



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

Religious Studies

RSS09

(Specification 2060)

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

Report on the Examination

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General comments

The entry for this paper was similar to last year with the majority of students taking Section A Buddhism and equal numbers taking Hinduism and Sikhism.

Section A Buddhism

Question 1 *Samsara and the three marks of existence*

- 01** Most students had a good understanding of the concepts dukkha and anicca. The higher levels were awarded to those students who had a detailed and accurate knowledge of the three kinds of dukkha and the various forms of anicca. Whilst ordinary dukkha and viparinama dukkha (related to impermanence) were very well explained, the sankhara dukkha was less well understood as attachment to ego or sense of self and with reference to the 5 skandhas. Some reference to the various levels of meaning and application of these concepts to real life experience gained higher level marks.
- 02** This appeared to be a challenging question for many students who did not fully recognize the importance in the question about different ways of knowing or understanding these concepts. The distinction between intellectual and cognitive knowledge and subjective experience of suffering and impermanence was not always recognised. There was confusion about what was meant by 'understanding through experience' as some thought it meant experience of being a Buddhist, whilst others thought it was through everyday life and empirical experience. Those who argued for the necessity of deeper knowledge through emotion and contemplation and study of the dhamma were able to present a more balanced argument.

Question 2 *The Four Noble Truths*

- 03** Most students had a sound basic knowledge of each of the four noble truths but the higher levels were given to those who responded to the word 'framework' in the question. Many used the analogy of the doctor diagnosing and prescribing a cure for an illness; others showed how each truth led to or depended on the previous one so the sequence and meaning was interpreted and integrated.
- 04** Most arguments in support of the four noble truths being the only basis for the Buddhist way of life were very well made as these truths contain most of the other teachings. Those who responded to the notion of 'only' were able to refer to other possible bases for the Buddhist way of life, such as sangha, karma and moral precepts etc. and also recognized the importance of applying truths to practical living.

Question 3 *The Eightfold Path*

- 05** This was the least well answered question in this section and many students had a very generalized knowledge of the nature of meditation in the eightfold path. Those which referred to the three aspects of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration and explained each of them and the distinctions between them gained the higher levels. Reference to the four right efforts of changing negative and harmful states into positive ones, mindfulness in relation to body, feeling and mind, and the jhanas in relation to right concentration, characterised the better answers. Also not all paid attention to the aspect of the purpose of meditation, which is quite straightforward and has a variety of dimensions from gaining a calm mind to facilitating insight and supramundane knowledge.
- 06** This question was answered in a much better way as students were able to refer to the equal importance of morality and wisdom as being essential to the Buddhist way of life.

Question 4 *The Sangha*

- 07** The relationship between the lay and monastic community was quite well understood by most students, although many answers were rather general and vague in their response. Those who examined the nature of the relationship as inter-dependent, respectful and mutually beneficial, as well as giving detailed examples of the ways on which this was expressed and how it contributed to social progress and creating a harmonious community, gained the higher levels of marks.
- 08** Some very good and balanced arguments were presented in response to this question. The better ones made out a convincing case for the ways in which lay life provided a greater challenge to develop morality and wisdom but was equally effective in attaining enlightenment if the lay people were determined and purposeful in seeking it.

Section B Hinduism

Question 5 *The Hindu concept of God*

- 09** This was the most popular question in this section and some students presented very detailed and accurate descriptions of the powers and attributes of each of the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The best answers explained how these three forms express a complex notion of God, involving different aspects of the ultimate reality as well as distinct manifestations.
- 10** The implications of the question that the trimurti makes Hinduism a polytheistic religion were very clearly recognised by most students. The practical expression in Hindu worship in the Vaishnavite and Shaivite forms, as well as many temples and shrines to distinctive deities, clearly supports a polytheistic view. However some students also provided evidence and information about those forms of Hinduism which do not rely of images of deities at all and are based on the abstract notion of Brahman.

Question 6 *Means to liberation in Hinduism*

- 11** Not many answered this question but those that did showed a good understanding of the nature of both jnana and bhakti yoga, the better ones explaining how each of these provides a path to liberation.
- 12** Some excellent arguments and evidence were presented to show how jnana yoga is linked to the sannyasin stage of life and requires complete dedication, as well as the validity and accessibility of bhakti yoga to many Hindus.

Question 7 *Worship in Hinduism*

- 13** Some excellent and detailed descriptions were presented of the various parts of the Hindu temple with some clear explanations of how the design itself expresses spiritual concepts. Occasionally more attention needed to be given to the instruction to examine the purpose of Hindu temples.
- 14** There were some well balanced and argued answers to this question about the limited importance of temples for Hindus and the arguments for and against were clearly and equally convincing.

Question 8 *The Hindu way of life*

- 15** Some excellent answers to this question were presented due to the students' research into the various kinds of sadhus and rishis currently teaching in India and the difference between the roles of sadhu and rishi as the embodiment of sacred knowledge made

available to followers in ashrams or in special one to one relationships. Those who clarified the roles of these holy men gained the higher levels of marks.

- 16** This was quite a challenging question for some as they did not pay attention to the phrase 'no longer important' which gave the opportunity to compare the past with the present. However some very good arguments were presented to show that in contemporary society the path of the holy man has a new and more important role in the context of increasing materialism and consumerism and a genuine seeking for spiritual life amongst people all over the developed world.

Section C Sikhism

Question 9 *The Gurus*

- 17** Most students were able to provide the outline of Guru Arjan's life but not many answers showed a very good understanding of his particular contributions in relation to the Harmandir, the compiling of the Adi Granth and his harmonious relationships with Moghul Emperor Akbar in providing a period of stability and peace for Sikhism to develop.
- 18** The evaluations whether Guru Arjan had a 'limited role' were usually well judged and balanced.

Question 10 *Festivals*

- 19** This was well answered in relation to the descriptions of how Vaisakhi is celebrated in the gurdwara and local community, although detailed information was not required, but not many explained its significance very well. This required reference to the importance of the founding of the Khalsa and the importance of courage, commitment and clear identity for Sikhs.
- 20** The evaluation of the relevance of Vaisakhi in the present was quite well dealt with, especially by those who recognised that it provided a chance for reasserting the values and principles of Sikhism and the importance of religious practice and communal solidarity for Sikhs.

Question 11 *The Guru Granth Sahib and the Gurdwara*

- 21** Not many responded well to the word 'formation', which required an examination of how it was formed over the years and the various developments and additions of the different gurus. Not many had a detailed knowledge of the different types of content, e.g. Mul mantra, prayers and hymns, moral and ethical rules, and ragas.
- 22** This question required an evaluation of whether the Guru Granth Sahib is important only to a minority of Sikhs. This was well argued on both sides, with answers typically showing how the Guru Granth Sahib is not relevant to those who cannot understand the gurmurki script but yet is vitally important as a source of faith, teachings and inspiration.

Question 12 *Diwan and Langar*

- 23** This required an explanation of both the practice and spiritual meaning of langar and sewa. This is more than simply preparing food in the langar kitchen. Higher levels were given to those who explained the nature of sewa in developing humility, egolessness and willingness to contribute to the welfare of all.
- 24** Some good answers to this question were presented which indicated that in the modern world, especially in the UK, there is not the same need for a food kitchen as in the past in

India, but those who acknowledged the symbolic nature of langar as expressing the equality and unity of the community gained higher marks. Some were able to express clearly the essential nature of langar in contemporary life.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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