recognizing them as "enlightened" beings (Bodhisattvas), who are capable of helping others to 'enlightenment'**
    - **Buddhism spreads to neighboring states (Korea, Japan, Indochina) that want to associate themselves with China.**

- **Missionary activity**
    - **Buddhist monks to China**
    - **Christian monks into Britain**
    - **Islamic scholars, judges move across Asia, Africa, Mideast**

Monasticism in Christianity and Buddhism

- Both religions were founded by ascetics: Jesus and Buddha
  - What does "ascetic" mean? asceticism? Make sure you know
- Monks represent those who attempt to live up to each religions ideals.
  - Buddhism: most clerics are monks; keepers of tradition and scripture, sometimes become "holy" or saint-like
  - Christianity: separate groups of monks and priests; both are keepers of tradition and scripture, and either may become "holy" or saint-like
    - Monks more involved in missionary work
    - Essential in maintaining literacy and culture in Europe
    - Benedict of Nursia (500s CE) father of western monasticism
    - St. Benedict's rule focused monks on work, study, prayer

Islamic Monasticism: Why Not?

- Muhammad was not an ascetic: he married, had children, was a political as well as spiritual leader.

- Islam: all male Muslims are "priests" capable of performing any ceremony. Muslim clerics are men who devote themselves to study of scripture and many gain followings. Any Muslim may convert others to Islam.

- No need for monks or separate religious clerical orders

Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity became world religions because each had:

- A general appeal to all persons
- No specific connection to any particular group or gender
- Sponsorship by a powerful elite or elites
- The ability to spread through trade
- Missionaries who could spread the message of the religion and convert new believers