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## Hinduism

By [Ellen DeWitt](#)

- **When did Hinduism originate?**
- **What is the message of Hinduism?**
- **How does Hinduism compare to the Bible?**

There are approximately 690 million Hindus in 88 countries, comprising 13% of the world's population. The influence of Hinduism in the West, particularly in America, has been far-reaching in the 20th century. Many of the personality cults of the 1960s and 1970s received their impetus from Hindu thought, especially the New Age Movement.

## The History of Hinduism

Hinduism in present-day India is divided into four historical periods:

- The first is dated 3000 to 1500 B.C. in the Indus Valley. They developed the cult of the goddess and the bull.
- The second is dated from 1500 to 700 B.C. when the Aryan people (from Russia and Central Asia) conquered the Indus Valley, bringing their religion with them. Their scriptures, called Vedas, were considered to be "revealed wisdom" and were filled with 1,028 hymns, prayers, and chants, together with many gods and goddesses (polytheism). The religion took the name Hinduism after an old Persian name for the Indus River. The caste system of dividing individuals into five social classes developed in this period. They are: (1) the Brahmins, the

priestly-scholarly caste, (2) the kshatriyas, the warrior-soldier caste, (3) the vaishyas, the agricultural and merchant caste, (4) the sudras, the peasant and servant caste, and (5) the hariyah, the outcasts or untouchables, considered less than human and treated as such. Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in enacting social reform that outlawed <sup>3</sup>untouchability<sup>2</sup> in 1949, but it is still wholeheartedly embraced, especially in southern India.

- The third period is dated from 700 to 300 B.C. is called the upanishadic period, which means "to sit at the feet of." Asceticism (self-denial) and reincarnation were developed at this time. Also new was the rise of the teacher/student or guru/disciple relationship on an intensely spiritual level. Devotees willingly forsook the authority of the Brahmins (priests) to follow a guru who could show the way out of rebirth. Gautama Buddha was a prime example of a nonorthodox ascetic who could instruct one in the path of enlightenment. His path led to a major world religion called Buddhism. [See the Concepts<sup>1</sup> brochure entitled <sup>3</sup>Buddhism.<sup>2</sup>] The Upanishad writings took Hinduism from a vague polytheism (many gods) to pantheism. (Pantheism teaches that god is everything and everything is god. The ultimate god is an impersonal force or spiritual energy field of the universe. It not He. The universe is actually spiritual in nature and continues on through endless cycles, as illustrated in the seasons of the year. Both good and evil flow naturally from god. Truth as well as good and evil are relative not absolute. This is seen in the Star War movies.) The Upanishadic writings teach that the world is an illusion. Everything that lives has an individual soul which is trying to get back to the impersonal god-soul. This may require many reincarnations. One of the means for accomplishing this is from the practice of yoga.
- The fourth period of Hindu history is dated from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. Three gods of power developed. They are the Hindu trinity: Brahma, Vishnu (Krishna being one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu), and Siva (Shee-va), the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe. At this time the Bhagavad Gita (the Song of God) became the most important and popular of all Hindu texts. It describes and philosophizes about a charioteer and his driver. The driver turns out to be Krishna. It stresses intense spiritual devotion.

## Yoga

The word "yoga" comes from the word "yoke" and means to "yoke together" or "unite together" man's individual spirit with the universal spirit which is god or the force. There are basically four paths or types of yoga:

- (1) the way to god through knowledge, uniting the rational and the irrational spirit
- (2) the way to god through love or emotions

- (3) the way to god through work and mental detachment from that work
- (4) the way to god through psychology, self-actualization

## Hinduism vs. the Bible

God: The heart of Hinduism lies in its conception of god, reality, and humankind's relationship to that reality. Brahman is a life-principle or force that resides in all that exists. Hinduism adheres to monism (that all of reality proceeds from this one essence). Yet it is also polytheistic in that it advocates worshiping many lesser deities. Because this one essence is expressed pluralistically in the material universe, Hinduism also adheres to pantheism.

The Hindu conceives of Brahman, not as a separate metaphysical reality but rather as a principle of life that comprises all that exists. That there may be lesser deities does not matter. Brahman is a neuter principle through which and by which all of reality is a part. Brahman is conceived as being nonpersonal yet at the same time indistinct from humanity.

Brahman is also conceived of as being a creator. His creation is new manifestations of reality, which are continuously unfolding.

Vishnu is the preserver of the creations of Brahman. He is worshipped in ten incarnations. They ascend from animal form to human form. They are fish, tortoise, boar, man-lion, dwarf, Rama-with-the-Ax, King Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and the future incarnation, Kalkin.

Fundamental and essential to Christian thought is that God is distinct from His creation. That is inconceivable to the Hindu. The Bible describes God as being one in essence and three in persons. As "Father" God is a personal and loving God. God is the all-powerful Creator, creating the earth within the confines of time and declaring that creation "very good" and complete (Gen. 1:1, 31; 2:1). The Bible describes Jesus as God's only incarnation. Jesus did not come to "preserve" the existing order of things. Rather, through His act of atonement on the cross He brought about reconciliation between God and the creation alienated from God by sin (Colossians 1:15-23).

Siva, the third god of the Hindu triad is called the Destroyer. He is a god who shows mercy, or on a moment's notice becomes the god who destroys. He is unpredictable. The element of eroticism is in Siva worship. He is seduced by the goddess Parvati, who is his source of power.

The Bible offers no correspondence to Siva in its doctrine of the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, far from being a destroyer, is the comforter and guide (John 14:16; 16:7).

Reincarnation and Salvation: Karma is the effect whereby one's actions and deeds result in release from a previous birth to a higher or lower rebirth in the cycle of reincarnation, depending on deeds done in a previous existence. Continuous karma results in rebirth into lower life-forms. Any attempt to intervene in the existing lower classes is believed to be an interruption in the cosmic process. The distinction between good and evil is denied by the Hindu because material reality (and <sup>3</sup>sin<sup>2</sup>) is an illusion. Karma is not sin in the sense of rebellion against God. Rather it is merely a part of one's destiny. Salvation in Hinduism is not the forgiveness of sins committed against God. It is rather a quest to end all earthly suffering, an escape from illusion, and the successful attainment of Nirvana (ultimate enlightenment). Death results in rebirth into another life-form. The rebirth is a necessary and natural consequence of Karma. The Bible, however, says, man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and will exist as an eternal being (Revelation 20:4). There is no reincarnation. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

## Also:

The unique incarnation of God in Christ means that salvation is possible through Christ alone (Romans 3:24, 6:23). Hinduism teaches that all paths lead to God. They believe that some of the great social and political leaders in history were incarnations, such as Jesus and Mahatma Gandhi.

The Ganges River of northern India is the most sacred of all holy places. It has become a goddess in itself and the place where Hindus gather for worship, or to sprinkle the ashes of their own departed loved ones for purifying.

Devotion is a way of life in India, but god is worshipped more domestically than publicly. Meditation is important. Yoga is the most common. Hinduism is tolerant of other systems of thought and non-Hindu religions for the same reason that other religions are intolerant toward it and each other. Each religion's truth is, from its own perspective, the highest of all truths. For Hinduism, the highest of all truths is the truth of all religions. Therefore by definition it adjusts itself to the most divergent thought forms. ["Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult," Zondervan, 1993]

## Questions and Answers

Q: When did Hinduism originate?

A: In 3000 to 1500 B.C. in the Indus Valley.

Q: What is the message of Hinduism?

A: Karma is the effect whereby your actions result in release from a previous birth to a higher or lower rebirth. More karma results in rebirth into lower life-forms and suffering. The final goal is to escape

from the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth. That means the dissolving of all personality into the unimaginable abyss of Brahman (the god-force). This is done through four yogas (knowledge, love, good deeds, or being a monk).

Q: How does Hinduism compare to the Bible?

A: It is totally the opposite of the Bible. The Bible says God is a personal Being not merely a force. There is no reincarnation, and after death comes judgment. Jesus Christ is the only incarnation of God. Salvation and deliverance from sin is only through the blood of Jesus Christ.

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