

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?



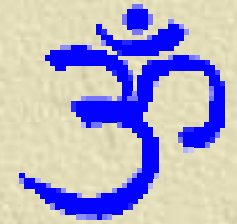
✦ **Shruti** ("heard") – oldest, most authoritative:

- ◆ 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?



✦ 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?



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- ✦ **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

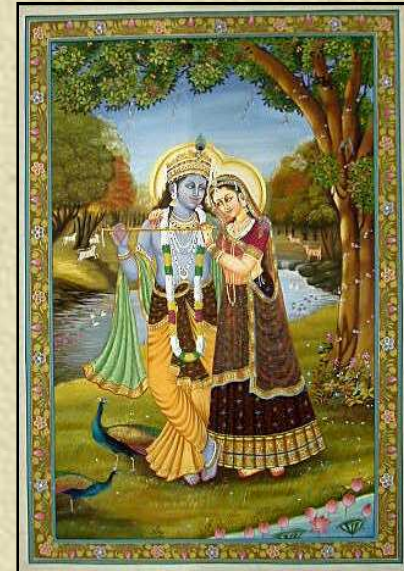


Brahma, the creator god

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)

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

Shiva, god of constructive destruction
(the transformer)

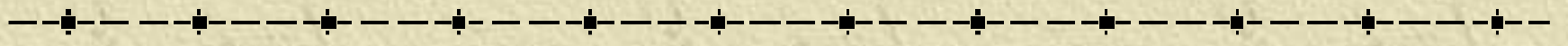
Appears as Shiva **Nataraj**,
lord of the dance of creation...



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

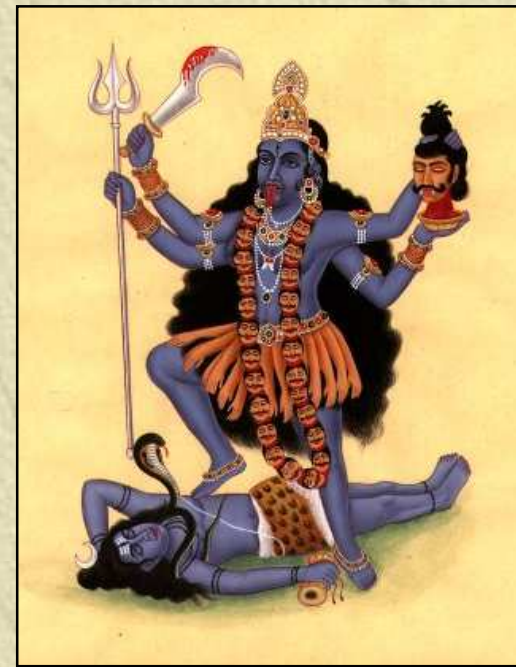
Parvati, divine mother, wife of Shiva



What about the goddesses?

Devi – the feminine divine

Durga, protectress



Kali, destroyer of demons

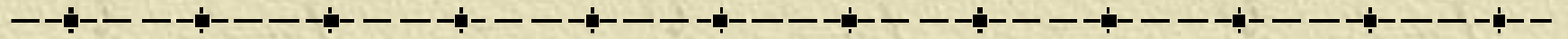
Plus about 330 million other deities



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:

- ✦ [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**