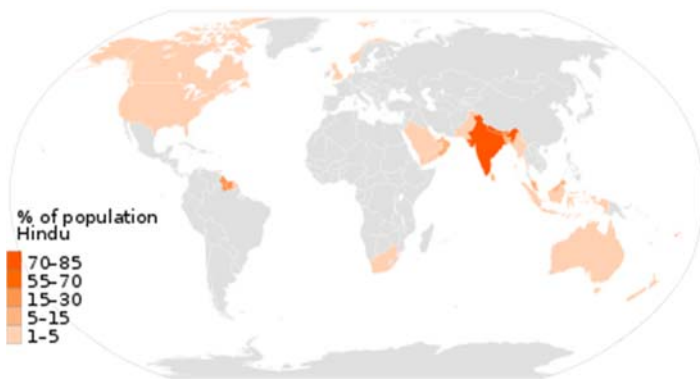


Hinduism



Origin/Founder: Hinduism is the oldest and most complex of all religions. It has no central founder or specific origins. The word *Hinduism* derives from the Indus River Valley (the location of modern-day India), one of the earliest civilizations to teach this religion. India is also the location of the Ganges River, the holiest site in Hindu tradition.



History: Hinduism evolved over thousands of years in India & Nepal, with many different influences. The earliest forms of the religion (its roots) are believed to date back as far as 3000 BC. Development of the religion continued when the Indo-Aryans, nomadic hunters that invaded India around 1500 BCE, brought sacred scriptures that were first sung then later written in Sanskrit.

Symbols: *Aum*, also known as *OM*, is the most important symbol in Hinduism. It is made up of three Sanskrit letters- A, U, and M. All the major Hindu mantras start with *Aum*. *Aum* represents Brahma, the One Supreme Being believed to have created the universe. It is believed to be the sound heard at the beginning of time.



Tenets: Hindu worship, or *puja*, involves images, or icons, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple. Puja is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity. The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where offerings are made and prayers are said. Worshippers repeat mantras (prayers) and offer water, fruit, and other gifts to their favorite gods and goddesses.

All Hindus believe that everyone should strive to achieve a balanced *dharma*, the good conduct, moral law, and righteousness that directly affects your karma. Your *karma* is considered to be good or bad depending on what you have carried with you from your past life and what you shall be rewarded or punished for in your current or next life.



Hindus observe many different rituals, traditions, and festivals. *Diwali*, the Hindu festival of lights, is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia. It is celebrated over five days and commemorates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. For most Hindus, Diwali honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Deity: Hindus are polytheistic; they believe in many gods, three specifically that are a form of the One Supreme Being, Brahma. Brahma and his Goddess, Gayatri, both created the world.



Vishnu is the god of preservation or protector of the universe.

When darkness over crosses its limit and dharma is in peril, Vishnu will reincarnate himself and save the earth to protect the good people from evil. Hindus believe that Vishnu has come 9 times, and the 10th is to come soon or has already begun. He controls all the avatars (Krishna). He is considered to be the embodiment of goodness and mercy.

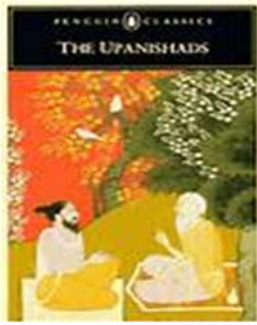
Shiva, also known as the transformer, is the god of destruction and reaction however, Shiva is not considered to be an evil figure. He makes change impossible by destroying the old elements or people in the world so they can be reincarnated.



Afterlife: Reincarnation is the belief that the soul is reborn based on the good (or bad) works a person does in current life, aka *karma*. Hindus believe that souls are not created or destroyed, and change bodies as we change clothes. Souls will become a part of nature or another human in the next life. Cows are considered to be sacred because that is one of the reincarnations a soul will experience; due

to this belief, beef is not eaten.

Scriptures: Vedas, brought by the Aryans and written in Sanskrit, are the oldest Hindu scriptures, believed to define truth for Hindus. They believe that the texts were received directly from Brahma and passed on to the next generations by word of mouth.



The Upanishads, mostly composed between 800-200 BCE, are a Vedic text. They reshaped Hinduism by providing believers with philosophical knowledge, especially in regards to human salvation. Central to the Upanishads is the concept of *brahman*, the sacred power which molds reality.

The Bhagavad Gita tells 700 verse story of Krishna and describes the Caste System. The Bhagavad Gita, or "Song of the Lord", is considered to be the world's longest poem. It is one of the most popular Hindu texts, known as a *smriti* (the remembered tradition). In the text, Krishna points out that knowledge, work and devotion are all paths to salvation and that the central value in life is that of loyalty to God.