

Lesson 6 Reading

While you read this text, come up with questions you have to discuss during class

Lesson 6 Vocabulary

- 1. Judaism- religion of the Jewish people**
- 2. Hinduism- the world's 3rd largest religion out of India**
- 3. Polytheism- the belief in many gods**
- 4. Monotheism- the belief in one god**
- 5. Talmud- primary source of Jewish religious law**
- 6. Ethics- moral principles that govern a person's behavior**
- 7. Diaspora- when people are living outside their homeland**
- 8. Dispersed- distribute or spread over an area**
- 9. Vedas- religious texts or writings from ancient India**
- 10. Sanskrit- language of the ancient Indian area**
- 11. Varnas- social classes in Hinduism**
- 12. Divine- god-like. To be like a god**
- 13. Jati- group of clans in India relating to one job**
- 14. Caste- social classes based on their job**
- 15. Dharma- to live the right way. A way of living**

- 16. **Karma-** spiritual rule about cause and effect
- 17. **Reincarnation-** the rebirth of a soul in a new body
- 18. **Pilgrimage-** journey into a new meaning about yourself

The Central Teachings of Judaism

The religious and moral ideas of Judaism have had a lasting effect on Western civilization. Let's learn about four central teachings of Judaism that remain very influential today.

Monotheism

Most people in ancient times believed in many gods, a belief named **polytheism**. The Israelites, later called Jews, were different because they believed that there is only one God, a belief referred to as **monotheism**. Judaism is the world's oldest monotheistic religion.

Judaism teaches that God is the **source** of morality (standards of right and wrong). These ideas of right and wrong had not always been valued by other ancient civilizations. Jews learn about and follow their religion by

studying their sacred texts. Through study and prayer, many Jews feel that God is close to them in their daily lives.

Following Jewish Teachings

Following the teachings in the Hebrew Bible and the **Talmud** (TAHL-muhd), a set of Jewish writings that explain the teachings of Judaism, is central to Jewish life. The Torah and the Talmud **instruct** Jews about how to lead moral lives. For example, Jews are taught to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Among Judaism's oldest and best-known laws and teachings are the Ten Commandments, which explain how to lead an upright and honorable life, as well as how to have a relationship with God. One of the commandments sets aside a holy day, the Sabbath, every week. The Sabbath, a day of rest and prayer, is still practiced by Jews and followers of other world religions, including Christianity. The commandments also lay down standards of right and wrong, such as “You shall not steal” and “You shall not murder.”

Over time, Jewish religious leaders developed a larger set of laws and teachings, some of which refined the Bible's dietary restrictions on what foods to eat. These dietary rules are often followed during religious holidays, such as the festival of Passover. These holy days celebrate the Exodus—the freeing of the enslaved Israelites from Egypt. Jews observe these rules and practices in different ways.

Equality and Social Justice

Beginning with the Ten Commandments, Judaism has always been concerned with a code of **ethics**, or moral values of right and wrong. Two important values that have influenced many societies are equality and social justice.

Unlike some other ancient civilizations, the Israelites did not view their leaders as gods. Instead, they believed in only one God, and even kings had to obey God's laws and teachings. Judaism teaches that God considers all people equal.

Belief in equality goes hand in hand with a concern for social justice. Many stories and sayings in the Hebrew Bible,

or *Tanakh*, teach about treating everyone fairly. For example, one passage says, “You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor.” Caring for the less fortunate people in society is a basic value in Judaism.

The Importance of Study

Studying the Hebrew Bible, and especially the Torah, is very important in Judaism. Jews also study interpretations of the Hebrew Bible made by scholars and rabbis, or religious teachers.

In ancient times, rabbis and scholars who interpreted the Torah's teachings made decisions that were passed down orally. In the 200s C.E., Jewish scholars began to create the Talmud, which recorded how different people believed that the rules found in these oral traditions and the Torah should be applied. The Talmud became a basic source of Jewish law. Later on, rabbis wrote their own studies of both the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, continuing the tradition of interpreting the teachings of Judaism.

Throughout history, Jews have kept their reverence for study and learning. Many Jews learn about Jewish history, law, and traditions through reading and discussion. They also pass on their knowledge to other members of the faith and to others.

Foreign Rule and the Jewish Diaspora

The invasion of Judah in 597 B.C.E. and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C.E. threatened the survival of Judaism. Thousands of Israelites, or Jews, were **exiled** in Babylon. Earlier Israelites of the tribe of Judah called themselves “Judeans,” and their homeland, Judah. After the Kingdom of Israel was destroyed, those in the surviving Kingdom of Judah were all called Judeans. The name was later shortened to “Jews” and came to be applied to all Jews.

The **Jewish Diaspora** had begun. From this time on, the followers of Judaism were **dispersed**, or scattered, across many lands. Those who did return home found their land dominated by foreign rulers. It would not be easy to keep Judaism alive.

Rule by the Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks

The Jewish captives lived in Babylon for about half a century. From then on, Jews outside their homeland prayed to return. During this exile in Babylon, men the Jews believed to be great prophets rose up to encourage the people to remain faithful to Judaism.

In 539 B.C.E., the Persians conquered the Babylonians. The Persian king, Cyrus, ended the Jews' exile. He let the Jews practice their religion, return to Judah, and rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. The rebuilt Temple became known as the Second Temple.

For nearly 400 years, foreigners ruled Judah. After the Persian reign ended, the Greeks took control. Unfortunately for the Jews, the foreign rulers were often harsh.

One Greek ruler, Antiochus IV (an-TIE-uh-kuhs), tried to force the Jews to worship idols of Greek gods in the Second Temple. In 168 B.C.E., the Jews rebelled and initiated a war. By 164 B.C.E., they drove the Greeks from Jerusalem,

reclaiming the Temple. Jews celebrate Hanukkah (HAH-nuh-kuh) to honor this victory and a miracle that the rabbis say occurred in the Temple at that time.



Rule by the Romans

For about 100 years after the war with the Greeks, the Jews lived as an independent kingdom in Judah, now called Judea. Then, in 63 B.C.E., they fell under Roman rule.

The Romans were building a great empire and were quick to act against any sign of rebellion. Thousands of Jews were brutally executed under Roman rule. However, the Romans did allow the Jews to practice their own religion and to govern some of their own affairs. In 22 B.C.E., the Romans

appointed King Herod to rule the Jews. Herod announced a major project to expand the Second Temple of Jerusalem, on an even grander scale than Solomon's Temple. The work took 46 years to complete.

In 66 C.E., the Jews rose up against the Romans. For about three years, they managed to keep the Romans out of Jerusalem. Then, in 70 C.E., a Roman military leader named Titus led an army of 60,000 soldiers against the Jews. Although they fought back fiercely, the Jews were hopelessly outnumbered and watched in horror as the Romans destroyed the great Temple of Jerusalem. All that remained of the Second Temple was its western wall. To this day, Jews consider the Western Wall their most sacred place.

In 135 C.E., the Romans suppressed another Jewish revolt. This Roman victory began the final exile of the Jews from their homeland. The Romans seized Jewish land and forbade the Jews from entering Jerusalem. Although some Jews always remained in the land of Israel, thousands were sent to other parts of the Roman Empire.

The Jews had lost control of their homeland and their holy city, but Judaism not only survived, it flourished. Next, you will learn how the Jews preserved their faith and way of life.

Preserving the Teachings of Judaism

After losing control of their homeland, their holy city, and the great Temple that was the heart of their religious practices, the Jews faced a great struggle to preserve their religion. They were exiled throughout many gentile, or non-Jewish, lands. With creativity and dedication, they found ways to keep Judaism alive.

New Teachers and Practices

The rabbis at Yavneh also introduced new practices to ensure that the teachings of Judaism would be passed on. For example, the rabbis made the synagogue important. A synagogue is a house of worship, as well as a place to study, to meet, and to gather socially. It strengthened Jewish communities.

The rabbis also created a religious service for synagogues. Prayer and study of sacred texts became a new way to

worship God without the Temple rituals. Today, Jews, Christians, and Muslims follow this model for services.

Moreover, the rights of women have changed. Judaism was once a patriarchy, in which men held power. Under Jewish law, women had some rights. They could buy and sell land, bring cases to court, agree to marry, and—at times—own property. Women gained more rights over time. For many groups today, women and men are seen as equal.

Over the centuries, rabbis studied and commented on Judaism's sacred texts, and developed other new practices. These new practices helped Jews preserve their religion in communities worldwide.

In 1948, a new Jewish nation, the State of Israel, was created in part of the lands once ruled by King David and King Solomon. Many Jews settled there. For these and other Jews around the world, Jewish traditions have enabled their religion to thrive.

The Origins of Hinduism

In this lesson, you will explore the origins of Hinduism. You will learn about dharma and other Hindu concepts: Brahman, moksha, deities, karma, and samsara. Finally, you will learn how Hinduism continues to impact Indian culture.

No single person founded [Hinduism](#). Beginning in the Indus River valley and spreading throughout India, Hinduism developed over thousands of years as a collection of traditions.

Some scholars suggest that in the second millennium B.C.E. or earlier, groups of nomadic people speaking Indo-European languages migrated into northern India. These nomads, sometimes called Aryans (AHR-ee-uhns), brought to India their gods and rituals, some of which eventually became part of Hinduism. Other scholars believe Hinduism developed from within the Indian subcontinent among native groups. Hinduism drew on local traditions, which, over thousands of years, allowed a wide range of practices and beliefs to arise in different parts of India.

The roots of Hinduism are found in the [Vedas](#) (VAY-duhz), which most Hindus believe contain eternal truths. The Vedas

are a collection of sacred texts, including verses, hymns, prayers, and teachings, composed in [Sanskrit](#) (SAN-skrit). (*Veda* is Sanskrit for “knowledge.”) The understanding of the Vedas expanded over centuries in India, as the teachings of the Vedas were handed down orally from generation to generation, before India had a written form of Sanskrit. Centuries later, this understanding spread to other parts of Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, where its influence is still present today in countries such as Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Vedic culture includes rituals and sacrifices that honor a number of deities (gods and goddesses) associated with nature. Over time, these rituals became more complex. Priests and religious scholars, called Brahmins (BRAH-minz), grew increasingly important. They were responsible for [interpreting](#) the Vedas, performing the necessary rituals, and teaching the Vedas to future generations. The religion itself was not called Hinduism until much later, and over the years, it has been known as Sanatana Dharma and Brahmanism.

Modern-day Hinduism is a diverse religion shaped by various cultures, traditions, languages, and populations. But it is also held together by its core ideals. Many beliefs, forms of worship, and deities are shared but often differ from place to place. The Vedas, to which Hinduism traces its roots are sacred to nearly a billion Hindus worldwide. Along with later sacred texts, the Vedas explain some of the core concepts of Hinduism. As you will see, these ideas have had a significant impact on the world.

Hinduism and Social Structure

As Hinduism continued to grow and change, its teachings influenced the shape of Indian society. In fact, the development of India's social structure was loosely based on principles found in Hinduism.

Early Hinduism viewed society as a sum of equal parts. The Vedas describe four main social classes, or varnas, necessary to a functioning society:

- **Brahmins (priests, scholars, and teachers)**
- **Kshatriyas (KSHA-tree-uhs) (rulers and warriors)**

- **Vaishyas (VIESH-yuhs) (merchants, artisans, and farmers)**
- **Shudras (SHOO-druhs) (servants and laborers)**

According to the Vedas, each varna had its own duties according to one's talent or natural calling. For example, Brahmins studied and taught the Vedas. Warriors had a duty to become skilled with weapons.

Separate from the idea of the four varnas was the existence of social groups called **jatis. Jatis developed as Indian society shifted away from herding and hunting to other occupations. Each jati was generally associated with a particular job. Over the centuries, the number of jatis grew, and their place in the social hierarchy became very complex. The jatis were based on one's occupation, or job, as well as birth, unlike the varnas.**

In time, different jatis became associated with the four broader varnas. Eventually, jatis became more rigid, evolving into what is called the **caste system. Hindu reformers like Indian freedom leader Mahatma Gandhi criticized the ideas of hierarchy and discrimination within**

the caste system, arguing that it had no place in Indian society and did not fit with Hindu teachings.

Every jati usually had its own lifestyle, occupations, customs and traditions, and rules about social interaction. Over time, certain groups became excluded because they did work that other Indians were unwilling to do or considered lowly, like handling garbage or dead animals. People from these jatis were often not allowed to enter houses of worship or attend many schools. They have been referred to as Untouchables.

Today, while caste discrimination is illegal in India, it continues to exist in some parts of the country. Many scholars point out that caste practices are not as prevalent in urban parts of India and that very few people of Indian descent living outside the Indian subcontinent still identify by caste.

Hindu Beliefs About Brahman

Brahman is the name of a supreme power, or a divine force. Many Hindus understand Brahman to be ever-present and all-powerful. Everything else in the world changes, from

the passing seasons to all living things that eventually die. According to Hindu philosophy, only Brahman exists forever.

For religions like Hinduism, time moves forward in a circle, like a great wheel. The same events return, just as the sun rises each morning, and spring follows winter. Some Hindus see this cycle as the work of Brahman, who is constantly creating, transforming, and re-creating the universe. The cycle never ends.

Hinduism teaches that everything in the world is a part of Brahman, including the human soul. The Hindu tradition thus follows [monism](#). Hindus called the soul *atman*. In certain traditions, Hindus view the soul as part of Brahman, just as a drop of water is part of the ocean. Through their souls, people are therefore connected to Brahman. In these traditions, the other deities worshipped in Hinduism, such as Vishnu (VISH-noo) and Shiva (SHIH-vuh), are simply different forms of Brahman.

To honor their deities, ancient Hindus held elaborate rites and sacrifices outdoors. In later Hindu times, as Indian

civilization developed and cities grew, people began to build massive temples for worship. Today, many modern Hindu temples are modeled after the ancient principles used to design those early temples. Hindus today may pray in a temple, at a personal home altar, or anywhere else they may choose.

In addition to honoring deities, these rites were believed to help the worshipper focus on Brahman, using every sense. Incense and fragrant flowers used in rituals involve the sense of smell; the eyes focused on the deity; sounds of bells and prayers would fill the ears; and food offerings were tasted at the end of such worship.

Hindu temples range in size, and some of the more prominent ones are magnificent in size and design. Their doors often face east, toward the rising sun. The buildings are covered with beautiful carvings and sculptures. These works of art usually show deities from Hindu sacred texts. The temple interiors usually contain a tower and a small shrine. Hindu temples also vary based where they are and the culture of the area. A Hindu temple in southern India

might have a different appearance than one in the United States, but they are both important places of spiritual and cultural growth for their worshippers.

Hindu Beliefs About Deities

There are many deities in Hindu sacred texts and worship rituals. As you learned earlier, some Hindus believe that all the deities represent various aspects of the Brahman, or the Absolute. For these Hindus, each deity represents an aspect, or quality of Brahman.

There are three important gods, alongside their goddess partners. They are Brahma (BRAH-mah) (not Brahman) and Saraswati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, and Shiva and Shakti (also called Parvati). Each deity represents different aspects of the universe. Brahma creates it, Vishnu preserves it, and Shiva transforms it. Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge and creativity, Lakshmi the goddess of good health and prosperity, and Shakti the goddess of love and devotion.

Ancient Hindu sacred texts often describe deities and their battle with evil. One famous story is found in the *Ramayana*. It tells of Rama's fierce battle with Ravana, a demon king.

The stories teach valuable lessons about the difficulties every individual faces as an obstacle to doing the right thing. These obstacles include greed, anger, selfishness, and violence.

Many Hindu children across the world have learned about their religion by listening to readings of the *Ramayana*, or in recent years, by seeing the stories dramatized on television.

Ancient literary texts like the *Ramayana*, which most Hindus view as sacred, have inspired many Hindu holidays and festivals. For many Hindus, the Hindu New Year is celebrated at the *Diwali* (dih-WAH-lee) festival. Diwali means “row of lamps.” The lamps are symbols of good (light) winning over evil (darkness). They are often said to represent Rama's triumph over the evil Ravana and, for some, the start of the Hindu New Year.

Hindu Beliefs About Dharma

Dharma is a central concept in Hinduism and other Indian traditions. Dharma is often described as duty. However, it is a way of life that helps people live happily, selflessly, and in balance. For Hindus, achieving dharma is one of the most

important goals in life, alongside kama (love), artha (wealth), and moksha (oneness with God).

As you have already read, according to the Vedas, each social class, or varna, had its own duties. These duties usually involved a certain type of work. Duties might include studying religious texts, herding animals, trading goods, or serving as a warrior. Therefore, each class was seen as having its own dharma. In fact, early Hindus called their system of social classes varna dharma, or “the way of one's role in society.” Early Hindus believed that when everyone followed the dharma of their varna, society would be in harmony.

Brahmins, for example, were ancient Hindu society's priests and religious scholars. Their duties included performing rituals and teaching the Vedas. This was quite an accomplishment since ancient scholars had passed down this knowledge through word of mouth. To recite the Vedas orally, Brahmins had to learn tens of thousands of verses! This tradition has continued into modern times, though learning the Vedas is open to anyone.

In addition to following the dharma of their own varna, Hindus are expected to follow a common dharma, or set of values. This is often said to include being truthful, sharing food with others, performing social service, and caring for one's soul.

Another basic value is nonviolence. Many Hindus, as well as followers of other Indian traditions, have a respect for life that stems from their belief that all life forms have a soul. Hindus consider all living things to be sacred, which is why the cow is revered. In Hinduism, the cow is seen as a generous, ever-giving creature that takes nothing more than what is necessary for its survival.

Hindu Beliefs About Karma

The belief in dharma expresses much of what Hindus believe about the right way to live. [Karma](#) is another belief Hindus share with other Indian traditions. It explains the importance of living according to dharma.

In Hindu belief, the law of karma governs what happens to people's souls after death. Karma is the belief that every action has consequences, and those consequences are felt

over a number of lifetimes. From ancient times, many Indians believed that souls had many lives. The type of body the reborn soul received depended on the soul's karma.

For Hindus, karma is seen as a law of cause and effect, and as motivation to act well. They believe that acquiring good karma is what is needed to achieve moksha, or freedom from the cycle of rebirth. In parts of India, karma has sometimes been used to explain why people had a certain status in society. Hindu teachings show that any living being can acquire good or bad karma, regardless of their birth.

Hindu Beliefs About Samsara

As you have learned, Hindus believe in a continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. They call this cycle *samsara*. As long as people are part of samsara, they will know pain and death. Samsara ends when the soul escapes from the cycle of rebirth, the time when some Hindus believe that they are united with Brahman, the supreme force in the universe. There is no set amount of lives a Hindu must be born into to be released from samsara.

People escape the cycle of rebirth, or [reincarnation](#), by following their dharma. Hindu philosophy outlines four major paths to achieving liberation: selfless service, studying scriptures, unconditional love for Brahman, and deep meditation. Each of these paths could be followed individually or in some combination.

Hinduism has many holy sites. Because of that, many Hindus go on journeys called [pilgrimages](#). Millions of Hindus from across the world visit the Ganges River annually because it is considered sacred. Millions also visit shrines and temples, like the famous temple Tirupati, dedicated to Vishnu in southern India. Pilgrims travel to these sites to purify their souls.

Today, some pilgrims still travel for days over difficult land, including mountains. However, most travel by car, plane, bus, and train to make their journeys.

In this lesson, you will learn about Buddhism through stories that are told about the Buddha's life. You will find out what Prince Siddhartha discovered during his life and how his teachings became the basis of Buddhism.

Prince Siddhartha's Birth

Prince Siddhartha was born about 563 B.C.E. in the present-day country of Nepal, near the Himalayas. His father, Suddhodana, was a powerful king. His mother was Queen Maya.

According to Buddhist tradition, before her son was born, the queen had a dream in which she was carried high over the Himalayas to a silver mountain and set on a silver couch. A white elephant with six tusks walked around her and then struck her on the right side.

The king and queen asked the Brahmins, or Hindu priests, to interpret her dream. “You are carrying a child who will be a great man,” they told the queen. The Brahmins declared that the prince's future held two possible paths. As a prince, he could rule the universe. But if he left his royal life to see the suffering in the world, he would become the [Buddha](#), one who is enlightened.

The queen gave birth to Prince Siddhartha in a garden. Stories say that after the prince's birth, a soft, warm rain of

heavenly flowers fell on the baby and his mother. According to Buddhist tradition, the infant prince already looked a few years old and could walk and talk. Siddhartha began his remarkable life by taking a few steps and declaring, “I am the leader of the world and the guide to the world.”

The Prince's Royal Life

Prince Siddhartha's father wanted his son to be a great and powerful ruler. The king was worried about the Brahmins' [predictions](#). If the prince saw the world's suffering, he might ignore his royal duties to seek a spiritual path.

The king decided that raising the prince in a world of perfect wealth and beauty would protect his son from all of the horrors of the world. He provided Siddhartha with only the finest gardens, houses, education, and food. Servants took care of the prince's every need, from washing his clothes to playing music for his amusement.

The prince enjoyed his life filled with lavish pleasures, yet always felt curious about the world outside the palace walls.

Some days, he would sit under a rose apple tree and wonder about the world beyond his reach.

At the age of 16, Prince Siddhartha married a beautiful young noblewoman with a wedding feast that lasted seven days and seven nights. For 13 years, the couple lived together in perfect harmony, enjoying the prince's many palaces. Siddhartha and his wife even had a son.