

# Theological Equipping Class

## *Hinduism*

6/14/20

### Introduction: Why Study Hinduism

Complexity and Diversity

### Questions to Explore

1. What is Hinduism?
2. What do Hindus believe about god or gods?
3. What is the Hindu concept of scripture?
4. What is the Hindu concept of salvation?
5. What is reincarnation?
6. What are the roles of castes and stages of life for Hindus?
7. What is the significance of holy times and places in Hinduism?
8. How does Hinduism relate to Christianity?

### What is Hinduism?

Cultural significance

- 1 billion adherents
- Influence on other religions
- Familiar jargon: karma, nirvana, reincarnation, yoga, avatars, mantras

Why is it called Hinduism?

Who founded it and when?

A "family of religions"

Common elements

1. Regard for the vedas
2. Respect for the veneration of the various levels of deities and spirits
3. Reception of the caste system.
4. Belief in reincarnation.

## Hindu Gods

### Complexity

- Personal or impersonal
- Idol worship or not
- Pantheism, polytheism, monotheism, henotheism, atheism, agnosticism

What is henotheism?

Who or what is Brahman?

Ishvara: the personified form of Brahman

Trimurti: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver), Shiva (destroyer)

What are avatars?

A pantheon of gods: 330 million

## Hindu Scripture

### Complexity and diversity

#### Vedas: 1500 to 1000 BC

- Arranged by verses: mantras
- "They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. To what is One, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan."
- Creation: "there was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep? There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond...Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows – or perhaps he does not know."
- Vedas are the fountainhead of Hinduism, but they exert very little practical influence on most Hindus today

#### The Sutras, Brahmanas and the Upanishads

#### Epic Poems: the Ramayana and that Mahabharata

#### Tantras and Puranas

#### Sanskrit: well made

## Salvation

Four goals: *puruṣārtha* (“object of human pursuit”):

1. Pleasure: kama (enjoyment of the material world, and in particular sexual passion)
2. Productivity: artha (the pursuit of material prosperity)
3. Duty: dharma (conducting ourselves in a way conducive to spiritual advancement)
4. Salvation: moksha (liberation from the attachments caused by dependence on the material world and from the cycle of birth and rebirth).

Reincarnation and escape from the cycle

Salvation: not from hell or wrath, but reincarnation

How do you achieve this moksha, this release or liberation?

1. the way of works
2. the way of knowledge
3. the way of devotion

4 primary paths to experience oneness with Brahman

1. Karma Yoga (performing one’s duties selflessly)
2. Bhakti Yoga (loving Brahman through devotion and service)
3. Jnana Yoga (study and contemplating sacred texts)
4. Raja Yoga (physically preparing the body and mind to allow deep meditation and introspection, so as to overcome suffering caused by material attachments)

Reincarnation

Doctrine of Sin?

Karma ("action")

- every action has an equal reaction either immediately or at some point in the future
  - Good actions: actions in harmony with dharma (duty), will have good reactions or responses
  - bad actions; actions against dharma, will have the opposite effect
  
- An unbreakable law of cause and effect
  
- You get what you DESERVE/EARN/MERIT
  - Not fate
  - Not judgment

Reincarnation: *samsara* (wanderings or existence)

- Latter of all life forms
  
- Eternal *atman*
  
- Not looking forward to reincarnation
  
- Uncertainty

- Can't cheat karma
- How to achieve release: duty and knowledge

### Castes and Stages

Varnashram dharma: "duty to god according to caste and stage of life."

### Castes

- Racism
- castes are inflexible. You can't switch castes or marry outside of your caste.

### Four major castes

- First level "twice born"
  - Brahmin or priestly
  - Warrior or ruler
  - Business caste: farmers, traders, and merchants
- Second level: called other backward castes by the Indian government
  - Subcastes
- Third level: Outcastes – *dalit* ("untouchables")

### Stages of life (*ashram*)

1. Student
2. Householder
3. Quiet retreat
4. Homeless wanderer

Dharma depends on varna and ashram.

### Holy times and places

- Diwali
- Holi: festival of colors...
- Onam
- celebrations of various gods

### Holy places

- traditional pilgrimages
  
- holy cities, holy mountains, holy temples, holy rivers, holy tombs

### Christianity and Hinduism

	Hinduism	Christianity
God	Impersonal	Personal
Jesus	One among the many	The second person of the trinity, fully God and fully man
Number of gods	Many	One – the true triune God
Humanity	Extended from the being of god	Separate from and distinct from the being of God, but made in His image distinct from the rest of creation
Problem	Ignorance, karma, reincarnation	Rebellion, sin
Solution	Liberation from reincarnation	Forgiveness, redemption
Means	Striving, working, self-effort	Faith and repentance
Outcome	Nirvana: merge into oneness, loss of self, individual disappears	Eternal life with God

Scripture	Many books of varying levels of authority; inspired only in the sense of inspirational	One book with 66 books of inspired divine authority
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