

### Lesson Four - Ancient India Religions (Hinduism and Buddhism)

- 6.25 Explain how the major beliefs and practices of Brahmanism in India evolved into early Hinduism.
- 6.27 Write a narrative text describing how Siddhartha Gautama’s (Buddha) life experiences influenced his moral teachings and how those teachings became a new religion that spread throughout India and Central Asia as a new religion.

### Hinduism

**Hinduism** is the major religion of the Indian subcontinent and the world’s third largest religion. It developed in South Asia, but has a long tradition in Southeast Asia, and newer populations in Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. The practices of Hinduism have existed for thousands of years. There are many diverse practices within Hinduism, but they share the common philosophy that there is a supreme life force in the universe. Hindu teachings emphasize that all living beings are part of this Supreme Being and that there is divine presence in all.

Hinduism has no single founder, and scholars are still researching its origins. Unlike modern religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Hindus do not trace their roots back to specific founders and prophets. Religious scholars and practicing Hindus trace the origins of the religion back to ancient texts called the **Vedas**. The Vedas probably began to develop around 1500 BCE and were passed down by mouth for centuries. They emerged in written form around 300 BCE or earlier. The early Vedas were written in **Sanskrit**. They outline a set of beliefs and practices that scholars used to call Brahmanism, but now call Vedic Religion or Vedic Hinduism.

By the early Common Era, Hinduism had spread to Southeast Asia, where it remained for over 1,000 years and continues to have some influence on the cultures of the region. In the colonial era, Hindus were taken as laborers to places like South Africa, Malaysia, Fiji, and the Caribbean countries of Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad.

Because of that, Hinduism has been a part of those societies for several centuries.

#### Hindu Beliefs

The four Vedas detail the core philosophies of Hinduism and have established many traditions. Although the Vedas teach that there is one Supreme Being, Brahman, who manifests as the entire creation, Hindus honor many Deities as expressions of Brahman. Planets, stars, chemical elements, and all forms of life are all considered manifestations of Brahman. This is one reason why Hindu teachings encourage humans to revere nature and animals as forms of Deities. One Hindu scripture says that there are 300 million Deities, 300 thousand Deities, 300 Deities, and only one Deity—all on one page! This shows the many ways Brahman is present in Hindu beliefs. Of these many Deities, most Hindus believe that **Brahma**, **Vishnu**, and **Shiva** are the most important. The divine female form, known as Shakti, is also very important in Hindu philosophy.

#### Answer the following questions using the article.

What is the relevance of Hinduism today?


Explain how Hinduism developed.


How could you explain what Brahman is to someone?


Why would Hinduism influence humans to respect nature and animals?


#### Watch the video, "Roots of Hinduism" and answer the following questions

1. Where can the roots of Hinduism be traced?


2. What three Hindu Gods make up the trinity?

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3. What do all the Hindu Gods and Goddesses have in common?


4. How does the video explain Brahman?


### Hindu Gods and Goddesses

Most Hindus believe in Brahman, a Supreme Being present in all things. However, to develop a closer personal relationship with a chosen Deity, most Hindus worship Gods and Goddesses who represent different aspects of Brahman, such as Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning. **Hinduism** is the only major religion where God is worshipped in female as well as male form.

One of the most important Hindu Deities is **Brahma**. Hindus believe Brahma is the creator of Earth. Brahma is usually depicted with four faces and four arms.

**Vishnu** is “the preserver” of the universe. He has appeared on Earth in many **avatars**, nine of which are the most famous. Vishnu’s avatars are the different animal and human forms. Two of his avatars are **Krishna** and **Rama**, about whom epics have been written. These epics, the **Mahabharata** and Ramayana, are still popular across the world today to both Hindus and non-Hindus.

**Shiva** is the third of the main Hindu Deities. Although Shiva is called “the destroyer,” he is viewed as a positive force. Much like a forest fire can clear the way for new growth, Hindus believe that Shiva destroys and transforms so that the universe can be reshaped in new and beneficial forms.

Hinduism teaches that the whole universe, including male and female Deities, people, animals, and objects, are all expressions of one Supreme Being. For Hindus, an important spiritual task is to see beyond what they perceive with their senses to view this unity, which is the “true reality.” This task influences Hindus’ interactions with people and nature, since they believe that all life is connected and should be treated with respect.

#### Answer the following questions using the article.

What do Hindus do to develop a more personal relationship with their gods?


Describe the following Gods and Goddesses

Brahma	
Vishnu	
Shiva	

What are the Mahabharata and Ramayana?


Imagine your religion was Hinduism. Briefly summarize what it is you believe using information from the text.


#### Watch the video, “Hindu Gods: The Complete List”

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. Who was the founder of Hinduism?


2. How many Hindu Gods are there?


3. What is Brahma the God of?


4. What is Vishnu the God of?


5. What is Shiva the God of?


6. What is the point of avatars?


7. What is the Ramayana?


8. What is the Mahabharata?


## Dharma and Karma

Every **culture** has its own code of rules for people to live by. In many cultures, religions and religious values create guidelines for behaviors.

### Reincarnation

**Hinduism** does not have a single set of rules, but its teachings influence the way that people live their lives. Hindus believe that the universe is an endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth. **Reincarnation** is the idea that when a person dies, his or her atman, or eternal self, is reborn in a new physical form. The ultimate goal of life is to achieve moksha, or union with Brahman. Hindus believe it often takes several cycles of death and rebirth before people achieve moksha and are freed from the cycle of rebirth.

### Karma

How close one comes to moksha in a lifetime depends on the law of **karma**. Karma is the positive or negative force created as a result of good or bad actions performed during a person's lifetime. Hindus believe every action has a corresponding good or bad reaction that affects not only an individual's current life, but also determines how one will be reborn in future lives. Humans are considered to be the closest to Brahman, with animals, plants, and other objects being farther away from Brahman. People with good karma will be reborn at a level closer to Brahman, while people who do bad things leading to bad karma will be reborn farther away, such as an animal or a plant.

### Dharma

Hinduism also teaches that all human beings should act according to their **dharma**, or the religious and moral duties of an individual. These duties are connected to an individual's role in society. Dharma is not a doctrine, but rather a guide to how one should act in various situations. Truthfulness, nonviolence, selflessness, and moderation are all considered part of a dharmic life. However, some also believe dharma is connected to one's social status and occupation.

Hindus seek to balance the duties of dharma with the principles of **kama** and **artha**. Kama refers to love between people and the pleasures of life. Artha refers to the prosperity necessary to support one's self, family, and community. Many scholars also define artha to include a person's well-being. Hinduism teaches that people should pursue these principles without harming others or neglecting the duties of dharma.

### Moksha

Hinduism also places a value on human love and family life and encourages a turning away from material things in old age. A person's adherence to dharma helps to prepare the soul for liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. This break from the cycle of reincarnation is called moksha. Hindu scriptures describe four paths called yogas to moksha: the path of selfless service, the path of knowledge, the path of meditation, and the path of unconditional love for a Deity. Many people are familiar with the meditation yoga, which is often practiced by Hindus and non-Hindus throughout the world.

Hindus also believe in the principle of ahimsa, or nonviolence. This leads them to treat all forms of life with respect. Some Deities are associated with various animals. Ganesh, Deity of good luck and overcoming obstacles, is depicted with an elephant's head. Durga, Deity of justice, is associated with the tiger. The cow is a revered animal in the Hindu religion. As a result of their reverence of cows and all life, most Hindus do not eat beef and many are vegetarians or vegans.

### Answer the following questions using the article.

Describe the following elements of Hinduism?

Reincarnation	
Karma	
Dharma	
Moshka	

What is the ultimate goal of reincarnation?

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What would you be reincarnated as if you had good karma? What about bad karma?

Good -
Bad -

### Watch the video, "Hindu Beliefs"

draw lines to match the terms with the definitions

Term	Definition
Dharma	Every time someone dies their soul enters a newly born body
Brahman	The Good or Bod that results from our actions
Reincarnation	Doing one's duty
Moksha	Goal for all Hindus is to be united with this
Karma	Reincarnation stops and the soul achieves freedom from all attachments

### India's Epic Story

Much of the daily life of ancient Hindus was guided by their **dharma**, but **Hinduism** also strongly influenced the structure of ancient Indian society. Though the modern Indian caste system does not reflect ancient Hindu teachings, it has some roots in ancient Hindu texts.

The **Mahabharata**, or the "Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty" is a **Sanskrit** poem that consists of approximately 200,000 lines of verse. The author of the Mahabharata is unknown, but tradition says it was written by Vyasa, who is also one of the story's major characters. It is believed that the story was first written down between 500 and 400 BCE, though parts of the epic refer to events that occurred centuries earlier. The Mahabharata reached its final form about 400 CE under India's Gupta Empire. No one is completely sure how much of the epic story is based on historical events and how much is based on legend. Most Hindus do not view the Mahabharata as a historical epic, but instead draw from its moral lessons on dharma.

The Mahabharata, which is organized into 18 parvans, or sections, tells of a war between two noble families for

possession of a North Indian kingdom. It also describes Indian geography, history, and moral and religious teachings. The sixth book of the Mahabharata is an 18-chapter poem called the Bhagavad Gita, which means “Song of the Lord.” It highlights the importance of some of the most important aspects of Hinduism in a simple and easily understood form. The Gita, as it is commonly known, is the most famous section of the Mahabharata. Hindus consider it a very important sacred text.

The Bhagavad Gita records a conversation between a hero, Prince Arjuna, and Lord **Krishna**, avatar of Lord **Vishnu**. It takes place on the eve of a battle. The prince is reluctant to fight because he has friends and relatives among the enemy. Lord Krishna explains that Arjuna must do his duty and not worry about success or failure. It is the moral rightness of his actions that is important. The **Bhagavad-Gita** reflects on the nature of life and death:

**For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.**

—Bhagavad Gita 2.20

Hindus often cite verses of the Bhagavad Gita as inspiration.

**Answer the following questions using the article.**

How do Hindus use the Mahabrata?


What is the Mahabarata about?


What is the Bhagavad - Gita about?


**Watch, “Celebrating the Birth of Krishna”**

How important is the Bhagavad Gita to Hinduism? Use evidence from the video to support your answer.


**Hinduism Activity**

Draw a picture that represents the term in the box next to it.

Reincarnation	
Dharma	
Karma	

Moksha	
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## Prince Gautama Becomes The Buddha

**Hinduism** was prevalent and played a major role in the society of ancient India, but the region also gave rise to another major religion, **Buddhism**. Although this religion would not last in India, it greatly influenced many of the values of Indian **culture** today. The **beginning of Buddhism** lies in the life and teaching of Prince Siddhartha Gautama. He was born sometime between the 500s to 300s BCE, probably in what is now Nepal, just over the border from India. His royal father and aunt raised him in luxury. They kept him shielded from the troubles of the world. He married and eventually had a son. But how did a prince become the founder of a religion focused on simple living and the detachment from material goods?

A Buddhist legend tells that when leaving the palace one day, Gautama saw an old man, a sick man, a dead body, and poor monk. These sights disturbed him deeply and his mind was constantly troubled. How could he be happy when there was so much suffering in the world? Even his much-loved wife and son, like all humans, would one day grow old and die.

One night when he was 29, Gautama left his family and quietly slipped away from the palace. For six years he wandered about, seeking an answer to human suffering. It is believed that he may have briefly practiced **Jainism**, an offshoot of Hinduism whose followers practice harmlessness to all living things and personal sacrifice, including fasting.

### Becoming Buddha

Finally, at the age of 35, Gautama resolved to meditate his way to truth. He sat down under a tree near the East Indian city of Varanasi and sought to detach himself from his senses, feelings, and desires and reached a peaceful state of contemplation and reflection. In this meditative state, Buddhists believe, Gautama came to understand the cause of human suffering, the way around it, and the nature of supreme inner peace. The prince had become the Buddha. The name Buddha means “awakened one,” or “the one who knows.”

The Buddha began teaching his ideas in the Varanasi area. He taught that any human being could achieve enlightenment and inner peace by following the path that he discovered. It did not require priests or ceremonies. It did not even require a god or gods. The Buddha attracted many followers to his ideas and continued to spread his message throughout India. The spread of Buddhism continued in Asia even after his death.

### Answer the following questions using the article.

Who was the founder of Buddhism?

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Summarize the following parts of Sidartha Guatama’s life.

Early Life

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Change In Life

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Became the Buddha

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Being the Buddha

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What was the Buddha’s message?

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## The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

The Buddha's message was a simple one. It followed the Hindu principle of **dharma**, in that it presented a way of action for people to follow. This way of living begins with what Buddhists call the **Four Noble Truths**.

1: All life is full of suffering

The Buddha taught that everyone suffers, although it does not mean that happiness is impossible. Buddhists believe that every human being is subject to misfortune at one time or another. Everyone gets sick. Everyone dies. Anyone may experience loss, the betrayal of a loved one, or other insults and injuries throughout the course of their life.

2: The cause of human suffering is desire and attachment

The Buddha taught his followers that everything that comes through the senses or the mind causes cravings—for food, for pleasant experiences, for possessions. We suffer because we cannot have things we want. Therefore Buddhists teach that people must try to avoid being overcome by these desires as they go about their daily lives.

3: The cure for suffering is detachment, or ending desire

**Buddhism** does not teach that feelings and pleasures are bad. Instead Buddhists believe that it is the clinging to cravings that causes suffering. Therefore, Buddhism teaches that people must free themselves from these cravings. Buddhism teaches that people should live simply and not strive for material wealth or social advancement.

4: The way to overcome desire, and therefore end suffering, is to follow the **Eightfold Path**

The Eightfold Path provided a system for people to follow in their daily lives to free themselves from suffering. It is sometimes called the Middle Way, because its teachings help people to live a life somewhere between a life of denial and a life devoted to luxury.

The Buddha also accepted the ideas of **karma** and **reincarnation** although he did not believe in a soul. By following the Eightfold Path and living a moral life, one could achieve **nirvana**, a state of heavenly peace and freedom from desire and suffering. The Buddha rejected belief in personal gods, such as the many Hindu deities.

As the Buddha traveled throughout India teaching about the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, many people began to follow him, including local merchants and traders. These traders brought Buddhism to China, Vietnam, and other countries in Southern and Eastern Asia. Later, an Indian emperor converted to Buddhism and encouraged the people of his kingdom to open their minds to the concept of nirvana. For several hundred years, Buddhism was a leading religion in India.

### Answer the following questions using the article.

What were the Four Noble Truths

1.
2.
3.
4.

What is the Eightfold Path?


What is nirvana


What enabled Buddhism to spread?


### Watch, "The Life of the Buddha"

Write a summary of his life, highlighting key events that you learned about.


