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1. Is there a standard ritual or practice that all Hindus take part in?

* Hinduism does not require anyone to follow specific rituals or practices. Each believer chooses their own form of worship and when they perform that practice. Ex. Some would perform a morning ritual to welcome the day while others have a closing ritual. Some have daily practices while others only take part once a week. However, almost all Hindus would take part in the major festivals that take place throughout the year.

1. What is the meaning of ‘om’, and how is it used? Draw the symbol ‘Om’.

* Om is chanted at the beginning of most prayers in Hinduism as a representation of the supreme Brahman. It is used as a way to focus the mind and calm the spirit: a mantra.

1. What happens in the Puja ceremony. What is the purpose of the Puja?

* The Puja is a ceremony that is done in a Hindu’s home and is usually a practice of thanksgiving to the home’s chosen diety. Pujas take place on festival days only. Usually the Puja includes making an offering of food, flowers and incense. After the ceremony, those present will share the food between them.

1. Traditionally, the Hindu home is the center of religious learning and practices. What is the reason for temples then? How do you think the Hindu temple become more important in countries like Canada, which have a smaller Hindu population?

* Temples are places where believers can gather for special services and festivals throughout the year. They are where the priests would live and perform services each day, as well as have classes for children to learn about Hinduism. Temples in India are often the site of pilgrimages, where a believer would choose to make a trip to visity the holy site and spend a period of time in prayer and meditation towards a special purpose.
* Hindu temples in countries like Canada also become a community center for the local Hindus so they can gather, share activities and just visit together.

1. How does the cow become a sacred animal in Hinduism?

* The cow represents the peaceful nature of a vegetarian lifestyle. All Hindus are supposed to aspire to this non-violent vegetarianism so the cow becomes a symbol of this and gains respect. Most Hindus will not eat beef because of this.

1. Yoga is a great way to stretch and exercise for most westerners. What does the real practice and purpose of Yoga include, as used by the Hindu Swami?

* Yoga was developed as a way to help people get into the state of meditation on union with Brahman. They try to control their body and breathing to aid in concentration. A swami is a holy man that has dedicated their life to master the art of meditation.

1. Most Hindus would like to take a pilgrimage to the city of Varanasi, in the same way that Christians and Jews would think of Jerusalem. Why is this place considered a holy city in Hinduism?

* Varanasi is an ancient city on the banks of the Ganges river. It is considered as the home of Shiva on earth and has about 1500 temples in the city. The entire city is considered to be a holy site and is the destination of many Hindu pilgrims. It is also an important site for Jains and Buddhists.

1. The Swastika is also an important symbol in Hinduism. What does it stand for and how would you know that it was the Hindu version compared to the one taken by the Nazis?

* The swastika is the symbol of good luck for Hindus and is used as a blessing for Hindu events (weddings, festivals, etc.)
* The Hindu/Jain form of the swastika has arms bent opposite to the Nazi version.

1. Festivals are important times to celebrate your beliefs with others who follow your religion. List four of the Hindu festivals described in the text. When do they happen and what do they celebrate?

* Diwali – the festival of lights , late October

Celebrates the triumph of good over evil. Celebrate with fireworks, decorating with lights and gift giving

* Holi – the spring festival, March

Celebrates Prahalad’s escape from evil. Hindus have a bonfire and squirt coloured water at each other

* Mahashivaratri - Celebrates Shiva, February
* Navaratri – the Nine Nights, spring and autumn