



Name _____

rebirth in three ways. The soul can be free by doing good works and making good karma, by meditation, or by devotion to God. Hindu children enjoy the ancient Krishna stories in the same way that many Christian children like Bible stories.

Not all Hindu stories are thousands, or even hundreds, of years old. Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu teacher who lived in the 19th century. He used stories all the time to teach his students different spiritual truths. You might even recognize some of his stories, like the story about four blind men and an elephant.

One day, four blind men were led to an elephant to "see" it. Each of them felt a different part of the great beast, but being blind, each had different idea about the nature of the animal. The first man felt the elephant's leg and said that an elephant is like a pillar. The second man felt the elephant's tummy and said that an elephant is like a large jar. The third man had a different idea after he felt the elephant's trunk. He said the elephant is like a thick club. The last man disagreed with all of his friends. He felt the elephant's huge ears and was sure that the elephant was like a fan.

Soon the four friends were all arguing about the true nature of the beast. A passerby asked them what they were fighting about, and they told him. The man explained to them that the elephant had different parts, and that each of them had only experienced one part. Sri Ramakrishna used this elephant story to explain why it is ridiculous for men to argue about which religion is best because anyone who fights about God has only seen a part of him!

One common theme in many Hindu stories is their belief in reincarnation, or the idea that we are born many times. In Hinduism, the soul does not stay in one body. The soul first enters the body of something simple, not human. You might be a bug in your first life! As your soul evolves, it enters more and more complex life forms (here kitty, kitty). Eventually, the soul enters a human body. Then the law of karma kicks in. This means that good choices in one lifetime lead to good things in the next lifetime. Unkind acts may mean hardships in the next life. Hindus believe that we create our own future circumstances. A belief in karma is a good reason to be nice to people!

Another important idea in Hinduism is dharma. Dharma means fulfilling our purpose in life. Everyone has a special dharma. Your dharma right now is to be a student. Later, you might be a parent, an employee, a businessperson, or something else. The idea of fulfilling one's purpose is important to every Hindu, and each person's ultimate goal is to reunite with Brahman.

Like many religions, Hinduism has many festivals throughout the year. One of the most important is Divali, the Festival of Lights, which celebrates the New Year. Divali means "row of lamps." Hindus light clay lamps filled with oil and place them in windows, on roofs, and around courtyards. Divali celebrates the triumph of light over darkness. Holi is the rowdy, spring harvest festival. Everyone throws colored powder at each other! Janmashtami is Krishna's birthday. During Janmashtami, the streets and homes are decorated with mango leaves and banana trees. Temples to Krishna are decorated with flowers and lights to honor the blue avatar.

With its many gods, colorful festivals, and rich stories, Hinduism is unique. Every Hindu can find a special god or goddess to worship. Hinduism affects all elements of life for those who follow it. Hindus don't simply practice their religion. They live it!

What is Hinduism?

Questions

1. How did Hindus originally transmit the Rig-Veda?
 - A. by word of mouth
 - B. on scrolls
 - C. through stone tablets
 - D. on cave paintings
2. What is the language of the Rig-Veda?
 - A. English
 - B. Chinese
 - C. Sanskrit
 - D. Persian