

Arizona State University (ASU) REL100 Religions of the World Practice Exam (Sample)

Study Guide



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Questions

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1. What principle do Orthodox Jews typically follow in their practice?
 - A. Strict adherence to traditional Jewish law
 - B. Modern interpretations of scripture
 - C. Syncretism with other religions
 - D. Reformist practices
2. Who is the central figure of the Christian faith?
 - A. Jesus Christ
 - B. Moses
 - C. Paul the Apostle
 - D. John the Baptist
3. Which great epic is the Bhagavadgita a part of?
 - A. The Mahabharata
 - B. The Ramayana
 - C. The Vedas
 - D. The Upanishads
4. What is considered the highest law for husband and wife until death in the Laws of Manu?
 - A. Mutual respect
 - B. Mutual fidelity
 - C. Financial security
 - D. Shared responsibilities
5. What is Karma in Hindu and Buddhist traditions?
 - A. The law of cause and effect influencing future rebirths
 - B. A philosophy of non-attachment
 - C. A system of moral conduct
 - D. A belief in a predetermined destiny

6. What is the role of meditation in Buddhism?
- A. To memorize texts
 - B. To cultivate mindfulness, concentration, and insight
 - C. To achieve physical fitness
 - D. To develop social skills
7. What are Sutras in Buddhist literature?
- A. Written records of the teachings of the Buddha
 - B. Prayers recited during meditation
 - C. Historical accounts of the Buddha's life
 - D. Rules for monastic discipline
8. How many books compose the collection of the Vedas?
- A. 3
 - B. 4
 - C. 5
 - D. 6
9. What does Tikkun Olam mean in Jewish thought?
- A. Repairing the world through social action and ethical behavior
 - B. Observing the Sabbath
 - C. Counting the Omer
 - D. Celebrating Jewish festivals
10. Who is recognized as the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school of Indian philosophy?
- A. Ramanuja
 - B. Shankara
 - C. Vaisheshika
 - D. Kapila

Answers

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1. A
2. A
3. A
4. B
5. A
6. B
7. A
8. B
9. A
10. B

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Explanations

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1. What principle do Orthodox Jews typically follow in their practice?

A. Strict adherence to traditional Jewish law

B. Modern interpretations of scripture

C. Syncretism with other religions

D. Reformist practices

Orthodox Jews are characterized by a strict adherence to traditional Jewish law, known as Halakha. This principle is central to their practice, as it governs various aspects of life, including dietary laws, Sabbath observance, prayer rituals, and moral conduct. Orthodox Judaism places a strong emphasis on maintaining the practices and beliefs that have been handed down through generations, closely following the interpretations found in the Torah and Talmud. This dedication to traditional law sets Orthodox Judaism apart from other branches of Judaism that may adopt more modern interpretations or practices that align with contemporary society. The commitment to Halakha reflects a belief in the divine origin of these laws and their unchanging nature, which serves as a guiding framework for personal and communal life among Orthodox Jews.

2. Who is the central figure of the Christian faith?

A. Jesus Christ

B. Moses

C. Paul the Apostle

D. John the Baptist

The central figure of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ. Christianity is fundamentally based on the teachings, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who is revered as the Son of God and the Messiah. His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection are viewed as pivotal events that provide salvation and eternal life to believers. Jesus' teachings form the foundation of Christian doctrine, making Him central not only in terms of faith but also in how the faith is practiced and understood. Other figures such as Moses, Paul the Apostle, and John the Baptist are important within the Christian tradition, each contributing significantly to the faith. However, they are not regarded as the central figure. Moses is a key prophet in Judaism and is recognized in Christianity as a precursor to Jesus. Paul the Apostle played a crucial role in spreading Christianity and interpreting Jesus' teachings, especially to Gentile communities. John the Baptist is known for baptizing Jesus and preparing the way for His ministry, but he does not hold the same foundational status within Christianity as Jesus does. Thus, Jesus Christ stands as the central and defining figure of the Christian faith.

3. Which great epic is the Bhagavadgita a part of?

A. The Mahabharata

B. The Ramayana

C. The Vedas

D. The Upanishads

The Bhagavadgita is part of the Mahabharata, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient Indian literature. The Mahabharata narrates the story of a dynastic struggle for power and incorporates complex themes such as duty, righteousness, and the nature of reality. Within this epic, the Bhagavadgita specifically presents a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna, serving as a philosophical and spiritual guide that addresses deep questions about life, ethics, and duty. This connection to the Mahabharata is crucial, as the narrative context enriches the teachings and insights found in the Bhagavadgita. The other works mentioned, such as the Ramayana, the Vedas, and the Upanishads, are significant in their own right but do not contain the Bhagavadgita. The Ramayana focuses on the journey of Rama and his quest to rescue Sita, while the Vedas are a large body of ancient texts that form the foundation of Hindu scripture. The Upanishads, on the other hand, delve into philosophical discussions about the nature of reality and the self. While all these texts are essential to Indian religious and philosophical thought, it is the Mahabharata that is the right context for the Bhagavadgita.

4. What is considered the highest law for husband and wife until death in the Laws of Manu?

A. Mutual respect

B. Mutual fidelity

C. Financial security

D. Shared responsibilities

In the context of the Laws of Manu, which is an ancient Indian text outlining dharma (moral and ethical duties), the concept of mutual fidelity is regarded as the highest law for a husband and wife. This principle asserts that spouses should remain faithful to one another, as fidelity is deemed essential for maintaining the sanctity and integrity of marriage. The emphasis on mutual fidelity reflects the cultural and religious values in Hinduism regarding marital relationships, where loyalty and commitment are paramount. This not only strengthens the bond between partners but also establishes a stable family structure, which is a fundamental aspect of societal order. While mutual respect, financial security, and shared responsibilities are certainly important components of a healthy marriage, they do not hold the same doctrinal weight as mutual fidelity in the context of the Laws of Manu. The text prioritizes fidelity as a sacred duty, reinforcing its importance as the foundational ideal that supports the overall harmony of the marital relationship.

5. What is Karma in Hindu and Buddhist traditions?

A. The law of cause and effect influencing future rebirths

B. A philosophy of non-attachment

C. A system of moral conduct

D. A belief in a predetermined destiny

Karma in Hindu and Buddhist traditions is fundamentally understood as the law of cause and effect that influences future rebirths. This concept posits that every action, whether good or bad, has consequences that shape an individual's future experiences and conditions, particularly in the cycle of samsara, which refers to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. In essence, positive actions lead to beneficial outcomes, while negative actions can result in adverse consequences in this life or in future lives. This understanding of karma reflects a broader philosophical framework in both traditions concerning moral responsibility and the interconnectedness of existence. It emphasizes that individuals are agents in their own spiritual journeys, shaping their destinies through their choices and actions. This principle is often connected to the idea of dharma, which underscores the importance of living in accordance with one's ethical and moral responsibilities. Other options, while related to aspects of the broader teachings in Hinduism and Buddhism, do not accurately encompass the full scope of karma as traditionally understood. Non-attachment is more about emotional states and desires, moral conduct pertains to ethical behavior but does not capture the causal relationship inherent in karma, and the notion of predetermined destiny contradicts the principles of free will and moral agency found in these traditions.

6. What is the role of meditation in Buddhism?

A. To memorize texts

B. To cultivate mindfulness, concentration, and insight

C. To achieve physical fitness

D. To develop social skills

Meditation plays a crucial role in Buddhism as a practice aimed at cultivating mindfulness, concentration, and insight. This meditation practice helps individuals develop a deeper understanding of their thoughts, emotions, and the nature of reality. By focusing on the present moment and observing one's mental processes without attachment, practitioners can gain insights into the nature of suffering, impermanence, and the interconnectedness of all beings. Mindfulness meditation, for instance, involves paying attention to one's breath or bodily sensations and is aimed at becoming more aware of the fleeting nature of thoughts and feelings, leading to greater peace and eventual liberation from suffering. Concentration practices help deepen one's focus, enabling the practitioner to foster a calm and clear mind, which is essential for developing insight into the teachings of Buddha. This process is fundamental to the path of spiritual awakening and enlightenment in Buddhism, as it leads to transformative experiences that are vital for personal and spiritual growth.

7. What are Sutras in Buddhist literature?

A. Written records of the teachings of the Buddha

B. Prayers recited during meditation

C. Historical accounts of the Buddha's life

D. Rules for monastic discipline

Sutras in Buddhist literature are primarily understood as written records of the teachings of the Buddha. These texts encapsulate the doctrines, philosophical concepts, and guidance that Buddha imparted to his followers, making them foundational texts within various Buddhist traditions. The term "sutra" itself means "thread" in Sanskrit, symbolizing how these teachings weave together essential insights into the nature of existence, morality, and the path to enlightenment. While there are prayers recited during meditation, they are not defined as sutras; rather, those might be from specific liturgical texts or chants. Historical accounts of the Buddha's life are typically found in texts such as the "Jataka Tales" or chronicles that document his biography but do not qualify as sutras. Rules for monastic discipline are contained in a different category of texts known as the "Vinaya," which govern the ethical and practical aspects of monastic life, distinct from the philosophical teachings presented in the sutras. Thus, the definition of sutras focuses specifically on the teachings of the Buddha, which is why the chosen answer aligns accurately with their role in Buddhist literature.

8. How many books compose the collection of the Vedas?

A. 3

B. 4

C. 5

D. 6

The Vedas, which are among the oldest sacred texts in Hinduism, comprise a collection of four main texts. These four Vedas are the Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda. Each of these texts serves a unique purpose and contributes to various aspects of ritual, philosophy, and spiritual knowledge within the Hindu tradition. The structure of the Vedas is not just limited to these four texts; each Veda is further divided into different sections, including Samhitas (hymns), Brahmanas (ritual instructions), Aranyakas (theological discussions), and Upanishads (philosophical teachings). However, when referring to the total number of main texts that constitute the collection, it is primarily recognized as four. This foundational understanding of the Vedas is crucial for studying Hindu scriptures and religious practices, as they provide insight into the earliest traditions and beliefs of one of the world's major religions.

9. What does Tikkun Olam mean in Jewish thought?

- A. Repairing the world through social action and ethical behavior
- B. Observing the Sabbath
- C. Counting the Omer
- D. Celebrating Jewish festivals

Tikkun Olam, which translates to "repairing the world," is a significant concept in Jewish thought that emphasizes the responsibility individuals have to improve society and the world around them. The idea is rooted in the belief that humans are co-creators with God and that they should engage in various forms of social action and ethical behavior to bring about positive change. This can involve a wide range of activities, from community service to advocating for social justice and equality. The other options listed, while relevant to Jewish practice and identity, do not capture the essence of Tikkun Olam. Observing the Sabbath, counting the Omer, and celebrating Jewish festivals are important religious practices in Judaism, but they focus more on rituals and community gatherings rather than the broader, proactive commitment to social and moral improvement represented by Tikkun Olam. Thus, the concept encourages a hands-on approach to addressing societal challenges and fostering a more just and compassionate world.

10. Who is recognized as the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school of Indian philosophy?

- A. Ramanuja
- B. Shankara
- C. Vaisheshika
- D. Kapila

The founder of the Advaita Vedanta school of Indian philosophy is Shankara, who lived in the early 8th century. Shankara is renowned for his profound interpretations of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahma Sutras, which laid the groundwork for Advaita, a non-dualistic interpretation of the Vedic texts. His teachings emphasize the idea that the self (Atman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman) are identical, promoting the understanding that the apparent distinction between the individual soul and the universe is an illusion (Maya). Shankara traveled extensively across India to establish his philosophy, set up monasteries, and engage in debates, helping to solidify Advaita Vedanta's position within Indian philosophical thought. He is often credited with reviving Hinduism in a time when Buddhism was predominant in India, which highlights his impact on the religious landscape. Other figures mentioned, such as Ramanuja, are associated with different schools of thought, particularly Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism), and do not pertain to the founding of Advaita Vedanta. Vaisheshika and Kapila are related to other philosophical traditions in Indian philosophy, such as atom