

*Millions of people around the world today follow the beliefs of religions that began in ancient India.*

## Origins of Hinduism

### ***What are the basic beliefs of Hinduism? How did Hinduism develop?***

**Hinduism** (HIHN • doo • ih • zuhm) is one of the world's oldest religions. It is also the third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. Hinduism developed from the faith of the Aryans. The sacred writings, called the Vedas, teach the key ideas of Aryan religion.

At first, the Vedas had to be memorized by Brahmin priests and spoken out loud. Much later, they were written down in Sanskrit. Over time, the Aryan religion changed as it blended with the ideas of other people of India. This mix of beliefs eventually became Hinduism.

### **What is Hinduism?**

Hinduism includes many beliefs and practices. A core belief of Hinduism is that there is one universal spirit called **Brahman** (BRAH • muhn).

Ancient texts known as the Upanishads (oo • PAH • nih • SHADZ) describe the search for Brahman. These writings say that every living thing has a soul that is part of Brahman. The body is part of life on Earth. At death, the soul leaves the body and joins with Brahman.

The Upanishads say that a soul that becomes one with Brahman is like a lump of salt thrown into water. The lump of salt is gone, but the water tastes salty. The salt has become part of the water.

Most ancient Indians, however, could not easily understand the idea of Brahman. They believed in many different deities that were more like people. Hindus built temples and statues and held ceremonies for these deities. Eventually, three deities became the most important: *Brahma* the Creator, *Vishnu* the Preserver, and *Shiva* the Destroyer. Over time, many Hindus came to think of all the deities as different parts of Brahman, the one universal spirit.

Another part of Hinduism is the belief in **reincarnation** (REE • ihn • kahr • NAY • shuhn), or the rebirth of the soul. Hindus strive for *moksha*, the ultimate peace. Hindus believe that most souls do not reunite with Brahman immediately after death. Instead, each soul must first pass through many lives. The Upanishads describe reincarnation as a process in this way:

"As a caterpillar, having reached the end of a blade of grass, takes hold of another blade, then draws its body from the first, so the Self having reached the end of his body, takes hold of another body, then draws itself from the first."

—from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Fourth Brahmana, line 3*

In Hinduism, the idea of reincarnation is closely related to another idea known as **karma** (KAHR • muh). According to karma, people's **status** in life is not an accident. It is based on what they did in past lives. In addition, the things people do in this life decide how they will be reborn. If someone leads a bad life, that person is reborn into a lower form of life. When good people die, their souls are reborn into a higher form of life.

Hindus believe they have to earn a better existence in the next life. To do that, they must follow **dharma** (DAHR • muh), or their personal duty. People's duties are different, depending on their place in society. A farmer has different duties than a priest. Men have different duties than women.

How did Hindu beliefs shape the way of life in ancient India? For one thing, Indians accepted the Hindu idea that all life is sacred. Animals as well as people were treated with kindness and respect.

Beliefs such as reincarnation also made many Indians more accepting of the *varna* system. A devout Hindu believed that the people in a higher *jati* were superior and deserved their status. At the same time, the belief in reincarnation gave hope to people from every walk of life. A person who leads a good life is reborn into a higher *jati*.

**Understanding Cause and Effect** How did Hinduism affect the way ancient Indians lived day to day?

## Connections to **TODAY**

### Hindu Beliefs

Many Hindus today believe that a man should go through four stages in his life: a student (preparing to live in the world), a married man (accepting worldly responsibilities), a forest dweller (retirement from the world), and finally, a wandering monk (completely renouncing the world).

## Rise of Buddhism

### *Why did Buddhism appeal to many people in various parts of Asia?*

During the 500s B.C., some Indians felt unhappy with the many ceremonies of the Hindu religion. They wanted a simpler, more spiritual faith. They left their homes and looked for peace in the hills and forests. Many trained their minds to **focus** and think in positive ways. This training was called meditation. Some seekers developed new ideas and became religious teachers.

One of these teachers was Siddhartha Gautama (sih • DAHR • tuh GOW • tah • muh). He became known as the Buddha (BOO • dah). He founded a new religion called **Buddhism** (BOO • dih • zuhm).

### The Buddha

Today, Buddhism is one of the major world religions. Most Buddhists live in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Only a few live in India, Buddhism's birthplace.

Siddhartha Gautama was born around the year 563 B.C. The exact date of his birth is not known. He grew up as a prince in a small kingdom near the Himalaya. Today, this area is in southern Nepal (nuh • PAWL).

As a young man, Siddhartha seemed to have everything. He was rich, handsome, and happily married with a newborn son. Then one day he left his palace to explore the life of ordinary people in the kingdom. As he traveled, Siddhartha was shocked at the misery and poverty around him. He saw beggars, people who were sick, and aged people with nowhere to live. For the first time, he understood that the world was filled with suffering.

Siddhartha gave up all he had and became a monk. Saying goodbye to his wife and son, he began his journey to find the meaning of life. Dressed in a yellow robe, he traveled the country, stopping to **meditate**, or think deeply. As he preached his message to people, he gathered followers. His teachings became known as Buddhism.

### What did the Buddha teach?

Some of the Buddha's ideas were not new to India. He followed some Hindu ideas and changed others. Like Hindus, the Buddha believed that the world of the spirit was more important than the everyday world. He felt that one reason people suffered in life was that they cared too much about the wrong things. These included fame, money, and personal possessions. Wanting such things could fill people with bad emotions like greed or anger. But seeking spiritual truth, he believed, led to inner peace.

The Buddha taught his followers the Four Noble Truths. He believed these would help people seek spiritual truth.

#### The Four Noble Truths:

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. People suffer because they desire worldly things and want to satisfy themselves.
3. The way to end suffering is to stop desiring things.
4. The only way to stop desiring things is to follow the Eightfold Path.

The Buddha's fourth truth says that people can end suffering by following eight steps.

#### 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.

When people were finally free from all earthly concerns, they would reach **nirvana** (nihr • VAH • nuh). According to Buddhist teaching, nirvana is not a physical place. It is an emotional or spiritual state, a feeling of perfect peace and happiness.

Buddhism spread because it welcomed people from all walks of life. The Buddha placed little importance on the *varna* system. He believed people's place in life did not depend on the *varna* into which they were born. The Buddha explained that the success of life depended on peoples' behavior now.

Like Hindus, the Buddha believed in reincarnation, but in a different way. He taught that people could end the cycle of rebirth by following the Eightfold Path rather than their dharma.

Many people accepted the Buddha's message, especially Untouchables and Indians in the lower *jati*. For the first time, these groups heard that they, too, could reach enlightenment.

For more than 40 years, the Buddha taught his ideas. After his death, Buddha's followers disagreed over the meaning of the Buddha's ideas. Eventually, the Buddhists divided into two groups: Theravada (ther • uh • VAH • duh) Buddhists and Mahayana (mah • huh • YAH • nuh) Buddhists.

## Theravada Buddhism

*Theravada* means "teachings of the elders." Followers of Theravada view the Buddha as a great teacher, but not a god. Theravada Buddhism is the major religion of the modern-day country of Sri Lanka (sree LAHN • kuh). Buddhist teachers spread the ideas of Theravada to Myanmar (MEEAHN • mahr), Thailand (TEYE • land), Cambodia (kam • BOH • dee • uh), and Laos (LAH • ohs).

## Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism teaches that the Buddha is a god. Followers of Mahayana Buddhism believe that the Eightfold Path is too difficult for most people. By worshipping the Buddha, people will go to a heaven after they die. There, they can follow the Eightfold Path and reach nirvana.

Bodhisattvas (BOH • dih • SUHT • vuhz) hold a special place in Mahayana Buddhism. Bodhisattvas are enlightened people who do not enter heaven. Instead, they stay on Earth to do good deeds and help others on the path to nirvana.

Mahayana Buddhism spread northward into China and from there to Korea and Japan. A special kind of Mahayana Buddhism arose in the central Asian country of Tibet (tih • BEHT).

Buddhist leaders called lamas led the government of Tibet. The Dalai Lama (DAH • ly LAH • muh) led Tibet's government, and the Panchen Lama led the religion. Tibetans considered both leaders to be reincarnations of the Buddha.

Today, few Buddhists live in India where the Buddha first preached. Buddhism, however, is widely practiced in Southeast Asia and East Asia. There are an **estimated** 376 million Buddhists in the world today.

**Identifying** Where is Buddhism practiced today and in what forms?

## Jainism

### *What are the teachings of Jainism?*

Along with Hinduism and Buddhism, another Indian faith known as **Jainism** (JEYE • nih • zihm) arose about 500 B.C. Today, there are 6 million followers of Jainism. Most of them live in India.

### Who is Mahavira?

The exact origins of Jainism are unknown. Its current form was developed by a religious leader named Mahavira. Mahavira lived in India at about the same time as Siddhartha Gautama.

Like Siddhartha, Mahavira came from a wealthy royal family in northern India. After his parents died, Mahavira gave up his wealth and property. He owned nothing and begged for his food.

Mahavira became known as the Jina, or the conqueror. His followers came to be known as Jains. Many of Mahavira's teachings were like those of the Buddha. Both taught that people needed to stop wanting worldly things. Only by doing so could they escape the cycle of rebirth and reach nirvana. The Jains practiced strict poverty.

## What is *Ahimsa*?

The key value of Jainism is *ahimsa* (ah • HIM • sah). This means practicing nonviolence toward all living things. Believing that all life is sacred, Mahavira's followers tried to avoid harming any living creature. For example, they used brooms to sweep away insects so that they would not step on them. Jains did not farm because they were afraid of plowing under worms and other living things in the soil.

The idea of *ahimsa* has long influenced India's culture and politics. In the 1900s, the Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi (MOE • han • dahs GANH • dee) wanted to free India from Great Britain. He led a nonviolent struggle against British rule. Thousands would come to hear Gandhi speak or to simply sit with him while he prayed. At the time, Indians refused to pay taxes or buy British goods as a show of protest. Many protesters were jailed, but India eventually gained its independence. Gandhi himself was jailed many times.

Gandhi's method of nonviolent resistance influenced many others. In the United States, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led nonviolent protests to gain rights for African Americans. Like Gandhi, Dr. King was able to use nonviolence to bring about great change in his country.

**Identifying** What is the belief of *ahimsa*?

## LESSON 2 REVIEW

### Review Vocabulary

1. What do the ideas of *reincarnation* and *karma* have in common?

2. How would practicing *Buddhism* affect people's daily lives?

### Answer the Guiding Questions

3. **Explaining** What do Hindus believe about Brahman?

4. **Drawing Conclusions** How did the Buddha say people should live?

5. **Comparing** What beliefs do Buddhism and Jainism share?

6. **INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY** Write a paragraph comparing Hindu and Buddhist beliefs about reincarnation and how one should live.