



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2012**

**Religious Studies**

**RSS09**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit J World Religions 1: Buddhism, Hinduism,  
Sikhism**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **General Comments**

There was a small entry for the January paper, most of whom were resits.

More than two thirds of the students answered questions on Section A: Buddhism, most of the rest were entered for Sikhism and a small number did Hinduism.

### **Section A *Buddhism***

#### **Question 1 *Samsara and the three marks of existence***

01 This question on samsara and how it affects a Buddhist attitude towards life was by far the most popular question on the whole paper. The range of responses varied quite widely. The best answers gaining higher levels explained fully the concepts of samsara as the endless cycle of death and rebirth and how this process is perpetuated by the law of karma. Some students explained that escape from the trap of samsara was possible by following the Buddhist path of morality, meditation and wisdom. Others developed further the ways in which a Buddhist's attitude towards life is affected by this belief in samsara. The less good answers tended to focus on the Tibetan wheel of life and give detailed descriptions of each the various realms of rebirth without relating it to the concepts and issues in the question and did not refer to the second part of the question on the Buddhist attitude towards life at all.

02 Some answered this question as a general response to Buddhist teachings on suffering rather than specifically samsara. The better answers pointed out that a belief in samsara can lead to a optimistic view of life as it offers many chances to improve ones destiny and also gave strong motivation to seek nibbana.

#### **Question 2 *The Four Noble truths***

03 This was very well answered by most students despite its challenge as a conceptual and philosophical question. The higher levels were given to those who were able to provide a range of meanings of nibbana with both positive and negative aspects e.g. freedom from suffering and the cycle of rebirth and samsara, extinguishing the defilements of greed hatred and delusion, the 'unconditioned', a transformed consciousness. The recognition that nibbana is ineffable is part of this attempt to explain its meaning and was also relevant to a higher level answer.

04 Most students were able to provide two sides to the argument, one being that nibbana never be understood unless it is experienced, the other that there are levels and different kinds of understanding and in the present lifetime it may be glimpsed before being fully attained.

#### **Question 3 *The Eightfold Path***

05 Most students were able to state and describe each part of the Eightfold Path but not all examined either the overall purpose or the purpose of each part. The overall purpose of the path is the means to nibbana and each part contributes to this through the development of morality, meditation and wisdom. The higher level answers explained the purpose of morality, meditation and wisdom in relation to nibbana and how each of these aspects were related to and interdependent upon each other.

06 This question was generally well answered with a good balance of argument and evidence to support the view that Buddhist follow the Eightfold Path for their own personal liberation and enlightenment as well as the opposing view that the attainment of enlightenment is not possible without being selfless and compassionate.

### **Question 4 *The Sangha***

07 This was the least well answered question in this section.

The life and discipline needed to include the various merit making activities of dana such as donating requisites to the monastic sangha. A central part of this answer was an examination of the five moral precepts and their implications for the life of the lay as well as the notion of right livelihood in the Eightfold Path. Discipline also included the lay practice of attending the vihara on full moon days and taking eight precepts. Not many students included all these points.

08 Some good discussion was presented about the importance of the lay community within Buddhist societies in their contribution to the coherence and harmony of society as a whole.

## **Section B Hinduism**

### **Question 5 *The Hindu concept of God***

09 This was the most popular well answered question in this section. Students showed a sound and detailed knowledge of characteristics of Lakshmi and Saraswati and a very good understanding of their individual and generic roles as the creative and life giving energies within the Hindu pantheon.

10 Good balanced evaluations were presented which argued for the significance of goddesses within Hinduism as a whole but also the fact that Hindus choose to worship their own particular deities regardless of whether they are male or female deities.

### **Question 6 *Means to liberation in Hinduism***

11 This was very well answered with the examination of the nature of atman as the inner essence of all living beings and the true self of the individual human being. The process of self realisation as the identification of the inner self with the universal life energy Brahman was very well explained.

12 This was also well answered as students recognised the fundamental issue about the relative importance of belief over practice within a religious tradition as well as its particular expression in Hinduism.

### **Question 7 *Worship in Hinduism***

13 Students showed a sound and detailed knowledge of yajna and havan.

14 This was quite well answered with a recognition of the importance of a range of moral actions and duties within the Hindu way of life.

### **Question 8 *The Hindu way of life***

No one answered this question.

## Section C Sikhism

### Question 9 *The Gurus*

17 This was the most popular question in this section.

Some students spent too much time describing what happened at the founding of the Khalsa and did not address fully why the Khalsa was formed at this time. These reasons included the need to provide a defence and security for the Sikh community in a time of persecution and the need to give a clear identity to Sikhs to distinguish them from other faiths.

18 Some good answers here in which students recognised that Sikhism was already a religion and the work of the previous gurus had created the foundations for this, but the formation of the Khalsa had a role in establishing a clearly identifiable religion.

### Question 10 *Festivals*

19 This was answered in a descriptive way with not enough analysis of why this festival of Diwali is significant for Sikhs as a commemoration of Sikh heroism and courage, defence of other persecuted groups and the Sikh values of equality and readiness to be a martyr for the faith.

20 Not many grasped the importance of 'inner meaning' as it is applied to personal faith and spiritual experience. Most recognized that public aspects were also important.

### Question 11 *The Guru Granth Sahib and the Gurdwara*

21 The nature of the gurdwara was well understood but the role was less well dealt with.

22 Most students showed a good understanding of the contemporary situation in the UK in which the gurdwaras do provide essential community facilities for Sikhs but may not meet all the complex needs of second and third generation Sikhs in the UK.

### Question 12 *Diwan and langar*

Very few students attempted this question.

### Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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