

Cult



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Cults and religions are often a critical piece of world-building. From the naïve do-gooders to apocalyptic demon-summoners, cults and religions span a range of purposes and belief systems. Use the following tables to generate a compelling cult or religion to inhabit your world.

CORE Tenet

A single core teaching stands above all others. Use the following table to identify the religion's core tenet. *Choose one or roll a d12.*

1. **All You Need Is Love:** Love is all you need, particularly familial love and love of the gods.
2. **Do Unto Others...:** These cultists believe in helping their fellow man. The more joy in the world, the better.
3. **Equality Above All:** All living creatures deserve to live together, as equals. Slavery is the greatest crime.
4. **For I Am Come Again:** These cultists are obsessed with bringing their god back into the world. They perform their ritual ceremonies seemingly without end in hopes that one of them will open the final door.
5. **Knowledge Is Power:** This religion is deeply engrained in study, often arcane. Its secrets require decades of close research from a thousand holy texts.
6. **Material Wealth Is Sin:** These cultists seek to rid themselves of all material wealth, and live as beggars. Churches and the trappings associated with their religion are the only possible exception.
7. **Meditation and Self-Reflection:** This religion is a vehicle for self-discovery. All else is flexible, and teachings usually take the form of perplexing *koans*.
8. **Nothing Really Matters:** There are no rules. The gods, while powerful, are as meaningless as their subjects down below.
9. **Only Mortals Remain:** The gods have long left this world and no longer impart any meaning to it. We must choose our own purpose in life.
10. **Only the Strong Survive:** This cult is a constant battle for supremacy. The strong are revered and charity is abhorred.

11. **Slaughter is the Only Virtue:** Bloodshed and death are the way of this cult. Violence is a virtue in and of itself.
12. **Worship for Power:** These cultists desire power above all else. The ceremonies and rituals, dark or divine, are simply a means to gain strength.

COMMANDMENTS

In addition to the core tenants above, religions have all sorts of additional rules and regulations. Use the following table to generate additional commandments. *Choose as many as you want or roll any number of d20s.*

1. Thou shall bury the seeds before consuming the fruit.
2. Thou shall conduct prayer with eyes closed and hands upraised.
3. Thou shall devote one day a week to rest. No work shall be performed on that day.
4. Thou shall honor thine superiors.
5. Thou shall make no contract lasting more than 7 years. Marriage and other permanent contracts are abominations.
6. Thou shall not cut trees or harvest plants at night, except within the presence of a priest.
7. Thou shall not drink the milk of animals.
8. Thou shall not harm pigeons, lest you have divine punishment inflicted upon you.
9. Thou shall not inflict undue pain on thine enemies.
10. Thou shall not kill without cause.
11. Thou shall not perform magic of any type, except by express permission of a priest.
12. Thou shall not punish a child under the age of 8. Children are guiltless in all cases.
13. Thou shall not say the Lord's name out loud, nor write it down. It may only be whispered by the high priest to pass on Its knowledge.
14. Thou shall not take possessions upon which you have no claim.

15. Thou shall not touch members of the opposite sex, unless it is a family member.
16. Thou shall not wear red, for it is the color of blood.
17. Thou shall not wear shoes or bring weapons inside a temple. Tracking blood or dirt inside a temple is a terrible crime.
18. Thou shall only eat eggs hard boiled. The yolk cannot be cracked.
19. Thou shall read from the Holy Scriptures every day.
20. Thou shall wake up for a brief prayer in the dead of night, then you can return to rest.

CENTRAL MYTH

While most religions are composed of a tapestry of stories, one particular myth stands above all others. Use the following table to generate a central myth. *Choose one or roll a d10.*

1. **Child of God:** A central prophet was the child of god. It is through this heroic creature that we learned much of the divine.
2. **Death of the Divine:** One or more central gods were killed in a horrific calamity—either by the hand of man or the hand of another deity.
3. **Inevitable Armageddon:** The end of all days is fast approaching and it will be terrible. There is nothing that can be done.
4. **Judge of the Afterlife:** A man's words and deeds are weighed after he dies. Those who have acted in accordance with the cult are rewarded. Those who fail are punished with everlasting suffering.
5. **Loss of Innocence:** Mortals were once innocent, pure creatures under the gods' loving care. Due to a terrible mistake, we were cast from this pedestal and now toil in the mud.
6. **Slaying the Beast:** The great antagonist, possibly a god but more likely a monster, was slain by a human with the help of a god.

7. **Stealing from the Gods:** Some critical tool, such as fire or magic, was stolen from the gods. They never quite forgave us.
8. **Test of Faith:** The gods tested the faith of a mortal terribly, but the mortal persevered and was rewarded.
9. **The Great Flood:** Long ago, the gods cleansed the world of evil through a great flood. They saved only a few species to repopulate the lands.
10. **The Promised Land:** The gods have promised us a wonderful land, flowing with milk and honey.

DISTINGUISHING MARK

It is quite easy to recognize some worshippers out and about in their daily lives. Use the following table to generate a distinguishing mark. *Choose one or roll a d8.*

1. **Brand:** These cultists are easily identifiable by a cruel brand, often on the forehead or forearm.
2. **Handshake:** Cultists identify one another through a secret handshake. The handshake is subtle or quick enough that is it nearly imperceptible to the outside observer.
3. **Holy Material:** Instead of a specific symbol, an entire material is deemed holy (such as silver, raven feathers, or troll teeth). These items are treated with care and often woven into clothes or jewelry.
4. **Holy Symbol:** Members of this religion wear a small holy symbol, usually as a necklace of some precious metal.
5. **Masks:** Members of this cult wear strange masks. Most only wear them during rituals, but higher level members wear the items out in public.
6. **Mutilation:** Some part of the body is cut or burned away, often as a newborn. These areas are mostly cosmetic, such as the left earlobe or last joint of the pinky toe.
7. **Saying:** Cultists greet one another with a brief saying, often a proverb or blessing.

8. **Tattoo:** Tattoos adorn these cultists. The markings indicate religious belief as well as status within the church.

PRIESTS

Almost all religions have priests, members of a religious caste who guide others in worship. Use the following table to generate the priest's holy outfit.

Choose one or roll a d6.

1. **Beggar:** These priests are forbidden from ornate garb and must adorn themselves in rough hides. They are foul-smelling and unshaven, but preach the word of god.
2. **Cloaks:** Clothed in long cloaks, these priests make sweeping, dramatic gestures as they praise their gods.
3. **Divine Costume:** These priests dress as the god they represent, and often act out complex plays during services.
4. **Formal:** These religious leaders look similar to businessmen or other daily workers. They wear their best clothes, but do not stand out otherwise from the crowd.
5. **Martyr:** These priests emulate some famous martyr in their myths or perhaps just remind themselves of their place before god. They mark themselves in the manner of the martyr's death.
6. **Ornate:** The voice of god must look the part. These priests dress in ostentatious clothing, long furs, and expensive jewelry. Most of them wear enormous hats.

TEMPLE

Most religions require a central place of worship for prayer. Use the following table to generate a typical religious structure. *Choose one or roll a d10.*

1. **Cathedral:** These structures are grand and otherworldly, with stained glass and curved arches that draw the eye up.
2. **Caves:** These cultists refurbish natural caves for their rituals. If no caves are available, they build and reinforce tunnels into the soil.
3. **In the Darkness:** The actual structure of this temple hardly matters, as services are held in near-pitch blackness.
4. **Metal:** These temples are riddled with metal beams and jagged spikes. The area feels alien and lifeless.
5. **Multi-Shrine:** This temple contains a dozen or more vestibules with small shrines to minor gods.
6. **Relics:** The walls of this temple are adorned with trophies or relics from religious victories.
7. **Simple:** This religion admires simplicity. Its temples are almost warehouse-like in their austerity.
8. **Standing Stones:** These cultists worship in the open air, surrounded by massive stone blocks.
9. **Temple-less:** It is against the precepts of this cult to build any house of worship. Ceremonies are held in homes or public places.
10. **Wood:** Only wood is allowed in the construction of these temples, and they take on a rustic, natural feeling.

