

**FOUR GREAT RELIGIONS: FOUR  
LECTURES DELIVERED ON THE  
TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, AT  
ADYAR, MADRAS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649587377

Four Great Religions: Four Lectures Delivered on the Twenty-First Anniversary of the Theosophical Society, at Adyar, Madras by Annie Besant

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**ANNIE BESANT**

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# FOUR GREAT RELIGIONS

## Four Lectures

*Delivered on the Twenty-first Anniversary of the  
Theosophical Society, at Adyar, Madras*

BY

ANNIE BESANT

*Fellow of the Theosophical Society*

LIBRARY OF  
THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY  
ADYAR, MADRAS

LONDON  
THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING SOCIETY  
26 Charing Cross, S. W.  
NEW YORK: THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING SOCIETY  
63 Fifth Avenue  
BENARES: THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING SOCIETY

1897

THEOSOPHICAL PRESS  
826 OAKDALE AV.  
CHICAGO, ILL.

cca

## PREFACE TO AMERICAN EDITION.

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SINCE the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 aroused the American public to a sense of the importance of Eastern thought, the study of Comparative Religion has made great strides in the United States. The present work is designed to present four of the chief religions of the world side by side, each as it appears to its more thoughtful and liberal adherents. The fundamental unity of these religions is thus made apparent, and it is seen that, instead of bending our efforts to convert our neighbors to our own faith, we should do well to search out and bring forth the spiritual treasures it contains, often hidden under a mass of intellectual verbiage that repels the non-intuitional. A true brotherhood of religions can only be secured by members of each recognizing and honoring the truths contained in other faiths, and being willing to live in amity without endeavoring to convert. We have all much to learn and much to teach, and if the missionaries of every faith would become learners and teachers instead of proselytizers, they would become the messengers of peace and good-will instead of the stirrers-up of strife.

ANNIE BESANT.

CHICAGO, 1897.

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## FOUR GREAT RELIGIONS.

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### FOREWORD.

THE following lectures do not pretend to be anything more than popular expositions of four great faiths, and are intended for the ordinary reader rather than for the student. Delivered to audiences composed almost entirely of Hindus, with only a sprinkling of Zoroastrians and Christians, they rather take for granted a knowledge of Sanskrit terms; so notes have been added where obscurity might arise from their use. They are intended to help members of each of the four religions to recognize the value and beauty of the three faiths which are not their own, and to demonstrate their underlying unity. In the lecture on Buddhism I had especially in mind the misconceptions which shut the Lord Buddha out from the hearts of His countrymen, and strove to remove them by quotations from the received Scriptures containing the authoritative records of His own words. For indeed I know of no greater service that could be rendered to religion than to draw together again these sundered faiths,

which almost divide between them the Eastern world. Mother and daughter they are, and family feuds are proverbially bitter; yet might the quarrel be healed, if the desire for amity reigned on both sides. Less deeply rooted, but more keen, was the antagonism to Christianity, exasperated by the ignorant and often coarse and abusive attacks levelled by the lower class of missionaries against the venerable faith held by nearly all my hearers. Yet they listened respectfully and after a while sympathetically to the exposition of the faith so young in comparison with their own, and finally recognized that it also was a great religion, and was not really alien from Hinduism. I can wish these lectures no better fate than that they may act as a message of peace to the hearts of their readers, as they evidently did to the hearts of their hearers.

The general principles underlying these lectures are the following: Each religion is looked at in the light of occult knowledge, both as regards its history and its teachings. While not despising the conclusions arrived at by the patient and admirable work of European scholars, I have unhesitatingly flung them aside where they conflict with important facts preserved in occult history, whether in those imperishable records where all the past is still to be found in living pictures, or in ancient documents carefully stored up by Initiates and not wholly inaccessible. Especially is this the case with regard to the ages of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, touching which modern scholarship is ludicrously astray. That scholar-