

Studies of Religion (SOR) External Practice Exam (Sample)

Study Guide



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SAMPLE

Questions

- 1. What is the primary aim of the three exiles experienced by the Jewish people?**
 - A. To spread Jewish culture across Europe**
 - B. To symbolize historical suffering and resilience**
 - C. To promote alliances with other nations**
 - D. To encourage religious conversion**
- 2. What message does the 'Lotus Sutra' convey?**
 - A. Importance of individual enlightenment**
 - B. Acting towards each other with a spirit of brotherhood**
 - C. Pathway to nirvana**
 - D. The inevitability of suffering**
- 3. What is the primary purpose of Zakat in Islam?**
 - A. Religious pilgrimage**
 - B. Almsgiving or charitable donations**
 - C. Annual fasting during Ramadan**
 - D. Daily prayers**
- 4. Who is considered the creative force of the universe in Hinduism?**
 - A. Brahma**
 - B. Vishnu**
 - C. Shiva**
 - D. Ganesh**
- 5. How does the Jewish covenant relate to the concept of nationhood?**
 - A. It restricts citizenship to only those of Jewish descent**
 - B. It promotes the establishment of a Jewish national identity**
 - C. It eliminates the need for a government**
 - D. It suggests that all nations have equal standing**

- 6. How does the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights view the concept of human rights?**
- A. As absolute and unchangeable**
 - B. Through a cultural and religious lens**
 - C. As a European imposition**
 - D. With a focus on economic implications**
- 7. Greater Jihad is best defined as:**
- A. External conflicts against enemies**
 - B. The internal struggle to live righteously**
 - C. Financial sacrifices for charity**
 - D. Political activism in governance**
- 8. What does Moksha represent in Hinduism?**
- A. The pursuit of wealth**
 - B. Overcoming desires for liberation**
 - C. The path of knowledge**
 - D. The social hierarchy structure**
- 9. What does the term "purgatory" refer to in Catholic belief?**
- A. A reward for good deeds**
 - B. A punishment for the wicked**
 - C. A state of purification for souls**
 - D. A place of eternal bliss**
- 10. What is the significance of the term "Tao" in Taoism?**
- A. A type of meditation practice**
 - B. The fundamental principle that is the source of all things**
 - C. A moral code for followers**
 - D. A historical figure in Taoist teachings**

Answers

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

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Explanations

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1. What is the primary aim of the three exiles experienced by the Jewish people?

- A. To spread Jewish culture across Europe**
- B. To symbolize historical suffering and resilience**
- C. To promote alliances with other nations**
- D. To encourage religious conversion**

The primary aim of the three exiles experienced by the Jewish people is to symbolize historical suffering and resilience. This concept is deeply rooted in Jewish history and collective memory. The exiles—which include the Babylonian Exile, the Roman Exile, and the more recent exiles during the Holocaust and other diasporas—represent significant periods where Jewish people faced tremendous hardships, loss, and displacement. Each exile serves as a reminder of the struggles and suffering endured by the Jewish community throughout history. They also highlight the resilience of the Jewish people, who have maintained their identity, culture, and faith in the face of adversity. The resilience demonstrated during these times is a core aspect of Jewish history, emphasizing a narrative of survival and continuity. In contrast, spreading Jewish culture across Europe, promoting alliances with other nations, or encouraging religious conversion do not encapsulate the central aim of these exiles. While cultural dissemination and alliances may have occurred as a result of living in diaspora, they are not the primary focus of the exilic experience, which is fundamentally about overcoming suffering and maintaining faith and identity.

2. What message does the 'Lotus Sutra' convey?

- A. Importance of individual enlightenment**
- B. Acting towards each other with a spirit of brotherhood**
- C. Pathway to nirvana**
- D. The inevitability of suffering**

The message conveyed by the Lotus Sutra is profound and multifaceted, primarily emphasizing the concept of universal salvation, which aligns with the idea of acting towards each other with a spirit of brotherhood. The Lotus Sutra teaches that everyone has the potential for Buddhahood and that compassion and support for one another can lead to collective enlightenment. This sutra encourages followers to help others on their spiritual journeys, creating a community that fosters mutual encouragement and assistance, highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings. In contrast, while the importance of individual enlightenment is a theme in many Buddhist texts, the Lotus Sutra specifically extends beyond individual achievement to the collective aspect of spiritual growth. Similarly, the pathway to nirvana is significant within Buddhism but is presented within the context of individual practice rather than the communal spirit emphasized in the Lotus Sutra. Lastly, the inevitability of suffering is a key component of Buddhist teachings but does not encapsulate the core message of the Lotus Sutra, which focuses more on overcoming suffering through unity and shared compassion rather than the suffering itself.

3. What is the primary purpose of Zakat in Islam?

- A. Religious pilgrimage
- B. Almsgiving or charitable donations**
- C. Annual fasting during Ramadan
- D. Daily prayers

The primary purpose of Zakat in Islam is indeed almsgiving or charitable donations. Zakat is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, which are fundamental acts of worship and practice that shape a Muslim's faith and actions. Specifically, Zakat is intended to purify wealth and assist those in need, embodying the principle of social justice within the Islamic community. By mandating that Muslims give a portion of their wealth annually to those who are less fortunate, Zakat promotes a sense of solidarity, compassion, and responsibility among members of the community. This practice not only aids in alleviating poverty but also encourages the concept of wealth redistribution, ensuring that societal resources circulate rather than accumulate solely among the wealthy. The other options represent different important aspects of Islamic practice but do not pertain to the purpose of Zakat. Religious pilgrimage refers to the Hajj, which is another of the Five Pillars focused on pilgrimage to Mecca. Annual fasting during Ramadan, known as Sawm, emphasizes self-discipline and spiritual growth. Daily prayers, or Salah, are a fundamental act of worship that maintains the spiritual connection with God. Each of these practices serves different purposes within the Islamic faith, but only Zakat is specifically aimed at charitable giving and supporting

4. Who is considered the creative force of the universe in Hinduism?

- A. Brahma**
- B. Vishnu
- C. Shiva
- D. Ganesh

In Hinduism, Brahma is recognized as the creative force of the universe. He is part of the Trimurti, which consists of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. Brahma's role involves the initiation of creation and the establishment of order in the cosmos. According to Hindu beliefs, Brahma is responsible for creating all living beings and everything in the material world, which positions him as the foundational creative principle in the universe. Brahma is often depicted with four heads, symbolizing the four Vedas (the foundational texts of Hindu philosophy and practice), indicating his comprehensive knowledge and power in the act of creation. This understanding of Brahma as the creative force sets him apart from other deities in Hinduism, each of whom has distinct functions and attributes related to preservation, destruction, or specific aspects of life and the universe.

5. How does the Jewish covenant relate to the concept of nationhood?

- A. It restricts citizenship to only those of Jewish descent**
- B. It promotes the establishment of a Jewish national identity**
- C. It eliminates the need for a government**
- D. It suggests that all nations have equal standing**

The Jewish covenant plays a fundamental role in shaping the concept of nationhood for the Jewish people, as it provides a theological and historical foundation for Jewish identity and national consciousness. The covenant, established between God and the Israelites, outlines specific obligations, rights, and a sense of purpose that binds the Jewish people together. This relationship fosters a cooperative bond that extends beyond religious observance; it instills a shared identity and collective memory among Jews, reinforcing the idea of nationhood. This covenantal relationship encourages the establishment and continuity of a distinct Jewish national identity, rooted in shared beliefs, practices, and cultural heritage. It emphasizes the importance of a communal and national life, as the covenant not only indicates a spiritual agreement but also serves as a cornerstone for Jewish self-understanding as a people chosen to fulfill a unique mission. In contrast, the other options do not accurately reflect the relationship between the Jewish covenant and nationhood. Restricting citizenship based solely on descent (which would imply a narrow interpretation of Jewish identity) does not encompass the broader implications of the covenant. Suggesting the elimination of government overlooks the importance of structured community governance for the fulfillment of covenantal responsibilities. Finally, the idea that all nations have equal standing does not capture the exclusivity that the

6. How does the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights view the concept of human rights?

- A. As absolute and unchangeable**
- B. Through a cultural and religious lens**
- C. As a European imposition**
- D. With a focus on economic implications**

The Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights approaches the concept of human rights as framed within a cultural and religious context. This perspective emphasizes that human rights should be understood through the lens of Islamic teachings and values. It reflects the idea that rights are not simply universal or secular constructs but are deeply rooted in specific cultural and religious traditions, particularly those of Islam. By situating human rights within the framework of faith, the declaration seeks to uphold principles such as justice, equality, and dignity while acknowledging the unique social and ethical considerations that inform the Muslim worldview. This culturally nuanced approach distinguishes it from other human rights documents that may present rights as absolute and unchangeable or as a product of Western ideologies. The other options reflect alternative perspectives. Viewing human rights as absolute and unchangeable does not allow for the cultural interpretations that this declaration encourages. Considering them as a European imposition overlooks the rich Islamic heritage of justice and ethics. A focus on economic implications, while relevant to certain discussions of rights, does not fully encompass the broader relational and spiritual dimensions that the Universal Islamic Declaration emphasizes.

7. Greater Jihad is best defined as:

- A. External conflicts against enemies
- B. The internal struggle to live righteously**
- C. Financial sacrifices for charity
- D. Political activism in governance

The correct interpretation of Greater Jihad is indeed the internal struggle to live righteously. In Islamic theology, Greater Jihad refers to the personal, spiritual effort each individual makes to improve themselves, strive for righteousness, and maintain a strong moral compass. It encompasses striving against one's own desires and weaknesses to adhere to the principles of Islam more faithfully. Greater Jihad is often contrasted with Lesser Jihad, which can include external conflicts or struggles, but the emphasis is primarily on the internal battle against sin and the pursuit of personal and spiritual betterment. This struggle is seen as an essential part of a devout Muslim's life, reflecting a commitment to faith, self-improvement, and adherence to the tenets of Islam. The other options do not accurately capture the essence of Greater Jihad. External conflicts would relate more to Lesser Jihad, while financial sacrifices for charity and political activism are important forms of communal engagement but are not the focus of Greater Jihad. Therefore, the understanding of Greater Jihad as an internal struggle aligns perfectly with Islamic teachings on the importance of personal growth and ethical living.

8. What does Moksha represent in Hinduism?

- A. The pursuit of wealth
- B. Overcoming desires for liberation**
- C. The path of knowledge
- D. The social hierarchy structure

Moksha in Hinduism signifies the ultimate goal of liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). It represents a state of spiritual freedom achieved by overcoming material desires and attachments. This liberation allows the soul (atman) to reunite with the ultimate reality, often referred to as Brahman, which is essential for spiritual enlightenment. This understanding connects Moksha with the journey of transcending worldly desires and illusions, ultimately leading to a realization of one's true self and the divine. The focus is on pursuing spiritual goals and understanding rather than being bound by mere worldly pursuits, making the overcoming of desires a central theme of Moksha. Other choices relate to different aspects of Hindu beliefs. For instance, the pursuit of wealth, though significant in certain contexts within Hindu practice (such as in the concept of Artha), does not encapsulate the essence of Moksha. Similarly, while the path of knowledge and the social hierarchy (varnashrama) are important principles within Hinduism, they are not the primary focus of what Moksha represents.

9. What does the term "purgatory" refer to in Catholic belief?

- A. A reward for good deeds**
- B. A punishment for the wicked**
- C. A state of purification for souls**
- D. A place of eternal bliss**

The term "purgatory" in Catholic belief refers to a state of purification for souls who have died in a state of grace but still need to atone for minor sins or the temporal effects of sin before entering heaven. This concept is rooted in the understanding that while these souls are ultimately destined for heaven, they must undergo a process of purification to attain the holiness necessary to be in the presence of God. Purgatory is seen not as a permanent state but rather a temporary one, where souls are cleansed and made ready for the beatific vision of God. This belief underscores the Catholic emphasis on God's mercy and the importance of purification before attaining eternal life. In contrast, other choices describe different theological concepts. A reward for good deeds relates to the idea of heaven. Punishment for the wicked aligns more closely with the concept of hell. A place of eternal bliss refers specifically to heaven, which is distinct from the purification process that occurs in purgatory. Each of these alternatives highlights different aspects of Catholic eschatology, but they do not accurately represent the role and significance of purgatory within the belief system.

10. What is the significance of the term "Tao" in Taoism?

- A. A type of meditation practice**
- B. The fundamental principle that is the source of all things**
- C. A moral code for followers**
- D. A historical figure in Taoist teachings**

The term "Tao" holds great significance in Taoism as it refers to the fundamental principle that is the source of all things and the ultimate reality underlying the universe. It embodies the idea of a natural order, guiding the flow of the cosmos and the way in which all entities exist and operate within it. The concept of the Tao encourages individuals to align themselves with this intrinsic order, promoting harmony and balance in their lives. In Taoist philosophy, the Tao is often described as an ineffable force that cannot be fully articulated in words, emphasizing its transcendent nature. It serves as the foundation for understanding life's processes, the interdependence of all beings, and the practice of wu wei, or effortless action, encouraging followers to live in accordance with the rhythms of the universe. The profound nature of the Tao helps inform various practices within Taoism, including meditation, but it is not confined to a specific technique or moral code. Rather, it is the existential essence that informs Taoist thought and guides personal conduct in a broader sense.