**World Religions: Hinduism Socratic Seminar**

**Best Answers of A+/A**

**IB Scores of 6 or 7**

1. **QUESTION #1: How would Hinduism answer Big Question #1: What is the meaning of life?**

**A+/A Answer #1 (IB Score of 6 or 7)**

The meaning of life according to Hinduism is to escape the circuitous cycle of **samsara**. However, both the Vedas and Upanishads have different interpretations of the meaning of life. While the **Vedas** emphasis on **dharma** through the interpretation of ***varnashrama dharma*** and ***Laws of Manu***, the **Upanishads** focus more on the **atman** and achieving **moksha** with reference to the **Bhagavad-Gita**. Nevertheless, both tie in to **faith**, whether it be in others or oneself.

There are many interpretations of the***varnashrama dharma***system which enables these stages into the student, householder, forest-dwelling hermit, and the sannyasi (renouncer). The students' role is to understand and interpret the **Vedas**. The householder's job is to take care of not only their family but also others in society. They emphasize on **kama** and **artha** for fulfillment of desire. The purpose of fulfilling this desire is to achieve faith toward supporting others.

According to the ***Laws of Manu***, the purpose of **ashrama** is to repay debts to the ancient seers, gods, and ancestors. These can be seen through actions such as studying texts, offerings, and having a son to perform ancestral rituals. Some forms of **puja** and fire sacrifices include **Navarati** where icons of Gods such as Durga and Ganesha are burnt as offerings. Another example are the **Diwali** and **Holi** festivals which commemorate the gods and the abundance they provide. By invoking the gods and goddesses through the rituals, the Vedas argues that one has fully achieves true dharma. Through dharma, one can fulfill the faith aspect of the 5 ways of knowing. By showing faith to others, one can maintain cosmic order in the universe. The Vedas focus on maintaining cosmic order because they believe the universe was “born from the sacrifice of the cosmic man.”

On the other hand, the Upanishads emphasize more on atman and achieving moksha. They believe that true sacrifice lies in the breath where it fuels the inner sacrificial fire which brings enlightenment. This can be seen in the **Bhagavad Gita** as it describes that “the surrender of the fruit of action” is the purpose of sacrifice. Furthermore, it also states to “surrender all actions to me, and fix your reason on your inner self,” which highlights that one should turn inwards rather than outwards.

The Upanishads even criticize that the brahmins and rituals “has no more value than a well…when water flows everywhere” if one does not turn inwards toward themselves. This revolutionary view changes the perceptions of faith toward oneself. They shift the focus of life toward divine nature, self, world, and in between them.

Many Upanishads practice union of the “self” through **margas** such as **yoga** and **meditation**. The purpose of these exercises is to liberate oneself from samsara and become eternal. They also help one “feel” God through unity. This is also interpreted as unifying with God. This form of faith also frees oneself from attachments. (Mr C note- expand this part to give more specific practices of the margas for an IB score of 7)

Both the Vedas and Upanishads focus on the "faith" aspect from the five ways of knowing. By having faith in others or God, one can achieve the ultimate goal of reaching the infinite. Faith comes from **karma** and is rewarded in different ways. Whether a Vedic or Upanishad, the reward comes in the next lifetime. Therefore, they both focus on "action" and its consequences. The Vedics believe this action is performed externally through selfless acts to show gratefulness. The Upanishads believe this action must be performed to oneself and learning to free oneself from attachments.

**A+/A Answer #2 (IB Score of 6- needs a more developed thesis and some more specific text references and practices for a "7")**

In Hinduism, the meaning of life is to pursue the responsibilities of the four ashramas along with achieving the four aims of life. The ultimate purpose of life is to escape samsara and achieve moksha as a renouncer.

Based on the rules of the Varnashrama Dharma system, there are four ashramas that each devotee must diligently pursue throughout their course of life: the student, the householder, the forest-dwelling hermit, and the renouncer. The duty of the student is to thoroughly understand the teachings of the Vedas. The householder is expected to support the individuals in stages of other three. The aim of the hermit-dweller is to detach themselves from all household distractions and enter the last stage as the renouncer. As a renouncer, their ultimate goal is to achieve moksha, or the ideal life for men.

Similarly, besides the four ashramas, Hindu devotees are also meant to diligently pursue the four aims of life, including dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. Even more, the roles of the four stages of life closely corresponds to the spiritual aims of life. It is important that Hindus diligently pursue these goals of life in order to achieve each “level” to progress a stage and ultimately achieve moksha.

In practice, dharma is expected to be applied throughout all stages of life in various forms; individuals in the “householder” stage should perform regimens each day to ensure the harmony and well-being of the family; in the “student” stage, individuals should adhere their actions to the teachings of the Vedas and regularly perform rituals; during the “hermit-dweller” stage, devotees may follow strict rules for maintaining their ritual purity, or adopt practices, such as becoming vegetarian or advocate for nonviolence; finally, individuals at the “renouncer” stage should fully detach from al distractions and make moksha their only goal. For all the duties of life, devotees must always conform to dharma as the center of life and order.

When a Hindu devotee achieves the role as a householder in their life, their goal is to aim for kama and artha. In Hinduism, kama means pleasure and desires of the mind and body. Though kama is not the end goal of a devotees’ life, Hindus do not condemn such enjoyment and, rather, encourage the pursuit of such pleasures. This Hindu view of desire also applies to a devotees’ aim for artha. In fact, the pursuit of artha is sometimes considered noble seeing as it is necessary for individuals to gain wealth and fame to raise a family and keep the household; it is within the duties of the householder.

Moksha is the final goal of the purusartha, focused devotees in the hermit-dwelling and renouncing stage. When an individual achieves moksha, he/she has fulfilled all duties and obligations and is prepared to accept the true nature of the atman, or, infinite bliss.

In conclusion, the main purpose of life for Hindus is to achieve the four aims and roles of life, learn the experiences, and achieve moksha (liberation).

1. **QUESTION #2: How would Hinduism answer Big Question #2: What is 'God'? How can you 'know God?'**

**A+ Answer #1 (IB Score of 6 or 7)**

Whether from **shruti** or **smriti**, there are two different perceptions of “God” in Hinduism. **Monists** believe that **brahman** is **atman**. This can be seen in the ***Brahadaranyaka*** and ***Chandogya Upanishads***. The *Brahadaranyaka* states “I am in Avyakta Brahman, Avyakta Brahman is in me. I know as I am not the physical body but Atman, Atman and Avyakta Brahman are one and the same.” The *Chandogya* states “He who desires the soul, who plays with the soul, who makes love with the soul, who attains ecstasy in the soul, becomes his own master and wanders at will through the worlds."

These quotes accentuate the monistic view that Brahman is one supreme entity that can be found in oneself. They believe that subtracting all remains nothing but one existence. The gods and goddesses described are manifestations of Brahman. This is further reinforced through the expression of “**AUM**.” This sound is inclusive of everything in existence, which summarizes the monist belief of Brahman.

Dualists, however, believe that God and the soul are separate. They therefore require images to represent the Gods and Goddesses. They believe that displaying and creating images of them embodies their blessings. In other words, they believe that those images are Gods and Goddesses. The focus for dualists is to channel the gods toward atman.

Many Gods and Goddesses have various forms. For example, **Shakti**, the mother of all energy, has forms of **Shitala, Parvati, Durga,** and **Kali**. Their respective roles are Goddess of smallpox, benevolent goddess, slayer of the demon Mahisasura, and Goddess of time. Another example is **Vishnu**, the God of preservation. His nine incarnations are **Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasingha, Vamana, Parasurama, Ram, Krishna,** and **Buddha**. Of the reincarnations, Krishna's is one of the most popular ones as epic poems such as the **Mahabharata** describe his interactions. A famous one depicts him advising **Arjuna** before battling the enemy army. Before battle, Krishna says "Arjuna, the realm of sacred lore is nature-beyond its triad of qualities, dualities, and mundane rewards, be forever lucid, alive to your self."

The purpose of the different forms and stories is to portray how one should face life. Rather than using "reason and language," one must use "intuition" to understand these forms and stories. Hinduists interpret these lines as God connoting to us that we are spiritual warriors. They believe we must face our life and the "action" represents living. While living, one must close the distance between them and God through **darshan**.

Some examples of darshan include visiting temples. When the devotee gazes at the deity, he or she feels the presence of God entering the body. Because of this, the devotees feel the deity’s blessings through darshan. This is imbued through divine images such as **Nataraja**, which represents the Five Activities of Shiva. Other practices can be observed through chariots such as the **Rathayatra festival**. During the festival, images of **Jagannatha**, or **Krishna**, in **yatras** are displayed for the public to see.

As mentioned earlier, **puja** is another form of worship to gods and goddesses. This involves offerings that are believed to be blessed after being left behind. Pujas are ubiquitous and can be carried out in numerous occasions, whether it be rituals, celebrations, or holidays. These offerings not only express the love to the deities but also display devotion to the gods and goddesses.

Hinduists have a variety of different beliefs of God's existence and how to "know" God. Whether it be from a monist or dualist, Hinduists believe that God can only be reached through experience of past lives and intuition. When living, one must submit themselves to God, whether that be a separate presence of from themselves.

**A+ Answer #2 (IB Score of 6- needs more developed thesis statement and more practices for a 7)**

There are various forms of God in Hinduism, depending on the perspective and “branch” of the devotee. The most notable difference of the reference of God is between the monistic and dualistic views.

When a Hindu is a monist devotee, they believe that there is only one God—Brahman. They believe that Brahman is the supreme divine reality with the source of all being and all knowing, hence, directly connected to life. Based on the Upanishads, monists believe that, under Brahman, there are countless deities that God manifests, including Brahma, Vishnu, Harihara, Kali, and Ganesha. On the other hand, dualists reference divine realities as “god” or the name of the specific deity under worship. Dualists believe that Krishna, Rama, Shiva, and other deities are all individual Gods, whereas Monists see them as subordinate deities to Brahman. Hence, in Hinduism, “God” may be monotheistic or polytheistic, depending on the perspective as a dualist or monist.

Similarly, Hindus also have multiple methods of “knowing” God and “feeling” the presence of God.

More specifically, when a devotee achieves moksha, it is thought that he/she’s atman is in union with Brahman. A monist in moksha will realize that Brahman is in atman, meaning God has always been with the devotee, but the devotee just needed to gain a higher connection with his/her true self to understand it. A dualist in moksha would believe that, during liberation, God enters the atman to achieve union. Dualists do not believe that Atman and Brahman are the same identity; rather, they see Brahman as an elevation to one’s atman during moksha. Nevertheless, the process of “knowing” God in both process is to unite the atman with the brahman.

Furthermore, Hindus have various rituals in “feeling” and “knowing” God’s presence.

Most notably, Hindus most meaningful way for a sensory religious experience is performing darshan. Darshan can be performed by both seeing the deity and being looked upon by the divine to build a caring relationship between the devotee and deity/God. For example, Hindus visit temples or pilgrimage sites to see an icon of a specific god that they worship. Similarly, devotees may have statues of deities at home to worship daily. Even more, Hindus also believe that even just by seeing an image (printed) of a deity is to see the deity itself. They believe that, through any form of gaze/eye contact between the devotees and god, there is divine presence around them, and they have been blessed by their god.

Likewise, Hindus also “know” and connect with God through Sound. Many sounds are identified with specific gods. For example, the sound OM represents Brahman and is the sound in which the universe is manifested. There are also Hindu mantras and chants that imbue spiritual presence. For instance, the mantra Om Namo Narayanaya is a specific mantra when worshiping to God Vishnu. Hindus believe that reciting such phrases brings the devotee closer to their god and can enhance their connections with the deity.

Last but not least, Hindus also “feel” god through pujas. Devotees believe that by performing pujas, the deities infuse blessing upon them. Forms of Puja can include offering deities with fruit, incense, or flowers, washing the image of deity, or performing symbolic/religious gestures. Some notable pujas performed throughout all Hindu communities include Arati, Mantras, and sacrifices. By performing such actions, worshippers gain connection with the deity/god.

1. **QUESTION #3: How would Hinduism answer Big Question #3: How should you approach and understand 'death'?**

**A+ Answer #1 (IB Score of 6- it is wonderful on practices- but needs to connect and develop these practices more to the thesis and beliefs to get a 7)**

Death is viewed as a natural part of **samsara**. Hinduists believe that when one dies, they move on to another life. This is also referred to as reincarnation. However, one’s **karma** influences the quality of their next life. For example, good deeds result in a prosperous life and evil deeds result in inclement ones.

There are rituals performed when one’s close one passes away. Hindus cremate the body the day of the death through a fire sacrifice. It is referred to as “the last sacrifice.” After the body is washed, smeared with sandalwood paste, and wrapped in cloth, it is then brought to the ground by male relatives. They then chant holy names and phrases. The eldest son also cracks the skull open to allow the soul to leave the body and then lights the body up. This signifies the Hinduists way of approaching death. They view it as a normal and natural phenomenon. After the funeral, the relatives close themselves off from the outside for ten days to prevent the spread of “pollution.” Rice balls are also offered to the dead for them to use to build a body in the spiritual world.

The celebration of the Goddess **Kali Puja** also involves cremations. This is to celebrate the victory of the goddess. Red lines, depicting blood, are painted from her mouth to her cheeks and neck. The cremation ground depicts the detachment from emotions that bind us such as anger and lust. The meaning of this cremation is to show the detachment of oneself from their body. Death is viewed as an opportunity to allow this to happen.

However, if the dead is a baby or a saint, then Hinduists bury their bodies instead. The **Sanyasis** have their bodies emplaced in tombs surrounding shrines. This is because Hinduists believe that the babies are not ready to move on to their next life yet. It is preferred to reserve the body to allow the soul of the baby to have more time before rebirth. As for the saints, their bodies are not burned because they have already severed their earthly ties.

Many of these rituals originate from the **dharma-shastra**. The book is said to be written by the sage **Manu**. The book describes the laws and principles regarding male **Brahman** priesthood. It also emphasizes on the males' roles of death and how they are expected to lead the ceremonies. The followers of the Vedas believe that the fire signifies moving to another level in **ashrama**. They believe death is like a door of opportunity to move on to another life. However, the Upanishads believe that the fire frees one's atman from their body. In other words, they believe it signifies the end where one achieves **moksha**.

As seen in these death ceremonies, Hinduists view death as a good thing. They celebrate rather than mourn because they believe it helps them take a step closer toward moksha. Hinduists rejoice at the presence of death as it allows them to focus on their **atman**. Rather than worry about death, they focus more on their current soul and strive to disconnect themselves from attachments to achieve the eternal.

Some sacred cities such as **Varanasi in Ganges** are considered popular places for the old and sick. This is due to the belief that if one dies there, they will be released from samsara immediately. Many also have their ashes scattered across the river. The river then carries their ashes into the divine realm.

1. THIS ANSWER SHOULD BE FULL SENTENCES: On my website open up "Week 4 Bhagavad Gita Part 2"
2. Closely read on pages 49-50 stanzas #5 beginning with "I have passed through many births…" and through stanza #12 ….success comes quickly from action."
3. IDENTIFY 3 DIFFERENT HINDUISM CONCEPTS you see in this reading and explain each concept in only 2-3 sentences each.

A+ Answer (This would get a 6 or 7 on "Paper 1" of the IB Exam)

In stanzas nine through eleven, Lord Krishna identifies the Hindu concept of Moksha. In order to achieve moksha, one must renounce all desires, distractions, negative emotions, and devote themselves fully to the search of God. When a devotee achieves liberation, he/she experiences the union of the atman with Brahman and recognizes the God, and the atman escapes the cycle of samsara.

In stanzas six through eight, Lord Krishna explains the Hindu concept of an avatar. An avatar is a descent of God to earth in a physical form with the specific goal of aiding the world, especially in times of chaos. Avatar’s goals are primarily focused on the manifestations of Vishnu: preserving the order in the world. Some notable avatar forms of Vishnu are Krishna, Rama, and Kalki.

In stanza five, Lord Krishna describes the Hindu concept of reincarnation. Lord Krishna explains that he has gone through numerous reincarnations in order to achieve moksha and become a deity in Hinduism. He then explains that Arjuna has also gone through various reincarnations but has yet to achieve liberation. Reincarnations is when one’s atman returns to the physical realm in a new body after death. This signifies the Hindu concept that, when one dies, they don’t necessarily “die”; their atman is eternal and imperishable and will be reincarnated repetitively until it achieves moksha and leave samsara.

For #5-#12 these are A+ bullet point notes examples:

1. THIS ANSWER CAN JUST BE KEY WORD NOTES: On my website open up "Week 4 Bhagavad Gita Part 2" Read only "The Fifth Teaching Renunciation of Action" (pages 56-61)
2. What is the Main Idea of this fifth teaching?

* Path to renunciation
* Renunciation and discipline are both important. But when compared, discipline is more important than renunciation. In fact, to renounce all actions, one must have discipline.
* Renouncing all desires, senses, emotions, ego, and negativity means to be free from any bondage and to be able to abide to all actions.
  + Recognizing that life is an illusional sense
  + One must have pure mind and body. No evil should contaminate.
* Once renunciation is achieved, one will find the ultimate reality/infinite spirit/peace (moksha)

1. Write down 1 verse that you think is important:

* “When ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge of the self, then, like the sun, knowledge illuminates ultimate reality” (16)

1. Do a close reading of this 1 verse you selected:

* When one renounces from his ego, ignorance, emotions, and all negative thoughts, he will reach his infinite spirit, or, moksha, and find peace with the Gods.

1. THIS ANSWER CAN JUST BE KEY WORD NOTES: On my website open up "Week 4 Bhagavad Gita Part 2" Read only "The Sixth Teaching The Man of Discipline" (pages 62-69)
2. What is the Main Idea of this sixth teaching?

* Discipline goes hand-in-hand with renunciation. Must have discipline in order to renounce one’s self.
* One who focuses on action is a sage, who seeks to mature his discipline. In comparison, one with focuses and experiences tranquility has already matured in discipline. In other words, they have renounced all intention and detach from all sense and actions.
* Renounce= think about nothing but also in full focus
* Disciplined= No cravings of desire
  + Restrained in thought and do not waver from their acions
  + Disciplined in all areas of life, including diet, physical activity, sleep
* One who is disciplined must be content with self (inner) and should/have unbind bonds of suffering
* Disciplined= Renunciation= Tranquility= perfect joy= infinite spirit (liberation)
* Becoming a Man of Discipline is the most important goal/achievement in one’s life
  + Must devote to god and his inner self (connect atman with Brahman)

1. Write down 1 verse that you think is important:

* “When his mind is tranquil, perfect joy comes to the man of discipline; his passion is calmed, he is without sin, being one with the infinite spirit”

1. Do a close reading of this 1 verse you selected:

* When a mind cease (renounces) from all thoughts, he achieves infinite spirit, or, moksha.

1. THIS ANSWER CAN JUST BE BULLET POINT/KEY WORD NOTES: Write down some THOUGHTS related to this prompt: What do you personally like best about Hinduism?

* I like the Hindu concepts of renunciation of thought and enduring on one’s actions.

1. THIS ANSWER CAN JUST BE BULLET POINT/KEY WORD NOTES: Write down some THOUGHTS related to this prompt: What do you personally NOT like about Hinduism?

* I don’t like the idea of a caste system nor the four stages/roles of life.
* Though I like the four aims/goal of life of an Hindu, I do not like how they also categorize the roles that people must abide to.

1. THIS ANSWER CAN JUST BE BULLET POINT/KEY WORD NOTES: Write down some THOUGHTS related to this prompt: How is Hinduism similar to one or more other religions?

* Hinduism is very similar to Buddhism
  + Similar concept of reincarnation, karma, nirvana
* Also similar to Jainism
  + Ascetic ideologies
  + Karma, reincarnation, samsara
  + Nonviolence
  + Disciplined and focused on the inner self

1. THIS ANSWER CAN JUST BE BULLET POINT/KEY WORD NOTES: Write down some THOUGHTS related to this prompt: How is Hinduism different from 1 or more religions?

* Christianity
  + God and devotee are separate. In Christianity, you would not find “the atman with Brahman”. Instead, the highest reality would be heaven.
  + No reincarnations (however, there are similar ideas to Hinduism’s karma)
  + Monotheistic (Jesus)
* Islam
  + Monotheistic (Allah)
  + Mosques (in comparison to temples)
  + (similar because both religions give autonomy to devotes)

1. WRITE DOWN 2 THOUGHTFUL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS you would like your group to discuss. Try to make the discussion questions related to Hinduism.

* How would Hindus respond to deaths through suicide?
* Do Hindus believe in ghosts and spirits? Why? Significance?
* How would Hindus react to divorce? Are they allowed?
* Why do Hindus have so many gods? Do they also have multiple heavens and hells (in afterlife)?

1. FINALLY- find 1 quotation from anywhere that you think is significant. If you could only choose 1 quotation that you think captures "the essence" of what Hinduism really is all about, what would be your 1 quotation?
2. Write the quotation and source here.

* “Old ways won’t open new doors”

1. Do a close reading of the quotation.

* This quote emphasizes on the Hindu concept of taking action and not being caught in one’s emotions, doubt, negative behavior, or desires. One should remain content with which ever path they are led to and be able to destroy their ego and self-doubt that comes in their way.