

What is Hinduism?



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- ✦ **One of the oldest religions of humanity**
 - ✦ **The religion of the Indian people**
 - ✦ **Gave birth to Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism**
 - ✦ **Tolerance and diversity: "Truth is one, paths are many"**
 - ✦ **Many deities but a single, impersonal Ultimate Reality**
 - ✦ **A philosophy and a way of life – focused both on this world and beyond**

How did Hinduism begin?



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- * No particular founder
 - * Indus River Valley Civilization >5000 years ago
 - * *Aryans* enter 4000 - 3500 years ago
 - * *Vedic* Tradition 3500 – 2500 years ago:
 - ◆ rituals and many gods (polytheism)
 - ◆ sacred texts (Vedas)
 - ◆ social stratification (caste system)
 - * *Upanishads* (metaphysical philosophy) 2800 – 2400 years ago
 - * Vedic Tradition develops into Hinduism

What are the Sacred Texts?



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- ✧ ***Shruti*** (“heard”) – oldest, most authoritative:
 - ◆ Four ***Vedas*** (“truth”) – myths, rituals, chants
 - ◆ ***Upanishads*** - metaphysical speculation
 - ◆ Plus other texts
 - ✧ ***Smriti*** (“remembered”) – the Great Indian Epics:
 - ◆ ***Ramayana***
 - ◆ ***Mahabharata*** (includes ***Bhagavad-Gita***)
 - ◆ Plus others

What do Hindus believe?



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- ✦ One impersonal Ultimate Reality – *Brahman*
 - ✦ Manifest as many personal deities
 - ✦ True essence of life – *Atman*, the soul, is Brahman trapped in matter (“That art thou”)
 - ✦ Reincarnation – atman is continually born into this world lifetime after lifetime (*Samsara*)
 - ✦ *Karma* – spiritual impurity due to actions keeps us bound to this world (good and bad)
 - ✦ Ultimate goal of life – to release Atman and reunite with the divine, becoming as one with Brahman (*Moksha*)

How does Hinduism direct life in this world?



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- ✧ **Respect for all life – vegetarian**
 - ✧ **Human life as supreme:**
 - ◆ **Four “stations” of life (Caste) - priests & teachers, nobles & warriors, merchant class, servant class**
 - ◆ **Four stages of life – student, householder, retired, renunciant**
 - ◆ **Four duties of life – pleasure, success, social responsibilities, religious responsibilities (moksha)**

What are the spiritual practices of Hinduism?



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- ✦ The Four *Yogas* - seeking union with the divine:
 - ◆ *Karma Yoga* – the path of action through selfless service (releases built up karma without building up new karma)
 - ◆ *Jnana Yoga* – the path of knowledge (understanding the true nature of reality and the self)
 - ◆ *Raja Yoga* – the path of meditation
 - ◆ *Bhakti Yoga* – the path of devotion
 - ✦ *Guru* – a spiritual teacher, especially helpful for Jnana and Raja yoga

How do Hindus worship?



✧ ***Bhakti Yoga*** is seeking union with the divine through loving devotion to manifest deities

- **In the home** (household shrines)
- In the Temples (priests officiate)
- ◆ **Puja** – making offerings to and decorating the deity images
- ◆ **Darsan** – “seeing” the deity (*not* idol worship)
- ◆ **Prasad** – taking the divine within your own being through eating of food shared with the deity

Who do Hindus worship? – the major gods of the Hindu Pantheon

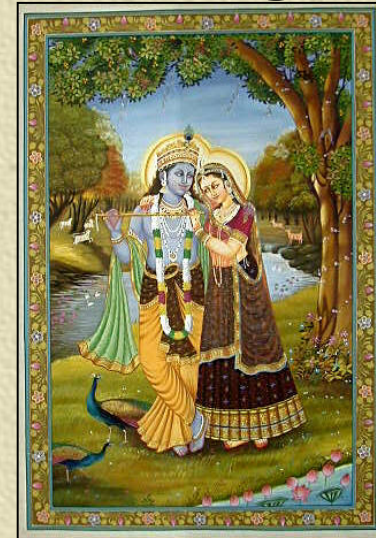


Brahma, the creator god

Who do Hindus worship? – the major gods of the Hindu Pantheon



Vishnu, the preserver god



Incarnates as ten ***avatars*** (descents) including:

Rama (featured in the Ramayana)

Krishna (featured in the Mahabharata)

(Each shown with his consort, ***Sita*** and ***Radha***, respectively)

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Shiva, god of constructive destruction
(the transformer)

Appears as Shiva ***Nataraj***,
lord of the dance of
creation...



and with his wife, ***Parvati***, and son ***Ganesha***
(the elephant headed remover of obstacles)

What about the goddesses?

Devi – the feminine divine

Saraswati, goddess of wisdom, consort of
Brahma



What about the goddesses?

Devi – the feminine divine

Lakshmi, goddess of good fortune,
consort
of Vishnu



What about the goddesses?

Devi – the feminine divine

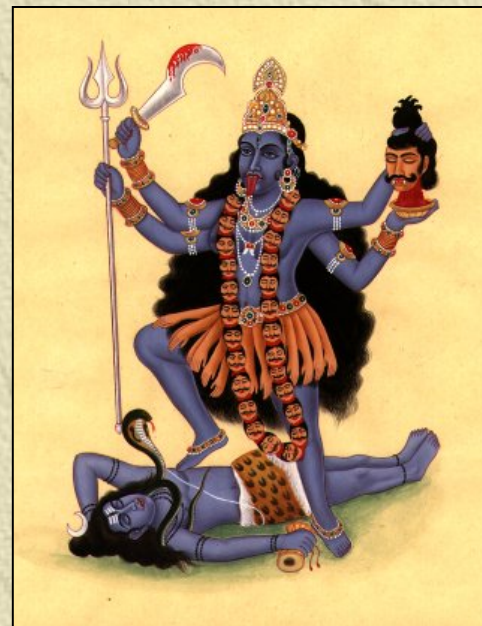
Parvati, divine mother, wife
of
Shiva



What about the goddesses?

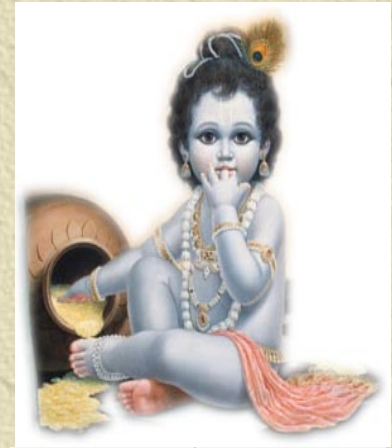
Devi – the feminine divine

Durga, protectress

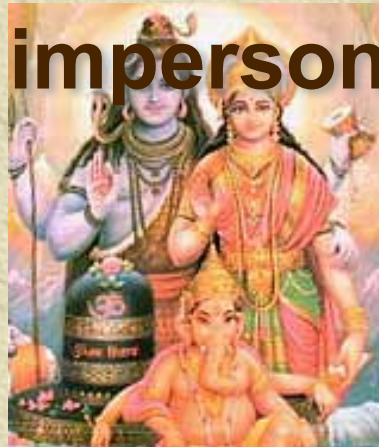


Kali, destroyer of demons

Plus about 330 million other deities



**All these deities are but
Manifest forms
(attributes
and functions) of the
impersonal Brahman**



**And we too are manifest
forms of God!**

**“We are not human beings
having spiritual experiences;
We are spiritual beings
having a human experience!”**

“That art Thou”

Hinduism is about recognizing the all pervasiveness of the divine

Explore Hinduism on the Web:

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- ✦ [The Hindu Universe](http://www.hindunet.org): Lots of information on Hinduism and the Hindu community on-line and around the world. Includes chat rooms and message board forums - **www.hindunet.org**
 - ✦ [The Virtual Hindu Temple](http://www.rajdeepa.com/vmandir/vmandirindex.htm): Contains some interesting and useful pages including: [Discover Hindu Gods & Goddesses](#) and [FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HINDUISM](#). Also contains a gallery of deity images and a [collection of links](#) to Hindu sacred texts online and other sites related to Hinduism - **www.rajdeepa.com/vmandir/vmandirindex.htm**
 - ✦ [Hinduism for Schools](http://www.btinternet.com/~vivekananda/schools1.htm) provides basic, introductory info to teach primary and secondary level students about Hinduism - **www.btinternet.com/~vivekananda/schools1.htm**

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