

HINDUISM



Population: Over 915 billion **People Groups:** 1,235
Countries: 51 **Unreached People Groups:** 1,115

Deity and Complexity

Hinduism is a complex set of religions, mixing pantheism (the belief that God is everything and everything is god) with polytheism (the belief that many gods exist). There are over 330 million gods in Hinduism, each of which is part of one ultimate spiritual reality known as Brahman.

Sacred Texts

The Vedas are the oldest inspired sacred writings for Hindu belief. The most well-known sacred writing is the Bhagavad Gita, which is one of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are sacred writings that contain mythical stories and philosophical teachings. Other sacred writings include Samhitas (praise songs to the gods), Brahmamana (guide to the priests outlining rituals and prayers), and Aranyakas (instructions on worship and meditation).

Major Beliefs

God/Supreme Being: Many gods, who are forms of one Supreme Reality (Brahman).

Jesus Christ: One of many spiritual teachers. Neither atoned for sin nor rose from the dead.

Foundational Texts/Sources of Authority: The Vedas, which include the Samhitas, Brahmamana, Aranyakas, and the Upanishads (containing the Bhagavad Gita).

Human Nature: The human spirit lives in a physical body, which dies and is reborn until reunited with Brahman.

Basic Human Problem: The individual is trapped in the cycle of reincarnation, ignorant of his/her potential.

Solution to the Basic Human Problem: Liberation from reincarnation and realization of oneness with Brahman through good works, meditation, or devotion.

Life after Death: The individual will be reincarnated or reborn until achieving liberation.

COMMON BELIEFS

Reincarnation (Samsara):

the process through which every atman (uncreated, eternal soul) must pass until one reaches salvation (moksha). Physical life is cyclical rather than linear: we're born, we live, we die, and we're born again . . . we live again, we die again, and on and on. What happens to you in this life is dependent on your karma from a previous life—what goes around comes around.

Salvation (Moksha):

liberation from reincarnation (samsara). There are three paths to Moksha: (1) the way of works (Dharma), (2) the way of knowledge (Jnana), and (3) the way of devotion (Bhakti).

Culture and Worship

Hinduism has a communal culture with individualistic belief and worship. Historically, there is a system of castes (levels of society) in Hindu cultures, ranging from priests (and others) at the highest level all the way down to those who don't even qualify for the caste system, known as "the untouchables."

Common Practices

- **Yoga:** a path of mental, physical, and spiritual discipline that leads to moksha (salvation); uses the body to clear the mind and connect to Brahman.
- **Mantras:** prayers, chants, and utterances that aid in meditation and worship.
- **Ritual Bathing:** daily before devotions; periodically in rivers with cleansing power.
- **Festivals:** celebrating events in history; expressing devotion to gods.