April 6, 2025

**World Religions: Hinduism**

**Introduction**: Three Types of Persons, three paths:

* Irreligious
* Religious
* Gospel

**Hinduism Overview**

1. Third largest religion in world (900m, 2.5m in USA)
2. No founder, no overall creed- tremendous diversity, difficult to generalize, contradictions

“A man may not believe in God & still be a Hindu”.

1. The term “Hinduism” was applied by outsiders to all religious practices in Indus Valley “umbrella” term…. “family of religions”
2. Hinduism is more of a smorgasbord than a sit-down menu experience.

**Eastern v Western Mindset**

**Origins of Hinduism**

2000 BC- Aryans (Noble Ones) cross into Indus Valley Civilization & assimilation occurs. The outcome is the Vedic Age, the oldest Hindu texts (written in sanskrit)- The Vedas (4). Indus Valley Civilization declined, population migrated south taking their religious practices with them. The essence of Hinduism is assimilation: all ways lead to truth. Rig Veda: “Truth is One; the wise call it by many names.” Later, the Upanishads are added to 4 Vedas.

Additional Sanskrit epics include The Mahabharata & Ramayama.

**Important Vocabulary**

* Atman= true inner self, soul
* Samsara- complete process of birth, life, death, rebirth (reincarnation)
* Moksha- liberation, uniting the Atman to the Godhead
* Brahman- Godhead, ultimate reality
* Brahma- the creator god (one of many)
* Brahmin- priest caste (upper of four castes)
* Maya- illusion, our experience is not reality
* Yoga- to yoke… to unite

**Significant Features**

* Humans Are Layered with Atman (soul) in center covered by the world which creates Maya
* For your Atman to be liberated (Moksha) from the Samsara cycle, one must practice yoga
* Four Types of Yoga:

1. **Jnana** Yoga- “path of knowledge”. Practiced by intellectual, philosophical individuals. It includes asking deep questions & usually requires a GURU (teacher)
2. **Bhakti** Yoga- “path of devotion”. Worship of a deity- singing hymns (from the Vedas), prayer, making sacrifices. Practiced by the average person or emotionally inclined.

“The Vedas cannot show you Brahman, you are that already. They can only help to take away the veil that hides the truth from our eyes.” -Adi Shankara, Hindu Philosopher

1. **Karma** Yoga- “path of action”. According to Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, Karma yoga is “unselfish action practiced for the benefit of others.” One’s actions are spelled out by your Dharma (moral law)- determined by your caste & stage of life. This is the idea that your deeds will help you reach Moksha. Open to all practitioners.
2. **Raja** Yoga- “chief/king path”. Using meditation/altered state of consciousness to draw insights leading to Moksha. Available to the more intellectual individuals.

**Hindu Beliefs-**

1. **Deities**

There are thousands/millions of deities in Hinduism & those who worship usually choose one to become a devotee (henotheism). The three leading deities (Trimurti):

Brahma- creator

Vishnu- preserver

Shiva- destroyer

Worship/devotion of any deity is worship of all deities since Hindus believe all deities are ONE GODHEAD

However, belief in deities is not required of a Hindu

“a man may not believe in God & still be a Hindu” -Mohandas K Gandhi

1. **Reincarnation**

SAMSARA-cycle of birth, life, death, rebirth…..which one goes through countless times until one reaches MOKSHA (liberation from the cycle). ATMAN is separated from Brahman & trapped in Samsara. God has given us a longing to have relationship with Him.

“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” Hebrews 9:27

The Bible deals with resurrection in 1Cor 15. Certainly it is not samsara.

1. **Karma**

Universal law of cause & effect. Following one’s dharma brings good Karma. The effects of your actions will impact you in this life, or the next.

God has implanted us with a sense of justice. Fortunately, Grace>Karma

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and [[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%202%3A8-9&version=NASB#fen-NASB-29225a)]this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Eph 2:8-9

1. **Ahimsa**

Ahimsa (non-violence) leads Hindus to practice vegetarianism (to avoid animal death). Reverence for the Cow (and in some cases others such as rats).

Gandhi’s actions were consistent with Ahimsa & inspired Amer. Civil Rights protests.

**Features of Hinduism**

1. **Caste System**- scholars debate whether this is from scripture or social customs.

1947-the caste system was legally abolished, but not socially.

Each Caste developed its own dharma (code of behavior), including marrying within your own caste. There may have been a racial aspect to the system.

The 4 Varnas

* Brahmin- priests
* Kshatriya- government officials & bureaucrats
* Vaisha- farmers, skilled laborers, merchants
* Shudra- unskilled, manual laborers

Below the Castes= Dalits, untouchables

1. **Ascetism** is revered in traditional India. The beggar, sadhu, swami is a high calling for an individual. Traditional Hindu beliefs renounce materialism which creates a modern conflict in India today.
2. **Death of Hindu**- Bodies are burned on funeral **Pyre,** preferably on the Ganges River. If possible, the pyre is on a **Ghat.** Though illegal today, the traditional practice of Sati (widow burning) traditionally occurred.
3. **Prasada** is food that has been blessed by a deity. This food is believed to give spiritual as well as physical nutrition to the consumer.

**Homework:** Consider how Hindu ideas & practices have impacted modern American society. Let’s discuss this to begin next class.