

Hinduism

THE BASICS

- ⇒ World's oldest religion
- ⇒ World's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam
 - Largely influenced later religions: Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism
- ⇒ Nearly 1 billion followers
 - 13% of the world's population
- ⇒ Dominant religion in India (82%)
 - Also found in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Bali
- ⇒ 1.1 million Hindus in the U.S.



ORIGINS

- ⇒ 3000 BCE
- ⇒ Began in Indus Valley (now Pakistan)
 - Along banks of Indus River
 - Very developed, urban population
- ⇒ 1000 BCE
 - Aryans (nobles from European and Persian backgrounds) migrated into India
 - Mixed with native peoples

Is a drop of water the same thing as the entire ocean?

- ⇒ Relationship between God and the universe: (Hindu philosopher) Adi Shankara wrote that each of our souls contain a piece of God, just like the drops of water each contain a tiny amount of the ocean
 - The quest in Hinduism can be understood as the search for this piece of God inside each of us
- ⇒ "Truth is one, paths are many"-- there is no one correct way to approach God

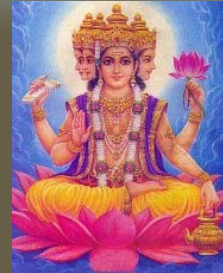
HINDU GOD(S)

- ⇒ Brahman is the supreme being; the sole reality who is present in all things
 - Brahman has no form, and is eternal
 - Brahman is creator, preserver and transformer of everything
 - Brahman appears in the human spirit as *Atman*, or the soul
- ⇒ Atman is the self or soul; the hidden self; the part of the human being that is more than the body and the personality
- ⇒ But, Atman = Brahman!

Continued...

- ⇒ Often believed that Hindus worship many gods. Really one eternal god (Brahman). The other gods are different aspects of the Brahman
- ⇒ Three principal gods:
 - Brahma: creates the universe
 - Vishnu: preserves the universe
 - Shiva: destroys the universe

- ⇒ Brahma: The Creator
- ⇒ Vehicle: swan
- ⇒ has 4 heads, 4 arms, and a reddish complexion
- ⇒ not commonly worshipped
- ⇒ not to be confused with Brahman (the ground of all being) or the Brahmin (priestly caste)



- ⇒ Saraswati: Goddess of knowledge, music, and the arts
- ⇒ Vehicle: swan
- ⇒ Wife of Brahma
- ⇒ Sits on a white lotus playing a veena



- ⇒ Vishnu: The Preserver
- ⇒ Vehicle: garuda (bird)
- ⇒ Has 4 arms, a blueish complexion, and rests on a snake
- ⇒ Was incarnated (born as an animal or human) nine times with one more still to come
- ⇒ (Rama was the 7th avatar (incarnation) of Vishnu and the central figure in the epic story Ramayana)



(Krishna was the 8th avatar and usually portrayed as a child and a prankster; often shown playing the flute)


- ⇒ Lakshmi: Goddess of wealth and prosperity
- ⇒ Vehicle: owl
- ⇒ Wife of Vishnu
- ⇒ Usually shown bestowing coins and flanked by elephants



- ⇒ Shiva: The Destroyer / Transformer
- ⇒ Vehicle: bull
- ⇒ Has matted hair, a third eye, a blue throat and a trident in his hand




- ⇒ Ganesh: God of the intellect and the remover of obstacles
- ⇒ Vehicle: mouse
- ⇒ Son of Shiva & Parvati
- ⇒ Has an elephant's head




SCRIPTURE: THE VEDAS

- ⇒ The Vedas
 - Means "knowledge"
 - Written around 1500 BCE
 - Collection of hymns, prayers, and magic spells
 - Developed from oral and poetic traditions (originally chanted)
 - Sanskrit – the (holy) language of the Vedas



The Upanishads

- Philosophical text
- Parables told by gurus to students
 - Describes pure being, consciousness, and bliss
 - Development of the concept of yoga (path)
 - Makes reference to the sacred syllable, 'om'



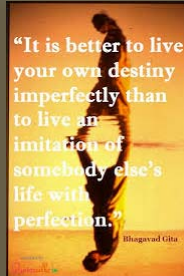
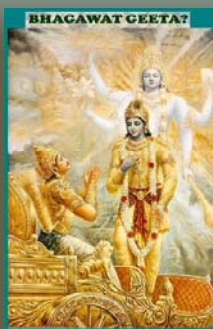
"Om"

"I will tell you the Word that all the Vedas glorify, all self-sacrifice expresses, all sacred studies and holy life seek. The word is OM. That Word is the everlasting Brahman: that Word is the Highest End. When that sacred Word is known, all longings are fulfilled. It is the supreme means of salvation: it is the help supreme."

-From the *Katha Upanishad*

The Bhagavad Gita from *The Mahabharata*

- ⇒ "Song of the Blessed Lord"
 - knowledge, work and devotion are all paths to salvation and that the central value in life is that of loyalty to God
 - Spiritual insight that can transform spiritual life
- ⇒ Setting:
 - Battlefield
 - Arjuna (Krishna in human disguise) does not want to fight his kinsmen, but it is his duty

BHAGAWAT GEETA?

WHO SHOULD READ THE BHAGAWAT GEETA?

- The Young - To learn how to live.**
- The Old - To know how to die.**
- The Ignorant - For wisdom.**
- The Learned - For humility.**
- The Rich - For compassion.**
- The Poor - For comfort.**
- The Dreamer - For enchantment.**
- The Practical - For counsel.**
- The Weak - For strength.**
- The Strong - For direction.**
- The Haughty - For warning.**
- The Humble - For exaltation.**
- The Troubled - For peace.**
- The Weary - For rest.**
- The Doubting - For assurance.**
- The Sinner - For salvation.**
- The Human - For guidance.**

KARMA

- ⇒ Relations among past deeds, present character, and future fate
 - All actions have unavoidable consequences
- ⇒ Reincarnation
 - The soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and is reborn in a new body. The next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived
 - Law that governs advancement or regression in physical world of deaths and rebirths


SAMSARA & MOKSHA

- ⇒ *Samsara*: wheel of birth and rebirth
 - Continues forever
 - Souls reborn until they reach perfection
- ⇒ *Moksha*: the release of the soul from *samsara*
 - From the dissatisfaction of existence
 - Offers freedom from ignorance, brings the truth

RELIGIOUS PATHS for MOKSHA

- ⇒ Karma Yoga: path of work
 - Doing caste duties without hope for reward
 - Selfless duties
- ⇒ Jnana Yoga: path of knowledge
 - Study and learn the lessons of the ancient masters
 - Transformative wisdom

Jnana yoga (knowledge)



"There is a rider who sits serene and motionless in his chariot. Having delegated responsibility for the journey to his charioteer, he is free to sit back and give full attention to the passing landscape. In this image resides a metaphor for life. The body is the chariot. The road over which it travels are the sense objects. The horses that pull the chariot over the road are the senses themselves. The mind that controls the senses when they are disciplined is represented by the reins. The decisional faculty of the mind is the driver, and the master of the chariot, who is in full authority but need never lift a finger, is the Omniscient Self"

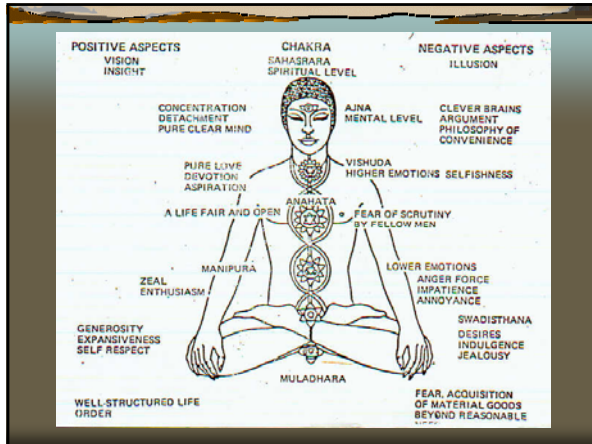
-Explanation from *The Upanishads*

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- ⇒ Raja yoga: path of physical & mental discipline
 - Training the body so the soul can be free
 - Practice five abstentions – from injury, lying, stealing, sensuality, and greed
 - Five observances – cleanliness, contentment, self-control, studiousness and contemplation of the divine
- ⇒ Bhakti Yoga: path of love
 - Devoted love to God
 - Man is dependent on God, surrendering to Him is easiest way of release
 - The last words of the *Gita*: "Letting go all dharma, take refuge in me alone; I shall deliver you from all sins; do not grieve"







"When the five senses and the mind are still, and reason rests in silence, then begins the Path supreme. This calm steadiness of the senses is called Yoga. Then one should become watchful, because Yoga comes and goes... When all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered, then a mortal becomes immortal, and even in this world he is one with Brahman. When all the ties that bind the heart are unloosened, then a mortal becomes immortal. This is the sacred teaching."

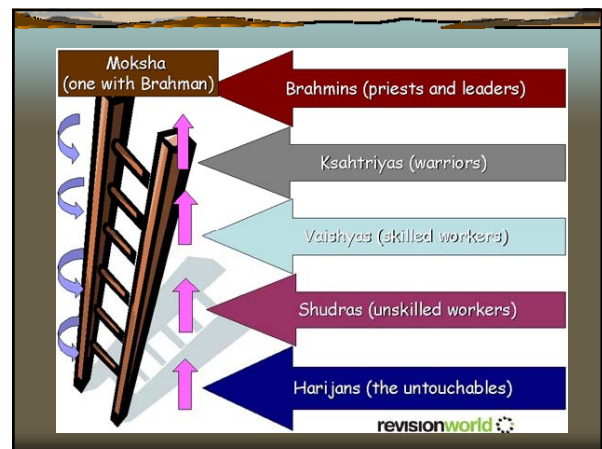
- From *Katha Upanishad*

- ### Main Practices
- Worship every day, follow dharma as best as possible, observe the rites of passage called *samskaras*, celebrate the holidays and festivals, and go on pilgrimages or visit sacred places
 - Hindus worship in temples with a ceremony called *puja*
 - Priests guide the worship
 - Bells, fire, chanting, and offerings of flowers and incense
 - Worship can also include repeating the name of God, singing, and meditation

- ### CASTE SYSTEM
- Sanskrit word is *varna*
 - Indian term is *jati* (means 'colors')
 - Division of social ranks and tasks developed by Aryans during conquest
 - Four categories:
 - The priests (Brahmins)
 - The warriors, nobles (Kshatriyas)
 - The merchants, artisans (Vaisya)
 - Unskilled workers, peasants (Shudra)
 - Untouchables, or out-castes, are excluded additionally (Harijan)
 - Each group has a different set of rules dealing with careers, marriage, diet, etc.

"When they divided Purusha how many portions did they make?
 What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?
 The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made.
 His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced"

Extract from the Rig-Veda (hymn 10.90)



THE PROBLEM FOR HUMANS

- Soul
- Karma
- Wheel of rebirth
- Individual choice

*the same things are the ingredients for the solution

The Laws of Manu

- ⇒ 200 BCE-200 CE
- ⇒ Ideal code of behavior for Hindus
- ⇒ Still have some influence on life today, though not considered "law" anymore

The Four Stages of Life (for men)

1. The student
2. The family man
3. The recluse (Forest Dweller)
4. The wandering holy man (Ascetic)

*For most Hindu people these represent a metaphorical path, not an actual path

*Women follow similar paths and can accompany husbands