

Section 2 Matters of life and death

Topic 1.2.2 Hinduism and life after death

Revised

Hindus believe in life after death because:

- it is taught in the Vedas, which contain eternal truths that most Hindus believe
- it is taught in the Upanishads, which many Hindus also believe to contain eternal truths
- it is taught in the Bhagavad Gita, and most Hindus feel that the teachings of the Gita contain ultimate truths and so must be believed
- many Hindus feel that for life to end at death does not make sense; they believe reincarnation, which rewards the good and punishes the evil when they die, makes sense of this life
- they also believe in life after death because of the evidence for reincarnation; for example, children who are born knowing things they could not know unless they had been on Earth before.

How Hindu beliefs about life after death affect the lives of Hindus

- The aim of Hindu life is to escape from continuing to be reborn (samsara) through reaching moksha (freedom from rebirth), which is when the soul lives in paradise, often called nirvana. This affects the lives of Hindus because they must try to live the type of life that will lead them to moksha.
- The lives of some Hindus are very affected because they follow all the rules of the four stages of life (ashrama) in order to reach moksha. These Hindus believe in the law of karma and so they only do things in this life that will bring good effects in their next life.
- Some Hindus believe that the way to gain moksha is by devotion to Krishna, and spend a lot of time in worship (puja) both at home and in the mandir.
- Some Hindus believe that moksha is achieved through deep meditation to achieve oneness with Brahman (jnana yoga). This has a huge effect on their lives as they must live alone to spend sufficient time in meditation.

Evaluation of Hinduism and life after death

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What do most Hindus believe the Vedas and Upanishads contain?
- 2 What do Hindus believe rewards the good and punishes the evil when they die?
- 3 What is moksha?
- 4 What rules do some Hindus believe they must follow to achieve moksha?

Answers at end

Topic 1.2.7 Hindus and abortion

Revised

Some Hindus believe that abortion is always wrong because:

- some gurus have said that all abortion is wrong
- they believe that taking life gives bad karma.

Some Hindus believe that abortion should only be allowed if the mother's life is at risk because:

- Hindu teachings on ahimsa say that violence can be used as a final choice
- if the foetus threatens the sanctity of the mother's life, abortion is acceptable.

Some British Hindus believe in the UK law on abortion because:

- the teachings of the Gita mean that abortion will not affect karma as the soul of the foetus cannot be damaged
- they believe that life does not begin until the foetus can survive outside the womb.

Evaluation of Hinduism and abortion

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What do some Hindus believe taking life gives?
- 2 What do Hindu teachings about ahimsa say about using violence?
- 3 What have some gurus said about abortion?
- 4 What do the teachings of the Gita say about abortion?

Answers at end

Topic 1.2.10 Hindus and euthanasia

Revised

Some Hindus are against all forms of euthanasia because:

- the teaching on ahimsa means that euthanasia is unacceptable because it must involve inflicting violence
- euthanasia would damage a soul and bring bad karma, stopping the soul from gaining moksha
- according to the law of karma, God alone must give and take life at the right time
- the Laws of Manu say that murder is wrong.

Some Hindus believe that euthanasia can be allowed in certain circumstances. They accept switching off life-support machines and not striving to keep someone alive and also believe euthanasia should be allowed when there is no quality of life. They have this attitude because:

- if someone is brain-dead, God has already taken their life and so switching off the life-support machine would not be euthanasia
- the Gita teaches that the soul cannot be harmed
- refusing euthanasia when there is no quality of life is a form of violence and so is against ahimsa
- striving to keep someone alive is preventing the soul from moving on to moksha or its next life.

Evaluation of Hinduism and euthanasia

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 Why does the teaching on ahimsa make euthanasia unacceptable to some Hindus?
- 2 Why do some Hindus believe euthanasia would prevent a soul gaining moksha?
- 3 Why do some Hindus believe switching off life-support is not euthanasia?
- 4 Why is refusing euthanasia when there is no quality of life regarded as ahimsa by some Hindus?

Answers at end

Summary of Hinduism and matters of life and death

- Hindus believe in life after death because it is the teaching of the Vedas, Upanishads and Gita. Their beliefs about life after death affect their lives because they will try to gain moksha either by living a good life, or living a life devoted to God, or by living a life of meditation.
- Some Hindus think abortion should never be allowed. Some Hindus think abortion can only be allowed if the mother's life is in danger. Some Hindus think abortion is allowed in any circumstance.
- Some Hindus agree with euthanasia if the dying person wants to die easily because it releases the soul. Other Hindus only allow life-support machines to be switched off and no other form of euthanasia because life is sacred.

Section 3 Marriage and the family

Topic 1.3.3 Hindus and sex outside marriage

Revised

Hindus believe that sex outside marriage is wrong because:

- sex is not allowed in the student stage of life (ashrama), so sex before marriage would prevent you from gaining moksha
- the Hindu scriptures say that sex should only take place in marriage
- Hinduism teaches that sex is for the procreation of children who should be raised in a family where the mother and father are married
- committing adultery is betraying your dharma, which prevents your soul from achieving moksha
- adultery is a betrayal of the marriage partner and betrayal brings bad karma
- adultery is likely to harm the family, which should not be harmed as it is where children learn to be good Hindus.

Evaluation of Hinduism and sex outside marriage

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What is not allowed in the student stage of life?
- 2 What does Hinduism teach that sex is for?
- 3 What do you betray if you commit adultery?
- 4 What does betrayal of your marriage partner bring?

Answers at end

Topic 1.3.5 Hindus and divorce

Revised

Traditional Hindus believe that there should be no divorce, unless the couple are childless after fifteen years or if there is cruelty. They have this attitude because:

- it is the teaching of the Laws of Manu
- divorce is likely to harm families and so should be discouraged
- having children is part of your duty as a householder so childlessness is grounds for divorce
- violence in marriage is against ahimsa and so would be grounds for divorce.
- they regard the Laws of Manu as out of date
- some gurus and swamis teach that divorce is acceptable for Hindus
- living in hatred and discord brings bad karma, so divorce would be needed for the soul to gain moksha
- they believe divorce is a lesser evil than forcing a couple to live in hatred and bitterness.

Evaluation of Hinduism and divorce

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Many other Hindus believe that divorce should be allowed if a marriage has broken down because:

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 When do traditional Hindus allow divorce?
- 2 What is part of your duty as a householder?
- 3 Who teach that divorce is acceptable for Hindus?
- 4 What does living in hatred and discord bring?

Answers at end

Topic 1.3.7 Hindus and family life

Revised

Family life is important in Hinduism because:

- unless Hindus perform their duties as a householder and raise a family, they will not achieve moksha; so the family is important as the way to reach nirvana
- Hinduism teaches that the family was created by God as the basic unit of society and as the only place in which children should be brought up
- without the family, children would not learn the difference between right and wrong
- the family is very important for Hinduism to continue and grow as it is the family that brings children into the faith
- the Hindu scriptures show the importance of Hindu family life and Hindus should follow the guidance of the scriptures.

Evaluation of Hinduism and family life

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What happens to Hindus if they do not fulfil their householder duty and raise a family?
- 2 What do Hindus believe God created the family as?
- 3 What do children learn from the family?
- 4 What show Hindus the importance of family life?

Answers at end

Topic 1.3.9 Hindus and homosexuality

Revised

Most Hindus disapprove of homosexuality and think it should not be practised by Hindus because:

- the Laws of Manu only mention and approve of heterosexual sex
- all Hindus should pass through the householder stage where one must marry and raise a family – neither of which a homosexual can do
- Hinduism restricts sexual activity to the householder stage of marriage and family life
- as homosexuals cannot be householders, they will not be able to attain moksha.

Some Hindus believe that homosexuals should be treated the same as heterosexuals because:

- there are sculptures and carvings of homosexual sex (both male and female) in old Hindu temples
- there are ways to achieve moksha other than being a householder
- there is a special caste of men called the Hijras who dress and behave as women to serve the mother goddess Parvati
- as scientists now believe that sexual orientation is natural, it must be given by God.

Evaluation of Hinduism and homosexuality

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What Hindu book only mentions heterosexual sex?
- 2 What problems arise for homosexuals as they can't be householders?
- 3 What are there in old Hindu temples which seem to approve of homosexuality?
- 4 Who are the hijras?

Answers at end

Topic 1.3.11 Hindus and contraception

Revised

Most Hindus believe that all forms of contraception are good because they believe:

- the householder ashrama should be about fulfilling one's dharma, not struggling to cope with a large family
- the soul cannot be affected by contraception, as there is no soul before conception
- humans have a duty to make sure that the population does not exceed the food supply
- contraception does not involve violence to a living thing and so it is not against ahimsa.

Some Hindus accept only certain forms of contraception, such as the pill and sterilisation, because:

- they believe that contraceptives that kill either sperm or eggs are against ahimsa
- they are against abortion and so cannot accept

abortifacient contraceptives (those that bring about a very early abortion).

A few Hindus are against any form of contraception because:

- they believe that large families are part of the householder ashrama
- they believe that sex must involve the possibility of children to fulfil dharma
- they believe strongly in ahimsa and think that any contraceptives that kill either sperm or eggs or cause an early abortion are against ahimsa.

Evaluation of Hinduism and contraception

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 Why do most Hindus believe contraception cannot harm the soul?
- 2 Why do some Hindus only accept certain forms of contraception, such as the pill and sterilisation?
- 3 Why do some Hindus not accept abortifacient contraceptives?
- 4 A few Hindus are against all contraception because they believe large families are part of what?

Answers at end

Summary of Hinduism, marriage and the family

- Hindus believe that sex before marriage and adultery are wrong because sex is only allowed in the householder stage of life and adultery brings bad karma.
- Some Hindus do not allow divorce because they believe marriage is for life. Many Hindus allow divorce, especially if the couple cannot have children, because they think arguing and quarrelling in a marriage will give bad karma.
- Family life is important in Hinduism because Hinduism teaches that the family is the basis of society and raising a family is part of the dharma of the householder stage of life.
- Most Hindus believe that homosexuality is wrong because it stops people from fulfilling their duty as householders. Some Hindus accept homosexuality because it is natural and could be another way of finding moksha.
- Most Hindus allow contraception because contraception does not affect the soul and it helps the population not to exceed the food supply. Some Hindus only accept contraceptives which do not kill sperm or eggs because of their beliefs in ahimsa. A few Hindus are against all forms of contraception because they believe it is the duty of a householder to have a large family.

Section 4 Religion and community cohesion

Topic 1.4.3 Hindus and equal rights for women in religion

Revised

Traditional Hindus believe that men and women have different roles and so cannot have equal rights in religion, so they do not allow women to be priests or religious leaders because:

- it is the teaching of the shruti scriptures
- it is the teaching of the Laws of Manu, which must be followed to fulfil your dharma and achieve moksha
- it is the tradition for the householder ashrama, which all Hindus must complete
- it is part of Indian culture, which traditional Hindus regard as part of Hinduism.

Modern Hindus (such as Iskcon and the Virashaivas) give women equal rights in both life and religion and have women religious leaders because:

- they believe that all souls are actually or potentially part of the divine and so are equal
- they believe that even the shruti scriptures need interpreting for today's world
- they believe that the Laws of Manu were intended for a different time and society
- they believe there are other ways to gain moksha than following the traditional ashrama.

Some modern Hindus (such as the Swaminarayan) would say that men and women should have equal rights in other aspects of life, but not in religion.

Evaluation of Hinduism and equal rights for women in religion

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What do traditional Hindus believe about equal rights?
- 2 Which Hindus give women equal rights in both life and religion and have female religious leaders?
- 3 Which scriptures teach the traditional view?
- 4 Which belief about the soul means men and women are equal?

Answers at end

Topic 1.4.7 Why Hindus should promote racial harmony

Revised

There are many reasons why Hindus should try to promote racial harmony:

- Hindus believe that every soul is an actual or potential part of the divine (Brahman), so every soul must be of equal value, whatever the person's race or colour.
- The Indian Hindus suffered from racist treatment when they were ruled by the Moghul Empire and then the British Empire, and this treatment has led Hindu leaders to work for racial harmony.
- Although the majority of Hindus are from India, there are many different ethnic groups in India. Gandhi, who led the struggle for Indian independence, taught that the different racial and ethnic groups in India must work and live together as equals.
- Hinduism is opposed to racism and racial discrimination in any form. Hindus work with many other groups in the UK to promote racial harmony.

Evaluation of Hinduism and racial harmony

Evaluation questions will only ask you to refer to one religion, so it would be best just to use Christianity in answering evaluation questions, although you could use extra reasons from Hinduism.

Now test yourself

Tested

- 1 What do Hindus call the divine?
- 2 Under which rulers did Indian Hindus suffer from racist treatment?
- 3 What did Gandhi teach about racism in India?
- 4 How do Hindus in the UK show their opposition to racism?

Answers at end

Summary of Hinduism and religion and community cohesion

- Traditional Hindus teach that men and women have different rights in religion because of the Laws of Manu. Modern Hindus believe that men and women should have equal rights in religion because all souls are part of the divine and so are equal.
- Hindus should promote racial harmony because they believe that every soul is a part of Brahman and so everyone should be treated equally.

Answers to Now test yourself

Unit 1

Topic 1.2.2 Life after death

- 1 Eternal truths
- 2 Reincarnation
- 3 Freedom or release from rebirth
- 4 The rules of the four ashrama (stages of life)

Topic 1.2.7 Abortion

- 1 Bad karma
- 2 It can only be used as a last resort
- 3 All abortion is wrong
- 4 Abortion will not affect karma as the soul of the foetus cannot be damaged

Topic 1.2.10 Euthanasia

- 1 Because it must involve inflicting violence
- 2 Because it would damage a soul and bring bad karma
- 3 Because God has already taken their soul
- 4 Because it is a form of violence

Topic 1.3.3 Sex outside marriage

- 1 Sex
- 2 The procreation of children
- 3 Your dharma
- 4 Bad karma

Topic 1.3.5 Divorce

- 1 If the couple is childless after fifteen years or if there is violence
- 2 To have children
- 3 Some swamis and gurus
- 4 Bad karma

Topic 1.3.7 Family life

- 1 They won't achieve moksha
- 2 The basic unit of society and the only place that children should grow up

- 3 The difference between right and wrong

- 4 The Hindu scriptures

Topic 1.3.9 Homosexuality

- 1 The Laws of Manu
- 2 They won't be able to achieve moksha
- 3 Carvings and sculptures of homosexual acts
- 4 A special caste of men who dress and behave as women to serve the goddess Parvati

Topic 1.3.11 Contraception

- 1 Because there is no soul before conception
- 2 Because they believe that other forms that involve killing eggs or sperm are against ahimsa
- 3 Because they are the same as abortion
- 4 The householder ashrama

Topic 1.4.3 Equal rights for women in religion

- 1 They believe that men and women have different roles and so cannot have equal rights in religion
- 2 Modern Hindus such as Iskcon and Virashaivas
- 3 The shruti scriptures
- 4 The belief that all souls are actually or potentially part of the divine

Topic 1.4.7 Racial harmony

- 1 Brahman
- 2 The Moghul Empire and then the British Empire
- 3 That the different racial and ethnic groups in India must work and live together as equals
- 4 They work with many other groups in the UK to promote racial harmony