

Introducing World Religions

Student Discussion Questions

Chapter 10 Hindu tradition

1. How do you suppose the everyday life of Vaiṣṇava Hindus is affected by their belief that Viṣṇu has many avatāras? In general, how do you suppose Hindus feel about the existence of numerous forms of God – not all of whom they worship? Can you think of any parallels to the notion of *iṣṭadevatā* (chosen deity) in other religions?
2. What do you notice about the Hindu the portrayals of the divine from the examples of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Śākti (i.e., Devī)? How do these figures compare with divine figures in other traditions about which you have read?
3. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, what seems to be Arjuna's main problem on the battlefield as he dropped his bow and refused to fight? Do you find Kṛṣṇa's arguments in favor of fighting persuasive? Do you think Arjuna would have been persuaded to fight if his divine eye had not opened? Do you tend to favor Gāndhī's or Tilak's understanding of the text (see pages 245-6)?

Chapter 11 Sikh tradition

1. Describe the Sikh practice of reciting God's Name. Compare the Sikh practice to methods of prayer found in other religious traditions you have studied, or with which you are familiar.
2. Review the symbolic meanings of the 5 Ks worn by members of the Khālsā. List some symbolic articles worn or used by members of other religions, and explore similarities and differences in their meanings.
3. What do you see as the most important or interesting act done by each of the ten Sikh Gurūs? Explain your choices. What sense of their personalities can you get from the stories of their lives?

Chapter 12 Chinese traditions

1. What kind of character traits do you see evidenced in this "self-assessment" made by Confucius? Explain.

At fifteen my mind was set on learning. At thirty my character had been formed.
At forty I had no more perplexities. At fifty I knew the Mandate of Heaven (*Tian*)

ming). At sixty I was at ease with whatever I heard. At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing moral principles. (*Analects* 2:4: Chan, Wing-tsit (trans. and comp.) (1963) *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, page 22)

2. Given what you know about Confucius, why do you think he "made" the *Spring and Autumn Annals* so "boring?" What meaning might he have wanted scholars to have gotten from studying the classic (see BOX 12.2)? Compare and contrast the modern "western" concept of history with the ancient Confucian sense of what makes a good document.

3. Discuss these two anecdotes from Confucian tradition: (1) What meaning do you take from the story of Confucius in his time of mourning? *After he mourned the death of his mother as a filial son for three years, he did not play the lute for three more days.* (2) This fable about Mencius and Xun-zi illustrates two views of human nature: *Two men were trying to get a donkey to move forward. One beat the donkey with a stick. The other tied a carrot to a stick so that the carrot dangled in front of the donkey's nose.* Which one is Mencius? Why do you think so?