



# India

Lesson 4

Religions of India

**Religions in India:** Hinduism 80.5%, Muslim 13.4%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.9%, other 1.8%, unspecified .1%

Religions in India. Information taken directly from the following website:  
<http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/religion/hinduism.htm>

This website gives questions and answers to help understand Hinduism. Following are some of the topics covered. If you would like more information please check out the website.

**Hinduism is the world's third most popular religion, with around 750 million followers.** (updated numbers about 950 million) The religion of Hinduism originated in Northern India, near the river Indus, about 4000 years ago and is the world's oldest existing religion. Hinduism is practiced by more than 80% of India's population.

<b>Place of Origin</b>	India
<b>Founder</b>	Developed out of Brahminism
<b>Sacred Text</b>	<a href="#">Vedas, Upanishads</a>
<b>Sacred Building</b>	<a href="#">Mandir</a>
<b>Major Festivals</b>	<a href="#">Diwali</a>
<b>Holy Place</b>	River Ganges is one of many holy places

### **Who is the founder of Hinduism?**

Hinduism has no founder, it developed out of Brahminism. Hinduism is the oldest religion, it may date to prehistoric times.

### **Where does the name Hindu come from?**

The word "Hindu" comes from the name of the river Indus, which flows 1800 miles from Tibet through Kashmir and Pakistan to the sea.

### **How is Hinduism different from other faiths?**

Hinduism has no founder, single teacher nor any prophets. Hinduism is not a Single Religion. Hinduism is the practices of a variety of different religious groups which come out of India.

### **What do Hindus believe?**

For many Hindus, religion is a matter of practice rather than of beliefs. It's more what you do, than what you believe. Hindus believe in a universal soul or God called Brahman. Brahman takes on many forms that some Hindus worship as gods or goddesses in their own right. **Hindus believe that there is a part of Brahman in everyone and this is called the Atman.**

**Hindus believe in reincarnation** - a belief that the soul is eternal and lives many lifetimes, in one body after another. The soul is sometimes born in a human body, sometimes in an animal body and sometimes in a plant body etc.. Hindus believe that all forms of life contain a soul, and all souls have the chance to experience life in different forms.

**Samsara** means going through the cycle of repeated births and deaths (reincarnation). **Hindus believe that existence of this cycle is governed by Karma.**

### **What is Karma?**

**Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and its next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived.** (Similar to [Buddhist](#) beliefs) Karma is the cause of our particular destiny. Misfortunes in our present life are the result of acts that we have committed in the past. In the same way, our actions in our present lives will determine our fate in the lives that follow. Hindus therefore aim to live in a way that will cause each of their lives to be better than the life before.

### **What is Moksha?**

**The spiritual goal of a Hindu is to become one with Brahma.** This freedom is referred to as moksha. Until moksha is achieved, a Hindu believes that he/she will be repeatedly reincarnated in order that he/she may work towards self-realization of the truth (the truth being that only Brahman exists, nothing else).

### **What is the Hindu way of life?**

**For many Hindus there are four goals in human life** (purusharthas);

1 **Moksha** - the release of the soul (Atman) from the cycle of rebirth.

The individual soul (Atman) unites with Brahman the universal soul. There are different ways to Moksha.

- spiritual - involves acquiring spiritual knowledge through yoga and meditation. devotion to god
- working selflessly for the good of society.

How a person is reincarnated is determined by karma.

2 **Dharma** - the code for leading one's life.

Respect for elders is considered important and many consider marriage as a son's religious duty.

3 **Artha** - the pursuit of material gain by lawful means.


4 **Karma**- through pure acts, knowledge and devotion, you can reincarnate to a higher level. The opposite achieves the contrary result.

**Why are there so many Hindu Gods?**

**Hindus actually only believe in one God, Brahman**, the eternal origin who is the cause and foundation of all existence. The gods of the Hindu faith represent different forms of Brahman. These gods are sent to help people find the universal God (Brahman).

Most Hindus have a personal god or goddess such as Shiva, Krishna or Lakshmi to whom they pray regularly.

**The three most important Hindu gods (forms of Brahman) are:**

		
<p><b>Brahma</b> - known as the Creator.</p>	<p><b>Vishnu</b> - Known as the Preserver</p>	<p><b>Shiva (Siva)</b>- known as the Destroyer.</p>

**Other Hindu gods include:**

**Saraswathi** - Goddess of Wisdom - Wife of Lord Brahma. Saraswathi is the Hindu goddess of knowledge, music and all the creative arts.

**Lakshmi** - Goddess of Wealth - Wife of Lord Vishnu.

Lakshmi is the goddess of light, beauty, good fortune and wealth.

**Parvati** - regarded as a representation of *Shakti*. Parvati is the wife of Lord Shiva and the Goddess of household and motherhood.

(Shakti is by literal definition sacred force, power, or energy. Shakti is the personification of Brahman as feminine)

**Ganesha** - Son of Shiva and Parvati.

The Hindu god in a human form but with the head of an elephant.