

Looking for Meaning

Key words

- God - supreme being, the ultimate reality, all powerful creator
- Atheist - a person who believes that God is not real
- Agnostic - a person who believes it's not possible to know whether or not God exists
- Revelation - this describes the ways in which God chooses to reveal God's nature to people, e.g. miracles.
- Awe - overwhelmed by a sense of God's presence.
- Symbolism - something that points to or explain something else
- Afterlife - the belief that when we die, there is another life.

Key facts

God and symbolism

Hindu:

- Hindus believe that there is one ultimate reality - Brahman - the supreme spirit of the universe. Brahman has 3 main functions and these are seen in the 3 gods:
- Shiva - the destroyer, because change is necessary for the creation of new things,
- Brahma - the creator and source of all creation
- Vishnu - the preserver
- Hindus believe that Brahman is everywhere but has no form so they choose to worship Brahman through gods and goddesses. They have murtis (statues/pictures) of them in their homes and in the mandir (temple) to help them to focus to worship.
- The sacred sound Aum is an important Hindu symbol. This is found everywhere in Hinduism. It can represent the 3 great deities - Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu, or the cycle of birth, death and eternity. By chanting it during meditation it's believed that it brings the worshipper closer to God and to ultimate reality.

Christian:

- The most important Christian belief is the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son - Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. The shamrock (a three leafed plant) is often used to symbolise that God is three-in-one.
- They believe in a creator God who gave people the ability to make their own choices - free will. But he is a God who is involved in people's lives.
- Jesus revealed to people something of God's true nature. Christians believe that his death on the cross was the greatest act of love, so the cross is a very important symbol for Christians.
- Christians call Jesus - Lord - this means he is the ruler of the world and of heaven
- They also call him - Redeemer - this means the bringer of forgiveness, the one who gives eternal life.

Suicide and euthanasia

Hindu:

- Suicide is generally against Hindu teachings - a person should concentrate on life's goals instead. There are some Hindus who would say that suicide can be acceptable when carried out as a sacrificial or religious act.
- Euthanasia is often referred to as 'mercy killing' and means bringing a peaceful end to the dying process. Hindus believe that as life is given by a Supreme Being, it's up to Brahman when a life should end. Respect and support should be given to those who are ill. It's believed that each person has a right time when they will die. To help someone to commit suicide would bring bad karma.

Christian:

- Christians believe that life is sacred (the sanctity of life) and is a gift from God. They think God is interested and involved in a person's life. Therefore, it's possible to ask God for strength and guidance. But, to take life is to play at being God. Only God should take life away. Therefore, Christians do not support suicide or euthanasia.

Afterlife and funerals

Hindu:

- A Hindu's funeral should take place within 24 hours of death. The body is washed, dressed and taken to the funeral pyre. The eldest son recites prayers from the Vedas (their holy writings) and lights the fire. If possible, he takes the ashes to India to scatter them in one of the sacred (holy) rivers, especially the River Ganges. In Britain, many Hindus are cremated at a crematorium.
- Hindus believe that death is just part of the journey towards moksha. Hindus believe that every action has cause and effect - this is the law of karma. After a person's death, their atman (or soul) lives on and takes on a new life in another body. This is called reincarnation. Karma affects a person's future life. The whole cycle of birth and rebirth is called samsara. Hindus want to escape from this and when they do, they reach moksha.

Christian:

- The central Christian belief is that when Jesus came back from the dead, he overcame the power of death so all people can have eternal life with God when they die. So death is not the end but they do not believe in reincarnation.
- It's not clear whether people will go straight to heaven after death, or whether they wait until the Day of Judgement. Heaven is seen as a paradise where people will live with God. Christians believe that what happens to them when they die depends on how they have lived their lives on earth.
- Christians are buried or cremated. A funeral service takes place and this is followed by burial in a graveyard or cemetery or by a cremation with the burial of the ashes. When the coffin or ashes are placed in the ground, the priest says, 'We commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' Relatives often place flowers on the grave and a stone will mark the grave.