A serene night landscape featuring a starry sky, a forest of evergreen trees, and a body of water reflecting the scene. The word "HINDUISM" is prominently displayed in the center in a glowing, white, outlined font.

HINDUISM



HINDUISM

Hindus believe that the world has been created and destroyed countless times

The universe goes through continuous cycles of creation and destruction that repeat like four seasons

When our present world cycle ends, another will be created

These cycles will continue indefinitely, and the current cycle is called Kali.

It is characterized by darkness, vice, and short life spans

It lasts 432,000 years and will eventually be replaced by a longer and more stable cycle called Satya, followed by Treta, Dvapara, and then another Kali



ORIGIN

Those who practice Hinduism insist that it has always existed

The religious language of Hinduism is called Sanskrit

In this language, Hinduism is called “Sanatana Dharma” which means “the eternal religion”

In line with this, Hinduism does not recognize a founder or religious leader

ORIGIN

Hinduism as it currently exists is a melding of four periods or layers:

- Indus Civilization
- The Vedic Period
- The Wisdom or Philosophical Tradition
- Devotional Hinduism



INDUS

Indus Civilization is the birthplace of Hinduism

It is the eclectic religious practices of the peoples in northwest India and Pakistan

As those practices spread through the Indian subcontinent, Hindu became a “catch-all” label for those not Buddhist, Jainist, Sikh, or Christian



VEDIC

The Vedic period is what gave rise to the caste system:

- Priests (Brahmins) – Study and teach the Vedas
- Warriors (Kshatriyas) – Protect and govern people
- Merchants (Vaishyas) – Take care of business
- Servants (Shudras) – Serve those in the above castes
- Untouchables (Dhalits) – No status

It was also during this period that the first of the four Vedas was composed

The Rig Veda would have been composed around the time of Moses



WISDOM


The Wisdom or Philosophical tradition gives rise to the beliefs many associate with Hinduism

This includes concepts such as reincarnation, karma, and advaita or non-duality, the doctrine that all is one and nothing is separate from another being

These teachings are distilled into four truths called The Great Contemplations:

- Consciousness is Brahman
- I am Brahman
- You are Brahman
- The self and Brahman are one

[Brahman is the Divine Essence, by the way]



DEVOTION

Today, the most common form of Hinduism is what may be referred to as devotional or bhakti Hinduism

It is about the average man or woman devoting his or her life to a god without leaving the comforts of life

All you have to do in this life is to choose whichever god you want to be devoted to and then be obedient to him or her

Your choice doesn't matter since each god is a different manifestation of the same True Reality: Brahman



WRITINGS

Unlike Islam or Christianity, whose Scripture canons are closed and relatively small, the sacred writings of Hinduism are enormous and ongoing

They are broken into two main categories:

- Shruti (“that which is heard”)
- Smrti (“that which is received”)

The former are older and are believed to have been intuited by seers

The latter are written and formulated by mere humans

WRITINGS

The writings included in the Shruti are:

- Vedas (4 ritual works)
- Brahmanas (Instructions for priests)
- Sutras (Instructions for all people)
- Laws of Manu (Instructions for all people)
- Upanishads (Philosophical meditations)

The writings includes in the Smrti are:

- Mahabharata (Epic of war between tribes)
- Bhagavad Gita (Vital section of previous)
- Ramayana (Epic story about Rama)
- Puranas (Stories about various gods)



BELIEFS

Hinduism is less about a set of doctrines and timeless beliefs and more about what one makes of it

Although Hinduism is probably the most diverse of all world religions, there are a certain set of core beliefs that most Hindus would agree with:

- The existence of one all-pervasive Supreme Being
- The divinity of the four Vedas
- The endless cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution that the universe goes through
- Karma, the law of cause and effect in which you create your own destiny
- The reincarnation of the soul until all karmas have been resolved and moksha is achieved



BELIEFS

- Divine beings exist in unseen worlds and can be communicated with
- It is necessary to have an enlightened master, or satguru, to know the Transcendent Absolute, as well as personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation, and surrender to the divine
- All life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and the practice of ahmisa (non-injury) necessarily follows
- No religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others



GODS

Ultimately, Hindus can fall on a spectrum concerning their belief in the divine:

- There is one God, and all others are manifestations of the true God
- There are many gods
- There is no god, just our own imagination conceiving of different gods

Although there are countless gods (Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Parvati, Kali), they are typically understood as manifestations of the one true God



WORSHIP

Hindus do not have a prescribed time or worship

Many have their own personal shrines at home and so do not attend a public worship service

In terms of worship practices, there are three main paths or yogas (“yokes”) to God:

- Karma yoga (path of action)
- Bhakti yoga (path of devotion)
- Jnana yoga (path of knowledge)



WORSHIP

The most popular is bhakti yoga, which has four main “denominations”:

- The school of Vishnu (venerates Vishnu, his wife Lakshmi, and Vishnu’s incarnations such as Krishna and Rama)
- The school of Shiva (venerates Shiva, his wife Parvati and their son Ganesha)
- The school of Shakti (venerates Kali and Durga, consorts of Shiva)
- The school of Smarta (venerates any number and combination of gods)

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