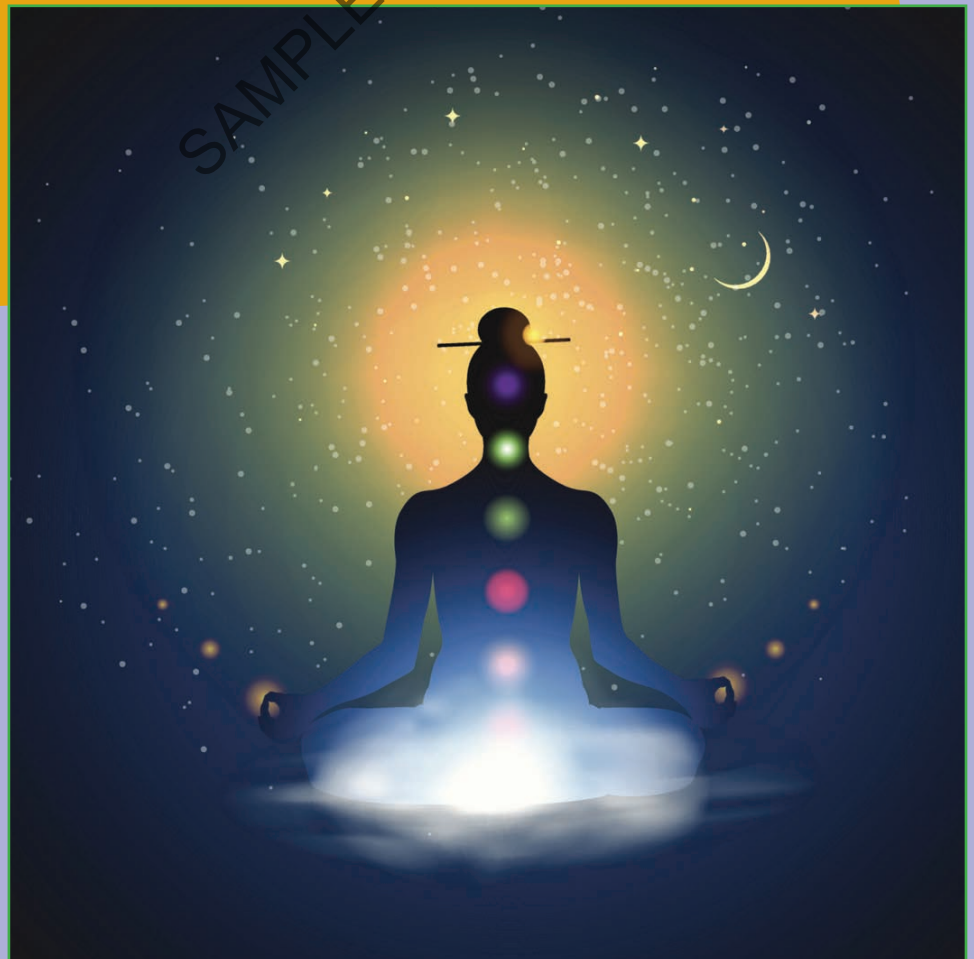


## Section C

# Foundations of Religion - Major World Religions

Chapter 1:	Being a Hindu . . . . .	204
Chapter 2:	Being a Jew . . . . .	215
Chapter 3:	Being a Buddhist . . . . .	228
Chapter 4:	Being a Muslim . . . . .	242



## CHAPTER 1 BEING A HINDU

### Origins

**Hinduism** is the oldest of the world's religions. It began in northern India around 2500 BCE.

Unlike the other major religions, Hinduism did not have a single, identifiable founder. Scholars believe that it was gradually spread across ancient India by **rishis**.

#### REMEMBER!

A **rishi** was a Hindu teacher of great holiness and wisdom.

Unfortunately, the names of these rishis have been lost over the centuries.

### Beliefs

Hinduism does not have a single, widely accepted **creed**.

However most Hindus accept the following teachings:

#### 1. Polytheism

Hindus are free to worship many different gods. However, the three most important Hindu gods are:

- **Brahma** – the god who creates life.
- **Vishnu** – the god who protects life.
- **Shiva** – the god who destroys life.

However all these different gods point to something far greater than themselves. This mysterious something is called '**Brahman**'.

#### 2. Brahman

Brahman is the supreme source of everything in the universe. Hindus believe that:

- It is **from** Brahman that all things come into existence.
- It is **through** Brahman that all things continue to exist.

However Brahman is not like the God of Christianity. Brahman is not a person. Brahman is **impersonal**.

Brahman is not only in all things but all things are in Brahman. This means that people, animals, insects, plants, rocks, rivers and even the gods themselves do not exist in their own right. They are all merely different ways in which Brahman expresses itself.



Altar in a Hindu temple.

#### REMEMBER!

A **creed** is a statement of what the members of a religion believe in.



Brahma, the Hindu god who creates life.

As one Hindu text called *The Bhagavad Gita* puts it:



### 3. Atman

**Atman** is what gives life to your body. It is an invisible fragment of Brahman in you. Like Brahman, every atman is eternal. This means that while your body may grow old and die, the atman does not. Instead, the atman goes through **samsara**.

### 4. Samsara

When your body dies, your atman is **reincarnated**, i.e. it enters a new body. Then your atman goes on to live another life. This process happens over and over again throughout time. This repeating cycle of birth, death and rebirth is called **samsara**.

The atman must live through samsara many times before it can achieve **moksha**.

### 5. Moksha

**Moksha** is when your atman finally escapes from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Moksha allows your atman to be reunited with Brahman. However, you can only do this when you have achieved **dharma**.

### 6. Dharma

**Dharma** is where you fulfil all your religious duties and live a good life. Dharma helps you to store up positive **karma**.

### Did You Know?

Hindus believe that whenever evil threatens to take over the world, the god Vishnu comes down on earth to fight evil and restore order.



Vishnu, the Hindu god who protects life.

## 7. Karma

**Karma** means ‘actions’. Hindus believe that the quality of your present life is decided by how you lived your previous life. So, if you consistently do good things in this life, you will be rewarded with a better life next time.

Eventually, if you live a life totally committed to doing only good, your atman will escape from samsara and be reunited with Brahman.

### Did You Know?

Hindus believe that Vishnu has visited humanity nine times so far. He will make his tenth and final visit at the end of this cycle of history.

Each time Vishnu has come as a different being, called an **avatar** (meaning: ‘one who descends’). One of Vishnu’s best-loved avatars is the warrior god **Krishna**.

## The Castes

Hindu society is divided into **castes**.

There are four castes. In order of importance, they are:

### REMEMBER!

**A caste** is the Hindu name for a social group.

1st	The Brahmin	These are priests.
2nd	The Kshatriya	These are rulers
3rd	The Vaishya	These are artisans, farmers and merchants.
4th	The Shudra	These are peasants and servants.

Over the centuries, the caste system developed into an entire way of life. Your status in your community was decided by the caste into which you were born. Even in today’s India, if you are a member of one caste, it would be unusual for you to marry or socialise with a member of another caste.

### Did You Know?

The lowest-ranking group in Hindu society is called ‘**the Untouchables**’. They are forced to do the most menial tasks, such as cleaning the streets and handling dead animals. Their fellow Hindus say that such work makes the Untouchables **impure** (i.e. unclean). As a result, Untouchables are forbidden to touch a member of the four castes or even to drink a cup of water from the same well.

One Hindu leader who tried to improve the treatment of the Untouchables was **Mohandas K. Gandhi**. He called them the **Harijans**, which means ‘**the Children of God**’. This was to remind people of their right to be respected.

## The Vedas

Hinduism's sacred text is a collection of four books called the **Vedas**.

These books were written during the third century BCE.

They contain **Mantras**, **Brahmanas**, **Aranyakas** and **Upanishads**.

### Did You Know?

Vedas means 'knowledge'.

#### REMEMBER!

**Mantras** are chants or hymns.

**Brahmanas** are explanations of those mantras.

**Aranyakas** are guided meditations on important aspects of Hindu belief.

**Upanishads** are poems offering insights into the meaning of life.

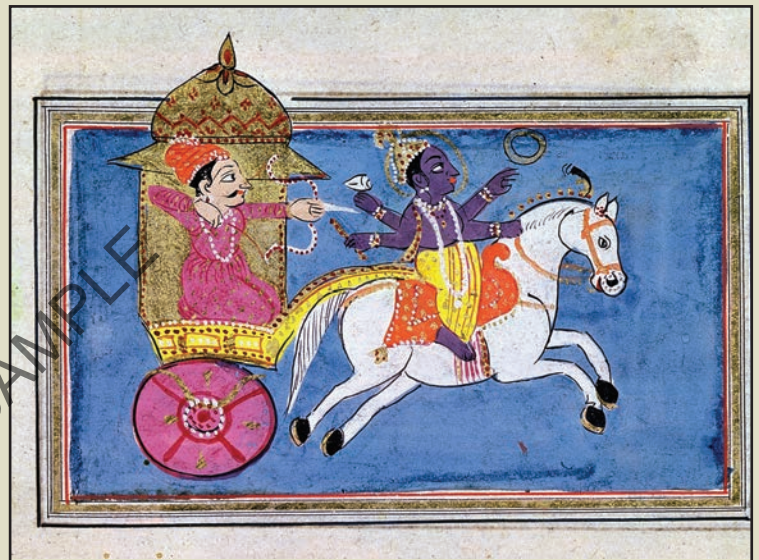
## SPOTLIGHT ON THE MAHABHARATA

The **Mahabharata** is another important Hindu book. It is a great epic poem that describes the challenges faced by succeeding generations of two families. It explores the joys and hardships of human life.

Within the Mahabharata is a story called the **Bhagavad Gita**. Its title means '**the Song of the Lord**'. It is a poem written in the form of **dialogue**, i.e. an exchange of ideas between people.

The Bhagavad Gita's two main characters are the god **Krishna** (an avatar of Vishnu) and a warrior named **Arjuna**. The two are united on the side of good in the battle against evil.

By the end of their dialogue, Krishna has helped Arjuna to see that for an action to be truly good, it must be selfless, i.e. one where you do the right thing without seeking a reward in return.



Arjuna in a carriage behind Krishna who is mounted on a horse.

## Worship

Puja is the Hindu word for worship. It should be performed twice a day, at sunrise and at sunset.

### Worship in the home

Most Hindus worship in their own homes. Almost every Hindu home has its own **shrine**.

#### REMEMBER!

**Puja** means 'giving respect'.

### Did You Know?

A Hindu shrine consists of an image (i.e. picture or statue) of the particular god a family worships.

Usually the mother arranges all the acts of worship for the family. She lights candles and burns incense sticks at the shrine. Then she sets out **the prasad**. This is an offering of food and flowers. It is placed in front of the image of a Hindu god. Such things are offered to show gratitude to **Brahma** (the creator god). Mantras are recited to summon the family's chosen god and texts from the Vedas are recited or sung.

Hindus pray for two reasons:

- To get the protection of their chosen god.
- To grow closer to this god in order to achieve moksha.

**Yoga** helps you to gain greater control over both your body and your mind. It helps you to remove any trace of anger, greed and selfishness from your life. You need this to achieve inner peace.

Yoga is important because Hindus believe that it is only when you have reached a lasting inner peace that the cycle of reincarnation ends, allowing the atman to be finally reunited with Brahman.

### Worship in the mandir



Krishna Mandir, Nepal.



Prasad is an offering of food and flowers to show gratitude to Brahma.

### Did You Know?

**Yoga** means **union**. It is a type of meditation popular among Hindus.

#### REMEMBER!

**A mandir** is a Hindu temple.

In India a typical **mandir** consists of a number of whitewashed buildings. These contain shrines to different gods. Usually there is an open courtyard where trees offer worshippers shade from the sun.

On entering a mandir you must:




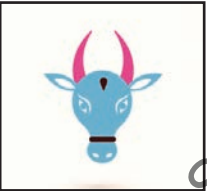
- Remove your shoes to show you respect it as a holy place.
- Sit on the ground and pray facing a shrine containing the image of your chosen god.

There are three stages in Hindu worship:

- **Bhajans:** This involves reciting mantras, singing hymns and dancing.
- **Havan:** Here a **pandit** (priest) lights a fire and pours liquid butter onto the flame.
- **Arti:** Here a tray containing the symbols of the five elements (air, earth, ether, fire and water) is set out before the image of your chosen god. Then a red spot is made on both your own forehead and that of the image. Next, money is placed on the tray as an offering. After this you are given a mixture of dried fruit, nuts and sugar to eat.

Sometimes Hindus listen to a **pravachan** (i.e. a sermon) given by a visiting holy man.

## Hindu Symbols

Aum (or 'Om')		Hindus believe that <b>Aum</b> was the very first sound made when the universe was created by Brahma. <b>Aum</b> is also the sound Hindus make when beginning and ending their prayers.
Lotus Flower		This symbol stands for purity, fertility, good fortune and progress.
Bindu		This is a coloured dot worn on the forehead of Hindu women. Married women wear a red dot. Unmarried women wear a black dot. Hindus believe it protects the wearer from evil.
The Cow		Hindus worship cows for their life-giving qualities (e.g. milk for food, hide for leather and dung for fuel). The cow represents humility and generosity. Hinduism rejects the whole idea of animal sacrifice.  Hinduism teaches that we have a duty to protect all living things.

## Rituals

### 1. Samskara

The first three samskara are celebrated while you are still a child in your mother's womb. You receive the fourth samskara shortly after birth. You are washed and the sacred symbol of Aum is marked on your tongue with honey from a golden pen.

You receive the fifth samskara when you are twelve days old. A Hindu priest prays with your family and announces your name.

You receive the sixth samskara when you are one year old. Your head is shaved to represent purity. You are now said to have left all the sins of your previous lives behind you.

#### REMEMBER!

**Samskara** is the religious ritual that introduces a Hindu into each new stage of life.

## 2. Upanayana

This is also called ‘**the Ceremony of the Sacred Thread**’. Usually, this ritual is restricted to boys who are members of the top three castes.

Traditionally upanayana took place when a boy left home to study with a **guru** (i.e. a religious teacher). Today it happens when they reach puberty. It marks the start of their formal religious studies.

The ritual itself takes place in front of **the sacred fire** (which stands for energy and purity). A priest prays that you will continue to grow strong in your religious faith. Then the priest blesses a **coloured thread** (i.e. a loop of cotton).

There is a different coloured thread for each caste. The thread is tied loosely with a special knot. This thread is then worn by you, from your left shoulder across to your right hip. It represents the idea that you are now beginning a new and pure life. From this point on you are considered a full member of your particular caste. This means that you must accept and fulfil all the responsibilities that go with it.

Every caste member is expected to do five things:

1. Worship the gods.
2. Respect gurus.
3. Respect their parents.
4. Help the poor.
5. Care for animals and the environment.

## Festivals

There are hundreds of Hindu festivals. Here we will look at two of the most important ones.

### Holi

This is also known as ‘the Festival of Colours’. Holi is held over several days in the Hindu month of **Phalunga**. It celebrates the arrival of spring.

Holi takes its name from the story of the evil princess Holika. She tried to murder her young nephew Prahlad because of his devotion to the god Vishnu. Prahlad was saved because he repeated Vishnu’s name. Holika was punished for what she had tried to do. She was destroyed in a great bonfire.

This story represents the Hindu belief that good will always triumph over evil. It is also the source of the traditional practice of lighting bonfires on the eve of Holi. These bonfires also represent the end of the old year and the start of the new.

On the first morning of Holi, Hindus are allowed to set aside some of their normal ways of behaving. They dress in white clothing and throw red-coloured water over one another and smear each other with paint. All this is done in a spirit of fun.

### REMEMBER!

**Upanayana** is the ritual where you become a full member of the Hindu community.



Holi - the Festival of Colours. Hindus drench one another in red-coloured water – all in a spirit of fun.



## Diwali/Diwali

This is the most widely known Hindu festival. It lasts for five days. It takes place in the Hindu month of **Kartika** (October/November).

Diwali is also known as ‘the Festival of Lights’. This is because it is a common practice for Hindus to thoroughly clean their homes and decorate them with oil lamps called diyas. These lamps are lit to welcome **Lakshmi** (the goddess of prosperity) into their lives.

Hindus celebrate Diwali by:

- Having a meal with family and friends.
- Putting on firework displays and dancing in the streets.
- Exchanging gifts.
- Clearing all outstanding debts.
- Buying new clothes and new household items.

## Yatra

Hindus go on pilgrimage:

- To fulfil a promise made to a particular god.
- To give thanks for the birth of a child.
- To **atone** (i.e. show you are sorry) for sins.
- To put aside pride and become more humble and generous.

**REMEMBER!**

**Yatra** is the Hindu word for pilgrimage.

Once Hindus reach a pilgrimage site, they must take a ritual bath, usually in a nearby river or lake. They pray that their sins will be washed away by these waters and that they can make a fresh start in life. After bathing, a male pilgrim has his head shaved. However, a female pilgrim only has to have one or two locks of her hair cut off.

Hindus have many places of pilgrimage. Some of these are places where it is said that a particular god or goddess came down on earth. For example:

- **Ajodhya** in northern India is called the birthplace of the god Rama.
- **Vrindavan** is where the god Krishna was born and grew up.

Another famous site is the city of **Varanasi**. It was built on the banks of the river **Ganges**.

Millions of Indians depend on the life-giving waters of the Ganges. Pilgrims to Varanasi light a small candle and float it down the river as an offering to the goddess Ganga.

### Did You Know?

The Ganges is the most sacred river in India. It is named after the goddess Ganga.



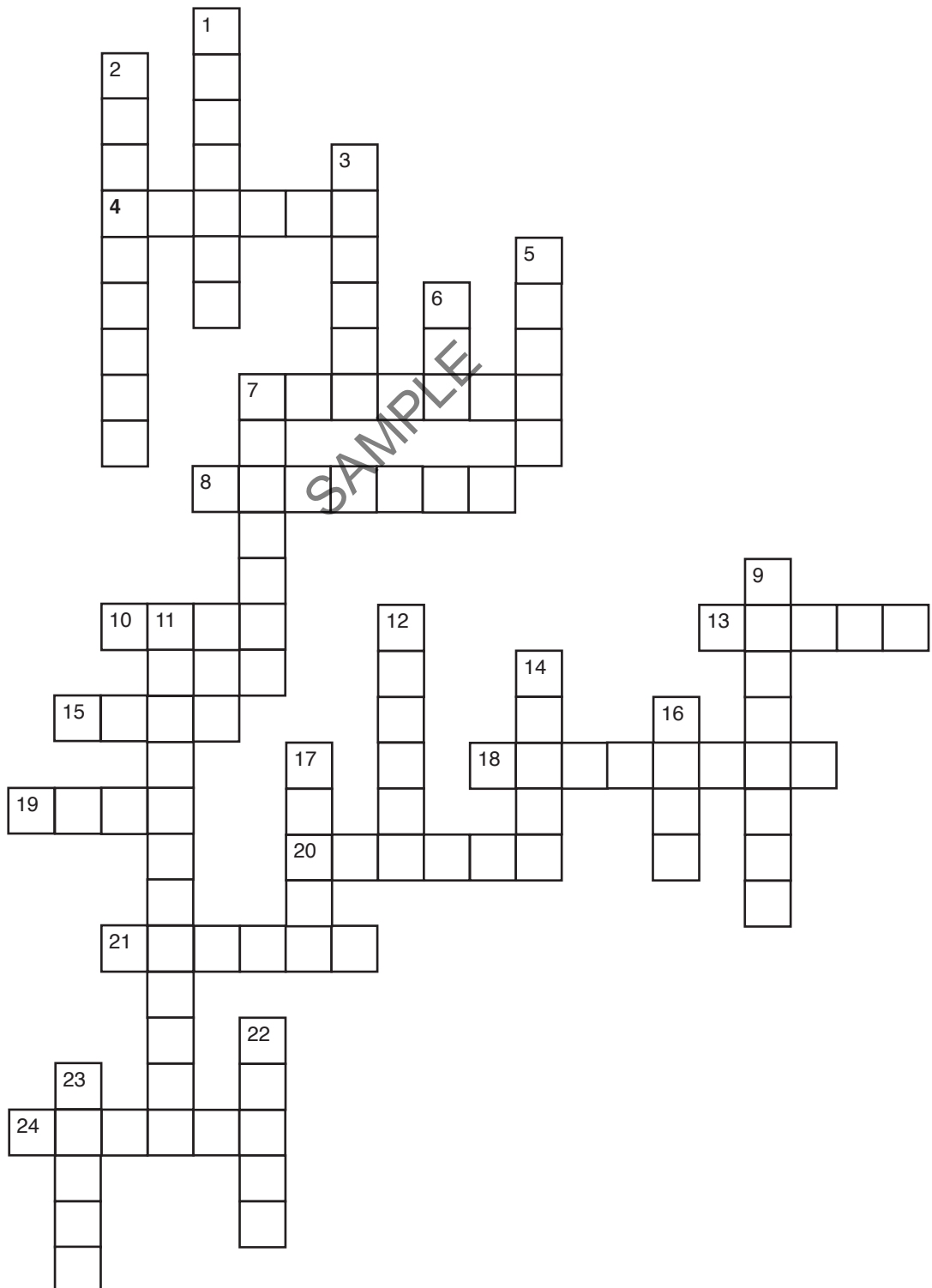
Morning on the River Ganges, Varanasi, India

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Say what it means!

- (a) A rishi was \_\_\_\_\_.
- (b) A mandir is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (c) Samskara is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (d) Upanayana is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (e) Yatra is \_\_\_\_\_.

### 2. Crossword



**Across**

4. Name meaning 'one who descends'.
7. These are priests.
8. These are the artisans, farmers and merchants.
10. The Hindu word for worship.
13. A coloured dot worn on the forehead by Hindu women.
15. Where a tray containing the symbols of the five elements (air, earth, ether, fire and water) is set out before the image of your chosen god.
18. Means an exchange of ideas between people.
19. Hindu name for a religious teacher.
20. These are the peasants and servants.
21. The most sacred river in India.
24. An offering of fruit and flowers placed before the shrine of a Hindu god.

**Down**

1. This involves reciting mantras, singing hymns and dancing.
2. These are the rulers.
3. The god who creates life.
5. It means 'to show that you are sorry for your sins'.
6. The very first sound made when the universe was created.
7. The supreme source of everything in the universe.
9. The oldest of the world's religions.
11. The lowest ranking group in Hindu society.
12. The god who protects life.
14. The god who destroys life.
16. It is a type of meditation. It helps you to get control over your mind and body.
17. The Hindu name for a social group.
22. Title of Hinduism's sacred text.
23. A statement of what the members of a religion believe.

SAMPLE

**3. Tick the box!**

In each of the following, say whether it is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
1. Hinduism had one identifiable founder.		
2. Hinduism does not have a single, widely accepted creed.		
3. Hindus are free to worship more than one god.		
4. Hindus say that Brahman is just like the Christian God. Brahman is a person.		
5. Hindus believe that people, animals, insects, plants, rocks, rivers and even the gods themselves do not exist in their own right. They are all merely different ways in which Brahman expresses itself.		
6. Atman is what gives life to your body. It is an invisible fragment of Brahman in you.		
7. Hindus believe that when your body dies, your atman is reincarnated, i.e. it enters a new body and goes on to live another life.		
8. The repeating cycle of birth, death and rebirth is called moksha.		
9. Hindus believe that the quality of your present life is decided by how you lived your previous life. So, if you consistently do good things in this life, you will be rewarded with a better life next time.		

	True	False
10. Hindus believe that whenever evil threatens to take over the world, the god Shiva comes down on earth to fight evil and restore order.		
11. The highest-ranking group in Hindu society are the Untouchables.		
12. One Hindu leader who tried to improve the treatment of the Untouchables was Mohandas K. Gandhi.		
13. Mantras are chants or hymns.		
14. Aranyakas are explanations of these mantras.		
15. Upanishads are poems offering insights into the meaning of life.		
16. Puja must be performed only once each day.		
17. Usually the father arranges all acts of worship for a Hindu family.		
18. You remove your shoes before entering a mandir to show that you respect it as a holy place.		
19. A pravachan is a Hindu holy man.		
20. You receive the sixth samskara when you are one year old. Your head is shaved to represent purity. You are now said to have left all the sins of your previous lives behind you.		
21. The Ceremony of the Sacred Thread is a ritual restricted to girls who are members of the top three castes.		
22. Holi is known as 'the festival of lights'.		
23. Holi celebrates the arrival of spring.		
24. During Holi, Hindus dress in white clothing and throw red-coloured water over one another.		
25. Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of prosperity.		
26. Once Hindus reach a pilgrimage site, they take a ritual bath and pray that their sins will be washed away.		
27. Ajodhya in northern India is called the birthplace of the god Krishna.		

## CHAPTER 2 BEING A JEW

### The Dead Sea Scrolls

One day in 1947, three young brothers were herding a flock of goats through the desolate wilderness near **the Dead Sea**. Their route took them through an area called **Wadi Qumran**. Bored by their job, the boys amused themselves by throwing stones into the openings of caves as they passed by. After one throw, they were surprised to hear the sound of something breaking, deep inside the cave. As they were short on time and afraid of entering the dark cave, they chose not to find out what had been broken.



A few days later the youngest boy, **Muhammad-edh-Dhib**, decided to go back to the cave and investigate. Inside the cave he found several tall terracotta jars. Each jar contained bundles of ancient manuscripts (i.e. handwritten documents). These manuscripts were sewn together in long scrolls and wrapped in linen.

The boy returned home and told his family. They returned with him to the cave and took the manuscripts. Thinking that the manuscripts might be valuable, his father sold them. The scholars who bought them quickly realised that they now possessed one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time. These manuscripts were 2,000-year-old copies of **Judaism's** sacred text.

#### Did You Know?

**Judaism** is the world's oldest monotheistic religion. Its members are called 'Jews'.

SAMPLE



Three young brothers discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave in Wadi Qumran.

Over the next nine years teams of archaeologists explored the caves around the Dead Sea. They discovered around 800 more manuscripts, all stored in the same way. These ancient manuscripts became known as **the Dead Sea Scrolls**.

#### Did You Know?

**The Dead Sea Scrolls** give us the oldest known complete manuscript of Judaism's sacred text. They were written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are thought to have been produced by a Jewish group called **the Essenes** (see: Section B, Chapter 2). They most likely hid these scrolls in caves to prevent their destruction by the Romans during the Jewish rebellion (66–73 CE).

Today, the Dead Sea Scrolls are housed in the **Shrine of the Book** at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. These 2,000-year-old manuscripts show us that the Jews have faithfully preserved the actual words of **the Tanakh** since ancient times.