

Empathizing (Hinduism)

Guest Speakers and an Indian Restaurant

Hinduism has spread throughout the world. Especially in cities, it should be possible to find Hindus who are willing to come and speak to a class. It can be especially interesting if the speakers are willing to contrast traditional Hinduism with how they practice their faith in the United States. Students are often quite interested in traditional Indian dress and the *tilaka* (also called the *tilak* or *tika*) worn on the forehead, as well as in statues of Hindu deities. Along similar lines, if you live in a community in which there is an Indian restaurant, it may be possible to arrange a visit to allow the students to sample Indian food. The predominance of vegetarian fare in many Indian restaurants highlights the prevalence of vegetarianism among Hindus and Indians in general.

Reincarnation

Though the Hindu belief in reincarnation differs markedly from the Christian belief in eternal life, ideas about reincarnation are prevalent enough in the larger culture that most students will have at least some idea of how the belief functions for those who hold it. Have the students form groups, and ask them to talk about whether they think the belief in reincarnation might change how one thinks about death in general. How might these thoughts about death differ for a Christian? You may also choose to have the class reflect on the differences and similarities between the Bhagavad-Gita's analogy about reincarnation (we discard worn-out bodies as we discard clothing that is worn out, cited on page 49 in the student book) with Saint Paul's teaching about our having both a natural and a spiritual body (see 1 Corinthians 15:44).

Moral Expectations

Moral expectations within traditional Hindu society are defined in part by one's position in society. Explore with the class to what extent this is true in our society as well. Ask the students to think of specific situations in which social standing might affect moral expectations. Traditional Indians simply expect this will naturally be the case, whereas we tend to think that if it is indeed the case, it should not be so. Christians hold that God's expectations for human conduct are the same for everyone, without regard for social position.



Arranged Marriage

Explore what might be the advantages and disadvantages to arranged marriage. Most students' immediate reaction to the idea of arranged marriage is negative. We are a society of believers in individual freedom of choice and in romantic love as the basis for marriage. However, on further reflection, many students may come to appreciate the strengths offered by the system of arranged marriages. It may help to point out that something roughly similar to arranged marriages sometimes occurs among wealthy and highly placed families in our own culture, when the intent of marriage is often as much about the families or forging business alliances as it is about the couple.

