

NOTES ON HINDUISM

Not founded by a single person at a specific time or by means of a single divine revelation.

No official statement of orthodox beliefs.

No official governing body or hierarchy of clergy.

Some practices resemble those of animistic religions.

Some doctrines are highly sophisticated, including theism.

So diverse it could be regarded as a collection of different religions.

Vedas - sacred writings of Hinduism, composed between 1500 and 400 B.C.

Includes hymns of praise to deities, texts on rituals, philosophical writings about the nature of reality and ways of knowing or becoming one with ultimate reality. The main parts of the Vedas are the Upanishads, the Laws of Manu and the Baghavad-Gita.

Dharma - "duty", moral responsibility, cosmic as well as social.

Moksha - the means of achieving liberation from the world; involves renunciation of earthly concerns, becoming involved with spiritual goals.

Karma - the consequences of one's actions, determining reincarnation.

Caste - the level of society into which one is re-born because of one's karma. Justified by creation myths. Each person has their own dharma. No social mobility.

Laws of Manu - Life is divided into an early (dharma) stage and a later (moksha) stage

Dharma stage :

- Chastity; studies, preparation for adulthood
- Householder's life; career and family.

Moksha stage:

- Leaving home , dwelling alone, meditating, attending to religious affairs
- Practices to purify the soul and make it ready for Nirvana.

Nirvana - "extinction", dissolution of all desire and absorption into Brahman

Brahman - the absolute, formless, impersonal ultimate reality.

Marga - four paths to salvation (moksha) or better birth.

- karma - faithful performance of work and social duties
- bhakti - way of devotion to one or more gods
- jnana - way of knowledge. Six major philosophical systems based on the Upanishads (e.g., Yoga, Vedanta)

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Three major gods, similar in some ways to the three persons of the Christian trinity. all manifestations of a single ultimate being (Brahman)

Brahma - creator
Shiva - destroyer
Preserver - Vishnu

Avatars - incarnations of Gods, e.g. Krishna is an avatar of Vishnu. Appears in times of crisis or need. The Hari Krishna sect are bhakti followers of Krishna

Yoga - to link or unite (the soul to God)

*Hatha - physical discipline aiming at mastery of the body designed to lead to one or more spiritual disciplines, e.g. karma Yoga.

Meditation techniques of various sorts beginning with breathing exercises and the use of a mantra for concentration and focussing the mind, stilling thought; leading to a state of **samadhi** - resembles unconsciousness or spiritual death but is described as superconsciousness in which reality is directly confronted and truth is directly grasped.