

Hinduism

Part 2 Ancient India & China



Hinduism

Main Idea

The religion of Hinduism developed and evolved over a long time in India, giving rise to a variety of beliefs and practices and to other religions, including Jainism.

Focus

1. What basic teachings do most Hindus share?
2. What are the sacred texts and religious practices of Hinduism?
3. What are the teachings of Jainism?

Key Terms

- Hinduism
- Reincarnation
- Karma
- Moksha
- Dharma
- Yoga
- Jainism
- Ahimsa

Basic Teaching of Hinduism

- One of the world's oldest religions, **Hinduism** is practiced by most people in India today.
- Because it is so old, however, its origins are difficult to trace.
- Unlike other major religions, Hinduism has no founder.
- It evolved over thousands of years and was influenced by the cultures and traditions of many peoples.



Basic Teaching of Hinduism

- Largely because it was influenced by so many cultures, the practice of Hinduism varies widely.
- Practices differ from place to place and even from person to person.
- However, a few fundamental teachings are shared by nearly all Hindus.



Brahman

- Among the most basic tenets of Hinduism is the belief in Brahman, the eternal being that created and preserves the world.
- Hindus believe that everything in the world is simply an aspect of Brahman.
- Because Brahman is all-encompassing, literally including all of creation, many Hindus do not believe that the human mind is capable of understanding it.



Brahman

- That is because people themselves are aspects of Brahman.
- Hindus also believe that each person has an *atman*, or soul, that is an aspect of Brahman.
- A person's *atman* shapes his or her personality and cannot be destroyed, even by death.



Brahman

- Most Hindus believe that various manifestations of Brahman called *devas* (day-vuhs) are active in the world, helping to maintain order in nature.
- For example, Ganesha is considered the lord of wisdom, while Lakshmi grants wealth.
- Like many teachings of Hinduism, people's views of the *devas* vary widely.



Brahman

- For example, many Hindus recognize three *devas*—*Brahma* the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer—as particularly influential.
- Some believe in thousands of *devas*, while others worship only one, usually Vishnu or Siva, as the true manifestation of Brahman.



Brahman

Hindu Beliefs

Hinduism teaches that everything in the world is a power of Brahman, the single great universal being. Most Hindus believe that various aspects of Brahman, called *devas*, are active in the world, helping to keep order in nature. Three of the *devas*, together called the Trimurti, have been particularly influential in the development of Hinduism. ***How do the ways in which the devas are depicted in art reflect their powers and roles in the world?***





◀ Brahma

Brahma the Creator is often depicted with four heads, representing the four *Vedas*.



▶ Vishnu

Vishnu the Preserver holds in each of his four arms one of his symbols.



◀ Siva

Siva the Destroyer is often represented dancing upon the back of a demon, surrounded by a ring of fire.



BASIC HINDU BELIEFS

Dharma	A person's spiritual duties and obligations, which he or she must follow to achieve liberation
Karma	The sum effect of a person's actions, both good and bad, which helps shape future experiences
Moksha	Liberation; release from the cycle of reincarnation, and joining with the atman
Samsara	Reincarnation; the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth a person follows before achieving liberation



Rebirth and Salvation

- Hindus believe that the universe and everyone in it are part of a continual pattern of birth, death, and rebirth.
- After death, they believe that the atman will be released from the body and later reborn in another, a process called reincarnation, or *samsara*.
- The nature of the person's new life will be shaped by his or her karma, the sum effect of his or her deeds and actions during life.



Rebirth and Salvation

- People who have behaved well will have good karma and can be reincarnated to a better station in the next life.
- Conversely, those who have bad karma will have a lower station.
- For Hindus, the ultimate goal of human existence is *moksha*, escape from the cycle of rebirth.
- When a person achieves *moksha*, the *atman* leaves the world and reunites fully with Brahman.
- During their lives, Hindus work toward achieving *moksha* because it releases a person from worldly cares and the difficulties of life on Earth.



Rebirth and Salvation

- The way to achieve *moksha* is to fulfill one's **dharma**, or set of spiritual duties and obligations.
- Individuals' **dharmas** vary based on their class and their station in life.
- Fulfilling one's dharma allows a person to create good karma, to avoid suffering, and, eventually, to break free from the cycle of rebirth.



What is moksha, and how is
it central to Hindu
teachings?



Sacred Texts and Practices

- As you have read, Hinduism has grown and evolved over centuries.
- Much of the religion's evolution stemmed from a number of sacred writings that have been produced during that time.
- These texts influenced not only what people believed about Hinduism, but how they practiced the religion in their own lives.



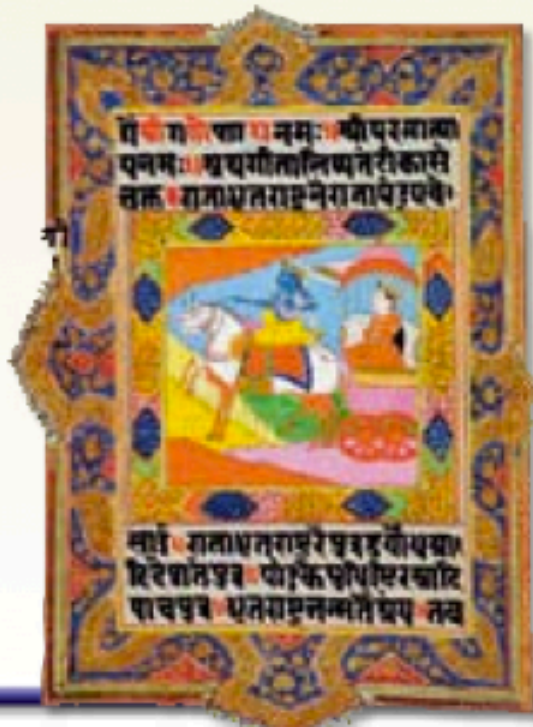
SACRED TEXTS

Bhagavad Gita

About the Reading One of Hinduism's most sacred texts, the *Bhagavad Gita* was written as a dialogue between a warrior named Arjuna and Krishna, an avatar, or human form, of Vishnu. In this passage, Krishna, as a divine being, advises Arjuna about how to obtain *moksha* and eternal happiness.

AS YOU READ

Note how Krishna says one can achieve *moksha*.



An illustrated page from the *Bhagavad Gita* created in the 1700s or 1800s ►

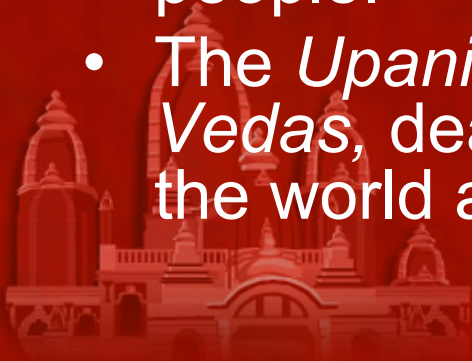
Sacred Texts and Practices

- The teachings and practices of Hinduism are based upon not one but many sacred texts.
- Most of these texts can be sorted into one of three categories:
 - The Vedas
 - Later writings inspired by the Vedas
 - Sacred epics
- The *Vedas*, sacred hymns of praise, were among the earliest sacred texts of Hinduism.



Sacred Texts and Practices

- Hindus consider the *Vedas* to contain eternal knowledge not written by humans but revealed to them by Brahman.
- The written *Vedas*, parts of which date back more than 3,000 years, are considered the core of Hinduism even today.
- As time passed, sacred texts that built upon the *Vedas* appeared in India.
- Some, such as the *Upanishads*, were also believed to have been revealed to rather than written by people.
- The *Upanishads* are philosophical reflections on the *Vedas*, dealing with such questions as the nature of the world and the meaning of life.



Sacred Texts and Practices

- Other sacred texts were based on themes found in the *Vedas* but composed by sages.
- Among them were two sacred epic poems, the *Ramayana* (rah-mah-yuh-nuh) and the *Mahabharata* (muh-hah-bah-ruh-tuh).
- Each of these epics tells a story but at the same time reflects on what it means to live according to Vedic teachings.
- The *Ramayana* tells of the relationship between Rama—the *deva* Vishnu in human form—and his wife Sita.



Sacred Texts and Practices

- For centuries, Rama and Sita have been seen as a model for Hindu couples to follow, both for their devotion to each other and their willingness to obey their dharma.
- The *Mahabharata* tells of a war between two families who want to control part of the Ganges River Valley.
- As it tells the story, the epic also teaches about dharma and proper behavior for rulers, warriors, and others.

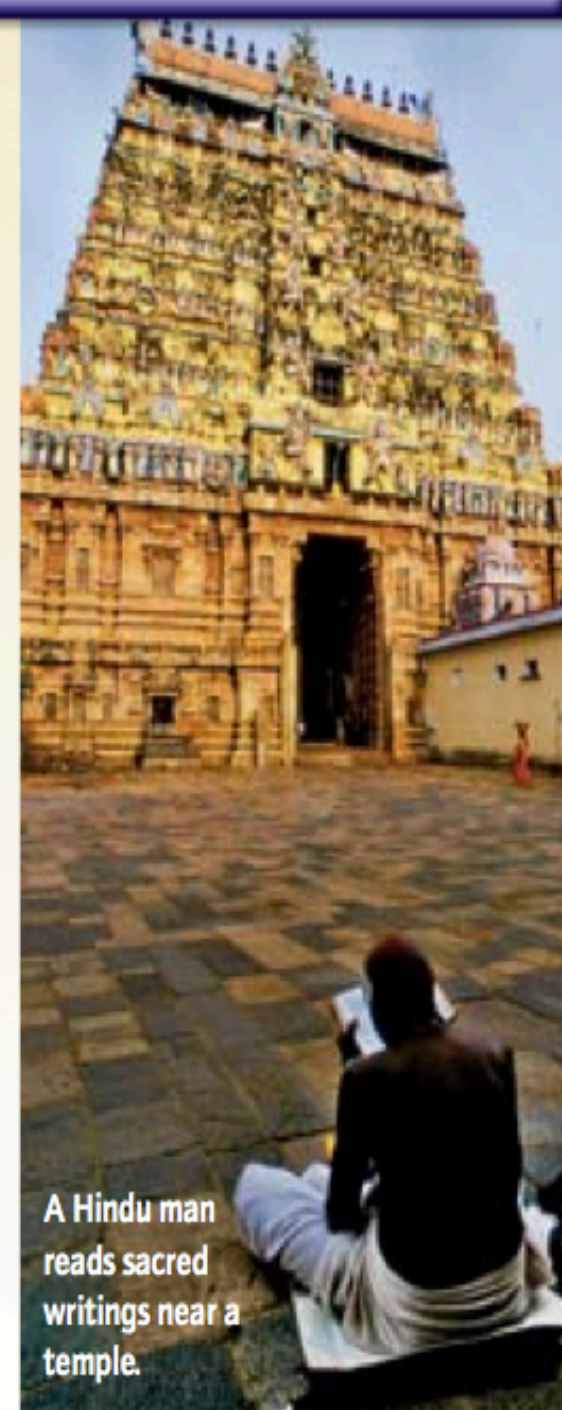


That devotee of mine, who hates no being, who is friendly and compassionate, who is free from egoism, and from (the idea that this or that is) mine, to whom happiness and misery are alike, who is forgiving, contented, constantly devoted, self-restrained, and firm in his determinations, and whose mind and understanding are devoted to me, he is dear to me. He through whom the world is not agitated, and who is not agitated by the world, who is free from joy and anger and fear and agitation, he too is dear to me. That devotee of mine, who is unconcerned, pure, assiduous, impartial, free from distress, who abandons all actions (for fruit), he is dear to me. He who is full of devotion to me, who feels no joy and no aversion, who does not grieve and does not desire, who abandons (both

what is) agreeable and (what is) disagreeable, he is dear to me. He who is alike to friend and foe, as also in honour and dishonour, who is alike in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, who is free from attachments, to whom praise and blame are alike, who is taciturn, and contented with anything whatever (that comes), who is homeless, and of a steady mind, and full of devotion, that man is dear to me. But those devotees who, imbued with faith, and (regarding) me as their highest (goal), resort to this holy (means for attaining) immortality, as stated, they are extremely dear to me.

—*Bhagavad Gita*

Summarize What qualities does Krishna say will help a person achieve eternal happiness when he or she dies?



A Hindu man reads sacred writings near a temple.

Sacred Texts and Practices

- Included within the *Mahabharata* is a passage that many people consider the most sacred of all Hindu texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*.
- The *Gita*, as it is sometimes called, was written as a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and Krishna, again Vishnu in human form.
- Their conversation addresses in great detail many aspects of Hindu belief and philosophy.



Hindu Religious Practices

- Because Hindu beliefs vary so widely, religious practices vary as well. Worship can take place anywhere— in large elaborate temples, in small village shrines, or at home.
- At temples, priests or other spiritual leaders might recite or read portions of the *Vedas* to worshippers.
- Sometimes an image of a *deva* is carried out of the temple and brought before the people.



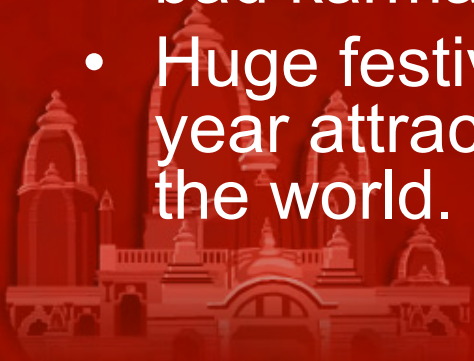
Hindu Religious Practices

- At home, individual worshippers might offer food, drink, or gifts to a *deva*.
- He or she might say special prayers, or meditate, or silently reflect upon the world and its nature.
- To help them meditate, some Hindus also practice a series of integrated physical and mental exercises called yoga.
- The purpose of yoga is to teach people how to focus their bodies and minds, which will aid their meditation and help them attain *moksha*.



Hindu Religious Practices

- At some point during their lives, many Hindus desire to make a pilgrimage, or religious journey, to a holy location.
- Among the places considered sacred by many Hindus is the Ganges River, which is thought to flow from the feet of Vishnu and over the head of Siva.
- Through this contact with two *devas*, the river's waters become holy.
- As a result, many Hindus believe that bathing in the Ganges will purify them and remove some of their bad karma.
- Huge festivals held in towns along the Ganges each year attract millions of Hindu pilgrims from around the world.



Jainism

Beliefs of Jainism

This Jain statue from the 1800s represents a soul that has been freed from the body and achieved *moksha*.



Jainism

- Around 500 BC, a group of Hindus broke away from the religion and founded a new religion called **Jainism** (jyn-iz-uhm).
- Led by a teacher named Mahavira, the Jains thought that most Hindus of the time put too much emphasis on ritual.
- The Jains thought this ritual was unnecessary, because people could achieve *moksha* by giving up all worldly things and carefully controlling their actions.



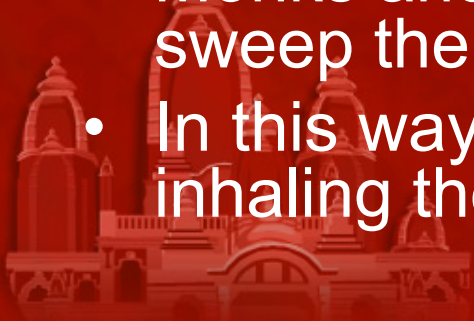
Jainism

- Central to Jain teaching was the idea of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence.
- *Ahimsa* was not a new idea.
- In fact, most Hindus also practiced *ahimsa*, though not to the same extent as the Jains did.
- Jains carefully avoid harming any living creature, from people to insects.
- As a result, Jains are usually vegetarians, refusing to eat meat from any animal.



Jainism

- In addition to renouncing violence, Jains promise to tell only the truth and to avoid stealing.
- They strive to eliminate greed, anger, prejudice, and gossip from their lives.
- Any of these things, they believe, can prevent a person from achieving *moksha*.
- The most devout of Jains give up all of their possessions and become monks or nuns.
- They live outdoors, seeking shelter only during the rainy season.
- Monks and nuns cover their mouths with masks and sweep the ground before them as they walk.
- In this way they avoid accidentally killing insects by inhaling them or by stepping on them.



Jainism

- Most Jains are not monks or nuns.
- However, their pledge to uphold the principles of *ahimsa* leads many Jains to careers that do not involve the harming of animals.
- Jainism calls upon those who are not monks to periodically fast, especially during festivals and on holy days, and to limit their worldly possessions.

