

**God in Other Cultures:
Hinduism**

**Session 2, Feb 10
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Brief review, questions

- Have you had any insights or conversations with others as a basis of last week's session?
- Has the Lord brought someone to mind to pray for?
- Questions?

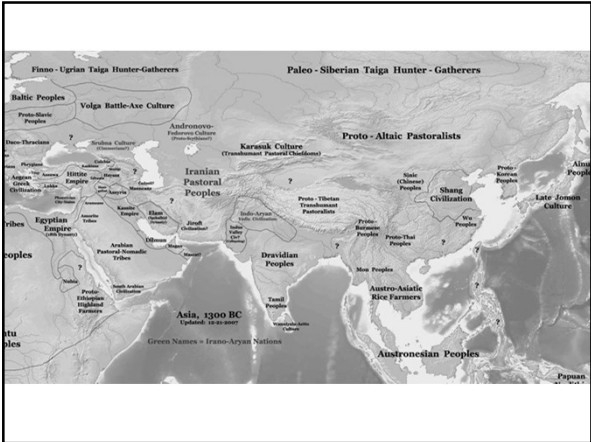
Basis for overview of religions

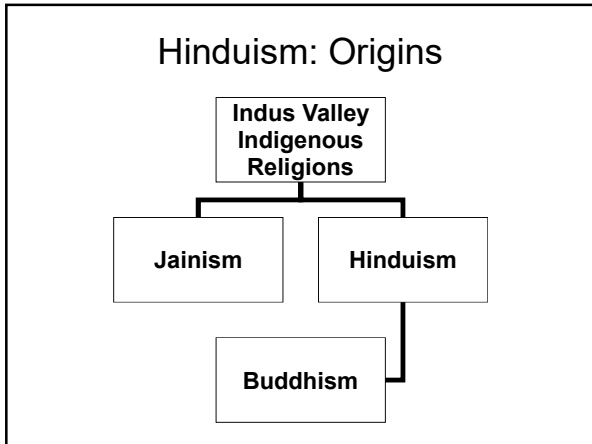
But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

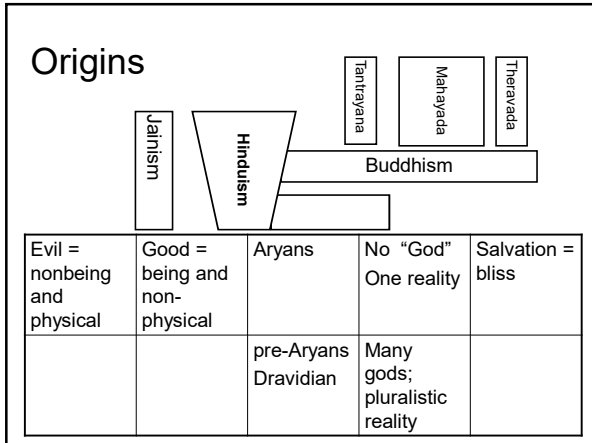
1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

“caught more than taught”

- Main Points**
- Origins
 - Sacred Writings
 - “God” – Brahman/Atman
 - Reincarnation – Karma
 - Moksha







Origins

- Generally these people felt that religion was to keep things on the right path
- After Aryan influx, society began to stratify around **varna** or color
 - Probably reflected both the assertiveness and the skin color of the invaders
 - Developed later into the **caste** system.

Five "Caste" Categories

- Brahmin – power class; priests, spiritual and intellectual leaders
- Kshatriya – rulers, warriors, nobles who protected and administered for material welfare
- Vaisya – farmers, traders, merchants who create wealth
- Sudra – servants, laborers
- Chandalas – “untouchables”

Sacred Writings

- **Shruti** – heard or revealed knowledge
 - came first
 - At first were oral traditions, later were written
 - The Vedas in four parts: **Rig-Veda**, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda and Atharva-Veda
 - **Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upandishads, and the Vedanta** comprise the rest of the shruti
- **Smriti** – remembered revelation
 - Contain much of the literature and story of Hindu belief

Rig-Veda

- Most well-known, most used
- Often found in bookstore religion sections
- Something of a “worship manual”
- Contains some of the “god” stories

“GOD” – Brahman/Atman

Worldview: the Absolute

- Imagines of Hindu gods not meant literally
- no gods / many gods conflict
 - Many gods for those who are at that level
 - No gods for those who have moved to that level
 - Brahman is the ground for all gods
 - Bottom line: there in only one “divine”; all gods are manifestations of powers

Worldview: the Absolute

- *Henotheism* = one superior god in presence of lesser gods
- There is more to the universe than the visible
- The divine can be **experienced** in a variety of ways

“That One”

- Underlying unity behind all phenomenon
- Deities are not creators of the universe but only components of it and...
- Divine expressions of the cosmic **order**

“That One”

- Before anything, there was “That One” – the generative principle and impelling force behind all creation.

Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma

- Command highest respect of all the thousands of Hindu deities
- **Shiva** – the Destroyer – is most popular
 - Mix of opposites: death, destruction and disease and dance and reproduction
 - Consort is Kali – also a mix of opposites
 - Imaged as reproductive organs, phallic symbols, or necklace of miniature human skulls

Shiva



Vishnu

- Vishnu – the Preserver
- God of love and benevolence
- Concern for people has led him to appear in avatar form nine times so far

Vishnu



Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma

- Has appeared in human form as Krishna (as in the Beatles song) and Gautama, the Buddha
- Faith in Vishnu is basically “monotheistic”
- Consort is Lakshmi – associated with luck, wealth, fertility, well-being, royalty and political power
 - Most popular of Hindu goddesses today

Brahma – the Creator

- Oldest and least worshipped (of the 3)
- Nature and society come from Brahma
- Image is of one of four faces, riding a white goose or swan
- Consort Sarasvati – associated with wisdom, knowledge and culture



Brahma

GOD – Brahman/Atman

- Sacred writings reflect on humanity's place in the universe and on the understanding of **Brahman** and **Atman**
- **Brahman** = the Absolute, behind the changes of the universe

GOD – Brahman/Atman

- **Atman** = essence of Brahman in every person – the universal self
- In reality, Brahman and Atman are the same; it is **Maya** (illusion) that creates the separation
- The Upanishads are the teachings of "psychological sacrifice" needed to unite the Atman and Brahman

Worldview: Humans

- Life in this body is only one chapter in a volume of the life of a soul
- Appearance hints at what we have been or will be but is appropriate to the now
- Karma is paramount: people get exactly what they deserve
 - While fatalistic, in this life one can change what one will become

Worldview: Human Problem

- Karma does not end with this body's life
- A person is responsible for the conditions in this life
- A person cannot change the effects of the past
- A person is free to change thoughts and actions now to alter future lives

Worldview: Solutions

- Human solution is harmony with the Brahman
 - Harmony is overcoming life's polar tensions
 - Harmony is according to the law of karma
 - There are no shortcuts
 - Four paths to salvation are the ones that produce the right kind of good actions
 - Meritorious acts are fueled by devotion to gods/spiritual values
 - Assistance from deity is needed

Worldview: life after death

- Each soul is indestructible
- **Samsara** -- Each soul will endure death of the body and rebirth into another body
- Distinctive personality is manifestation of karma and the result and cause of rebirth

Reincarnation

- The person or Atman goes through numerous rebirths until it is worthy to join Brahman
- This reincarnation is determined by the laws of karma
 - A person's thoughts and deeds are followed eventually by deserved pleasure or pain – EVERYTHING has a consequence

How does one get out of the cycle, escape reincarnation?

(Yes, you want to escape it!)

Moksha

- The release of Atman from the body so that it can join Brahman
- There are levels of joining
- Highest level of joining is absorption

Karma and Samsura

- Karma is the physical matter that “sticks” to your Atman, thus forming the body you have
- Samsura is the cycle of rebirth that the law of karma produces
- One gets the body that is appropriate to the karma of the person

Appeals of Hinduism

- Based on erroneous understandings
 - The part of reincarnation that implies “second chance”
 - The part of karma that emphasizes “cause/effect” or “just desserts” or “consequences”
 - More than one “path”

extras

Paths to Moksha

1. Karma yoga – yoke of work
 - The intention or motivation behind the work is more important than the result of the work
 - Work appropriate to caste duties
2. Jnana yoga – path of knowledge
 - No doubt in what is learned; the separation between Atman and Brahman is illusion
 - Therefore, one must learn renunciation

Paths to Moksha

3. Raja yoga – physical and mental discipline
 - requires celibacy
4. Bhakti yoga – way of devotion or love
 - attaining union with the god a person loves is the highest goal of living
 - suffering is the process through which people fight for their true nature – union with the Brahman-Atman

Developments

- India has been invaded numerous times
- Most recently by Persians, Greeks, Arabs and Europeans
- Impact of Islam was syncretic at first but that is no longer found among Muslims in India

Developments

- Christianity came in the first century CE but did not impact India until the arrival of Portuguese and then Dutch, British and French
- Notable adaptations of Christianity
 - Sri Ramakrishna found 'Ramakrishna' movement
 - Swami Sivananda – organized Divine Life Society

Responses to Western Influence

- Gandhi – reformer
 - Neither embraced nor rejected Western culture
 - Influenced by Isha Upanishad and by the teachings of Jesus
 - *Satyagraha* – truth force
 - *Ahimsa* – non-injury, non-violence
 - *Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7)*
 - Before anyone can correct the world, they must correct themselves
