Ancient India

Lesson 2 Religions of Ancient India

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How do religions develop?

GUIDING QUESTIONS
1. What are the basic beliefs of Hinduism? How did Hinduism develop?
2. Why did Buddhism appeal to many people in various parts of Asia?
3. What are the teachings of Jainism?

Terms to Know
Hinduism major religion that developed in ancient India; main belief: all souls are part of one universal spirit
Brahman the universal spirit worshipped by Hindus
Reincarnation the idea that the soul is reborn into many different lives
dharma a person's personal duty, based on the individual's place in society
karma a good or bad force created by a person's actions; it determines whether a person's soul will be reborn into a higher or lower form of life
Buddhism religion founded by Siddhartha Gautama; main belief: inner peace comes from ending desire
nirvana a state of perfect happiness that is achieved after giving up all desires
Jainism religion that does not believe in a supreme being; it emphasizes nonviolence and respect for all living things

When did it happen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3000 B.C.</th>
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<tr>
<td>c. 1900 B.C. The Harappans leave the Indus Valley</td>
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<td>c. 1500 B.C. Early Hinduism first practiced by the Aryans</td>
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<td>c. 599 B.C. The birth of Mahavira, founder of Jainism</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 563 B.C. The birth of Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism</td>
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What do you know?
Put a check mark (✓) next to each term that you know. For every word that you check, write a short description or definition.

✓ Sanskrit
✓ the Vedas
✓ varnas
✓ guru
✓ Untouchables
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Origins of Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It grew from the faith of the Aryans. Hinduism has no one founder and no one holy book.

Hindus believe in one great spirit called Brahman. They also believe that all living things and even the gods are part of Brahman.

Hindus believe that a person’s soul will eventually join Brahman. Before that can happen, however, a soul must live many lives—even some as an animal. The idea of living many lives in different forms, one after another, is called reincarnation. According to Hinduism, if people do the duties of their jati, they will get a better next life. They must follow dharma, or their personal duty. If a person follows dharma, then they have good karma.

Karma is the result of how a person lives. If you live a good life and do your duty, you have good karma and eventually, you will reach Brahman. If you have bad karma, you will be reborn into a lower jati or as an animal and will remain in the cycle of reincarnation.

This belief in dharma and karma mean that people have to obey the rules of their jati because that is where they have to stay until their next lifetime. The idea of reincarnation gives them their only hope.

Rise of Buddhism

Prince Siddhartha Gautama was born about 563 B.C. Siddhartha was wealthy, married, and had a son. One day he left the palace and was shocked to see that most people were poor. He asked himself why people suffered.

Sequencing

1. Fill in the blanks with words from this section.

Hindus believe that the soul goes through _______. A person is born into a _______. If they follow the _______ of their jati, they make good _______ and the cycle starts again.

Describing

2. How do Hindus believe their souls will eventually join Brahman?

________________________

________________________

Reading Check

3. How did Hinduism affect the way ancient Indians lived day to day?

________________________

________________________

________________________
Lesson 2 Religions of Ancient India, Continued

To search for answers, he left his family and lived alone. Legend says that Siddhartha meditated under a tree. Finally, he came to understand the meaning of life. This is called “Enlightenment.”

Siddhartha spent the rest of his life teaching people about his discovery. People called him the Buddha, which means “Enlightened One.” His lessons about life and suffering are called Buddhism.

The Buddha taught that everyone should stop wanting fame, money, and worldly things. Then they would reach nirvana, a feeling of perfect peace and happiness. The Buddha said that the only way to stop desiring things was to follow the Eightfold Path—the Buddhist rules for right living.

The Buddha did not agree with the jati system. He taught that all people could reach nirvana. This made Buddhism very popular among the lower jati and the Untouchables.

The Eightfold Path

1. Know and understand the Four Noble Truths.
2. Give up worldly things and do not harm others.
3. Tell the truth, do not gossip, and do not speak badly of others.
4. Do not commit evil acts, such as killing, stealing, or living an unclean life.
5. Do rewarding work.
6. Work for good and oppose evil.
7. Make sure your mind keeps your senses under control.
8. Practice meditation to see the world in a new way.

The Buddha taught his ideas for more than 40 years. When he died, his disciples could not agree about what his message really meant. They split into two groups. One was Theravada Buddhism. Theravada means “teachings of the wise men.” It says that the Buddha was a great teacher, but not a god. Theravada Buddhism spread south and east. It also became popular in Indochina.

The other kind of Buddhism is Mahayana Buddhism. It says that the Buddha is a god. Mahayana Buddhists also honor bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are enlightened people who choose not to go to heaven even though they could. Instead, they stay on Earth to help others reach nirvana.
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In Tibet, Mahayana Buddhism mixed with Hinduism and Tibet’s own religions. Buddhist leaders called *lamas* led the government. Tibetans believed lamas were reincarnations of the Buddha.

Today, very few Buddhists live in India. Buddhism is widely practiced in Southeast Asia and East Asia. There are about 376 million Buddhists in the world today.

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<tr>
<th>BUDDHISM</th>
<th>Theravada Buddhism</th>
<th>Mahayana Buddhism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Buddha was a great teacher.</td>
<td>• Buddha was a god.</td>
<td>• People who worship Buddha can go to heaven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Buddha was not a god.</td>
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**Jainism**

Another religion also came to India at this time. It is called **Jainism**. Its main teacher was Mahavira. Mahavira’s title was “the Jina,” or “the Conqueror.” His followers are called Jains. Much of Jainism is like Buddhism. Both taught that people should stop wanting worldly things. Their goal was to stop the process of being reborn and reach nirvana.

Jainism has one main teaching: Never harm any living creature. The name of this teaching is *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* means that a person should not kill even insects or worms.

Centuries later, in the early 1900s, an Indian man named Mohandas Gandhi led a movement to free his nation from the rule of the British. Instead of using weapons, Gandhi followed the example of *ahimsa*. He and his followers used nonviolent ways of protesting. Through peaceful ways, the nation of India gained its independence.

**Check for Understanding**

List one important belief or practice of each religion.

1. Hinduism ____________________________
2. Buddhism ____________________________
3. Jainism ____________________________

**Reading Check**

8. Where is Buddhism practiced today and in what forms?

9. What is the belief of *ahimsa*?