

HINDUISM Part 3 Unit 5: The Self and its journey



What this unit contains	The atman (real self), reincarnation, karma and moksha. Yoga and meditation. Dharma. Varnashrama dharma - the four varnas and the four ashramas. Main holy books. Ahimsa and other values. Hindu attitudes and responses towards the environment and animals, especially the cow. The work of Gandhi.		
Where the unit fits and how it builds upon previous learning	This unit re-visits some concepts introduced in Parts 1 & 2, for example reincarnation, further developing them and demonstrating how concepts and practices link together. Unit 6 begins with and extends the concept of the self (atman) and unit 7 similarly treats notions of God. It has therefore been recommended that this unit is taught in year 7.		
Extension activities and further thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Examine the Hindu notion that negative discrimination is based on wrongly identifying with the temporary body and its extensions (race, gender, family, country, sectarian religion, etc.). ➤ Compare how Hinduism and science view matter. ➤ Discuss ideas of transience and time, of the temporary and of ideas of eternity. ➤ Read some poems on one or more of the following themes: journeys, the journey of life, time, transience, etc, possibly including some by Hindus. Write your own commentary on one poem to demonstrate your understanding and use a symbol or visual image to help illustrate the ideas of the poem. ➤ Explore the difference between the system of four varnas and the hereditary caste system, with reference to one story or verse that explains this. Investigate the work of Gandhi. ➤ Make a book of questions in life that you find most puzzling. ➤ Choose 4 values that are important to you and say why you have chosen them. Compare them to a list of Hindu values. ➤ Identify notions of the spiritual warrior in other cultures (e.g. Arthur and his knights of the round table), and compare it to the modern soldier. ➤ Explore how a warrior's legitimate exercise of violence fits in with the ideal of ahimsa. Is it contradictory? 		
Vocabulary Hindu Hinduism Atman reincarnation samskara sadhu Karma moksha Yoga Meditation Bhagavad Gita Dharma Varna Ashrama Guna Krishna Arjuna Gandhi Eternal prakriti Brahman	SMSC/Citizenship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Prejudice and racism compared with the Hindu idea of a world family. ◆ Personal values. ◆ Ultimate questions of meaning and purpose in life. The concept of different roles in society being interdependent. 		

HINDUISM Part 3 Unit 5: The Self and its journey



Unit 5 Session 1

Learning objectives	A T 1	A T 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explore ways in which identity is expressed and what constitutes their own identity; ➤ Understand that Hindus believe that spirit (Brahman) is different from matter (prakriti), and the atman different from the body; ➤ Know some contrasting features of Spirit and matter; ➤ Know what Hindus mean by yoga, that the main purpose of yoga is to realise the self - the atman -and that there are four types of yoga; ➤ Know some basic practices comprising yoga and meditation. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>Introduce the idea of personal identity. Make mind maps of what determines identity. Feed back to the class.</p> <p>Where are you? Play the 'pointing game' Explain that Hindus believe that spirit is different from matter and the self is different from the body. Introduce the vocabulary Brahman, prakriti & atman.</p> <p>Present one or two analogies to pupils to explain Hindu beliefs that the atman is different from the body, e.g. if the body is like a car, then the soul is the driver, if the body is clothes, the soul is the person wearing the clothes. Use illustrations or other means. Let pupils devise one analogy of their own to ensure they are clear.</p> <p>Read the Bhagavad-Gita 2 - 22, this explains the clothes analogy. Give pupils in pairs the spirit and matter descriptive terms. They should sort into columns headed spirit & matter. Check answers. Recall the work done on namaste in units 1-5 and how this illustrates the concepts of the lesson.</p> <p>What do pupils understand by yoga? Distribute a description of the 4 types of yoga and explore how these are practiced. Perform a short meditation exercise, asking students to become aware of body, mind and breath. Can you empty your mind? What happens? Can you see how your mind works? Are you different from your mind? Debrief, exploring student responses. Are you the same as your mind or different from your mind? This explores how the soul differs from the body and the mind.</p> <p>Homework Explore some of the reasons for dissent in the world; select one where the dissent has been based on judging someone according to their external identity. (e.g. sectarian religion). Explain how the situation arises from judging someone according to superficial differences and explain what a Hindu perspective about this would be.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Literacy link Examine the 'possessive pronoun', and how the possessor is different from the possessed. Hindus talk of 'my mind', 'my body' but not generally 'my soul', since the soul is the true 'I'.</p> <p>Descriptions of spirit and matter</p> <p>N.B. Be careful to express Hindu concepts in suitable language. Hindus do not believe that they 'have a soul', but that they <u>are</u> the soul.</p>

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Unit 5 Session 2

Learning objectives	A T 1	A T 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Know that moksha (liberation) is a state of union with God obtained through yoga; ➤ Understand Hindu teachings about karma & reincarnation, citing one verse from Hindu scripture; ➤ Know the concepts of God, atman, reincarnation, samskara, karma, moksha, and understand how they are connected; ➤ Reflect on Hindu concepts, identifying possible strengths and weaknesses in the notion that the soul exists (i.e. that the true self is different from the body and the mind) and in ideas of karma, reincarnation etc. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>Recap existing knowledge about reincarnation. Consider responses to the atman (real self) being in a constant life - death - rebirth existence. Introduce the concept of moksha as liberation from this perpetual cycle. This liberation also means being unified with God, entering a state of bliss. So Hindus believe that through yoga they can achieve moksha.</p> <p>In small groups explore common notions of responsibility and accountability for actions. For example, consider whether it is just to punish someone who has broken the law. To further consider the notion of the unchanging soul, ask 'Is the criminal who is punished the same person as committed the crime?'</p> <p>Explore common sayings, ('as you sow, so shall ye reap', 'what goes around comes around', 'she had it coming'). Feedback responses.</p> <p>Explain that Karma is the Hindu concept of responsibility and accountability. Hindus believe that karma determines our (the atman's) next body.</p> <p>Research a story that explains Hindu concepts (beliefs) as they relate to life & death. In groups read the story of 'the Sadhu's Blessings' and answer the following questions: What concepts are implied or described here? What else do you notice? What don't you understand? Take responses and debrief</p> <p>Homework</p> <p>Write down personal responses to the concepts of atman, moksha and karma. How do these relate to pupils' personal beliefs?</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>'The Heart of Hinduism' Secondary pack. 'The Sadhu's Blessings' STO- 105</p> <p>The Heart of Hinduism, Teachers Book, pages 12-13.</p>

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Unit 5 Session 3

Learning objectives	A T 1	A T 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Know the four Hindu ashramas (stages of life), and explore and identify how these relate to their experience. ➤ Understand the relationship between the concepts of dharma, ashrama and moksha ➤ Know the four main sets of Hindu samskaras (rites of passage), and know in some detail about the funeral rites ➤ Understand some of the purposes of the samskaras, and the four ashramas, with reference to the aims of Hinduism. ➤ Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the emotions people feel on their journey through life; b) their philosophy of life. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>Reflect on experiences of journeys, such as holidays, and subsequently on their experience of time (e.g. how it goes quickly when we are happy). Consider the concept of life as a journey. What might be the times that seem to go quickly and the times which seem to drag? Describe times that have been 'high spots' that have sped by.</p> <p>Recall the 4 stages of life (ashramas) in Hinduism with which they are familiar. Where would pupils be at the moment? What do they think the purpose of life might be?</p> <p>Explain that Hindus believe that there are four aims of Life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dharma</i> (to lead a moral life, executing religious duties) - <i>Artha</i> (generating wealth and prosperity) - <i>Kama</i> (enjoying regulated sensual pleasure) - <i>Moksha</i> (liberation through wisdom and detachment from all material pleasures). <p>Assessment Task (including homework) Using the information sheet provided explaining samskaras, ashramas and dharma, and other research materials, students should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) draw a diagrammatic representation of the Hindu journey of life, marking the stages and rites of passage; 2) research the beliefs and practices of Hindu funeral rites and describe how these relate to the concepts studied so far in this unit; 3) the emotions Hindu and non-Hindu people feel on their journey through life; 4) how the Hindu philosophy of life conflicts or agrees with their own philosophy of life. 	<p>Resources <u>Poems (see extension activities):</u> "Just here on Holiday" – poem by Dr. Eleanor Nesbitt "Ozymandias" by Shelley "Death the Leveller" by James Shirley Heart of Hinduism - CD-Rom "Poems"</p> <p>Books: 'Ceremonies and Celebrations – Life's End' Hodder-Wayland ISBN 0 7502 2803 Information sheet</p> <p>NB. Hindu holy books describe this world as a meeting place (like a restaurant or a railway station), where people are continuously coming, meeting briefly and leaving. Other traditions share similar ideas.</p>

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Unit 5 Session 4

Learning objectives	A T 1	A T 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reflect on experiences of diversity amongst people (e.g. family, classroom or society in general) and the possible benefits and drawbacks; ➤ Know the four varnas (social classes), some of the characteristics of each and how they relate to the three gunas; ➤ Know the definition of 'varnashrama dharma'; ➤ Know one story/ verse/ analogy that explains how Hindus believe that we are interdependent on others in society. ➤ Explore the benefits of co-operation 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>Feed back from Assessment Task the work on a personal philosophy of life. Share views and discuss similarities and differences.</p> <p>Recap Hindu notions of unity based on the atman (soul) which cannot be labelled as black or white, young or old, male or female, Hindu or Christian, etc.</p> <p>Give out definitions of the Four Varnas and explore how diversity is accommodated by the system of four varnas. Each varna has its own set of duties that attempts to regulate behaviour. Present a definition of varnashrama dharma.</p> <p>To develop an understanding of the interdependence of the varnas in society, explore the metaphor of 'the social body', from the Rig Veda, perhaps drawing a large diagram to explore the analogy.</p> <p>Read and discuss the poem 'Body Club Strike' (based on a story from the Hindu book, the Hitopadesh)</p> <p>Group work Read "The Bundle of Sticks", and draw conclusions from it, answering questions such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the general point we can draw from this? 2) What can we deduce about different opinions? 3) What other differences are useful in teams? <p>Return to the diagram drawn in the previous lesson and label to identify the beliefs and values that underpin the system of four varnas and the various samskaras.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Rig Veda quotation from the Purusha Shakta prayers, verse 13: 'From his face came the <i>brahmins</i>, and from the two arms the <i>kshatriyas</i>. From his thighs were born the <i>vaishyas</i> and from His feet the <i>shudras</i>.'</p> <p>Drawing of 'the social body' is in the Heart of Hinduism, Teachers' Book, page26.</p> <p>'<i>The body club strike</i>' ("Beliefs, Values and Traditions" Published by Heinemann)</p> <p>Vedic Stories by Ananta Sakti Das (The bundle of sticks story) (Ahimsa Books) ISBN:09527492.0.3</p> <p>The Heart of Hinduism Secondary pack – Story; Gautama's disciple</p>

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Unit 5 Session 5

Learning objectives	A T 1	A T 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Know:the 2 categories of Hindu scripture; the main books within each ➤ Know how Hindus treat their holy books, and when they are used; ➤ Identify from a copy of the Bhagavad-Gita, specific verses/ passages that relate to previously-learned concepts/beliefs; ➤ Know the story leading up to the speaking of the Bhagavad-Gita; ➤ Understand what is a moral dilemma and identify some dilemmas they have experienced in their lives (personal & for the world); ➤ Understand how Krishna tried to resolve Arjuna's dilemma. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>	<p>Recall knowledge about Hindu stories and books with which they are familiar. Start a list/table, and add to it during the lesson.</p> <p>Recall how different faiths treat items that are special and/or sacred; explain how Hindus treat their books. Display a copy of the Bhagavad Gita. Explain that you are going to use it to find a story about Krishna that relates to the system of four varnas. The story involves Krishna speaking to Arjuna about his duties. Recall Krishna's divine status in Hinduism.</p> <p>Recall previous lesson, mentioning that Arjuna is a member of the kshatriya varna (class). Read the text around the class.</p> <p>How might it feel on an old-fashioned battlefield seeing friends and relatives on the opposite side? If possible, draw from other stories i.e. of people with allegiance to both sides during conflict. Arjuna had a dilemma. What was it? How did Krishna resolve Arjuna's dilemma? Clarify & record.</p> <p>People often seek advice when facing dilemmas. Explore pupils' experiences of dilemmas, & those in current affairs. What is the best way to deal with them? Who is a suitable source of counsel and guidance? Discuss how it helps to take counsel from others. Life's problems are often hard to understand with no cut and dry answers – discuss this. Scripture, from all traditions, tries to give answers. From one or two faiths already studied, compare their answers to a moral dilemma.</p> <p>Homework</p> <p>Explore notions of chivalry in different cultures e.g. King Arthur, legends from other cultures, modern USA, contemporary freedom fighters and compare with Hindu beliefs.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Heart of Hinduism Audio CD (Verses on Hindu concepts and values)</p> <p>Copy of the Bhagavad Gita</p> <p>Useful references:</p> <p>Chapter 1, Verses 20 – 46 are most relevant to Arjuna's dilemma; also Chapter 2, verses 1 to 3. For discussion of the warrior's duties see Chapter 2, verses 30 – 38. For the system of 4 varnas, Chapter 18, verses 40 –44</p>

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Unit 5 Session 6

Learning objectives	A T 1	A T 2	Suggested teaching activities	Sensitivities, points to note, resources
<p>Pupils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Know important Hindu values, and identify those which are related to environmental concerns; ➤ Know that ahimsa is the most important, and identify the beliefs/concepts that underpin it; ➤ Understand the importance of the quality of goodness (in respect of lifestyle and specific moral issues); ➤ Know about Hindu groups that are applying the principles of ahimsa and conduct research to identify ways in which Hindu ideals and practices can contribute towards a better environment. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p>		<p>Recall what is already known about Hindu values and especially those relating to the environment. (from Primary units)</p> <p>Set up groups of 4 or 5 pupils to research different projects that demonstrate the application of Hindu values covered in this unit. Give out sheet on Hindu values as a checklist against which each project can be related. Point out that ahimsa is the most important value and discuss why, drawing out issues about the beliefs and concepts underpinning it.</p> <p>Initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friends of Vrindavan (environmental charity) ▪ Swami Narayana Mission (tree planting, building without steel, etc.) ▪ Cow Protection Project (Bhaktivedanta Manor) - Aim: Know some of the principles and practices of cow-protection. ▪ Young Indian Vegetarians ▪ The Chipko Movement (protecting trees.) ▪ Gandhi's village economics - Aim: Know how Gandhi supported non-violence, and how he valued the traditional Hindu lifestyle based on an agrarian economy. <p>Alternatively teachers might arrange a visit to a relevant project e.g. the Cow Protection and Bull-Power Project at Bhaktivedanta Manor, and students could conduct research during the trip.</p> <p>Pupils should prepare a report on their chosen project, identifying how its practices tie in with Hindu teachings.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Heart of Hinduism – Teachers Book pages 14-15, 36-39, 88, 108-110.</p> <p>Books on Gandhi</p> <p>www.fov.org.uk</p> <p>http://www.swaminarayan.org/activities/index.htm</p> <p>http://www.krishnatemple.com/activities/cowprotection.shtm</p> <p>www.indian-vegetarians.org/</p> <p>http://www.freewebs.com/environmentalkids/story.htm</p> <p>http://www.fov.org.uk/hinduism/08.html</p> <p>http://www.iskcon.org.uk/ies/presentation.html</p>

Notes for Teachers – Unit 5

Session 4

The varnas are not merely classes as we may understand them but represent the various psycho-physical dispositions that exist everywhere, and a corresponding organisational structure

Many authors and teachers do not realise that Gandhi supported the system of four varnas, despite his determined opposition to the hereditary caste system.

Be careful not to promote the idea that notions of difference (such as embodied in the varna system) automatically promote negative discrimination and are therefore outdated.

Session 5

Although we have no time to explicitly cover the topic here, students may raise the question of the apparent contradiction between ahimsa and the warrior's duty to fight. We might note:

- 1) To assume or assert a contradiction is hasty. Absolute violence is a worthy ideal but in most societies is not practical.*
- 2) It is important to note that Hinduism traditionally allocated different specific values to different sections of society. War and violence were sanctioned for the kshatriya class only*
- 3) The ideas of dharma-yuddha (righteous war) looks at good versus evil. It does not sanction wars based on religious factions, where one side (ours!) is associated with good and the opposite with evil.*

Session 6

In looking at the concepts behind non-violence one may explore:

The atman - and the unity of all life and all living beings. (Hindus tend to see 'life' in terms of the consciousness within it, rather than just the external symptoms, such as birth, reproduction, etc.)

Karma – it will inevitably and inexorably come back on us

Reincarnation – this is how we receive our karma. Violence based on negative discrimination is untenable if we can be born in the same situation as those we injure or hurt.

God – especially as within our hearts, who guides us (as conscience) and helps us to feel for others as we feel for ourselves

The Three Gunas – anger and violence are a result of the qualities of passion and ignorance. Peacefulness is a symptom of goodness.

Note: all these ideal qualities listed above represent the quality of goodness, which represents the Hindu ideal in terms of personal qualities and conduct.

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Hinduism Unit 5 Session 1

Matter and Spirit

Hindus say that each of these terms describes either matter or spirit. Sort them into two groups, under the two headings of (1) matter and (2) spirit, matching up any opposites. Prepare to feed back to the class on your results and any discussion you had:

unchanging
conscious
alive
unconscious
always changing
temporary
moving
dynamic
eternal
non-moving
inert
dead

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Hinduism Unit 5 Session 3

Information sheet.

Dharma

This is often translated as religious duty but has two more literal translations:

- 1) that which sustains us;
- 2) that which is intrinsic to us.

A comprehensive definition is:

“Those duties that sustain and nurture us according to our own nature”

Ashrama

A stage of life, in which we nurture our spiritual life

The four ashramas are:

- 1) **Student life** (for learning spiritual values and how to earn an ethical livelihood)
- 2) **Household life** (for enjoyment, making money and raising children)
- 3) **Retirement** (for austerity, pilgrimage and more emphasis on spiritual life)
- 4) **Renounced life** (leaving home to look for God and preparing for inevitable death)

Samskaras

The four main sets of Hindu samskaras (rites of passage) are:

- 1) Birth ceremonies
- 2) Initiation (sacred thread)
- 3) Marriage
- 4) Funeral and other post-death rites



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Unit 5 Session 4

The Four Varna Information sheet

The Four Varnas

- 1) **Brahmins** (priests, teachers and intellectuals)
- 2) **Kshatriyas** (police, army and administration)
- 3) **Vaishyas** (farmers, merchants and business people)
- 4) **Shudras** (artisans and workers)

Associated qualities: (not complete list)

- 1) Cleanliness, truthfulness, knowledge, wisdom, austerity
- 2) Power, bravery, chivalry, protection of the innocent
- 3) Care for animals, generosity, skill in trade and business
- 4) Loyalty, creativity, skill in crafts and manual work

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Unit 5 Session 4

The Body Club Strike

The following poem is based on a story from the Hitopadesh, and supports the ideas of social interdependence upon which the original varnashrama system is based. Human society is compared to a body and the different sections of society to various parts of the body. Additionally, God is compared to the stomach – by providing food to the stomach, all the bodily parts are nourished. He is also compared to the root of a tree – the leaves, fruits, flowers, etc. can only be nourished by watering the root of the tree.

There was trouble afoot at the Body Club; President Stomach had been given the snub.
The members agreed by show of hand It was time for them to make a stand.
They were up in arms, for while they worked It seemed that Stomach sat and shirked.
So each took turns in having a say why things could not go on this way.
“We’ve slaved our fingers to the bone!” “We’re on our knees,” was heard their moan.
“Nose to the grindstone, shoulder to the wheel.” “Best foot forward – it’s a lousy deal!”
“It isn’t fair! What’s justice for?” “We refuse to Stomach any more!”
So they went on strike to prove their point and rested every aching joint.
But they couldn’t protest for very long, for they realized things were going wrong.
In sitting it out for a week and a day, all their strength was ebbing away.
They discovered if Stomach wasn’t fed, before very long they’d all be dead.
So they called off the strike reluctantly and made themselves a cup of tea.
Each needed the other to be nourished, so once again The Body Club flourished.

Poem by Ann Lovelace. From “Beliefs, Values and Traditions” (1997, Heinemann, Oxford).

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HINDUISM Part 3 Unit 5: The self and its journey

Hinduism unit 5 session 6

Hindu Values

Important Hindu values are numerous. They include the five abstentions (yama) and the five cultivations (niyama);

The five abstentions – qualities and practices to be avoided:

- Non-violence
- Truthfulness (avoidance of lying and deceit)
- Non-stealing
- Celibacy (avoidance of all sex; in married life, avoiding sex without desire for a child)
- Restraint from greed and accumulating unnecessary possessions.

The five qualities and practices to be cultivated:

- Purity (inner and outer cleanliness)
- Contentment
- Austerity
- Self-study
- Worship of the divine

Other values/virtues include:

- Respect for others
- Humility
- Compassion
- Tolerance of personal inconvenience
- Hospitality
- Sustainability
- Wisdom
- Respect and veneration of natural elders
- Giving shelter to one's natural dependants
- Stewardship
- Control of the mind and senses
- Simplicity

Note:

the values most related to the environment are: ahimsa, sustainability, simplicity, stewardship, respect, restraint from greed, control of the mind and senses, contentment, purity, worship of the divine, tolerance of personal inconvenience.



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Unit 5 Brief Summary of the Mahabharata

The story tells of a struggle for the throne between the five sons of Pandu (the Pandavas) and their impious cousins, the Kauravas (sometimes called the Kurus). Pandu was the second of three princes, and took the throne in preference to his blind elder brother, Dhritarashtra. As the result of a curse, Pandu died tragically while his sons were minors. Pandu's younger brother, Vidura, though pious and learned, was born of a maidservant and could not ascend the throne. It thus remained vacant and by the law of succession should have passed to Pandu's sons, headed by the pious Yudhishthira. As boys grew up, alongside their cousins, Dhritarashtra acted as regent. However, his one hundred sons, headed by Duryodhana, were increasingly resentful that fate had deprived them, as well as their father, of the vast Indian empire.

The Kauravas plotted to kill the Pandavas and their widowed mother by burning them alive. The princes were warned and escaped the burning palace via a tunnel. Now aware of their cousins' treachery, they opted to remain in the forest. During this time, the third brother, Arjuna, won Draupadi as a bride in an archery contest. Due to benediction gained in a previous life, Draupadi became the wife of all five brothers.

The blind king, feeling repentant, arranged to return to his nephews half the kingdom –by far the worst half. However, with the help of their friend Krishna, the Pandava kingdom flourished in all respects. Hearing of Yudhishthira's fame and popularity, Duryodhana seethed in envy. He threatened and cajoled his blind father to arrange a gambling match between the two groups of cousins. The weak, affectionate Dhritarashtra reluctantly consented. Duryodhana ensured that the dice were rigged and Yudhishthira lost everything. One of the Kurus even tried to strip Draupadi naked but Krishna protected her by supplying an endless length of sari. No warriors intervened, sowing the seeds of their future destruction. The five brothers took terrible, irrevocable oaths to destroy the offenders. Nonetheless, according to the terms of the contest, they and Draupadi were exiled to the forest for 13 years. During the final year they were to remain incognito and if discovered were to remain in exile for a further 12 years.

The five princes and their wife again entered the forest. After many adventures, they adopted disguises for the final year, trying to avoid the spies sent by their cousins. They remained undetected and finally returned to reclaim their kingdom. The Kurus refused and the two parties prepared for war on the plains of Kurukshetra.

Both Arjuna and Duryodhana went to the city of Dvaraka to enlist the help of Krishna. Krishna declined to fight himself but offered each of his visitors a choice – either himself (but not in a fighting role) or his personal army. Arjuna chose Krishna, whilst his rival was equally happy with Krishna's army. In this way, Krishna came to be Arjuna's chariot driver. The carnage lasted 18 days and the Pandavas were victorious, but with very few soldiers left. Yudhishthira was crowned emperor. His kingdom flourished for 30 years after which the Pandavas retired to the Himalayas, leaving their grandson on the throne.



HINDUISM Part 3 Unit 5: The self and its journey

Unit 5

Outline of the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita begins with an inquiry.¹ With the two armies preparing for battle, Dhritarashtra, the father of the Kurus, was doubtful about the possibility of his sons' victory over the Pandavas. He therefore asked his secretary, Sanjaya, about the situation on the battlefield. Even whilst in the palace, Sanjaya was able to mystically perceive the entire scene and explained everything to the blind king as it happened.

Sanjaya narrated how Arjuna requested Krishna to steer the chariot between the ranks of the two armies so that he might observe who was present. On seeing so many relatives, friends and teachers in the midst of both parties, Arjuna was overwhelmed with grief and decided to withdraw from the contest. He explained that after killing his own kinsmen it would be impossible for him to enjoy the earthly kingdom. This decision was based on the bodily concept of life, in which he considered his body his very self, and that bodily relations were his brothers, cousins, grandfathers, etc.... In this situation, and to rectify such a mistaken world-view, Lord Krishna spoke the Bhagavad Gita.

In His opening instructions in Chapter two, verse twelve², Krishna describes the nature of the self as an eternal, conscious being, completely distinct from the temporary, material body. He expounds the science of this eternal self in the following chapters and Krishna's words constitute the subject matter of the Gita. Such instructions are summarised in the eighteenth and final chapter wherein the Lord gives his final opinion. In the sixty-sixth verse³, Krishna states that the constitutional position and duty of everyone, as an eternal, spiritual being, is to serve Him, the Supreme Lord, and to act as He desires. Although Arjuna initially chose to retire from battle, after hearing Krishna's instructions, his illusion was dispelled and he resolved to fight.

Dhritarashtra had been hopeful of his sons' victory. He had been pleased to hear that Arjuna was unwilling to fight. But after hearing and repeating the sacred dialogue, Sanjaya again disappointed him. In the closing words of the Gita, he tells the King, "You are thinking of victory, but my opinion is that where Krishna and Arjuna are present, there will be all good fortune"⁴. He directly confirmed that Dhritarashtra could not expect victory. Victory was certain for the side of Arjuna because Krishna was there.

¹ Dhritarashtra said: "O Sanjaya, after my sons and the sons of Pandu assembled in the place of pilgrimage at Kurukshetra, desiring to fight, what did they do?" (B.G. 1.1)

² "Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be." (B.G. 2.12).

³ "Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear." (B.G.18.66).

⁴ "Wherever there is Krishna, the Master of all Mystics, and wherever there is Arjuna, the supreme archer, there will also certainly be opulence, victory, extraordinary power, and morality. That is my opinion." (B.G. 18.78).



HINDUISM Part 3 Unit 5: The self and its journey

Unit 5

Arjuna's Dilemma on the Battlefield

This subject may be of interest to teachers introducing the subject of dilemmas and difficult moral decisions. This topic is certainly relevant to us all. Some interesting points may be as follows:

- 1) The Gita is spoken in between two armies poised for battle. Explore where other scriptures are spoken (on hills, in caves, beneath trees, etc.)
- 2) Arjuna's dilemma was this:
 1. He didn't want to lose
 2. If he were to win, it would be at the expense of the lives of his friends and relatives on the opposite side
 3. He knew, deep down, that to avoid fighting was not a real option

To set an example, Arjuna argues like a common materialistic man, thinking in terms of personal profit and loss. He was considering, "What's the use of a kingdom without those with whom I would enjoy it?" Even his deciding not to fight, as he declared to Krishna, was not acceptable because in his heart he knew that it was his duty. He was also reluctant to kill superiors such as Drona, his military teacher. Thus, from all sides he could only foresee negative consequences.

- 3) Arjuna gave many excuses why not to fight, even by quoting scripture. Teachers could explore how we all have a tendency to rationalise irrational behaviour ("Even the Devil quotes scripture for his own purposes" – Shakespeare)
- 4) All of us are, in some respects, constantly in a state of dilemma and thus irresolute (see verses 2.44 of the Bhagavad Gita). For example, many people work hard to make money so that they can stop eventually working.



HINDUISM Part 3 Unit 5: The self and its journey

Unit 5

Arjuna's Dilemma on the Battlefield contd.

- 5) Arjuna's perplexity is based on identifying himself with the temporary body and anything connected to it. He was mistakenly thinking, "These are my relatives". Krishna's teachings removed Arjuna's mistaken conception – and that of all conditioned souls – the misapprehension that the body is the very self and that by extension one has an intimate relationship to everything connected to the body (name, relatives, land of birth, bank balance, reputation, sectarian religion, etc.)
- 6) It should not be understood that Krishna was urging Arjuna to be heartless. Affection is the natural state of the soul but in material life it is limited and irrational (for example, some people love their dogs and simultaneously eat hamburgers). Spiritual advancement means going beyond limited notions of love; broadening our affection, rather than negating it.
- 7) Before Krishna begins his instructions, Arjuna expresses his realisation that ultimately nothing material will satisfy his heart. He has reached a point of hopelessness.
- 8) Arjuna represents the disciple and Krishna the original guru (spiritual mentor). Arjuna's approaching Krishna for instruction represents the souls seeking God's guidance through a genuine spiritual teacher
- 9) At the end of the Gita, Krishna asks Arjuna whether his illusion has been dispelled. Some commentators state that Krishna was willing to speak the whole Gita again if needed, even though the two armies were impatient to begin hostilities. (Some ideals regarding the character of a teacher are implicit here)
- 10) Towards the end of the Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna, "I have told you everything. Now do what you wish to do." God does not interfere with the free will of the soul, nor does he force anyone to act.
- 11) When we become spiritually realised, all dilemmas, misgivings and hesitancy are dispelled (Bhagavad Gita 2.41, 18.72-73).

See also Heart of Hinduism Teachers' Book, page 8 and Fact Sheets (FCT-1102, 1103)