



Hinduism key facts

You are expected to know all of the information in this booklet.
You will be assessed on this knowledge.

Hinduism – an introduction

- Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world.
- The word 'Hindu' comes from a river called the Indus that flowed through the area of north west India where Hinduism developed.
- Unlike many other religions, there was not one person who founded Hinduism, nor was there one specific moment when it began. Hinduism developed among many different people over a long period of time across a very large area. The different people had different ideas.
- Hinduism is very diverse – Hindus do not all believe the same things or celebrate the same festivals or read the same sacred texts.
- Many Hindus believe that other religious beliefs may be equally true and so they do not try to convert others to Hinduism.

Sacred texts

- There is no one book that tells Hindus what to believe or how to live: there are many different books that Hindus can choose to read, or choose not to read.
- Nearly all Hindus believe that the four Vedas are sacred and revealed by God. These are the oldest Hindu texts.
- The Vedas are written in Sanskrit.
- The Vedas include hymns to Hindu gods and goddesses as well as teachings about the soul and afterlife and detailed instructions on how to worship and how to perform rituals.
- The Vedas tell us what Hindus believed and how they worshipped 3000 years ago. Hindus believe that the Vedas were passed on so accurately that they are almost like a recording of what people were reciting 3000 years ago.
- The Vedas are sometimes called shruti, which means 'heard' because this is how Hindus believe the Vedas were first received.
- The people who received the Vedas were called Rishis. They were great meditators and this allowed them to see and hear things that ordinary people could not.
- After the Rishis heard the Vedas they taught them to priests who memorised them and recited them to the next generation. This continued for many centuries.
- The first of the four Vedas, the Rig Veda, says 'Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions' which shows that Hindus should welcome good ideas wherever they come from and that they are comfortable with diversity.

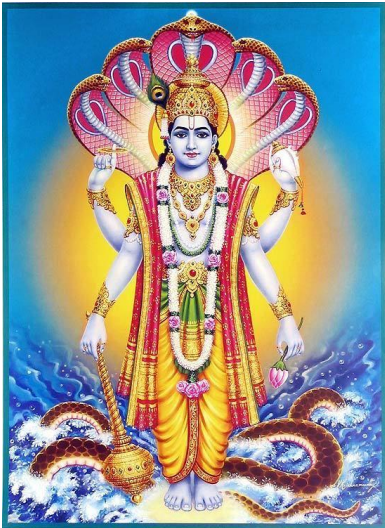
Hindu beliefs about God



***The Trimurti
Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva***

- Many Hindus believe that God has lots of different forms so there are many different ways to worship God. Hindus often worship different gods.
- Many Hindus today are monotheists and they believe that there is one supreme God who appears to humans in many different forms. Some Hindus believe that there are three main gods – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. These three gods are sometimes referred to as the Trimurti.
- Brahma is the creator of the world. Vishnu is the preserver. Shiva is the destroyer.
- Hindus will often worship a god that has traditionally been worshipped in their local area. However, they usually see this god as a form of the Supreme God.
- Hindu gods usually have an animal vehicle – a vahana – so that they can travel around and a god's vahana will usually appear alongside him or her in images.

Vishnu



- Vishnu is the preserver.
- Some Hindus believe that from time to time Vishnu comes to the earth in the form of an avatar to fight evil and restore peace and goodness.
- Vishnu has ten avatars. Nine have already come to earth.
- Vishnu's wife is the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.
- Vishnu's vahana is a bird called Garuda.
- Vishnu's weapon is a mace. This symbolises the way that Vishnu sometimes takes a physical form (an avatar) in order to fight evil.

Shiva



- Shiva is the destroyer.
- Shiva's wife is Parvati, a goddess of love and fertility.
- Shiva's vahana is a bull called Nandi.
- Shiva's weapon is a trident, called a trishula. It has three spears. Some Hindus believe that, at the end of time, Shiva will destroy the universe with this weapon so that it can be created again.

Ganesh

- Ganesh is the elephant-headed god of wisdom.
- There is a famous story about Ganesh in a Hindu text called the Shiva Purana. In the story, Ganesh's mother Parvati heard that Shiva was on his way home and wanted to take a bath and not be disturbed, so she created the boy Ganesh and ordered him to stand guard and not let anyone in. When Shiva arrived, Ganesh refused to let him in. Shiva told Ganesh that he was Parvati's husband but Ganesh still refused to let him in. Shiva was angry and cut off the boy's head. Parvati was furious that Shiva had destroyed her creation so Shiva told his helpers to bring him the head of the first dead creature they found. They came back with the head of an elephant and this was placed on Ganesh. He was then brought back to life as an elephant-headed god.



Dharma

- Dharma is the moral law that Hindus must follow. It can be translated as 'duty'.
- Hindus believe that the Supreme Being has revealed dharma to people through sacred texts.
- Following dharma carefully is likely to create good karma and lead to a good reincarnation in the next life.
- Helping those in need is a very dharmic activity – it is part of the Hindu duty of sewa (service).
- Everyone follows dharma in a different way eg. being loyal and respectful to your family and community; giving to charity; showing kindness to people who are less fortunate than you.
- Hindus believe that ways of following dharma can change depending on your stage of life.

What do Hindus believe about the next life?

- Most Hindus believe that the 'atman', the spirit or soul, is eternal (everlasting).
- Samsara is the continual process of death and reincarnation.
- Reincarnation is when a soul is reborn by passing into a new body.
- Hindus believe that their current life is just one of many lives that they have already led and will lead in the future.
- Hindus believe that when a person dies their soul is reborn into a new body. This will not necessarily be a human body.
- The person's next life depends on their karma – good deeds store up good karma and bad deeds store up bad karma. Depending on a person's actions, they might be reincarnated as any type of creature, or even find themselves in heaven or hell. All these reincarnations are temporary.
- Moksha is escaping from samsara and never dying again or being reincarnated again. This means that there is no further suffering of any kind.
- Most Hindus believe that achieving moksha can take many lifetimes. One way of achieving moksha is through yoga and meditation. Another way is through bhakti, which is Sanskrit for 'devotion' or 'worship'. As your worship and devotion increases, your soul will be purified and you will eventually achieve moksha.
- Some Hindus believe that moksha involves being united with God forever.