

PART 4 – *The Rise of World Religions*

9 HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

300 B.C.E. – 1200 C.E.

THE SACRED SUBCONTINENT: THE SPREAD OF RELIGION IN INDIA AND BEYOND

COMMENTARY

“Religion,” the text states at the beginning of Part Four, “is the sense of human relationship with the sacred, with forces in and beyond nature” (Spodek, p. 254). Essentially, religion provides answers to people’s eternal questions about their existence (“Where do we come from?” – “Why are we here?” – “What happens to us when we die?” – “What is our relationship to nature and natural forces?”) and a sense of security in a dangerous and unpredictable world. Some religions seek answers in many deities, representing a myriad of forces. Other, **monotheistic**, religions seek solace in a single, all-knowing and all powerful god. Other peoples have viewed the forces controlling human existence as being more distant and abstract, such as the Chinese concept of “Heaven” (*Tien*) or the Indian “life force” (*Brahman*). Some religions have an identifiable founder or beginning, while the origins of others are embedded in their people’s traditions. Every people regards its religion as both unique and universal -- that is all-encompassing and “true” – but viewed from an historical perspective (which concentrates on the visible aspects of religions, rather than their inherently unprovable beliefs) all religions share certain common characteristics. According to Spodek, there are five such shared traits: every religion has a sacred calendar and **rituals**, sacred space, a sacred literature or teachings, sacred art and images, and some sort of religious organization or hierarchy (pp. 2259-260).

In Parts Two and Three, we have studied a number of different religions; in Sumer, Egypt, early China, and in Meso-America. As the title of Part Four – *The Rise of World Religions* – indicates, this section will focus on the origins, beliefs, structure, and history of the five faiths that today include approximately 90% of all religious believers in the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These are generally referred to as “world religions,” that is, religions which have not only endured over time, but have exhibited the flexibility and inclusiveness of doctrine, ritual, and organization to enable them to grow, expand, and adapt themselves to the varying spiritual needs and cultural traditions of many different peoples and survive confrontations with other religions, with sometimes hostile secular rulers, and amongst themselves. Two traits in particular stand out in the text’s examination of the “world religions” in this section – all have been aided at one time or another by their adoption as the official faith, or state religion, of powerful empires or governments; and all have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for **syncretism**, that is the “borrowing and adaptation of ideas and practices” from different cultures and faiths (p. 256).

Chapter 9 discusses Hinduism, perhaps the oldest of the world’s major religions, and its cousin, Buddhism. Although Hinduism is today almost exclusively confined to India and persons of Indian ethnicity, it is regarded as a “world religion” by virtue of its antiquity; its current numbers (an estimated 12.8% of the world’s population in 1998); and its role as the parent religion of the more far-flung Buddhism. Spodek stresses that, perhaps more than any of the other major religions discussed in this section, “Hinduism” is less a description of a coherent ideology or belief system than it is a reference to a set of traditions and a way of life in India. This is clearly shown in its most important characteristics. It originated as a synthesis, or combination, of native Indian and later Aryan beliefs and practices and has remained flexible and syncretistic ever since, constantly changing and adapting to new peoples and conditions within India. Its great literary works, the **Puranas**, the **Vedas**, the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**, are also the main sources of early India history, learned by almost all Indians; and in the **caste-system**, its view of the proper organization of society is enshrined in the Indian social structure. These features have enabled Hinduism to survive and flourish in the face of defections to Buddhism; the rise and fall of Indian Empires; invasions by Hunas, Turks, Arabs, Mongols and Europeans; challenges from Islam and Christianity; the dispersal of millions of Indians around the globe; and dizzyingly rapid modernization and social change in India today.

Buddhism shares many beliefs in common with Hinduism – for example, the idea that earthly existence is an illusion and the concept of the “Oneness” of humans with the universe -- along with its ability to incorporate and legitimize different traditions and tendency to proliferate into many different sects; some stressing prayer, **devotion** and ritual, others stressing **asceticism** (self-denial) and **meditation**. These features caused Buddhism to split into two major schools – **Theravada** and **Mahayana** – but also facilitated its expansion throughout east Asia, where it was able to reach accommodation with Daoism, Confucianism, and the native Japanese folk religion, **Shinto**. At one point, it was also the major religion of central Asia, where it may have influenced – and been influenced by – Christianity. It is perhaps the most varied and syncretistic of the world’s major religions. Ironically, while it is a major religion in China (including Tibet), Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma (Myanmar), it is virtually extinct in India, surviving only on the periphery of its birthplace, in the Himalayas and on the island of Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

A. The Historian and Religious Belief: How Do We Know?

B. Hinduism

1. The origins of Hinduism: How Do We Know?
2. Sacred geography and pilgrimage
3. The central beliefs of Hinduism
 - a. The *Rigveda*
 - b. Caste
 - i. Purusha and the caste system
 - ii. *varna* and *jati*
 - b. The *Bramanas* and *Upanishads*
 - i. *brahman* and *atman*
 - ii. *samsara* and *moksha*
 - iii. *maya*, *dharma* and *karma*
 - c. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*
SOURCE: the *Bhagavad-Gita* from the *Mahabharata*
 - d. The *Puranas*
4. Temples and shrines
FOCUS: *Bhakti* -- the path of mystical devotion
5. Religion and rule
6. Hinduism in Southeast Asia
 - a. Hinduism in Southeast Asia: How Do We Know?
 - b. Hinduism and Buddhism in Southeast Asia

C. Buddhism

1. The Buddha
 - a. SOURCE: The Address to Sigala – Buddhism in Everyday Life
 - b. PROFILE: Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha
 - c. SOURCE: The “Four Noble Truths” and the “Noble Eightfold Path”
 - d. The Sangha and the doctrine
 - e. Mahayana Buddhism (the “Greater Vehicle”)
 - i. Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism
 - ii. *Bodhisattvas*
 - iii. The Amitabha and Maitreya Buddha
2. FOCUS: Jainism
3. The decline of Buddhism in India
 - a. The Gupta Dynasty and Hinduism
 - b. Social importance of *brahmin* priests
 - c. *Bhakti* Hinduism
 - d. Muslim invasions and conquests

4. Buddhism in China and Japan
 - a. Arrival in China: the Silk Route
 - b. Buddhism under the Tang dynasty
SOURCE: *The Transience of Life – a Woman’s Perspective from the Tang Dynasty*
 - c. Buddhism in Japan: How Do We Know?
 - i. Shinto, the “way of the *kami*”
 - ii. Buddhism’s arrival in Japan
 - iii. Japanese Buddhist sects
5. SPOTLIGHT: Images of the Buddha

D. Hinduism and Buddhism: How Do They Compare?

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and – most important – a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** type in the first column.

Kshatriyas	sanctification	Silk Route
Krishna	<i>Tripitaka</i>	Siddhartha Gautama
Diamond Sutra	yogic meditation	<i>Sangha</i>
Bodhisattvas	Vaishyas	<i>maya</i>
Brahmins	Shudras	Eightfold Path
dharma and <i>karma</i>	Untouchables	stupas
Jainism	<i>varna</i> and <i>jati</i>	Theravada/Hinayana
Four Noble Truths	<i>Brahman</i> and <i>atman</i>	Mahayana
Shingon sect	<i>samsara</i>	Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin)
Moksha	<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i>	Faxian (Fa-Hsien)
	Vishnu	Maitreya
	Shiva	Amitabha (“Pure Land”)
	<i>Bhakti</i>	Horyuji Temple

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Explain the origins, development and basic concepts of Hinduism and its integral place in Indian culture.
2. Understand the origins of Buddhism in early Hinduism; the reasons for Buddhism’s early success in India; and the development of Mahayana Buddhism.
3. Be able to compare and contrast the basic beliefs and practices of Hinduism (including *Bhakti*), Jainism and Buddhism.
4. Understand the ways by which Buddhism was spread throughout East Asia and the reasons for its eventual decline in India.
5. Explain the differences in beliefs and practices between various sects of Mahayana Buddhism in China, Vietnam and Japan.
6. Be able to fit the relevant aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism into Spodek’s general model of world religions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Introduce “religion” as an anthropological, historical and philosophical concept, using Spodek’s model and terminology. Explain why some organized religions have gained the status of “world religion” and initiate a discussion as to what qualifications constitute a “world religion.”

2. Discuss the origins of Hinduism in Vedic religion and early Indian society and explain the aspects of the religion that may have prompted breakaway movements such as Jainism and Buddhism. Note that both of the aforementioned faith were begun by members of the kshatriya caste and ask the class why that might have been the case.
3. Explain the different types of Buddhism and why and how they evolved; while discussing the migration of Buddhism throughout East Asia.
4. Discuss the reasons for Buddhism's early success and eventual decline in India.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. Debate: Since Hinduism today is confined mainly to India and people of Indian ethnicity, should it really be considered a "world religion"? If so, on what basis? If not, why not? (Base your arguments on specific evidence and information in the chapter.)
2. Compare Hinduism and Buddhism, with respect to their major doctrines, their organization and their adaptability. How are they similar? What are their most significant differences?
3. Compare Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. What are their most significant differences? Why did the split occur? What were its effects on the development of Buddhism?
4. Explain how and why Buddhism died out in India, yet was able to flourish throughout most of East Asia. How does the expansion of Buddhism throughout Asia illustrate the characteristics of a "world religion"?
5. Group work: Using specific examples from the text, discuss how significant aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism can be illustrated and explained through the study of paintings, sculpture and architecture.
6. Group work: A major tenet of both Hinduism and Buddhism is that life on earth is *maya* (illusion) and transient (fleeting). Cite as many specific primary sources (documents or illustrations) as you can that might demonstrate this belief. Be sure to explain the relevance of your sources.
7. Current events & issues: IS life on earth an illusion? What are some of the possible implications and ramifications of such a belief? Is such a belief a viable way to guide one's life? How can you account for the continuing attraction of Hindu and Buddhist metaphysical concepts in modern western societies?

TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	Hinduism and Buddhism	(p. 258)
	Chronology of the World's Religious Cultures	(p. 259)
	Major Religions of the World	(p. 260)
	Major Hindu Gods	(p. 264)
	Sacred Writings of Hinduism	(p. 265)
	Sacred Writings of Buddhism	(p. 278)
Large photographs or illustrations:	Illustration of the god Krishna from <i>Rasamanjari</i>	(p. 261)
	Scene from a dramatization of the <i>Ramayana</i>	(p. 267)
	Bronze sculpture of Vishnu	(p. 268)
	Kandariya Mahadeo Temple, Khajuraho	(p. 270)
	Kailasantha Temple, Ellora	(p. 271)
	Great Stupa, Sanchi	(p. 276)
	Guanyin, a <i>bodhisattva</i>	(p. 281)
	Horyuji Temple, Nara (Japan)	(p. 286)
	Byoddoin Temple, Uji (Japan)	(p. 287)

Maps:	Hindu South Asia	(p. 262)
	Asian trade routes	(p. 272)
	Buddhist Asia	(p. 277)
SPOTLIGHT:	Images of the Buddha	(p. 288-289)
PROFILE:	Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha	(p. 275)
FOCUS:	<i>Bhakti</i> : Path of Mystical Devotion	(p. 269)
	Jainism	(p. 279)
SOURCES:	The <i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> from the <i>Mahabharata</i>	(p. 266)
	The Address to Sigala: Buddhism in Everyday Life	(p. 274)
	The “Four Noble Truths” and the “Noble Eightfold Path”	(p. 276)
	The Transience of Life: a Woman’s Perspective	(p. 284)
	From the Tang Dynasty	

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

- 9-1 *Upanishads*: a mirror into the underpinnings of the ancient Hindu faith
- 9-2 *Apastamba*: traditional Hindu law
- 9-3 Mahavira: the “Great Hero” of Jainism
- 9-4 Gautama: a pampered prince faces his moment of truth
- 9-5 *Dhammapadam*: oral tradition becomes part of the Buddhist canon
- 9-6 Kamo no Chomei: a Japanese monk looks back on his life
- www The Ten Gurus and the *Holy Granth*: the universal message of Sikhism

AUDIO-VISUAL SOURCES (videos, DVD’s, CD-ROM, and web-sites)

Buddhist Texts; <http://uth.tmc.edu/~snewton/zen/index.shtml> [web-site]

This site contains a large collection of Buddhist texts, from the religion’s founding to the present.

Major World Religions; <http://omsakthi.org/religions/html> [web-site]

This site includes historical introductions to the major world religions and links to the major texts of each faith.

The Principles and Practices of Zen: 1992. [video; 116 minutes, color]

This film is about Buddhists and what they practice and preach, describing the principles they follow, as well as what they believe will happen to them in the afterlife.

Religions of the World: Buddhism. [video; 70 minutes, color]

Ben Kingsley narrates this introduction to the history, beliefs and practices of Buddhism.

Religions of the World: Hinduism. [video; 70 minutes, color]

The companion video to the above: one of six videos in the set.

Religion Search Engines: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Baha’I: <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/Searchengines/14603/> [web-site]

Provides a number of links to sources and information on the history, development, beliefs and practices of these major world religions. The sites include texts, illustrations, articles and many other materials.

Vedic Culture: <http://zeta.cs.adfa.oz.au/Spirit/Veda/Overview.html> [web-site]

This Australian web-site is a contains scholarly writings on various aspects of early Indian history and religion.