Name: _____

Date: _____

Hinduism

The Ganges River swells with water every spring as snow melts in the Himalayas. The water brings life as trees and flowers bloom, and crops grow. This cycle of rebirth is a metaphor for Hinduism, the religious faith of most people in India.

The Universal Spirit

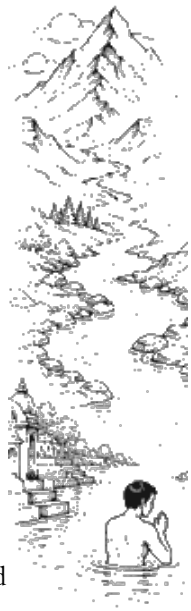
Hindus believe that every living thing has a soul, which comes from the universal spirit called Brahman. They believe that people's souls live on after death and that all living things can be reborn. This is called reincarnation.

Hinduism is the traditional religion of most people on the Indian subcontinent. It combines Aryan, Dravidian, and other Indian cultures and traditions. Hinduism has no founder but is influenced by the Vedas and other scriptures. The world's oldest religion, Hinduism is practiced by about 1.2 billion people, who live almost exclusively in the region.

Hinduism teaches that there is one universal spirit called Brahman, but Hindus seldom worship Brahman directly. They instead worship many gods and goddesses that are different forms of Brahman.

Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva

Brahma is the creator of the universe. Brahma is often pictured with four heads facing in different directions. Vishnu is the preserver of the universe who protects the world from evil. Hindus believe that Vishnu can take different forms called avatars to restore order to the world. Shiva is the god of destruction and re-creation. Shiva represents change, from day to night, the seasons, and the stages of life.



Karma and Rebirth

Many Hindus believe that our status in this life depends upon the karma humans accumulate in previous lives. Karma can be defined as the rewards or punishments a person faces because of their thoughts, words, and actions. A person who treats others with kindness and respect creates good karma. Likewise, a person who mistreats others creates bad karma.

Traditional Hindu teachings held that a person who followed the rules of their caste would be reborn as a higher form in the next life. Someone who neglected their duties would be reborn as a lower form of life, perhaps as an animal or insect.

Escaping the Cycle

The goal of Hinduism is to escape the cycle of rebirth by reaching moksha. Moksha means liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. A person who reaches moksha is finally free from the cycle.

Because they believe all living things have souls, many Hindus are vegetarians; they believe animals should live their natural lives and not be killed for food. Some Hindus are vegan, so they will not eat animal products, including eggs and cheese. Other Hindus will eat poultry and fish but will not eat beef. Cows are sacred to Hindus because they represent life, nourishment, and nonviolence; it is not unusual to see a cow wandering through the streets of an Indian city.

Hindu Worship

Many Hindus worship privately by performing rituals known as puja at a shrine in their homes. A Hindu may practice yoga, a system of exercise and meditation that teaches mastery of the mind, body, and emotions. There are Hindu temples (mandirs) and holy locations, but Hindu practices vary widely.

A guru is a spiritual teacher who understands dharma, the spiritual laws that govern the universe. Many Hindus are loyal to their gurus because they believe this spiritual guidance can help them escape the cycle of death and rebirth.

The Sacred Ganges

Hindus believe that water is holy because water brings life, particularly if the water is flowing in a river. The holiest of rivers is the Ganges. Today, the Ganges is very polluted, but Hindus believe the water from the Himalayas will purify the souls of those who drink or bathe in its waters. Many Hindus make a pilgrimage to the Ganges. Others travel to the river at the end of their lives in hopes of reaching moksha and escaping the cycle of rebirth.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

Hinduism is the t__a__i__i__n__l religion of most people on the Indian subcontinent and has no single f__u__d__r. Hindus believe in a u__i__e__s__l spirit called Brahman. Hindus believe every living thing has a s__ul, and souls can be r__b__rn after d__a__h. This cycle of death and rebirth is called r__i__c__r__a__i__n. Hindus worship many gods and goddesses as different forms of the ★u__i__e__s__l spirit. Brahma is the c__e__t__r, Vishnu is the p__e__e__v__r, and Shiva represents d__s__r__c__i__n, re-creation, and c__a__ge. Hindus believe Vishnu can appear in different forms called a__a__a__s. Good thoughts, words, and actions create good k__r__a, while ★h__rmf__l actions create bad karma. The ultimate goal for Hindus is m__k__ha, or l__b__r__t__on from the cycle of d__a__h and r__b__r__h. Many Hindus are v__g__t__r__a__s and cows are considered particularly s__c__ed. Many Hindu families perform p_____ at home shrines, and Hindus practice y_____, or seek guidance from a g_____. Hindus consider the G__n__es their holiest river. Many make p__l__r__m__g__s there to bathe in its s__c__ed waters, and some hope that ★d__i__g near the Ganges will help them reach m__k__ha.

Answer in Complete Sentences

★1. Explain why Hinduism can be described both as a monotheistic and a polytheistic faith. Use facts from the article to support your answer.

_____

_____

_____

★2. Identify and describe someone you know who has good karma.

_____

_____

_____

3. Why do many Hindus practice yoga?

_____

_____

_____

4. Why do many Hindus regard the Ganges River as holy?

_____

_____

_____

★ This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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